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Visions of travel and tourism after the global COVID-19 transformation of 2020

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The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

- Eleanor Roosevelt

This special issue is a reflection by tourism scholars on the initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world, with travel and tourism being among the most significant areas to bear those impacts. However, instead of an analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism places and sectors, as is the emphasis for many other journal special issues this year, the papers in this issue focus on visions of how the pandemic events of 2020 are contributing to a possibly substantial, meaningful and positive transformation of the planet in general, and tourism specifically. This is not a return to a 'normal' that existed before – but is instead a vision of how the world is changing, evolving, and transforming into something different from what it was before the 2020 global pandemic experience. Comments from the guest editors for this special issue are individually identified in this introduction editorial.

Resilience issues

Alan Lew

Resilience theory postulates that change is fundamental and the only constant that we can depend on (Butler, 2017; Cheer & Lew, 2017; Hall et al., 2017). Because all things change with time, systems (from a single entity to the entire planet) must adapt to their changing context or perish in some way. The resilience adaptive cycle suggests four general phases of a change event:

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Phase 1: (Re-)Organization (innovation and creativity),
Phase 2: Growth (exploiting opportunities that arise from phase 1),
Phase 3: Consolidation (establishing fixed institutions and rules for phase 2),
Phase 4: Collapse (failure of fixed institutions in phase 3 to adapt to context changes), which results in a return to the Re-organization (phase 1) or, alternatively, the complete dissolution of the system.

Systems do not need to move through all four of these phases. The collapse phase could, theoretically, be avoided if the system maintained a culture of constant innovation to match its changing context (i.e. staying in phases 1, 2 and 3 only). Similarly, a system can be 'stuck' in a collapse sequence if it is unable to effectively exploit its opportunities and resources (i.e. staying mostly in phases 1 and 4). In addition, the intensity of each phase can vary considerably. For example, a collapse (phase 4) can be minor and easily overcome, or it can be a pandemic; and it can be a common occurrence or a rare, once-in-a-lifetime event.

The COVID-19 pandemic event has caused a significant, although not total, collapse of the human-earth system. At the time of writing (May 2020), the collapse is still taking place, and the re-organization of the system is just barely beginning. We are probably, therefore, starting to enter a Re-organization phase of innovation and creativity, which is necessary for our human system to transform itself to adapt to the new context of the planet we inhabit.

Phase 1 innovation, for example, is seen in the many ways that people are seeking to connect with one another in the context of social/physical distancing policies implemented to control the COVID-19 pandemic. From this perspective, the deeper lesson of physical distancing has to do with expanding the integration of the planet in new directions. Humans are social animals and if they cannot connect physically they will find other ways. These other forms of connecting are creating new pathways to knowledge, understanding and empathy across the globe.

This is the goal of this special issue: to contribute, hopefully innovatively, to the Re-organization of the planet. As travel and tourism may be the single most impacted sector of the global economy under the COVID-19 pandemic, it makes sense for tourism scholars to be central to this innovative and creative re-organization process. The commentaries in this special issue are based on many years of focus and scholarship on travel and tourism around the globe. These writings are not based on deep dives and analyses of the COVID-19 pandemic, as data for such an understanding is not yet available.

What is most important at this early innovative stage of Re-organization is to be open to all ideas and to be willing to make mistakes. Innovation requires that we hold our judgements and acknowledge the potential value of every proposition. That means, for example, acknowledging some potential value in neoliberal economics, as well as sustainability. Unfortunately, the potential futures that we envision can only be based in some way on the pasts that we know. The new organizational structure(s) that will ultimately emerge post COVID-19 cannot really be known at this time, but will be formulated through the Re-organizational phase 1 of the resilience adaptive cycle, and tested and proven through the Growth phase 2.

'Growth' (phase 2) does not need to be GDP growth but could instead be, for example, growth in well-being. Many people have come to realize, in recent years, that things need to change, not just for tourism, but for the planet overall. The planet is simply delivering on that desire. Change is not easy, nor does it guarantee more fecund outcomes. But this time is the best chance yet to move the planet in a new direction. People are endlessly creative, and they will need to use their creativity to build a more meaningful, more benign, and less disruptive 'new normal' for our evolving global society. This is what the contributors to this special issue seek to nudge us all towards, in expressing their voices at this still very early time in the COVID-19 pandemic's change cycle.

Noel Salazar

The widespread crisis surrounding the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is laying bare the fragility and unsustainable nature of the current global economic system, in which travel and tourism play a crucial role. We should not forget that it was in great part due to international tourism and business travel that this coronavirus spread so rapidly across the planet. Not surprisingly, tourism is also one of the economic sectors most hit by the lockdowns and travel restrictions that countries have imposed to keep their citizens 'in' and travelers from abroad 'out'. While many still hope to return to 'business as usual' as soon as everything is over, others are seriously doubting that this will be possible.

The more significant question is what kind of world we envision for ourselves and future generations. A crisis gives us a unique opportunity to seriously reflect on this. While it is essential to dream about hopeful future scenarios, we should not forget that our social world is heavily marked by inequalities of various kinds. These inequalities existed before the crisis, have been exacerbated during the crisis, and will certainly not disappear after the crisis. It is within this general context that we need to re-envision the travel and tourism of the future, and the future of travel and tourism.

Michael Haywood

Nobody expects the status quo to remain. While certain policy changes are bound to occur, rather than being pre-determined, they will occur in response to: (1) the needs, demands, and changing habits and behaviors of the traveling public; (2) changing business models and practices; and (3) better preparedness for prevailing exigencies, such as a continuation of evolving zoonotic viruses and possibly other global and regional disruptions.

Actual innovation and revival will take place in the tourism trenches of everyday enterprises. But so many questions remain: Where are the blind spots in communities-as-destinations? How can they be identified and corrected? What needs to be done to dissipate the 'fear of disruption', which can be more damaging than the disruption itself? What needs to be done to protect employees, customers, suppliers and communities, and what is required to effectively communicate with these stakeholders, through the post COVID-19 cycles, particularly about the changes that will, or needs

to, occur? What is urgent and needed as cities, communities, and destinations adapt to, for example, car-free zones, revisions to placemaking and gatherings, and the design and planning of markets, events, and festivals?

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly has caused utter devastation. But crises often bring people and communities together. With time, and as the desire for connectivity and sociability is re-manifested, hope will return. Innovation and entrepreneurialism will reveal what is indeed possible and aspirational. The pause in economic activity has been eye-opening in that it has provided a glimpse of what the world could look like when the excesses of touristic activities are reined in. Social innovation needs to take place creatively at the community level to find the best balance between the benefits and excesses of tourism development.

This is what most of the articles in this special issue seek to address. But we must be cautious in what we wish for. In reference to climate change, a green economy, clean energy, and sustainability, for example, I encourage everyone to search for and examine all the facts and varying perspectives, and not just those to which you may seem ideologically attached.

Future forecasting

Alan Lew

Prognosticating the future is risky, especially in these still early days of not knowing how the pandemic will progress, and just as mysterious, how the Re-organization resilience phase will pan out. With that caveat, [Figure 1](#) models the COVID-19 transition from the current pandemic Collapse through the four phases of the resilience adaptive cycle. At a minimum, this exercise offers a starting point for discussion of where we are now and where we might go next.

In the short term, possibly for the coming two to five (or more) years, efforts will be made to 'Return to the Past' by governments, the travel industry, and many tourists who are anxious to stretch their wings again after being locked down. This seems to be occurring to some degree in China, which is several months ahead of the rest of the world in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic experience. As the virus situation begins

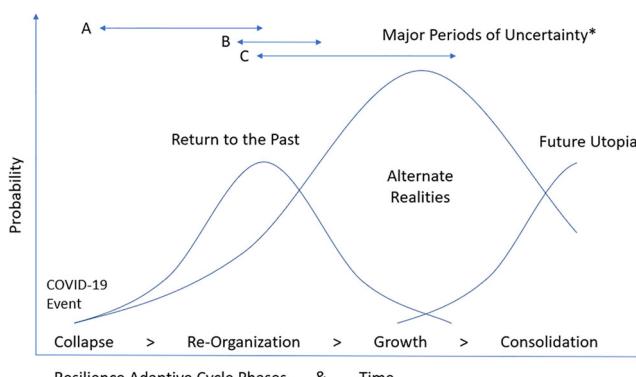


Figure 1. Resilience adaptive cycle phases and possible post COVID-19 pandemic scenarios.

*Note: A = Current Uncertainty (2 to 5+ years); B = Abandoning the Past; C = Alternative Experimentations.

to become better understood and stabilized there may be a big jump in proximity tourism to easily accessible destinations.

For a time, it might seem like nothing has changed at all. With time, however, the dominant values of the past will be less supported and ultimately abandoned as new values arising from the COVID-19 experience become more prominent (Kruglanski, 2020). This will give rise to an explosion of innovative and creative experimentation with 'Alternate Realities' (Figure 1), including new business models and government policy alternative, as the Re-organization phase transitions into a Growth phase. Some of these alternate experiments in organizing human societies already emerged in isolated ways prior to the pandemic. These may become more prominent, along with newer innovative alternatives that have yet to be imagined.

The world will change, as it always does. Some of the major values that might drive innovative alternative social systems in an emergent post COVID-19 world include:

- Peace (within and between countries and peoples);
- Love, Health and Happiness (as basic human rights);
- Equity, Fairness and Cooperation (in government and business policies and relations, and in ensuring protection of the most vulnerable populations and places); and
- Green Economies (such as full-cost life-cycle pricing and local sourcing), and perhaps a Gift Economy (where people pay what they can afford).

How these values will be achieved is unknown at this time, as they need to emerge from experimentation and consensus decision making. This may be the most important work to undertake during this COVID-19 transition period – how to facilitate change that has agreed upon values, while encouraging experimentation without an agreed upon method.

Eventually, a mostly global consensus will form over which approach or mix of approaches works best for a future utopia on Earth. What this alternative utopia looks like is impossible to know now, as it will emerge through the experiments with alternate realities as the resilience adaptive cycle moves from the Growth to the Consolidation phases (Figure 1). The best we can do at this time is to focus on the alternative values that we personally feel should form the basis of a future 'new normal' by defining and living them in our daily lives and careers.

Things could get worse before they get better. There are a lot of people and cultures on our planet and diversity is likely to expand, especially in the Re-organization and early Growth phases of creative innovation. But if we can hold our vision for what is possible, we can achieve it, at least in some measure and form. The old social-economic system will not be upended entirely, but its silencing during the pandemic has been an opportunity for alternative voices to be heard.

Michael Haywood

In refining Figure 1, I propose that the resilience 'Re-organization phase' will progress through the following stages, leading into the new 'Growth phase' for tourism businesses and communities.

1. Everyone trying to establish their local truth and the reality as it is being experienced by others;
2. Continuing efforts to build integrative awareness and engagement in collective sense-making;
3. Remaining in a state of pause as enterprises try to remain solvent, and divert capacity and resources in attempts to address the myriad of issues brought about by the crisis;
4. Identifying temporary measures to buy time, address the churn, manage the disruption taking place, and develop collective resilience;
5. Examining the new realities to clarify, if not revise, the purpose of tourism and communities-as-destinations (their core reason for being);
6. Undertaking a deep-dive assessment to clarify the current situation and discern critical shifts;
7. Engaging in aspirational thinking of what could or should be;
8. Deciding to stop certain activities, particularly those that in a post COVID-19 world are deemed obsolete or no longer fit-for-purpose;
9. Managing the transition period by accelerating re-structuring and re-strategizing, and the revision of policies;
10. Engaging in innovative programming, that will cut through years of institutional and systemic inertia, presenting the imperative and possibility for change;
11. Pushing through an agenda for change and transformation;
12. Creating new measures or metrics that identify how well tourism and all associated activities are performing for visitors and communities-at-large ... creating value and 'wellth' for all.

Taking stock, hope and change

Alan Lew

Mother Earth is forcing people to stay home and to become introspective – to ask themselves what is important in their lives? What is truth to them? What are they fearing, denying, or resisting? What do they want to do about these questions? This is the great *reset* of 2020, for the world, and especially for travel and tourism.

Joseph Cheer

The many discussion threads within this special issue suggest a myriad of questions and possible pathways forward for the post COVID-19 milieu. It is reminiscent of philosopher Bertrand Russell's enquiry into human potential where he asks:

Is there a way of life that is good and another that is bad, or is it indifferent how we live? If there is a good way of life, what is it, and how can we learn to live it? Is there something we may call wisdom, or is what seems to be such mere empty madness? (Foules, 1959, p. 8)

In a sense, we are broadly countenancing what is 'desirable tourism' and what is not. These are clearly value judgements and assessments based around consistent thinking that we have reached social and ecological tipping points that must be

turned around. Will we have the capacity and willingness to make the changes necessary? Is this wisdom or is it madness, as Russell expounds? Are we overthinking all of this and underestimating the extent to which systems can self-correct and adapt accordingly, or are we barking at passing cars as it were, where no amount of intellectual parrying can enforce the changes we so desire?

Running a rapid thematic analysis of the collection of papers for this special issue reveals a coalescence around two key themes:

- *Taking Stock* – How did we get here?
- *Future Proofing* – What are we going to do now?

'Taking Stock' is really an evaluation of the status quo amidst the still unfolding crisis. What have we learned so far from what was previously in place and how has the COVID-19 pandemic propelled us into necessary rethinking? This is a deep reflection and unpacking of just how we came to be in the position we find ourselves in.

Conversely, 'Future Proofing' is more forward thinking and considers the conditions and approaches that are required to make the so-called paradigm shift from what was, to a more hopeful, regenerative, and sustainable future, among other outcomes. Perhaps future proofing is an apt description for the hope of remaking tourism.

Patrick Brouder

There is another two-theme categorization to consider in the papers in this special issue: *Hope* and *Change*!

There is a group of papers which are hopeful that this is the moment of change. (Even the more skeptical papers seem to share that common hope of a better world, although they claim it is unlikely to materialize any time soon!) That sense of hope for a 'better world' and that something good can come out of tourism's return from near zero is central to our rationale for publishing this special issue.

The other set of papers is focused on how change may occur in a COVID-19 world (the more hopeful papers address change to a greater or lesser extent, as well). The change papers align with the resilience projection sketched out in [Figure 1](#). Change is desirable, but how it comes about is a messy, place-specific process that will be seen through a myriad of contemporaneous realities in a global patchwork. How these realities resolve themselves (assuming they do) will decide which alternate future will manifest. As tourism scholars, we are all well aware of the complexities that lie ahead, and even as some of us focus on hope and others on change, it seems clear that we can all agree that, at the end of the day, we all hope for change!

Overview of contributions

The authors contributing to this special issue were mostly either members of the *Tourism Geographies* Editorial Board, or members of an informal group of tourism scholars with research interests in 'Transformational Tourism'. Most of the papers are

'commentaries' which underwent editorial review and revisions prior to formal submission and acceptance by the journal.

Joseph Cheer

The essence of papers in this collection centers on the yearning to glean lessons and move purposefully forward from the pandemic in a manner that allows tourism to optimize its potential as a benefit to humankind. In a sense, almost all the papers, as should be expected from critical scholars, take the view that the status quo before COVID-19 was unsustainable.

Renaud's long association with cruise tourism is rather revealing in that he infers that everything that is not right about tourism is easily encapsulated in cruising. An enduring problem is that a portion of the travelling public loves cruising and many destination managers and policy makers see advantages in associations with the sector. This passion is found in many other sectors of the tourism and leisure economy, such as professional sports, which **Cooper and Alderman** point out have been similarly halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Can we be so sure that the human penchant as a creature of habit will not return to former consumptive ways after a vaccine is developed (if not before)? Hopefully, the COVID-19 era will not be looked back upon fondly as 'the time we thought we had woken up from our slumber but promptly went back to sleep again'.

Nepal's paper is rather wistful, and understandably so looking at adventure tourism's past with fondness and lamenting what it has become declaring, 'Annapurna is no longer a classic trekking destination'. Is this an inevitability and is this what happens necessarily when tourism is introduced? Nepal is confident that COVID-19 gives adventure tourism a chance to reset. The question that begs is whether adventure tourism is even interested in resetting, akin to the cruise tourists that Renaud discussed. What unfolds as Nepal suggests, might not only be up to the communities and policy makers, but more so the provinces of the tourism global supply chain that might roll on regardless, at least for the short term.

While we might already know what needs doing, does the broad tourism stakeholder group have the capacity and willingness to follow through? **Brouder** opines that transformation might remain a pipe dream unless 'sufficient institutional innovation' emerges – but these are the same institutions that were instrumental in getting us to where we are in the first place. Brouder's summation that 'the likelihood of a transformation of tourism is low and there is evidence of past moves towards sustainable tourism being ultimately undone by the dominant development path coming back' is daunting and depressing all at once. **Niewiadomski's** linking of globalization and the rise in international tourism suggests that deglobalization can have an adverse impact on any future recovery. However, COVID-19 is 'giving the global tourism industry a unique chance for a re-boot' and that there are 'unlimited path-shaping opportunities'. The extent to which COVID-19 will shape path-creation is undoubtedly, but the question regarding what this pathway might be remains open.

Tomassini and Cavagnaro's conflation of power and 'the local' poses very timely considerations – can tourism rebalance the disproportionate power relations between

the travelling classes and those who host them? Rethinking neoliberalism is very much allied to the reshaping of tourism in the post COVID-19 milieu, but how confident can we be that the markets will undergo behavior change? Will it always be 'about the economy, stupid', as Bill Clinton is said to have uttered, and will that dictate terms of engagement above that of social movements against it? **Higgins-Desbiolles** follows on from this, proposing that socializing tourism where the public good is prominent might form a realignment potential. One way forward is seen in **Everingham and Chassagne's** plea for values reshaping, for which the Buen Vivir tradition from South America might offer some salient instructions on how tourism limits might be better acknowledged.

Remaking tourism features prominently throughout the articulations in this collection and based around a unified appeal for positive transformation. **Ateljevic** calls for new ways of thinking, doing and being underlined by regenerative economics where land use and global food systems are transformed and more in sync with natural world systems and away from hyper driven production systems. **Edelheim** also appeals for a revaluation structured around tourism higher education where 'we equip our students, through the education we provide them, with tools not only to transform themselves but also to transform the realities they will inhabit'. Hope underlines much of what **Pernecke** holds true to advocating that as critical scholars, 'We ought to have *hope-as-utopia* and draw on the imaginative capacities of tourism scholars, students and professionals to envisage and articulate social realities vis-à-vis tourism that are more just, equitable and considerate'.

Romagosa considers finding a middle way that rebalances the weighting between economic, social and ecological priorities in a redefined sustainability paradigm. The annual Burning Man festival in the US, according to **Rowen**, presents a potentially ideal platform from which to rearticulate the urgency for finding the sustainability sweet spot that Romagosa suggests. Rowen's rendering of the Burning Man festival is very relevant to the transformation of tourism because as he says: 'the exemplary and creative response of some of its participants to this and past waves of disaster and crisis can offer lessons for the formation and maintenance of community and connection that may support more sustainable social and environmental economies'. Rowen is ebullient that *Burners'* 'pro-social behavior could be of use for a reimagined and reconfigured tourism'. Fair to say that they are the converted and the question that begs is whether the philosophies and subversive actions of Burners extends beyond what might be iconoclastic interests at best.

Ioannides and Gyimothy articulate the sentiments of almost all contributors by highlighting travel and tourism's so-called fork in the road. Are we able to 'grasp the opportunity and to rectify an otherwise defective global system' as they suggest, while noting that tourism remains subject to larger, overarching agendas beyond tourism circles? Are the solutions we need going to lie in technology and the wider smart tourism movement as many think? **Zeng, Chen and Lew** offer what they consider to be likely response, suggesting that in a high-touch industry like tourism, solutions to make us more secure in the event of future pandemics lie in low-touch or no-touch technologies, which would also create a new potential for high-touch opportunities for tourism workers.

In elucidating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous peoples, **Carr** argues that it 'accentuates the cumulative impacts from mass tourism, overtourism, colonialism and racism on Indigenous peoples as it has disrupted livelihoods'. Indeed, this accords with the argumentation that in times of crisis, the most vulnerable tend to pay the biggest price. Indigenous peoples and their encounter with colonization are manifold but as historical entreaties have proved, the spread of hitherto unprecedented illnesses is embedded in colonial narratives. Carr is piercing in her assertions that 'The virus, like colonialism, extends a legacy beyond this generation to future generations'.

That the COVID-19 pandemic has created an inflection point is certain. **Cave and Dredge** suggest that the diverse economies framework may offer any insights for a post COVID-19 tourism system. They describe this framework 'as systems of coordinated exchange through which value is produced, consumed and accumulated – organized into types of economic practice'. In essence, it flags how economic considerations and the refiguring these might be the key to the post pandemic tourism landscape. **Haywood** similarly places tourism's post COVID-19 recovering within the framework of an existing and yet diverse economic system, but sees innovative hope in the tourism sector's 'desire and ability to work collaboratively, as a collective unit'.

While a great deal of attention in foreshadowing the 'post-pandemic new normal' is spent on reforming the industry and policy making, much less attention is given to the role that tourists themselves should play in all of this. Where this has been apparent, behavior change is considered vital, and for **Stankov, Filimonau and Vujičić**, the key might lie in cultivating mindfulness in travellers. As they argue, 'a post-pandemic tourism industry could benefit from more conscious consumers, that are more aware of their unconscious behaviors, purchasing patterns, and increased ability to resist the promise of false happiness'. Similarly, in calling for the cultivation of a new global consciousness, **Galvani, Lew and Sotelo Perez**, adjudge that this is needed because 'True sustainability will only occur when it is valued as a part of the take-for-granted daily life of individuals and cultures across the globe'.

Mostafanezhad articulates the conundrum that COVID-19 presents us, the inhabitants on planet Earth, stating 'we must denaturalize the political-economic drivers of disasters and their human and non-human consequences in ways that not only reveal the open wounds of structural inequality, but also offer more than a band-aid to heal them'. This appeal resonates through all the contributions in this collection, and in the whole scheme of things, the rights to travel seem trivial when so many lives have been lost and public health concerns remain central. Mostafanezhad is realistic in opining, 'While there are reasons to be hopeful, who will benefit from this restructuring is still an unsettled question'.

The remaining contributions in this collection traverse the continuum of despair and hopelessness at one extreme, and ebullience and optimism at the other. **Hall, Scott and Gössling's** wide sweep of the status quo suggests that complexity and messiness, rather than straight-up circumstances, makes prognosticating and future forecasting tricky. Notwithstanding, humans, non-humans and the planet might be in for the fight of their collective lives in the post pandemic transformation. While COVID-19 is seen as a harbinger of what's to come, **Prideaux, Thompson and Pabel** argue that climate change presents a far greater threat to humanity, and that the

pandemic may provide some insights into how the planet and tourism might shift toward a carbon neutral economic production system.

Crossley's rendering of ecological grief deftly illustrates the way a sense of considerable loss has become an overriding emotion. That nature is appearing to benefit from a lighter human touch is a silver lining amidst overwhelming cumulonimbus. This aligns with **Lapointe's** interweaving of alterity and what this means for tourism. If indeed Lapointe's sense of alterity is so, when 'the transformation of the tourism sector within the striated zones, and simultaneous deterritorializing movements in the smooth corridors of 6ft-tourism products' takes place, will this be stomached so acceptingly by a tentative travelling public?

Tremblay-Huet meditates on the issue of power and privilege in regards to space appropriation suggesting that reinstating local agencies might signal a shift to a transformed status quo for host communities. Indeed, human flourishing as a touchstone is raised by **Cheer** who argues that any new normal must have this as a fundamental tenet.

In the end, while contributors have made stirring appeals for how we might see things changing, ultimately, transformation requires solutions and actions that are not only tolerable and viable, but have the capacity to puncture the policy maker and practitioner bubbles, and also entice the traveling public to embrace the pandemic's lessons to shift their past values to better align with those of planet. Whether or not the stampede for greater resilience building in tourism destinations can be achieved or not remains a quest that has taken on greater urgency than ever before (Lew & Cheer, 2017; Saarinen & Gill, 2018). That said, are we humans even capable of recognizing our self-harming failings and transform accordingly? On this, Bertrand Russell offers us yet another point for reflection:

And what are we to say of man? Is he a speck of dust crawling helplessly on a small and unimportant planet, as the astronomers see it? Or is he, as the chemists might hold, a heap of chemicals put together in some cunning way? Or finally, is man what he appears to Hamlet, noble in reason, infinite in faculty? Is man, perhaps all of these at once? (Foules, 1959, p. 8)

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