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"On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature"

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This paper examines the recent proposal to christen our geological epoch "the Anthropocene." The reasoning offered for this new name is that humanity's enormous mark on the geological strata would be a discernible boundary to future geologists; therefore a change in nomenclature is called for to reflect our transition out of the Holocene (our epoch's current formal name). I argue, however, that the pitch for the Anthropocene goes well beyond this rationale. The Anthropocene has morphed into a discourse that is organizing the perception of a world picture (past, present, and future) through a set of ideas and prescriptions that is tenaciously anthropocentric; indeed, the championed name itself—Anthropocene, or the age of Man—evokes the human-centeredness that is at the root of our ecological predicament. The main argument of this paper is that the discourse of the Anthropocene refuses to challenge human dominion, proposing instead technological and managerial approaches that would make human dominion sustainable. By the same token, the Anthropocene discourse blocks from consideration the possibility of abolishing a way of life founded on the domination of nature. In conclusion, I submit that while technological and managerial approaches have a place in addressing ecological problems, our predicament primarily calls for a drastic pulling back and scaling down of the human presence—welcoming limitations of our numbers, economies, forms of habitation, and uses of land and sea, so that humanity may flourish together with the entire breadth of Life. (Text from author's abstract)

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