

**Hamilton, Clive 2017. *Defiant Earth: the fate of humans in the Anthropocene*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, Maryland: Polity Press. ISBN-13 978-1509519750 ISBN-10 1509519750. Paperback (U.S \$13.02), e-book (US\$10.99), Hardcover (US\$34.43)**

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Clive Hamilton's *Defiant Earth* is a call to action that focuses on the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch that can no longer be ignored. Humans are now a rival force to nature, a fact that humanity has not adequately responded to. What are the root causes for this failure to fully recognize this issue, and how does society move forward? Hamilton's *Defiant Earth* provides an impassioned treatment of this topic written in terms that are accessible to both scholarly and general audiences.

Hamilton is a Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University in Canberra, Australia. Prior to his position at the university he served as executive director for fourteen years of the Australian Institute, an organization he founded. He holds an Arts degree from Australian National University, and a doctorate degree in the economics of development from IDS, Sussex University. He has published numerous works on social, environmental and political issues. Hamilton is also a leading figure in Australian public policy debates.

The Anthropocene, as a concept, is borne out of the development of earth systems science in the 1970s and 1980s, when societal views shifted to assessing the earth as a whole rather than as individual ecosystems. As environmental changes became more evident, it became imperative to see earth as a whole entity. The author, like some other scientists, contends that the Anthropocene began in 1945, after World War II. The Anthropocene, Hamilton argues, is not a geologic period that started when humans began to impact the planet, but rather when the point of irreversible damage was reached. The Anthropocene places humans as a force that now rivals nature. Scholars in the social sciences and other disciplines have, as the author states, misconstrued that this anthropogenic "rupture" is purely focused on social and historical parameters. It is instead the point when a new geological era was born as a result of human forces.

Hamilton defines anthropocentrism as the view of humans being the most important entity, over all other life forms. In the early sections of *Defiant Earth*, he discusses anthropocentrism and our failure to see humanity's uniqueness. Hamilton states that if anything, there is a failure to acknowledge how different humans are from other animals. There should not be a movement away from anthropocentrism because humans are an irrevocable force of nature, he writes, and this fact is something that can be no longer denied in light of nature's increasing volatility. He sums up his argument succinctly: "So the question is not whether human beings stand at the center of the world, but what kind of humans stand at the center of the world, and what is the nature of that world." (p. 43)

Hamilton criticizes the concept of ecomodernism, which he also refers to as the "good Anthropocene", versus the traditional framing of the Anthropocene. These two versions of the Anthropocene are similar ideas in that they do not deny humans are at the center of nature. However, the author contends that the "good Anthropocene" is an ecomodernist, humanistic and optimistic approach, in which it is posited that all ecological crises can be overcome with technology. Hamilton describes ecomodernism as a theological principle that is deeply tied to social order and the political policy and agency resulting from it. As society becomes increasingly industrialized, consumers have accepted the belief that through capitalism and technological advancement everything will be fine. The Anthropocene, unlike ecomodernism, is non-humanist in perspective and views nature as a force that cannot be conquered completely with technology. Hamilton states that this new framework is not something to be embraced, but rather a force of reckoning that must be acknowledged. Hamilton ends the chapter with a caution that technology is critical to solving many of the world's problems, but that we must also see the pitfalls that technology can lead to.

Hamilton states that the societal narrative has worked historically within a humanistic perspective, but that society has now moved into a post-humanist age. However, post-humanists continue to deny the central tenet that humans are a unique force of nature, thus devaluing the destructive environmental impact humans have. Hamilton focuses on the idea, argued by some post-humanists, that solutions can be found in reverting to pre-modernist states in order to achieve planetary equilibrium. This highly debatable argument asserts that humans coevolved with nature and that reversion to this natural state is key to humanity's future survival.

Hamilton counters that this is no longer possible. Humans are embedded in nature; however, our species is a unique force that has been and still is driven by capitalist agendas, which cannot be undone.

Hamilton's discussion moves on to the question of how human history is defined now that society has arrived in the Anthropocene. He writes that history can no longer simply be defined through the lens of modernity, and that humanity must move past post-humanist fatalistic or nihilistic perspectives. The author concludes this section with a strong statement: "So out of the political and economic changes that gave humans enough power and discretion to transform the Earth arose *the choice*. The forces bearing on the choice, for the responsibility or for neglect, were concrete historical ones" (p. 134). The new historical narrative, he writes, is one that will be determined by nature and by history.

Hamilton writes that the Enlightenment period led to the realization of societally derived freedoms as a force of change upon the Earth. Hamilton argues that the problem lies with the idea that humans are separate from nature, failing to recognize that this freedom was gained through nature. He describes this concept with the phrase, "freedom woven through nature" (p. 137). Hamilton states that there has been a disregard of humanity's responsibility for connectedness with nature. Freedom and meaning can still be derived through nature if the limits of earth systems are accepted. Humanity can no longer hold itself as a superagent dominant over nature.

At the close of the book, Hamilton brings the discussion back to the central tenet of humanity's role and responsibilities within the new Anthropocene. He brings forth the question of "care and neglect", or as viewed through an ethical lens, "good and evil." He notes that "neglect belongs to humankind alone because we are given autonomy" (p. 150). He argues that humans have transgressed past mere neglect of the earth, into a phase of wanton neglect.

Hamilton ends *Defiant Earth* with the question of how society's existence is now defined in the Anthropocene and what that means for the future. Humanity has arrived at a point where our existing frameworks, ethical, cultural or social, no longer hold true. How will society respond to this new narrative, and will we learn to live within it? Humans are a force that has now influenced geological deep time, writes Hamilton, requiring a new narrative and a movement away from the idea that the modern technological toolset will allow us to control and conquer nature. Nature has become a volatile force that is reminding humanity of the limitations that have been encountered due to our own neglect and disregard for our place in the Earth system—as a part of nature, rather than above it.

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