

Anthropathology: The Abiding Malady of the Species

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Introduction

A view of negative human evolution is put forward here by way of balance against the many positive, sometimes romantic, ‘ascent of man’, or academically cautious and narrow accounts.¹ Anthropathology is advanced as a hypothetical, quasi-singular entity with multiple roots and micro-manifestations, with some attempt being made to suggest a chronology and a speculative aetiology. Anthropathology is characterised by damaging features such as violence, greed, deception, extended niche construction, and complex suffering on a scale never been known among other species. This is an interdisciplinary endeavour that will probably not satisfy readers with demands for detailed, specialist, and evidence-based prose. No attempt is made to proffer solutions to the existential problem of anthropathology. Given certain controversial aspects, a look at cognate disciplines and epistemological tensions is included.

What Is Anthropathology? An Overview

As the name suggests, anthropathology is the core sickness² of the human species. But some difficulties immediately arise. First, there is no such established entity or discipline that studies it, merely a hypothesis put forward by Feltham (2007). Secondly, the objection is made that the concept of pathology cannot be legitimately applied to an entire species. Thirdly, it is understandable but incorrect that some

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equate anthropathology with misanthropy. These points will be addressed in due course. Anthropathology is a countercultural proposition, if we accept that mainstream culture is built on an assumption that life is good, or a mixture of good and bad but generally always progressing. It proposes that human existence is far from alright, that it is deeply warped, and that our nature is to some extent negatively engrained morally, psychologically, and neurologically. Humanity has a confused consciousness that commandeers and consumes its environment, denies many problems, and externalises its confusion.

It is clear that *Homo sapiens* has evolved beyond the evolutionary stage of even our nearest mammalian relatives. It is equally clear, however, that humanity has developed negatively both in terms of our own welfare and that of the biosphere. While we acknowledge our animal origins and kinship, and congratulate ourselves on our cognitive and cultural superiority, we cannot ignore the vast harms we do that make us compare poorly with other animals (Masson, 2014). Our violence, war, and destruction are superfluous to our survival needs, and indeed threaten them. Our vast, earth-spanning population dwarfs that of many other species, and our habitat encroaches on those of other species. We are grappling here with what we call the human condition and human nature.

The objection can be made that a pathological entity like cancer can usually be clearly identified, categorised, understood, and treated, successfully or otherwise. Cancer is distressing, painful, and often life-threatening, indeed often disfiguring and fatal. But anthropathology is not readily identified or treated, and is not obviously fatal. Like psychopathology, anthropathology is an umbrella term covering many distressing entities. We do not fully understand or have satisfactory treatments for psychopathological problems (psychiatric, clinical-psychological, and psychotherapeutic protests aside), and many of them are disputed in terms of aetiology and discreteness. But psychopathological entities afflict individuals and groups, whereas anthropathology appears to have a much broader remit. However, insofar as anthropathology is posited as a human universal, we can regard it as the sum total of all our unwieldy *kluges*, or makeshift adaptations that outlive their original purpose (Marcus, 2009). We might also use the term *equifinality* to account for anthropathology's many causal threads, insofar as *all roads lead to Rome's decline and fall*. Evolving haphazardly, we have inherited many viable and some elegant features, and many dysfunctional and ugly features. At the individual level, we each have a unique micro-anthropathological profile—one is greedier, more violent, more deluded, more prone to anxiety than the other, for example. Among different institutions, we can witness variable manifestations of dehumanisation, exploitation, and absurd rituals (macro-anthropathology). Anthropathology permeates all human endeavours and comorbidity is the norm at all levels. True, it is usually intertwined with some 'good' features (in the Church, for instance), which duality I examine below.

Insofar as human neonates do not exhibit (yet, many) anthropathological features, we might regard them as nonetheless possessing the neural wiring that is ready to imitate and accept common cultural conditioning. In other words, many thousands of years of cumulative anthropathology have primed us to activate

individually the capacity for lying, dissembling, dissatisfied cogitation, empty social ritual, concealed suffering, and so on. As well as walking upright, wearing clothes, building houses, and being cooperative and altruistic, we cheat, exploit, and hurt other human beings and animals, and we create elaborate ways of killing time, overcoming meaninglessness, and denying our mortality. Few of us are free of this two-sidedness, which we inherit and pass on. ‘Man hands on misery to man/It deepens like a coastal shelf’, as the poet Philip Larkin put it. Often attributed psychoanalytically to our parents as incompetent, damaged, or malevolent, they are better understood as the hapless transmitters of a transgenerational pathology. Anthropathology is in this way transmitted vertically through generations but also, via our cultural and built environment, horizontally. We are infected, as it were, and constantly reinforced in our pathological behaviours, by our unwitting peers and our shared, damaging environment: we know not what we do, nor how to extricate ourselves.

How Anthropathology Might Have Evolved

Most religions contain narratives of a Fall. Life was originally good, we were created, loved and protected by God, and lived together harmoniously, but we sinfully disobeyed God’s injunctions and were condemned to lives of sin, evil, suffering, and death. Some take this story literally, some dismiss it altogether, but some of us suspect it may contain an oral and allegorical history of a major bifurcation in human affairs. Unfortunately, religions persist well beyond the point at which they initially offered something useful (besides emotional comfort to some) and their primitive, distorted grasp of matters we now know much more about is an obstruction to mature knowledge. Buddhism and other Asian religions should be briefly mentioned, however, as godless and polytheistic religions that do not focus on evolutionary or historical causes so much as a mythical *samsara* (endless cyclical rebirths of the individual characterised by suffering) and a methodology for overcoming this in a final transcendence (*nirvana*). However, although we now have increased and better scientific theories of anthropathology-related matters, none is wholly satisfactory and many are in some conflict with each other. In this section, I examine some of the most interesting and promising of these theories of flawed humanity.

Big history, overlapping with deep history,³ is the attempt to go beyond the traditional, limited purview of recorded history by beginning at the very beginning of everything (Spier, 2011) and including as many large variables as possible. In this way, big history is academically challenging. Big history starts 13.8 billion years ago with the Big Bang and seeks to trace historical development from non-complexity to complexity, through the ‘Goldilocks conditions’ in which we have emerged on earth, to the present day. Given the overall cosmic trajectory, it looks inevitable that humanity would have arisen, would increase in complexity, and also eventually perish, in line with the entropic principle. ‘Exhaustion of critical resources and growing entropy’ (Spier, 2011, p. 200) are the key issues facing us.

Regardless of moral judgements of how we have acted historically, in different eras and places, the question of how we as a species address the problem of available energy is crucial. Big history holds up the largest of pictures in a way that reduces the significance of our past good and bad actions, perhaps even implies that human history could not have unfolded otherwise, but confronts us with the merciless facts of near-term threats and ultimate extinction. In the big picture, the details are probably unimportant, or are of mainly scholarly interest rather than practical, problem-solving use.

Palaeobiology should hold clues to the origins of suffering, pain, and predation. Humans cannot be said to have invented these since all animals are susceptible to them. What we must ask here is whether primitive life forms inevitably contained the potential for later, complex forms of suffering, pain, and predation. Both simple and complex organisms continue to exist, each having its merits for survival. Biological complexity often involves co-evolution of host and pathogens, not necessarily in active but in passive terms, for example, adaptations by pathogens for evading immune systems. Moalem and Prince (2007) reinforce the case that certain diseases have benefited us, and by extension we might have to resign ourselves to the prospect that anthro-pathology in various forms must always remain with us. Also, speculatively implicated in the research of Nithianantharajah et al. (2013) is a genetic accident 550 million years ago, to which vertebrate cognitive complexity and susceptibility to mental illness may be traced. Such lines of enquiry suggest that evolved human intelligence may never be sundered from accompanying high risks of psychopathology, unless genetic engineering becomes supremely sophisticated.

Zoological evolution and its quirks also contain the phenomena of mourning among some animals and gratuitous aggression and rape-like behaviour in others (Wrangham & Peterson, 1997); and comparative psychopathology suggests the capacity among many animals for species-abnormal behaviour (McKinney, 1988). If we are indeed the pinnacle of evolution, it is not necessarily in the sense of magnificent superiority but of highly complex, kluge-like adaptations. We are, we remain, part of an evolutionary arms race. Even today, our most advanced medical research battles to find alternatives to antibiotics as microbes become resistant to them. Retrospectively, it appears inevitable that natural selection should have led to *Homo sapiens*, an organism so complex and ecologically pervasive as to become, arguably, ultimately and fatally unwieldy and threatening to the biosphere. In this sense, we can be seen as a cancer-like manifestation of entropic complexity, doomed to join all other species in eventual extinction.

Distinctive human consciousness is usually celebrated as a superior attainment but it remains poorly understood and little agreement exists as to its origins. Animals have some form of primary consciousness but none appears to approach the threshold of our own. Sterelny (2003) advances a nuanced argument combining early human preferences for niche construction, pain avoidance, co-operation, and eventual complex cognition. Most evolutionary psychologists favour the concept of modularity of mind according to which domain-specific modules have evolved in response to selection pressures. Other academics wish to emphasise epigenetics and neuroplasticity, whereby the brain is portrayed as more oriented to new learning. I

want to sidestep most of these controversies about how the mind works and instead focus on how it malfunctions, or rather how it can be considered to be malfunctioning in a largely unrecognised manner.

Anthropathological consciousness may be considered a paradox. Growing consciousness appears to be self-evidently and invariably a *good thing* but a little analysis might suggest otherwise. The Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe (1933/2004) argued that a form of surplus consciousness evolved in us that made us unfit for satisfied survival. Diamond (1991) later speculates on connections between the male bird of paradise and its extravagant tail, and the tendency of many human males to become addicted to high-risk substances and activities, a perverse feature of sexual selection that Miller (2001) has further elaborated. In Zapffe's account, our consciousness is an overdevelopment of the cognitive faculty that renders us so knowledgeable of natural limitations—the indifference of nature to our existence, our loneliness in the cosmos, the godlessness of existence we must face, the inevitability of deterioration with age, personal death, and the ultimate extinction of everything—that we have to deny this knowledge in some way. Too late for us never to have been, but still better not to know the brutal truths of our circumstances and fate, and better not to have to constantly wrestle with them internally.

Zapffe's conclusion was that we resort to four main defence mechanisms (he was inspired partly by Freud): 1. *Isolation* (or denial) by altogether blocking out the threatening knowledge from awareness. 2. *Anchoring* ourselves within constructed belief systems such as religion, politics, and hope for the future. 3. *Distraction* of all kinds that allows us to focus on matters outside ourselves. 4. *Sublimation* as the focusing of awareness of what is threatening in an aesthetic manner, for example, writing artfully about death. Zapffe developed these ideas from a philosophical base, before and independently of those of the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (1973) and the terror management psychologists. While these suggested defence mechanisms could be extended and improved, they present a fair picture of the existential contortionism we indulge in. It may be self-evident that these defences are only necessary, or even possible, when the fundamental necessities of life have been satisfied. That is, as long as our attention is devoted to sheer survival we do not focus on our own thoughts of death and meaninglessness. The paradox here is that our very success as a species in surviving and allowing ourselves the luxury of cognitive reflection creates the conditions for the surplus consciousness which, reflux-like, then torments us.

Zapffe's views are partly replicated by Varki and Brower (2013), without their knowledge of Zapffe's writings (still mostly untranslated into English at the time of writing). While Zapffe's thinking came from philosophical and environmental sources, Varki and Brower come from scientific backgrounds (glycobiology, and molecular and cellular biology, respectively). Their starting point was to ask why no other animal has ever come close to the sophistication and complexity of human consciousness and the behaviour that flows from it. Using theory of mind as their guide, they postulate that when an animal witnesses a fellow's suffering and death there is often an affective response, but not a vivid inference that such experiences will afflict oneself. In other words, developing consciousness encounters a problem

when it is capable of realising that one must die; it is a problem because it upsets the survival instinct. It is perhaps a problem for sexual selection insofar as those morbidly preoccupied are less likely to attract mates. So Varki and Brower argue that a full theory of mind, or full consciousness, could arise only when another mechanism was in place—the ability to deny our awareness of our own mortality. For whatever reason, *Homo sapiens* was the species that, perhaps around 40,000 years ago, evolved simultaneously and paradoxically a consciousness of death and the ability to deny it—surely the ultimate in cognitive dissonance. As Trivers (2013) notes, deception is an important evolved strategy, and we are paradoxically better deceivers when we are self-deceived.

Spikins (2015) advances the hypothesis that from 100,000 to 6000 years ago when the outermost parts of the earth were explored, the relatively rapid worldwide dispersal of *Homo sapiens* can be explained by moral disputes between small groups. Evolving emotional complexity led to moral disputes that in turn became violent, reinforced by a drive to punish those whose actions did not appear to match another group's moral code. In this account, the 'dark side' of human nature may be inferred as coming from emotional complexity and moral tensions sometimes erupting into lost trust, altruistic anger, spite, vengeance, and hatred, and the need to put distance between one group and another.

A quite different take on distinctive human evolution is offered by the archaeologist Timothy Taylor (2010). In this account, technology is central. For Taylor, 'there was an actual moment when we became human' (p.2). Brushing aside theories of religion or death awareness as pivotal, he goes back over two million years to the first origins of tool use. As the weakest of the seven great apes, we are now wholly reliant on technology. This has come about, in his account, because dependency on artificial aids has domesticated us, altering us profoundly. From primitive weapons, tools, containers, and decorations, we gradually moved to clothing, burial sites, homes, fire use, agriculture, domestication of animals, fences, towns, and on towards the wheel, boats, and other means of overcoming natural selection pressures. Fast-forward to the present, and we have bigger, better, and more of everything artificial. We are dependent on weather-specific clothing, heated homes, appliances, eye glasses, medications, as well as (most of us) tea, coffee, alcohol, meat, cosmetics, books, cars and roads, computers, cellular phones; and (some of us) illegal drugs, planes, and ships. Smail (2008) reflects as a deep historian on the role of stimulants, among other things, in neurophysiologically meshing culture and evolution. Collectively, we seem unable to live without offices, churches, shops, schools, factories, mass entertainment, hospitals, and armaments. Many of us owe our longevity to medications and surgery, and millions depend on the daily support of prosthetics. In Taylor's terms (and see Spengler, 1931/2015), we cannot now survive without technology. The overarching trade-off is that as we grow more technologically complex and powerful collectively, we also become weaker individually, losing our sensory acuity and muscular strength.

Taylor does not focus much on what Tallis (2003) calls the tool-of-tools, the human hand. Not matched elsewhere in the animal world, our hand has a fully opposable thumb, and is multi-functional; it is the basis of all our weaponry and

artefact construction but also of our communication and numbering. Tallis outlines the steps that may have taken us to being the conscious human agent, all traceable to the hand.

A number of theories date widespread human malfunctioning closer to the present. Most evolutionary mismatch theory refers to the transition from hunter-gatherer existence to agriculture about 10–12,000 years ago, the end of the Pleistocene era. This mismatch is between our long evolved biological adaptations with ‘stone age minds’ to a stable natural environment and today’s unnatural environment, and includes behavioural problems such as phobias, jealousy, and criminal aggression, and medical problems like myopia, diabetes, and osteoporosis. For Diamond (1987) the advent of agriculture 1000 years ago was ‘the worst mistake in the history of the human race’. Coincidentally, this is possibly the temporal point at which patriarchal dominance took hold, and where anarcho-primitivists like John Zerzan (2002) place our putative wrong turn. In Zerzan’s view, only the complete rejection of modern industrial-technological society (and indeed agriculture) can restore human sanity. Note that this conclusion, based on something not so far from the reasoning of Taylor (2010) as to the technological route to our malaise, comes to quite the opposite conclusion of that of Taylor, namely, that we cannot go backward but only forward into further technological advances. To complicate matters, Homer-Dixon et al. (2015) call for new conceptual frameworks to understand the ‘deep causes of synchronous failure’ now facing us. Noting a ‘long fuse big bang’ mechanism at work in our impending global crisis, the authors nevertheless ignore the evolutionary, indeed big history, factors contributing to the long fuse.

Out of interest, we could refer here to any number of related hypotheses, most of which have been discarded, remain in doubt, or are highly contentious. On an actual historical Fall, De Meo (2011) argues that a process of geographically specific desertification approximately 6,000 years ago triggered a huge wave of violence, war, and unnatural behaviour. Taylor (2005) supports this account. Much more specifically, Cline (2015) puts civilizational collapse centring on Egypt at 1177 B.C. We can certainly ask whether dramatic climate changes in some eras led to famine and population decimation, accompanied by rapid ingenuity and harsh decisions regarding the fit and unfit to survive (Calvin, 2002). We should note that more environmentally rapacious populations may have been forced to adapt to harsh climates by inventing intensive food production methods, patriarchal controls, and eventually industry. Indeed, some Afrocentric hypotheses centring on the role of melanin attribute to northward migration to inhospitable cold climates the evolution of white people as barbaric and unfeeling. Elaine Morgan’s largely dismissed aquatic ape hypothesis disputes the argument that we lost our hair so that we could run and sweat while hunting on the savannah, and places emphasis on human evolution in and near water, as well as focusing on the evolution of children and women, and on salient inherited anatomical features (Morgan, 2000). Morgan’s is one among several hypotheses giving more weight to a female perspective on evolution.

Julian Jaynes (1976) proposed the novel theory that before only 3,000 years ago human consciousness was characterised by a bicameral (or hemispherical) mind in which one half ‘spoke’ authoritatively (much like a god) while the other heard and

obeyed. Put differently, humans experienced their existence somewhat like schizophrenics receiving commands and this state of affairs broke down in antiquity when we evolved our now well-known subjective consciousness. Most do not now regard Jaynes's thesis as plausible but some sympathy for it remains. McGilchrist (2009) proposes another argument for the significance of our left and right brain hemispheres that reverses Jaynes's conclusions. In this, the right hemisphere is wisely and holistically connected to the earth, emotion, poetry, and dream, while the left is dominated by rationality and analysis. We have become unhealthily over-controlled by the left hemisphere, such that the guidance of the right, or the proper balance between the two, has been lost. Many support McGilchrist's thesis for the emphasis it gives to an agenda of re-enchantment in opposition to 'dehumanising' modernity. But for McGilchrist, schizophrenia is a disease stemming from only the 18th century, whereas Horrobin (2002) has argued contentiously that it may go back to between 80,000 and 140,000 years, connected with increased human consumption of fatty acids, the hungry brain, and creativity. Also, while McGilchrist sees the right hemisphere as holding hope for our survival and necessary re-humanisation, Hecht (2013) argues that *pessimism* is neurologically dominant in the right hemisphere. Similar problems regarding brain structure arise in relation to different interpretations of the tripartite brain, with the over-rational neocortex supposedly dominating the limbic functions of affect and sensory acuity, and reptilian mobility.

Many interpreters of the human condition prefer to believe that things have gone seriously awry only since the advent of the 15th century 'age of discovery', experienced as invasion, infection, slaughter, colonisation, and slavery by its non-Western victims. The native American Hopi noun *koyaanisqatsi*, meaning something like 'untenable disorder and craziness', captures this perception of a serious breach in the natural order. Other analysts opt for the industrial revolution, the growth of capitalism and of late modernity (Clark, 2002; Hookway, 2015) as culprits. Needless to say, such accounts often come from the political left, who may harbour a rather rosy view of human nature, oppose deterministic aetiologies rooted in evolutionary theory, and await a socialist revolution. But it is also possible to argue that the stressful complexities of modern capitalist life (Rosa, 2015) blend together with trends going back thousands of years, and possibly accelerated by the consequences of agriculture combined with increased gene flow across once-separated populations. In this account, biological evolution did not reach a stasis 50,000 years ago but has speeded up. Indeed, anthropologists Cochran and Harpending (2009) interpret recent population genetics data to argue that evolution has accelerated in the past 10,000 years by a factor of 100 times compared with the previous six million years. A very dark reading of these trends might see them as that admixture of elements that presages an irreversible late stage of social and species entropy.

Given the tendency of archaeology to periodically turn up findings that subvert our current assumptions,⁴ we should exercise some caution as to which hypotheses we prematurely elevate and which we consign to the annals of the disproven and ridiculous. If we accept that something akin to anthropathology exists, we yet have no decisive aetiological account of it. It could have arisen as a useful accident. It

appears to be a cumulative series of adaptations that have become too complex and too path-dependent to continue to benefit us indefinitely. But acceptance of its existence, importance, destructiveness, and urgency would at least demand that it be taken seriously alongside other disciplines.

How Anthropathology May Be Transmitted

Anthropathology is transmitted somewhat haphazardly by evolutionary, cultural, developmental, and cognitive means. We appear to inherit many traits, positive and negative, from our distant and near ancestors, and it appears true that we have quite recently learned to become less violent, for example. The philosopher of biology Kim Sterelny (2014) focuses on the positive benefits of human intergenerational knowledge transmission but downplays the many negatives. Nested within us are many animal instincts, and also many evolutionary mismatch problems which we cannot simply shake off (Clack, 2009; Gluckman & Hanson, 2008). Dean (1997) applies genetic, neurobiological, and chaos theory to individual lives of substance misuse, suggesting many unpredictable, fractal outcomes. But our cultures also load many values on to us, some of which appear optional and others difficult if not impossible to resist. For most of us a job is necessary, for example, not only for income but as a means of structuring time, appearing normal, gaining status, attracting mates, and providing for our families. But today, in many cultures we can choose to embrace or deny religion. Biological imperatives—eating, drinking, self-protection, mating—remain, our ability to commit suicide or refuse to reproduce admittedly being major exceptions, and mostly achieved technologically. Indeed, it can be argued that some cultures have swung from rigidly limited behaviours to a counterproductively choice-saturated individualism.

One of the transmission routes for human values and behaviour, good and bad, is that of early individual development. Human upright gait, relatively frequent pregnancies, narrow birth canal, perilous birth process, and long vulnerable infancy make for a high-risk beginning to life, including intrauterine trauma, and extended dependency, all foci which certain models of psychotherapy have sometimes controversially explicated. We have no early choice but to balance our animal instincts (to cry in pain and hunger, or for attention, and to urinate and defecate) with our caregivers' conditional nurture, preferences, and whims. Parents as social agents have no realistic choice but to transmit expectations to us: we must learn to walk, speak, and behave in socially accepted ways. It is established that we are neurologically primed to learn language and to learn it correctly. We are taught not to refer to ourselves in the third person ('Johnny hungry') but in the first ('I'm hungry'). We are not born thinking but feeling, but language and social injunctions enable and probably force us to internalise and symbolise our feelings. We emote less as we grow, and think more, a developmental change paralleled in our evolution (Campbell, 1975). The thinker, according to this line of reasoning, becomes lodged in our heads as 'I', the detached ego. An internal struggle is established between the 'uncivilised

animal baby' and the individual who must fit in by suppressing disallowed spontaneous expressions. Freud's tripartite model of id, superego, and (judicious) ego roughly covers this dynamic process. Suppression and loss of some human functions underpin civilisation (Freud, 1908/2001), a thesis elaborated by Hobbes and opposed by anarchists.

As we grow (the 'we' here is, admittedly, presumptuously generalised) we inevitably experience some conflicts between our raw perceptions and needs, and the culturally normative, dominant narrative. Somewhere along the line, sensory awareness reduces, idiosyncratic qualities are somewhat smoothed out, and the person accepts social conditioning, much of which entails living and perpetrating a lie. (Consider the characters of Leo Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich and Arthur Miller's Willy Loman as key examples.⁵) In spite of residual awareness that the normatively transmitted worldview contains many glaring flaws and lies, sooner or later most of us must succumb to resignation, a point Griffith (2004) places somewhat arbitrarily at the age of 12 years but which many probably know from adolescence.

We are not born wholly anthropathological, then, but have it thrust upon us. In this model, the vast majority of us have no choice but to adopt the *anthropathological false self*. I believe this equates roughly with what Bohm (1994) refers to as 'thought', which contains a 'systemic fault'. This is the same as the 'I the thinker' but it is inevitably a self painfully divided as it struggles to reconcile what it actually sees and feels with what it is told it sees and feels. The sheer pressure of living in mass civilisation, which constantly reinforces the falsely adapted self, keeps us both on track and in perpetual conflict with ourselves. Call this alienation or any other name. Each of us searches for a social niche, a haven of relational, familial, cultural, and occupational comfort, in which we can survive, dimly aware that our society both protects and threatens us. In this way, we are all simultaneously perpetrators and victims of anthropathology.

Social brain theory (Burns, 2007) suggests that psychoses result from that aspect of evolution that has demanded 'a capacity for complex social and interpersonal relationship' (p.181) that exceeds the ability of some of us to cope. What is sometimes referred to as our 'extreme sociality' and 'hyper-co-operation' is also an Achilles' heel, pushing some into madness and many into borderline states where the requirements of constant social monitoring and responding appropriately become too costly. Although space restrictions prevent further exploration of the topic, related phenomena in mass psychology are relevant here. To take just two phenomena, consider trance-like and stampede-like behaviours. An example of the first might be climate change denial and associated policy inertia. As regards the second, anything from the fashion for tattooing, and nothing-to-lose migration, to a return to fundamentalist religion, might qualify. With contemporary mass populations we see such phenomena on a scale not known before, but where unconscious evolutionary and historical drivers augur badly for our prospects. While fragile individuals might be said to implode into mental illness, groups spread anthropathology outwardly in the direction of social chaos and incipient wars. Walsh (2014) takes up some related biosociological themes.

The Duality of Human Consciousness and Behaviour

Homo duplex, we are long accustomed to thinking in terms of good and evil, both theologically and psychologically. It is counterintuitive to assert that *all* human life and achievement is bad, just as its opposite affirmation is not credible. As E.O. Wilson (2014) puts it, 'We are all genetic chimeras, at once saints and sinners, champions of truth and hypocrites ... because of the way our species originated across millions of years of biological evolution' (p.28). Just recall how the Catholic Church, for all its good works, has been sullied historically by violence and corruption, and rocked by paedophile scandals in recent years. Few would argue that human existence contains no good and no bad elements. But we will certainly argue over the balance of joy, beauty, love, humour, and achievement versus suffering, ugliness, evil, decay, and death. Among a few others, Benatar (2016) has argued that life is bad enough (indeed asymmetrically weighted towards the bad) to make a strong moral case against further procreation, and a sober review by psychologists Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) concluded that bad outweighs good. De Waal (2006), among others, makes a case for a two-sided or bipolar nature illustrated by reference to our ape cousins, chimpanzees, and bonobos. Diamond (1991) remarks on the two-edged sword that agriculture represented in our emergence. Talbot (2005) makes use of paradoxical systems theory to analyse our evolved dualist readiness to respond to challenges in different ways. In any case, we seem unable to transcend thinking in such dualistic terms. And as we have seen, Jaynes, McGilchrist, and many others have attempted to explain and resolve our hemispherical problems.

Bohm (1994) argues that we humans have great difficulty in being aware of when our actions are going dangerously off course to adjust them in a timely manner. Comparing subtle bodily proprioception with cognitive stubbornness, he searches for ways in which the human mind might recapture some of this subtle, agile, corrective cognitive ability. Although gifted problem-solvers, we are also susceptible to failures in awareness and adjustment. This may be accounted for by our fierce (sometimes homicidal or self-defeating) attachment to habits and traditions, our path dependency, and our tendency to overcorrectiveness in some matters. We often assume that if one course is unprofitable or wrong, its opposite must be right. For example, in politics we are often sharply divided in our affiliations and we can sometimes swing from harsh dictatorship to ineffective soft democracy, probably neither of which is optimal. We can even perform this *volte-face* within ourselves, for example, the radically left-wing young person becoming a rigidly right-wing advocate in old age.

In the domains of politics and technology, say, quite often we fail to anticipate the unintended consequences of our actions, some of which may be disastrous. Ingenious problem-solving in the medical area, to take one example, can lead to new problems of antibiotic resistance, hospital-borne diseases, old age diseases and disabilities, high costs of desired drugs, and unsustainable costs of increasing lifespans. Very commonly we do not appreciate the operation of diminishing returns, as

our hopes and investments in one political, economic, or other endeavour yield poor repayment for great effort. We are hardly alone among species in such adjustment problems, but the scale of our projects is often so large that the consequences can be hugely damaging. Nuclear arms, rampant capitalism, and unsustainable levels of carbon emissions are clear examples. I have elsewhere referred to these self-defeating dynamics as anthropathological loops (Feltham, 2007), our very capacity for inventiveness also being a curse.

Manifestations of Anthropathology

Anthropathology subsumes violence, tribalism, greed, deception, untenable expansion, and pervasive suffering under its aegis. We have only recently spoken more of shared psychological pathology than moral evil (Staub, 2003), and the literature on culturally variable evil is limited (Parkin, 1985). Our Western epistemic tradition since at least the time of Aristotle has divided knowledge into discrete disciplines which facilitate ever greater expertise but far too little consilience or actual problem-solving. We assume that progress is made in this way but Bohm (1994) suggests we deceive ourselves, or rather *thought* deceives us into believing we are judiciously running the show, while in fact thought itself long ago took over, with its problematic fragmentation of perception. As the pessimistic historian Oswald Spengler (1931/2015) put it, ‘Man has become the slave of his thought’ (p.52). Our common thought system tells us that the individual and society are separate, that mental illnesses are discrete entities, internal distress is different from criminal acting out, most people are good or have only peccadilloes but violent criminals are beyond the pale, capitalist exploitation is legitimate but personal freeloading and cheating is not, and so on. But looked at without these assumptions, we might see all such foci as mere manifestations of the same underlying pathological dynamic.

Already we see debates about the reality or illusion of different mental health diagnoses and their putative aetiologies. It is less clear than it once was how depression and anxiety are distinct from each other, for example, comorbidity being more likely. Anti-psychiatrists or critical psychiatrists and critical psychologists dispute the existence of schizophrenia and attention deficit disorder. It has been suggested, and I concur, that we are all ‘neurotic’ in one form or another (Charlton, 2000; Ratey & Johnson, 2004), just as we all necessarily differ in personality from each other (Rich Harris, 2007). Reasonable evolutionary explanations for differing mental illnesses are offered by Gilbert (1989), Nesse (2005), and Stevens and Price (2015), among others, but these focus on mental ill health as if it is discrete. Evolutionary explanations for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are offered (Cantor, 2005), but the likelihood that civilisation is partly constructed around the *avoidance* of trauma is barely explored; much medical progress can be regarded as driven by strategies for avoiding terror and pain. The psychopathic (or sociopathic, depending on UK/USA conventions) manager who leads a profitable business effectively is understood to be common and is not necessarily diagnosed. The

academic, particularly in science and mathematics, whose achievements are not matched by his interpersonal skills or happiness, may nevertheless thrive reputationally. Some diagnoses are apparently prevalent in certain places and non-existent in others. Shyness is normal in Japan but a social phobia in the USA.

In the common assumptive world, the majority is normal, well adjusted, and happy, with only a minority being deviant. In a certain 'politically correct' interpretation, we are all different and equally valuable; or in another, patriarchal dominance is to blame for everything that goes wrong. The right-wing may insult the left as the 'loony left' while the left freely diagnose homophobia and xenophobia among the right. The religious may speak of the sins of the infidels, while atheists can retaliate in terms of 'religious delusions'. In practice, we increasingly recognise that modern life can be stressful and hence many need to consult psychotherapists who, however, are themselves only human and riddled with problems of their own (Adams, 2014). Irish writers James Joyce and Samuel Beckett wrote respectively of 'unhappitants of the earth' and 'you're on earth, there's no cure for that'. In other words, we are all affected by and complicit in suffering. Erich Fromm (2011) discussed what he saw as the pathology of human normalcy, constituted by narcissism, alienation, consumerism, and a religious vacuum. He was certainly not alone in his diagnosis of society as sick. Foucault (1989) too, of course, drew attention to the ways in which social ills are projected on to individuals and some minority groups. Farmer (2004) writes of the pathology of the indifferent healthy and uber-wealthy, while for Zerzan (2002) our whole way of post-hunter gatherer life is pathological.

Hardest of all for most of us is to acknowledge our own shameful shortcomings, indeed our anthropathology, which is evident at the levels of ego and tribe but concealed by our blind spots. Contrary to this, one extreme of self-denigration is the person suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder who falsely believes he has committed grave crimes, a problem shared with those whose religiosity may see them flagellating themselves. But it has long been those in positions of perceived greater integrity or virtue—priests, politicians, psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers, academics—who probably find it hardest to admit to serious personal and occupational errors or failures. Indicting our leaders, however, may also remind us that they can serve our need for the illusion that at least some of us escape from anthropathology. Surely Jesus was without sin and resurrected from the dead, surely the Buddha attained enlightenment even if very few of us do. Surely our selfless professors are rapidly discovering important new life-enhancing, disaster-averting theories and practices, and not merely obsessing over pet theories, jostling for status among their peers, and advancing their own careers.

Anthropathology and Pessimism

Anthropathology carries a dark view of human nature but is not based misanthropically on hatred or an endorsement of voluntary human extinction. It may have diverse roots and manifestations but arguably its central dimension relates to

consciousness producing uncomfortable knowledge that confirms inescapably our individual mortality, probable species extermination, and eventual cosmic annihilation. We immerse ourselves in life-affirming projects that can banish death awareness to the periphery of our consciousness and that act as an existential shield against thanatophobia, but we cannot banish death (O'Mahony, 2016). Death therefore remains a tacit shadow over all our projects. Whatever we achieve must perish in accord with the entropic principle. Even as I write this chapter, for example, probably within a decade or two of years I will be dead and forgotten, this book will probably be relatively little read, and evolutionary psychology itself may well be passing into the dusty archives of intellectual history within decades. We are, said Hamlet, 'quintessence of dust'. This is not a cynical view or a pessimistic one in the sense of being unrealistic, but an undeniable view (Feltham, 2016). We can certainly argue that it is unhealthy to dwell overmuch on death. But since our ancestors solved the problem of acute death awareness through religious mythologies, in our own time of accelerating knowledge and decreasing mythological defences we may find it harder to avoid death thoughts. It is unsurprising that depression and suicide are increasing worldwide but we seem to reflect relatively little on the vote of no confidence in human existence this represents.

Even the most positive of evolutionary psychologists concede that pessimism has some useful role in human survival, with the usual argument being that pessimistic vigilance and preparedness for things going wrong served ancestral fitness (Leahy, 2002; Nesse, 2000). Prophets of doom have warned against the dangers of always expecting the best. We would, however, expect pessimism to remain a minority disposition, and that is probably the case. Insofar as pessimism is entwined with introversion, depression, and some withdrawal from energetic life projects, it does not commend itself. But regardless of the size of its fan base, pessimism puts forward a negative evaluation that cannot easily be ignored. In line with pessimistic philosophers and other commentators such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Edgar Saltus, E.M. Cioran, Peter Wessel Zapffe, John Gray, David Benatar, Thomas Ligotti, and Ray Brassier (see Feltham, 2016), we can reinforce the analysis that the evolution of distinctive human consciousness was a problematic occurrence that was sure to lead to great and irreversible suffering. In other words, it is not only the future that is incidentally tainted with dark probabilities but the evolutionary past and intrinsic entropy that determine the ultimate fate of humanity. William Golding's (1955) novel *The Inheritors* depicts in highly imaginative terms the deadly encounter between Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens*, in which our own inventiveness is coupled with cruelty, and consciousness of guilt.

It should be noted, however, that some who agree with a deeply negative analysis of human behaviour do not come to pessimistic conclusions about our future prospects. The *dukkha* of Buddhism and sin of Christianity (interestingly similar in their etymological roots of de-centred, or off the mark, respectively) hold out hope of salvation by enlightenment via meditation and by the 'good news' of Christ. A pessimistic anthropathological take on Buddhism, however, is that even supposing the Buddha fortuitously understood and transcended suffering himself approximately 2500 years ago (*supposing*, because we can never know), vanishingly few appear to

have been able to follow his example since. Jeremy Griffith (2004) too, who fully acknowledges the horrors of the present human condition, believes optimistically that we now stand at the threshold of a radically new freedom. Paul Gilbert (1989, 2014) has based his understanding of compassion-focused self-help and therapy on the informed recognition that the human ‘tricky brain’ has been a ‘complete mess’ for two million years, which resonates with Kurzban’s (2011) ‘fragmented brain’. Somewhat similarly, Anthony Stevens (1993) believes that the ‘two million-year-old self’ can be accessed by Jungian archetypal psychiatry to effect 21st century therapeutic change. The earth scientist and inventor James Lovelock (2014), while expecting climate change to decimate humanity in the decades to come, believes enough will survive to engineer our species’ important future role in cosmic self-consciousness and exploration. Some who endorse evolutionary psychological views as to deep causes nevertheless see hope of steady progress in evidence of declining violence, a major ingredient of anthropathology (Pinker, 2012).

Hope springs eternal. It is quite possible to base one’s view of the human future on the heartwarming statistics of Steven Pinker’s *Better Angels* and the inspirational lyrics of John Lennon’s *Imagine*. Or indeed on the therapy-for-all, anti-capitalist, and re-enchantment agendas of assorted right-hemisphere enthusiasts.

Cognate Disciplines, Discarded Hypotheses, and Epistemological Problems

I have already mentioned some relevant academic disciplines and sub-disciplines in passing: the theology of the Fall and sin; Buddhist philosophy; big history; palaeobiology; evolutionary psychology. These by no means concur on the kind of anthropathology thesis I put forward here. There is sometimes a line between cranks and legitimate academics that is hazy, and it would be difficult to judge where psychoanalysis, for example, sits. Disagreement on many salient matters is rife among academics. Scientific research is always incomplete and many traces of human origins may never be found. Hasty conclusions may be avoided but we tend to fill in the gaps in our knowledge with interpretations based on bias. Each of us brings our personality biases (indeed our ‘epistemologically different worlds’) to such ventures; the nature of our chosen discipline and its perspectives influence our conclusions; our partly unconscious and usually undeclared politics often determine our interpretations of data; and finally we may be susceptible to denial. The pessimistic taste for negative evaluations of the human condition is a minority one.

There is, however, a curious paradox here. Among texts and authors supporting an anthropathological view, implicitly or explicitly, we have the following, many already mentioned: Bohm (1994), Burns (2007), Diamond (2011), Ehrlich and Ehrlich (2004), Gray (2002), Smith (2012), Varki and Brower (2013), Szent-Györgyi (1970), Taylor (2010), Zapffe (1933/2004), and Zerzan (2002). I raise this diverse spread of contributors here, both to remark on their different disciplines and to

question why in the light of such contributions we still have nothing approaching consilience. The paradox is that a vital topic addressed so passionately by writers like these should remain so uncoordinated. In part it is due to their differences of view, in part to writing at different times and places. But it is probably also due to academic pressures for specialisation and to an assumption that no convergent focus is of sufficient interest.

Among Western academics and the liberal public, mythologies of a supernatural creator and human Fall have largely given way to an alliance with scientific method and technological progress as overcoming deficiencies. Religious, paranormal, and transpersonal aetiologies and remedies may be fading fast⁶ but academia is infested with mythologies, hypotheses-in-limbo, and premature triumphs of its own. What, we might ask, is the current status of theories of panspermia or the infinite universe? Theories of classical behaviourism, sociobiology, the aquatic ape, the bicameral mind, and others have either been discarded or severely criticised and modified. New disciplines such as deep history, biohistory, and biosociology emerge and await evaluation.

One still current hypothesis that enjoys interest is the correlation in evolution between increased brain size and cooking (Wrangham, 2010). Yet as Cornélio, de Bittencourt-Navarrete, de Bittencourt Brum, Queiroz, and Costa (2016) demonstrate, there are good reasons for doubting this hypothesis, based on mathematical modelling. In certain cases, such as archaeology, questions are raised as to whether the discipline has sufficient theory, or clarity on its use of theory, beyond its 'stones and bones' remit, concerns about dating, and interpretation of data (Johnson, 2006). Anthropology has been remarked upon as suffering from the 'lonely anthropologist' problem but also from an implicit political bias which has sought to aggressively downplay reports of violence, vengeance, and the abduction of women among 'noble savages' (Chagnon, 2013).

Recalling Zapffe's notion of surplus consciousness (not to mention the Buddhist concept of *dukkha*, which includes common desire for reality to be different from the way it is and frustration at not being able to get what one wants), we can posit the idea that it is not only ordinary undisciplined humans who indulge in wasteful, delusional, and self-harming thinking, but also academia collectively, and in particular the social sciences, psychology, and the arts and humanities. The STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) have their problems, but have some reasonable built-in safeguards against protracted error. This topic is, however, a minefield of nuances and polemics (McGilchrist, 2009; Radnitzky & Bartley, 1987) and academia probably reflects the confusion and complexity of modernity.⁷

Parallel to language and tribalism, we have a babel of academic disciplines and specialisms. Research proceeds very slowly, with major breakthroughs coming rarely in science and hardly at all in the social sciences. No Darwin-sized figure has appeared since Darwin himself and arguably no Darwin has ever appeared among social scientists. Some of this slow pace is inevitable and necessary but some is simply due to tradition and competition. A problem for anthropathology as a putative discipline is its highly interdisciplinary nature, which calls either for rare

polymathic minds or massive transdisciplinary cooperation that is unlikely ever to materialise. Interestingly, some cited here have been relatively independent scholars (Darwin, Lovelock), thinkers writing outside their own disciplines (Bohm, Szent-Györgyi, Varki and Brower), or polymaths (Diamond).

Anthropathology and Evolutionary Psychology

‘The long-term scientific goal toward which evolutionary psychologists are working is the mapping of our universal human nature’ (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, p. 5). These authors speak too of a ‘natural science of humanity’. The same claims can be made for anthropathology, except that here the focus is on the denied, universally dark side of human nature. Anthropathology shares with evolutionary psychology a refusal to succumb to contemporary pressures from postmodernist writers to eschew the concept of human nature, grand narratives, and other essentialist foci (Ashworth, 2000). But evolutionary psychology tends to favour the concepts of domain-specificity and modularity of mind, and in speculative debates on the architecture of the mind, even ‘moderately massively modular’ arrangements are considered (Carruthers, 2003). Anthropathology, more monolithic, leans towards a concept of universally distorted cognitive processes now situated in individual, egoic, surplus, mischievous consciousness, as described by Zapffe and Bohm in particular.

Evolutionary psychology prefers to chunk its material for analysis and contains some implicit optimism for social change, whereas anthropathology, like big history, remains focused on the big human picture, which is certainly hard to grasp, and tends towards the view that our negative trajectory is irreversible. Evolutionary psychology refers somewhat vaguely to our human ancestral environment, while anthropathology suspects complex causes going back to animal and physical origins (for example, scarcity, predation, stealth, entropy). The paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall (2012) rejects both evolutionary psychology accounts of modularity and human universals theories, arguing that our ‘brains are makeshift structures, opportunistically assembled’ (p.227), and he refers ironically to our ‘accidental cognitive prowess’ (p.229) in an overall scheme of evolutionary experimentation.

In some ways, anthropathology resembles terror management theory in its partial focus on one overwhelming negative—death, but anthropathology both seeks historical origins and suspects future futility. As is well known, antagonism exists between evolutionary psychology and terror management theory, which continues in spite of bids for rapprochement (Landau, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2007). But while proponents of terror management theory and evolutionary psychology may compete with each other on some points, in anthropathological terms all such conflicts suggest an underlying tribalism. It is difficult to express this without seeming abrasive and rude towards academic colleagues (especially one’s editorial hosts), but a core of scepticism running through anthropathological investigation demands a high level of truthfulness. But I, too, am in epistemological competition here. As Trivers (2013) argues, deception and self-deception are pervasive and

‘self-deception deforms disciplines’ (p.319). Or, to borrow from Bohm’s (1994) concept of (dysfunctional) thought about (dysfunctional) thought, we do not recognise when our erudition deceives us.

Evolutionary science focuses on human development in anatomy, neurology, and behaviour, and it sometimes does so in uncritically celebratory or positive terms. Dunbar (2014), for example, in asking what evolutionary science must explain, says, ‘The substantive difference [between us and animals] lies in what we can do inside our minds’ (p.17). But the substantive difference surely also lies in our habitual over-thinking, deception, and destructive behaviour, in what extensive harm we do outside our minds that we do not even notice ourselves doing, and that we apparently cannot control. Specialist scholarly research can appear to be isolated from or indifferent to the anthropogenic havoc all around us, or perhaps regard it as political terrain that is not relevant to human evolution. This is, however, an ongoing thorny problem of pure versus applied research (McIntyre, 2006).

Insofar as evolutionary psychology and anthropathology share some deterministic and pessimistic features, they are disliked and critiqued by optimistic, Enlightenment-embracing writers such as Tallis (1999, 2011). In general, those enamoured of optimistic, determinism-denying attitudes, such as left-wing political thinkers (Clark, 2002), feminist writers, and many philosophers (e.g. O’Hear, 1999), often dislike and reject evolutionary psychology, neurophilosophy, and similar disciplines for suggesting that our behaviour is significantly limited by our deep past. Radcliffe Richards (2000) applies philosophical analysis to the typically superficial reading of a ‘selfish genes and moral animals’ polarity. Tattersall (2012) puts his view of evolutionary psychology thus: ‘This view has a wonderful reductionist appeal; but in reality our brains are the ultimate general-purpose organs, not adapted ‘for’ anything at all’ (p. 228). Hagen (2005) and Buss (2014) answer some of these criticisms. Insofar as anthropathology is deterministic and pessimistic, it falls within similar criticisms.

Does Anthropathology Have a Future?

One can answer this succinctly and provocatively in four ways: yes, no, no, and no.

1. It has a future insofar as it has persisted as a phenomenon for millennia and is unlikely to end while large human populations exist.

2. It probably has no future as a putative academic discipline because (a) it is so repellently negative in its characteristics and impossibly global in its negative scope; and (b) it logically ‘incriminates’ all humans, including academics, whose affective subjectivity typically defends against it by denying it.

3. It certainly has no *long-term* future insofar as humanity itself ultimately has no long-term future.

4. However, let us suppose that in the short term at least some of us find it compelling enough to investigate, and perhaps even minimally optimistic enough to question whether it might be negated.

The most pessimistic scenario—linking numbers 1 and 3 above—is that our continuing unacknowledged anthropathology takes us forward into one or another catastrophe that exterminates or decimates us (Oreskes & Conway, 2014). Anthropogenic climate change is currently the frontrunner for such disaster scenarios but nuclear war and other possibilities remain on the table. The adverb ‘probably’ within number 2 allows for a small possibility that anthropathology might receive serious attention, and might be acted upon in a timeframe that could conceivably alter something significantly. Alternatively, a rigorous evaluation of anthropathological claims might just result in its decisive refutation. Number 4, the most optimistic scenario, would demand that we were able to clearly define anthropathology and operationalise its ingredients for meaningful research.

A combination of 2 and 4 would demand some quantifiable and testable phenomena. To some extent, such work has already been accomplished, for example, in tracing prolific warfare historically and counting the dead. History, politics, and economics can tell us about the incidence of genocides, murderous dictatorships, economic inequalities, and so on. Climate science should be able to calculate the effects of and prognosis for anthropogenic climate change. Two further problems present themselves, namely the undeclared political bias of researchers and the difficulty of creating meaningful and rigorous research in laboratories, in the field, or in other special conditions. Evolutionary psychology shares this problem, however. It may be more promising to identify groups of human beings who do not exhibit significant anthropathological behaviour. Here, I am thinking of infants young enough not to have been inducted into anthropathology; people who are neurologically atypical (e.g. those with Down Syndrome or autism, feral innocents); those who by virtue of special conditions (e.g. epilepsy, stroke) sometimes experience unusual mental states; those who claim, or are believed, via meditation or fortuitous ‘enlightenment’ experiences, to enter alternate or higher states of consciousness; those who ingest mind-altering drugs such as LSD; and those in some cultures who have not suffered from chronic ‘nature deficit disorder’, dense urban living conditions, and ‘everyday trauma’ (Epstein, 2014). Clearly this wish list emphasises neurological research, perhaps with some anthropological opportunities for observation too, and novel investigations in experiential groupwork.⁸ Research might look for signs of egolessness, inability to lie or low tendencies to lie or dissemble, no or low levels of malice and unnecessary aggression, acceptance of death, absence or low levels of psychological suffering, and so on. Of course, we would run into some difficult choices, such as deciding whether religious beliefs are or are not delusional, the larger question here being ‘who decides what is and is not anthropathological?’ But in principle much of this research could be conceived and undertaken.

Conclusions

As science advances and mythological and emotive worldviews shrink, as religions recede and rationality strengthens its hold, simultaneously we are experiencing exponential information complexity and overload. This is partly addressed by the scientific study of information as a thermodynamic entity, and maintenance of distinct professional areas of expertise, but is accompanied by growing difficulties in discernment, by ‘dumbing down’, and by cognitive exhaustion. If we are unfit for high levels of sugar consumption without medical penalties, for example, we may also be susceptible to ‘infobesity’. We may find strategies to circumvent such difficulties, or alternatively we may be passing into an evolutionary stage of complexity and disorder from which we cannot recover—civilizational or species-wide collapse. As social science, psychology, and humanities academics, we face difficult choices between generating ever more divergent theory and argument, most of it inconclusive and of little obvious utility; judgements as to the urgency of threatening factors in our environment and our anthropathological trajectory; and the possibility of having to significantly change course. Having evolved to deal with an average expectable environment, and now often depending on our academic vocations for egoic, economic, and status-maintenance purposes, it feels counterintuitive to most of us to believe that a radically different cognitive focus and activity might be called for.

Anthropathology may or may not be a viable hypothesis but its core elements are these. Some combination of factors took *Homo sapiens* out of the animal world into an earth-spanning species with amazing constructive abilities alongside terrible destructiveness. Specifying the detailed historical mechanisms for this is not currently possible and may never be. But it seems likely that pre-existing biological tendencies made it inevitable in the long term. Simultaneously, the physical laws of the universe mean that our increasing complexity must eventually end in extinction. Human creativity stemming from dexterous hand-use and tool-making led to a culture of artificial technology that is all-pervasive and both convivial and life-threatening; and puts us on course for a transhuman future of robotics, artificial intelligence, and space exploration, the consequences of which are currently unknowable. Human sociality in mass societies underpins our progress but also overtaxes us. Our advanced consciousness makes us aware of nature’s indifference to our fate, and to inevitable individual and species death. In order to maintain morale, we are obliged to deny much that impinges on our consciousness. We thus remain locked into many social and belief systems that are anachronistic and absurd. Even though violence may be declining, it can never reliably or finally reduce to near zero, and our overall anthropathology drives us onward via greed, restlessness, and maddening symbolism, into continuous suffering.

Anthropathology might be understood concisely in these terms: our being too successful in having overcome natural disasters, food scarcity, predators, and other forms of adversity, and hence becoming over-populated; our concomitant over-reliance on technology, which has compromised us biologically and threatens the

earth; our complex consciousness which has a runaway, self-deceiving, thanatophobic downside; our failures to adapt to unintended consequences in a timely fashion; and also our being towards the senescent end of an entropic arc. In spite of metaphorical linkage with sin and evil, anthropathology is not choice-based but driven by deeply embedded and entangled forces we barely notice, let alone control. Anthropathology is lodged like a concealed deadly bacterium in our neural systems and habits of perception and behaviour such that we cannot recognise or shift it. Yet some of us, deluded or not, claim to recognise it. *If* such a self-deceiving entity as anthropathology—our chronically troublesome species trait—exists, and *if* some claim to know a way to overcome it, such as Jesus, the Buddha, psychoanalysts, their enthusiastic followers, et al., why does it remain largely undetected, misunderstood, unresolved, and troublesome?

Notes

1. Exceptions can always be found. Diamond (1991), for example, examines violence, genocide, sexual problems, addictions, ageing and death, and catastrophe; but seeks no unified explanation. Kaplan and Kaplan (2010) focus on many areas of logical error-making—a sizable field now in its own right—but do so somewhat jocularly and suggest such mistakes may be the ‘handmaiden of adaptability’.
2. ‘Core sickness’ is a tentative descriptor and might be read as ‘core moral, psychological (Staub, 2003), or neurological sickness’; or paraphrased as the sum of negative aspects of evolved and current human behaviour.
3. Deep history (Shryock & Smail, 2011) takes nine million years ago as its starting point.
4. As I write, for example, it is speculated that human remains in the Rising Star Cave in South Africa may point to a burial rite associated with *Homo naledi* up to 2 or 3 million years ago (Green, 2016).
5. In Tolstoy’s novella *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, and Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman*, respectively.
6. Readers will decide for themselves where to place various figures such as Rudolph Steiner, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, William Irwin Thompson, and Ken Wilber. Wilber (1996), incidentally, speaks of two Falls, the first (‘theological Fall’) 15 billion years ago, the second (‘scientific Fall’) about 4000 years ago, when humans became conscious of their illusory separation from original oneness. Hands (2015), presenting a recent ambitious and critical consideration of all sciences concerning origins, nevertheless leans towards some of the above writers with his favoured concept of ‘psychic energy’.
7. On complexity and confusion, consider the notion that (messy) modular minds lead to massive inconsistency, hypocrisy, and splintered perceptions (Kurzban, 2011); and then reckon with Seabright’s (2010) reminder that we trust and cooperate on a massive scale economically. These may both appear at odds with a

monolithic anthropathology, yet it is the dark undertow of fragile, kluge-like functionality that unites them.

8. While much psychological groupwork (such as encounter groups) aims at enhancing human potential, group analysis focuses somewhat on psychopathology, and existential group therapy commonly considers problems of isolation, meaninglessness, death, and freedom. However, all these are implicitly directed towards solutions, and a rigorously investigative anthropathology group would have to allow for the possibility of there being no solutions.

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