

Preface

This is a book about something that used to be considered a book: nature. According to the Christian tradition, the greatness of the divine creator was communicated to its creation, which, in turn, could be read as a book wherein such godly traces were to be found. In a post-metaphysical age, after God and Darwin, this book has turned into a scientific code to be broken, whose marvels are translated into the language of genetics or biochemistry. But, most significantly, the book of nature has been so much used—and misused—by human readers throughout history that it has ceased to be a mirror of a godly creation, turning instead into a laboratory where a gigantic experiment is taking place: that of a socionatural entanglement deeply imbricating the workings of humanity and nature. There is no purity anymore, but an incredibly complex entity that can be decomposed into endless relations and processes at different spatial and temporal scales. In sum, nature is not what it used to be.

To be sure, the most dramatic ascertainment of this shift lies in the very proposition that we may have entered a new geological age, moving from the Holocene to the Anthropocene: the age of man. In other words, geologists are suggesting that the favorable conditions created by the Holocene some 11,700 years ago might have been replaced by another age due to the massive—albeit often non-intentional—human intervention on Earth. Climate change would just be one of several manifestations of the corresponding alteration of the planetary system, which also comprises a dramatic loss of biodiversity or massive urbanization. The Anthropocene hypothesis has been rapidly embraced by other natural sciences and is starting to shape the conversation about nature in the social sciences and the humanities. By focusing on the Anthropocene, this book tries to be part of that conversation.

As such, it has been written in an accessible yet rigorous manner, in a deliberate attempt not to restrict in advance the range of its potential readers. In that regard, it has been organized and developed in a way that appeals to undergraduates, postdoctoral researchers, scholars, and even a cultivated reader interested in the subject. Hopefully, it works as a general introduction to the subject for those

who approach it for the first time, and as an addition to the body of reflection upon it for those who are already dedicated to it. In that regard, it has tried to cover as much terrain as possible, but of course some key choices have been made that have left some aspects of the topic out, while others have been emphasized: a brief book cannot contain everything. Above all, the book has tried to meet the epistemological and normative challenges of the Anthropocene, a task that has demanded a somewhat interdisciplinary dialogue with other disciplines—ranging from biology to geology, from economics to history.

I started to be interested in this fascinating subject while staying at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, a place of contagious vitality to which I remain indebted. I would like to thank its directors, Christoph Mauch and Helmut Trischler, for their hospitality. Later, my colleagues Zev Trachtenberg and John Barry invited me to a meeting in Ireland on the subject that I could not eventually attend—my mother passed away. But my interest was growing and I had the chance to catch up with Zev in a fantastic meeting organized by him in, of all places, Hollywood, California, under the umbrella of a WPSA conference. I am grateful to every participant in that event, including geologist Michael Ellis, an elegant *agent provocateur* among stubborn social scientists. And the same goes for Fariborz Zelli and Philipp Pattberg, convenors of the ECPR section on the Anthropocene that took place in Glasgow in September 2014, where I had the chance to chair a panel, after having presented an early draft of my work on this subject at their Department in the University of Lund. Finally, I am indebted to the Research Group *Ciencia Política y de la Administración* (SEJ-133), thanks to which I am more or less free to travel around feeding my intellectual curiosity.

Málaga, January 2015

Manuel Arias-Maldonado



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-15951-5>

Environment and Society
Socionatural Relations in the Anthropocene
Arias-Maldonado, M.
2015, X, 131 p., Softcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-15951-5