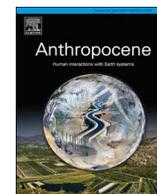




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Becoming homo sapiens sapiens: Mapping the psycho-cultural transformation in the anthropocene

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ABSTRACT

If it is true that humans are about to leave behind the environmental conditions we have known for the 150,000–200,000 years of our species' existence, then we are now changing the context in which we have evolved to date. This means *Homo sapiens* will have to co-evolve further with the climatic and environmental conditions it is creating through its planetary impact in the Anthropocene. Given the rapidity of the changes humans have set in motion, however, this next evolutionary phase may be cultural rather than biological, reflected in behaviors, practices, artifacts, institutions and underlying values and worldviews, and, therefore, psychological. Such a psycho-cultural transformation is frequently called for, but rarely explored in detail. This paper presents a model of psychological transformation from the fields of depth psychology and anthropology known as an archetypal death-rebirth process. Applied to a cultural transformation, the model offers a frame to interpret this time of unprecedented environmental and cultural endings. It gives purpose and meaning to the suffering involved in transformations and, crucially, offers hope through the vision of renewal. Its tripartite progression of severance, threshold, and reincorporation provides a map for navigating the *terra quasi-incognita* of this transformation that tells us what to expect and therefore how to respond. Finally, it offers an explication of how a transformation far more profound than changes in actions and policies may allow us to become the truly wise humans, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, our species' name denotes we could be.

1. Introduction

The widely recognized criticality of rapid anthropogenic climate change (IPCC, 2014; Steffen et al., 2015) along with other profound and deleterious changes in the Anthropocene (e.g., biodiversity loss, resource depletion, see Ellis, 2011) have led to the emergence of a scientific and public discourse on “transformation” (e.g., ISSC, 2013; O'Brien, 2012; Scoones et al., 2015). In the context of climate change, there is a growing recognition that efforts at mitigating greenhouse gas emissions are inadequate and too slow to halt, much less reverse current climatic trends (Anderson and Bows, 2011; Dangerman and Schellnhuber, 2013). A similar recognition is emerging around adaptation (e.g., Kates et al., 2011; New et al., 2011). In this emerging discourse on transformation, experts argue that far deeper societal changes than observed to date are necessary if society wishes to avoid the worst of projected climate changes (Brown and O'Neill Fabricius, 2013; Folke et al., 2010; Grin et al., 2010; Nalau and Handmer, 2015; O'Brien and Selboe, 2015; O'Brien and Sygna, 2013; Park et al., 2012; Pelling, 2011; Sharma, 2007; Kellert and Speth, 2009).

Transformational change – according to various existing definitions (Brown and O'Neill Fabricius, 2013; Feola, 2014; O'Brien, 2012) – is distinguished from smaller adjustments and modification by the alteration in a system's fundamental form, structure and function. Many argue that not only are changes needed in the outwardly visible forms of infrastructure and policy, but also in the values that underlie and drive human choices and behaviors (e.g., Adger et al., 2013; de Witt, 2016; Hackmann and St. Clair, 2012; Horlings, 2015; O'Brien, 2012). Explicitly or implicitly, they call for society to move away from values that drive environmentally unsustainable and economically and socially unjust trends to a new set of values supporting the emergence of true ecological, economic, and social sustainability (Corner et al., 2015; Kasser, 2009, 2016; Kinzig et al., 2013; Thompson and Rayner, 1998; WBGU, 2011). Meadows' (1999) work supports this argument. Her analysis of leverage points for affecting system change suggests that the most durable, effective and influential system change ultimately requires a shift in the *dominant* cultural worldviews and values – the deepest of these leverage points.

The oft-repeated call for value changes raises the difficult questions

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Table 1

Values problematic for sustainability.

(Sources: Adam and Groves, 2011; Aerts et al., 2007; Callicott, 1994; Daily, 1997; Dietz et al., 2005; Hayward, 1997; Jung, 1961/1965; Jung, 1961; Kasser, 2009; Keller, 1985; Leduc, 2014; Merchant, 1980; Neumann, 1994; Plumwood, 1993; von Franz, 1992; Wei-ming, 1994; Welzel, 2014; Sorell, 1991; Shepard, 1982).

Value	Extreme expressions of that value
<i>Anthropocentrism</i>	Gives humans absolute superiority over any other part of nature, ultimately devaluing all things non-human; becomes speciesism and human chauvinism that rejects all human embeddedness in and dependence on non-human nature.
<i>Dominion over nature</i>	Justifies human appropriation of and control over non-human nature for human benefit only.
<i>Scientism</i>	Claims that the positive natural sciences provide the only model of explanation” of the phenomena (natural and social) of the world and ties the rational, detached, science-based exploration and understanding of the world to the modernist ambition of becoming all-powerful, freeing humanity from the bonds of nature.
<i>Dualism</i>	Insists on the physical and moral separation of humans from nature, fostering a distancing of the material from the divine, of mind from matter, and devaluing all that which is believed to be embodied in the material (feminine, indigenous, body, Earth) relative to its opposite (masculine, rational, mind, God).
<i>Individualism</i>	Elevates the individual over the communal, insisting on individual rights over mutuality and responsibility; it glorifies egocentrism and selfish achievements, while negating the psychological and social benefits of altruism and self-transcendence or even denying equal rights to and responsibility toward other humans and non-humans.
<i>Freedom</i>	Gives license to live beyond or without limits and consume without restraint or regard for others, the environment or the future, and as such insists on human exceptionalism.
<i>Never-ending progress and growth</i>	Expresses a future orientation that unwaveringly anticipates improvement over the past and present; has become virtually synonymous with economic development and higher levels of material consumption

how these deep cultural drivers transform, what that change process looks like, and whether that process can be facilitated or supported. While many have deplored and critiqued the values that underlie unsustainable practices (e.g., McKibben, 2010; Hamilton, 2010; Orr, 2011) and many have described the more hopeful endpoints of the sustainability transition (e.g., Earth Charter Commission, 2000; Raskin, 2006), few in the transformation discourse address the process by which such a profound cultural transformation might occur. A prominent example is *World in Transition* (WBGU, 2011), one of the most substantial reports on the need for, and exploration of, various interventions to facilitate a global transformation toward sustainability. It describes certain values as supportive of the sustainability transition while “politics” (i.e., the active defense of interests and values in the political process are depicted as barriers to this transition. It offers no recommendations on how to foster a shift in values toward sustainability. Those “politics” reflect the struggle between new and old values, and between emerging and existing, dominant interests and powers (e.g., Bahadur and Tanner, 2014; Eriksen et al., 2015; Leduc, 2014; Penna and Geels, 2012).

This paper aims to help fill this gap by drawing on bodies of literature heretofore largely ignored in the discussion of transformation in the climate change context, namely analytical and archetypal depth psychology and anthropological work on rites of passage. We agree with Holm et al. (2015) that these previously untapped humanistic traditions have much to offer to the better understanding of the psychological dimensions of the sustainability transition. Our paper hinges on the argument that a discourse on cultural transformation must involve psychology because the prevalent worldviews, values, identities, and deepest beliefs about self and world held by its members are the underpinning psycho-cultural drivers that shape culture. In other words, a cultural transformation at the level of core values and beliefs is a psychological transformation. In our application of psychological theory to the transformation at the cultural level, we thus use the phrase “psycho-cultural transformation.” Our main aim in this paper then is to propose a model to look at the work required to successfully engage such a psycho-cultural transformation. It is a theoretical lens through which to explore how such a transformation might unfold and what it requires.

Below, we begin by articulating the worldview and system of key values that are problematic for sustainability and must be reviewed as society undergoes a deep psycho-cultural transformation. In Section 3, we lay out the psychological foundations and a model that is valuable for charting profound inner change, and then apply it to the collective, that is we explore a psycho-cultural transformation, in Section 4, with climate change as our context. We conclude with synthesizing remarks

in Section 5.

2. What is being transformed?

We begin our exploration of the psycho-cultural transformation process by articulating what might be transformed. We use the concept of “worldview” as shorthand for the internalized system of deeply held beliefs, values and related identity (self-image) that informs the perspectives and behaviors of individuals, and – collectively – the institutions, practices and artifacts of a culture (Hiebert, 2008; Aerts et al., 2007; Sire, 2015). Such worldviews also reflect stages or psychological positions over the course of human development.

Our focus here is on the views and values commonly associated with the globally dominant and environmentally significant “modern Western” culture (Pirages and Ehrlich, 1974). However, we recognize that all cultures espouse to certain values that are compatible with sustainability and others that run counter to maintaining environmentally sustainable, economically just and socially equitable and dignified lives (e.g., Blühdorn, 2007; Minkov and Hofstede, 2012). Thus, our focus is on those *dominant* values, beliefs and worldviews that will come up for review in a transformation given their insufficiency or incompatibility with environmental, economic and social sustainability (Table 1).

Without any or only weak counterbalancing tenets, these values together constitute a “dominant social paradigm” characterized by fragmentation, either/or thinking, an isolation of humans from nature, and a split of the material from the spiritual, the individual from community (e.g., Jung, 1931/1970; Jung, 1931, Jung, 1961/1965; Jung, 1961; Pierages and Ehrlich, 1974; Plotkin, 2008),¹ which has become globally pervasive (Basáñez, 2016; Kasser, 2009; Myers and Kent, 2003).

While these values are mediated by a complex web of social, economic, and governance institutions, and thus exert varying degrees of influence on cultural narratives, behaviors, policies, and developmental pathways, perpetuating them results in the human impact on Earth that

¹ We point the reader here to a fascinating, cross-cultural series on “Human Becoming”, hosted by the Berggruen Institute, which offers diverse viewpoints on various cultures’ core values, and how each views the individual relating to others, the larger world, and the divine (<http://philosophyandculture.berggruen.org/ideas/16>). While being careful not to essentialize any one culture or acknowledging extremist and corrupt values and behaviors in all cultures, the individualistic, non-relational conception of *being* human prevalent in modern Western culture emerges as a notable contrast to many other cultures’ relational, interdependent conception of *becoming* human. See also the collection of essays at <http://www.humansandnature.org/what-does-it-mean-to-be-human>, asking just such questions.

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