Investigating the Anthropocene: A Critical Look at a New Geological Epoch

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I have recently returned from Europe and a research trip funded by $2000 from the University Grant Program. The attendance of a conference in Germany and a workshop in the Netherlands has enabled me to make considerable progress on a new research project on the Anthropocene.

In Berlin, I made two presentations at the first major international conference on geoengineering hosted there by Potsdam’s Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies. My presentations were on “Carbon Dioxide, Short-lived Climate Forcing Pollutants, and Climate Engineering: The Frame of Gross Forcing” and “From Changing to Fixing the Climate: What Does the Atmospheric Anthropocene Permit?” Attendees from more that forty countries contributed to a lively and provocative, four day event.

From Berlin, I took the train to Nijmegen in the Netherlands for a workshop on rewilding in Europe. The workshop was part of a four year project at Radbound University on the “Ethics of Ecological Restoration in a Cultural Landscape.” Organizer Martin Drenthen had convened three notable European “rewilders” and nature experts: Frans Vera, Wouter Helmer, and Jan Desmet. In addition to the full day of discussion, there were two field trips associated with this workshop. One was to the Millingerwaard restoration area on the Waal River in the Netherlands. The other was to the post-industrial site, Duisburg Nord. In both cases, I learned a great deal about the European approach to rewilding.

On my return I was able to synthesize certain aspects of what I learned for a presentation attended by 200 people at the Mansfield Center’s conference on the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. My presentation, “An Ethical Imperative and a Troubled Future,” compared US to European approaches to wilderness and asked questions about the human management of landscapes in the Anthropocene. This presentation will inform an important section of my proposed book.

What I have also been able to do since my return is to complete and submit an application to the Guggenheim Foundation to support work on my proposed book on the Anthropocene. This application mirrors one that I submitted in May to the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund the same work, but had the benefit of being informed by my European experience.

In summary, University Grant Program funds made it possible for me to attend two of the most fruitful conferences/workshops I have ever attended. The also made it possible for me to develop a Guggenheim proposal which I recently submitted to support my research in 2015.