

Peer Review

Review of: "Let the Transformative Anthropocene Be Positive!"

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This commentary hopes to bring a positive perspective on the destructive path of human interference with global ecosystems since the Industrial Revolution. It gives a concise overview of the immense marks of humankind on landscapes and their biodiversity. The agricultural and industrial activities worldwide have contributed to what is known as the sixth mass extinction. These changes are well-documented, and the resulting outlook is well-known too: bleak and alarming. The positive that the commentary seeks to add comes from two corners. First, it calls for awareness and reflection on 'what kind of humans we want to be'. This is the standard appeal that commonly follows the well-known warnings. The weakness of such appeals is that the 'we' is rather unspecified and seemingly uncontrollable. The second line of argumentation is more surprising. The authors highlight the phenomenon that species and ecosystems tend to adapt to novel conditions, and sometimes even quite quickly. This is coined by the authors as the Bio-Evolutionary Anthropocene: while many species will become extinct, other species may have opportunities in the new conditions of the Anthropocene. Their example is a moth that, during the Industrial Revolution in England, changed its colour (in an evolutionary process) in response to the trees being darkened by factory soot. Biological evolution may be fast, they argue, and human interferences may even speed it up, for instance, through genetic engineering, or by introducing alien species. Normally, such influences are seen as dangerously disruptive, as they may contribute to the extinction of native species. However, such influences may also help new species to survive in the new human-made environment and, thus, restore biodiversity. Yes, maybe. The authors point to a forgotten corner of studies of the Anthropocene and its horrors, and this corner definitely deserves more attention. But to frame this as a positive perspective is quite a stretch.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.