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Remembering the Anthropocene: a future human's long view of climate change

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We live in a new epoch in which the impact of human behavior, industry, agriculture and civilization is having a profound and far reaching impact on the atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes. Whilst geologists differ over the precise dating of the epoch, whether it be from the presence of radioactive isotopes from the creation and detonation of nuclear weapons, or the mountains of plastic waste created in our linear take-make-waste economic system, or the hyper-acceleration of human generated atmospheric greenhouse gases, or even the proliferation of domesticated chicken bones in the geological record – what is clear is that humanity has already altered the world in fundamental and likely irreversible ways. We stand now at an inflection point in human history. With atmospheric CO₂ levels, around 410 ppm and rising fast, rapid thawing at the poles and mountain glaciers, rising sea-levels and acidification, growing intensity of storms, droughts and floods, and with significantly more warming already locked into the system, the trajectory we are on now must change and it must change fast. This talk will project forward 200 years, told from the perspective of a future human, reflecting on the Anthropocene and where it all went wrong or right? Will the Anthropocene end up as little more than a thin, radioactive, plastic-choked, oily smear in the geological record, littered with the bones of countless dead species? Or will humanity finds a way to stem global warming, move from a linear destructive and extractive economic model to a more circular, sustainable and regenerative model?

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