

**17.03.18**

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**GLAWCAL  
COMMENT #194**

**THE ANTHROPOCENE AND NEO-  
LIBERALISM' BREAKDOWN**

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*Based on*

**Jessica C. Lawrence "Managing the environment Neoliberal governmentality in the Anthropocene"**



**gLAWcal**  
Global Law Initiatives for Sustainable Development

## A gLAWcal comment on Jessica C. Lawrence "Managing the environment Neoliberal governmentality in the Anthropocene" in Pasi Heikkinen (Ed.) Sustainability and Peaceful Coexistence for the Anthropocene.

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"This chapter provides an interesting concerning the study of the origins of the famous Anthropocene. The exact starting point has not been agreed by scholars but what is clear is that we live in a world where human activity is the most important factor influencing Earth systems. A shift of our understandings is of how we relate to, and are responsible for, our collective ecological future is needed. According to the Anthropocene, we usually consider the world in terms of 'global systems', which human beings are both part of and the biggest influence on. This alternative understanding of the relationship between the 'human' and 'natural' worlds has brought with it a renewed interest in investigating the ecological impacts of human economic, social and technological systems, as well as in the project of attempting to imagine different systems, outcomes and ecologies, and to encourage human societies to take responsibility for their impact on Earth systems. New paradigms to understand the relationship and balance between human economic, cultural, social institutions and the changing of the environment have been developed. What is lacking is the inclusion of the concept of Anthropocene by legal scholars, lawyers and politicians. According to the author of this article, there will be a neoliberal response. Neoliberalism has been often defined. The most famous definition has been probably given by Marxist geographer David Harvey, who describes it as characterized by the fact that human being can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills

within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. It is important to understand that neoliberalism is not – or at least not only – 'class rule' by another name. In other words, as law and government take up the idea that the human/non-human divide has broken down, and that it is therefore necessary to take Earth systems into account in governing, the likely response will be aimed at expanding the efficient and effective management of natural capital, rather than, say, the reconceptualization/limitation of economic growth, or the acceptance of a more holistic, Earth-centric worldview. This chapter has argued that the Anthropocene's breakdown of conceptual barriers between human and non-human coincides with neoliberalism's breakdown of the barriers between public and private, between market and society and between one jurisdiction and the next.

Cite as: gLAWcal Comment #194 “The Anthropocene and Neoliberalism’s breakdown” (2018) based on Jessica C. Lawrence “Managing the environment Neoliberal governmentality in the Anthropocene”, in Pasi Heikkurinen (Editor), Sustainability and Peaceful Coexistence for the Anthropocene, gLAWcal Book Series, Routledge Publishing (New-York/London), 2017.

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The gLAWcal comments are insight and short analytical pieces written by the gLAWcal team. The gLAWcal comments are based on, and inspired by, the books and chapters published within one of the [gLAWcal book series](#) published by Routledge Publishing (New York/London).

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**Email:** [research@glawcal.org.uk](mailto:research@glawcal.org.uk)

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