



Towards the unthinkable:

Earth Jurisprudence and an ecocentric *episteme*

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one can be certain that man is a recent invention ... [i]t is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness ...

[and if] those [epistemic] arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility ... were to cause them to crumble ...

then one can certainly wager that **man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.**

-Foucault



two readings of 'the erasure of the human'

- the end of the human as species

two readings of 'the erasure of the human'

- the end of the human as species
- the end of the human *episteme*

thesis of today's presentation

- the concepts of *epistemes* and epistemic change can provide a coherent conceptual framework for understanding Earth Jurisprudence
- Earth Jurisprudence, in this framework, can be defined as the field, discipline or movement existing to bring about a change in *episteme*, using the law, from the current, anthropocentric episteme to a new, ecocentric one.

structure of today's presentation

1. introduction
2. anthropocentrism and ecocentrism
3. *epistemes* and epistemic change
4. Earth Jurisprudence as epistemic project
5. theoretical challenges
6. one response: a critique
7. conclusion

anthropocentrism

- etymological meaning – ‘man’ plus ‘centre’, or ‘man as centre’
- humans as independent from, and superior to, all else in the world
- manifests in ‘the tendency of human beings to regard themselves as separate to nature and [to regard] nature as existing for human use and exploitation’ (Burdon)

ecocentrism

- etymological meaning – ‘eco’ (orig. ‘house’ or ‘Earth’) and ‘centre’ – ‘Earth’ plus ‘centre’, or ‘Earth as centre’
- no apex at which humans (or any entity) can be placed
- a system of ecologies, of networks and relationships: each entity comprehensible only by reference to those existing alongside

the concept of *episteme*

- *a priori* configuration of mind that renders thought possible
- **epoch** in time
- characterised by/ arranged around/defined in terms of '**objects**' (all the things that can be known) and '**methods**' (all the ways of knowing them)

the concept of epistemic change

- the **event** that separates two *epistemes*
- **abrupt** and **all-encompassing**
- **beyond ontology**
- introduction of **new epistemic objects and methods** in a **two-phase process**:
 - 1 – ‘introduc[tion]... into the analysis of representations’ – provoking
 - 2 – an ‘irremediable modification ... [of] knowledge itself’ (Foucault)

conceptual summary

- anthropocentrism: **(hu)man as centre**
- ecocentrism: **Earth as centre**
- *episteme*: ***a priori*, epochal**, configured around **objects and methods**
- epistemic change: **abrupt** and **all-encompassing, beyond ontology**, introduction of **new epistemic objects and methods** in a **two-phase process**

Earth Jurisprudence in epistemic terms

- the field, discipline or movement existing to **bring about a change in *episteme***, using the law, from the **current, anthropocentric episteme** to a **new, ecocentric one**.

the project at present

- culture in the **first phase** of epistemic change
- theorists and environmental philosophers thinking the world **ecocentrically**
- concepts of '**community**', '**ecology**' and '**interrelationship**': ecocentric objects?

the role of Earth Jurisprudence

- bring about entry into the **second phase** of epistemic change
- **translate** individual ecocentrism to a larger **cultural level**
- **facilitate development** and uptake of **ecocentric objects and methods**
- prospective, deductive-normative
- **think** the qualities of a prospective **ecocentric episteme**
- **articulate how** ecocentrism manifests in the **intimate 'everyday' of individual consciousness**, and **how this is achieved**

theoretical challenges

- how to 'see' the nature of a specific prospective event of epistemic change, if epistemic change exists beyond ontology?
- how to think ecocentrically, if the *a priori* nature of *epistemes* renders all thought 'through' an anthropocentric lens?

a response?

critiquing current epistemic objects and methods

- step by step
- rejecting teleologies
- allowing space for possibilities to open with future insight
- directed towards:
 - opening up a more transitional space
 - revealing the contingency of current anthropocentric positions
 - facilitating creative thought in development of ecocentric objects and methods.

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