

Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes and David Wood (eds.)  
*Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy*  
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*Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy* begins with an imperative: ‘We cannot go on like this!’ (p. 1). In the midst of eco-catastrophe, the need to address climate change, deforestation, pollution, species extinction, overpopulation (and the list goes on and on), relentlessly forces itself upon us. Yet so too does the need to better conceptualise, think, understand and imagine both our current moment and what might come after it. We certainly cannot go on like this, but we also cannot continue to think as we have, and it is this imperative that inspires this excellent new collection. How might philosophy and particularly the philosophy of Jacques Derrida take on this need for change? How might it help us to understand and reimagine our times, and what are the limits to the assistance that Derrida’s work can offer us? These are the questions that occupy *Eco-Deconstruction*, a collection of fifteen new essays by some of the top scholars in Derrida Studies that give us not only thoughtful and original new readings of Derrida’s work but, more uniquely, charts the relevance of deconstruction for the environmental humanities.

More specifically, *Eco-Deconstruction* shows how Derrida’s thought pushes the limits of existing environmental discourse: Derrida’s critique of world, identity and self-relation is brought to bear on a range of ecological issues including the concept of ‘nature’, ‘earth’, ecological ‘scale’ and ‘the end of the world’. This last theme is of particular interest, the need to rethink the apocalypticism of our current moment recurs throughout the volume. For example, Ted Toadvine contends that our ‘eco-eschatological narrative’ of the end of the world works to problematically reinforce the notion of a single, ‘shared’ world threatened by climate catastrophe, a claim that falsely equates the phenomenological world of human life with the earth as a whole (pp. 56–57). Similarly, Vicki Kirby argues that a Cartesian notion of agency undergirds the very concept of the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change, a fact that forces us to ask how claims to ‘human’ culpability work precisely to justify rather than contest our irresponsibility in relationship to nature. At stake in these critiques is the way in which Derrida’s longstanding resistance to the notion of a shared world or community challenges the continuing and problematic humanism of environmental theory. The collection further develops this critique of existing environmental discourse through an array of essays dealing with ethics and responsibility; from Kelly Oliver’s

development of a deconstructively informed ‘earth ethics’ and Matthias Fritsch’s claim that deconstruction helps us reconcile competing notions of environmental ‘value’, to Dawne McCance’s account of a Derridean water ethics and Michael Peterson’s insistence that Derrida’s notion of ‘biodegradability’ challenges existing nuclear waste policy. This engagement with existing environmental thought is one of the true strengths of the volume, and will make it of interest to anyone working in and around environmental ethics from a continental perspective. Yet more than simply being another take on what Derrida’s work offers the environmental humanities, *Eco-Deconstruction* also engages in an unflinching exploration of the limits of Derrida’s thought.

One of the most original elements of this volume is its willingness to question whether Derrida’s thought helps us to think about ecological concerns at all. For example, Michael Mader argues quite compellingly that Derrida’s ahistorical ontologising of the economic leaves no room in his thought for ecology or any positive use of ecological notions such as ‘familial dwelling’ or communal ‘gathering’ (p. 162). Similarly, Claire Colebrook’s chapter contends that Derrida’s emphasis on ‘futures’ and ‘living on’ marks his inability to think about ‘literal extinction’ or the literal loss of the ‘archive’ (pp. 261–262). For these authors, there is an element of idealism or abstraction in Derrida’s work that makes it difficult for him to address the material realities of climate change. This question of the status of ‘materiality’ or ‘the real’ in Derrida’s work is, moreover, a theme across the volume, emerging not only in Mader’s and Colebrook’s contributions, but also in Karen Barad’s fascinating exploration of the deconstructive temporality of particle physics, Timothy Clark’s notion of a ‘scalar deconstruction’ uniquely opened up by the radical increase in human populations over the last century, and David Wood’s suggestion that deconstruction may ‘need an alliance with New Materialism’ (p. 46). Additionally, in the volume’s focus on literal questions of water, earth, nuclear waste, human survival and extinction, the status of the material world comes to the fore again and again. Not that the volume presents a clear consensus on this question – although I find myself more in Colebrook’s and Mader’s camp, insofar as I think that Derrida’s work faces certain struggles in its account of materiality. Yet whatever one’s feelings here, this question is, I think, one of the most important of the volume, insofar as it extends the appeal of the collection beyond the confines of the environmental humanities, opening the question of ‘eco-deconstruction’ to larger problems in Derrida’s Studies as well as to the hotly debated reemergence of realism and materialism in continental thought. Hence, although the labels ‘important’ and ‘original’ are often too freely applied in the genre of review, the originality and breadth of this volume, combined with the

quality, clarity and provocation of each of its chapters, makes the use of these labels not only appropriate but necessary. *Eco-Deconstruction* is an important new book, one that makes contributions across Derrida Studies and the environmental humanities. Given that we cannot, as this volume itself reminds us, continue to think as we have if we hope to address the dire complexities of climate catastrophe, there is more than ever the need for new engagements, reimaginings, rethinkings and unique combinations. There is a need to find resources wherever we can, and to utilise them in creative ways. If this is the imperative under which philosophy today takes place, *Eco-Deconstruction* offers us a compelling model for what such thought might be.

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