

**C. Tyler DesRoches, Frank Jankunis and Byron Williston (eds)**

***Canadian Environmental Philosophy***

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The introduction to C. Tyler DesRoches, Frank Jankunis and Byron Williston's collected volume *Canadian Environmental Philosophy* begins with a quotation from Margaret Atwood's survey of Canadian literature, *Survival*. Atwood notes 'Canada is an unknown territory for the people who live in it, and I'm not talking about the fact that you may not have taken a trip to the Arctic or Newfoundland, you may not have explored – as the travel folders have it – This Great Land of Ours', and clarifies that she is talking about Canada as a state of mind (p. 3). What is needed, says Atwood, is a map so one can see one's own position in relation to everything else, and in Canada we 'need such a map desperately, we need to know about here because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive' (Atwood 1972: 26). Atwood's remarks are commended by the editors as strikingly relevant, given that 'Arguably, we Canadians are still in desperate need of a mental map of our country, even if the reasons for this need have shifted over time' (p. 3).

*Canadian Environmental Philosophy* seeks to take up the Canadian perspective in environmental philosophy with a rigorous, comprehensive treatment of theoretical issues. What is offered is a 'snapshot of environmental philosophy as being practiced by Canadian philosophers today' (p. 5). Referencing the characterisation of Canadian environmental ethics by the *International Society of Environmental Ethics* three fields are mentioned: 'ethical responsibilities for our contribution to climate change, environmental issues relating to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, and the iconic role of 'the wild' or 'the northern wilderness' for Canadian identity' (p. 7). The editors note that these three themes appear in the book, including topics from political philosophy, normative ethics and philosophy of science, among others (p. 8).

The book is divided into four sections. Part One pertains to foundational issues in environmental philosophy, Part Two focuses on Canadian identity and the environment, Part Three addresses Anthropocene themes, and Part Four explores environmental philosophy as it intersects with Canadian policies (p. 9).

In Part One Philip Rose analyses mechanistic models of nature – models he contends are useful in some ways but also limiting – and suggests that thinking of nature as a mechanism in the sense of 'causal trigger' is useful. Allen Habib's chapter addresses how generations have a right or entitlement to earth, arguing that the planet is a good that should be divided equally between generations of all earthlings since no generation has a special entitlement to

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more of it (p. 55). The third chapter, by Antoine Dussault, considers whether application of the organisational theory of function to ecosystems coupled with a specific notion of biological teleology (*autopoiesis*) can usefully make a case for ecosystems having a good of their own. In the following chapter Gregory Mikkelsen suggests using Peter Miller's richness theory to support various environmental values including human, animal, organismal and ecosystemic.

Part Two begins with Matthew Barker's chapter, in which he envisions environmental virtue ethics as arising in cluster formations and argues that structures of character diversity within groups need to be dynamically evaluated (p. 120). Jankunis discusses the work of environmental advocate Grey Owl who falsely represented himself and his ancestry as partially Indigenous. Jankunis argues that Grey Owl still offers work relevant for environmental philosophy. Nathan Kowalsky mixes personal family narrative with reflections on perceptions of built environments and the 'bush', contending that the transcendent presence of the bush in Canada calls into question common conceptualisations of what constitutes the rural, urban and Anthropocene (p. 154).

In Part Three Williston argues for a type of ecological nationalism derived from rooted cosmopolitanism. Kent Peacock highlights the import of virtues such as ingenuity/creativity and heresy, contending ingenuity involves imagination and elegance, and argues revolutionary innovation is important to flourishing in the Anthropocene. Jennifer Welchman discusses extinction by hybridisation, navigating the terrain between a motivation to 'protect' existing forms of nature and the need to allow for species evolution, while calling attention to potential overtures of prejudice against hybrid species.

At the start of Part Four, using Lockean rights concepts, DesRoches argues that the human right to water involves moral limitations to commodifying water. Eric Desjardins, Jamie Shaw, Gillian Barker and Justin Bzovy discuss the Atlantic cod fishery and controversies surrounding holistic management, advocating a pluralistic research approach that involves, for example, the important epistemic role of testimony from fishing community members and farmers. Last, Jennifer Jill Fellows thoughtfully analyses the problematic ways in which Indigenous knowledge is frequently questioned or outright dismissed, often through claims that such insights are unscientific or non-objective. Using Sandra Harding's analysis of objectivity itself having a contextual narrative structure, Fellows contends that Indigenous ways of being and attendant insights cannot be assumed to be epistemically inferior because they fail to map the limited character of an approach that mimics the ideology embedded in claims to western objectivity.

There is much to recommend the book. Environmental ethics has been largely dominated by work from the United States; we do well to highlight uniquely Canadian contributions. It is also important for studies to be self-aware in situatedness, including the socio-political dimensions of geographical situatedness. The text contains several novel perspectives regarding

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environmental metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. I especially appreciated the attention afforded to on-the-ground policies, ecological identity, and the influence of the Anthropocene.

As someone who works in the area of oppression theory, though, I must highlight that the introduction was insufficiently attentive to the ‘we’ being referred to. Atwood’s quotation addresses people unreflectively immersed in settler culture. Canada itself is a name that grew from oppression; many Indigenous groups refer to what settler culture calls Canada as Turtle Island. This land is not an unknown territory for those with narrative traditions stretching back to a time of pre-settler culture.

Moreover, the chapter on Grey Owl focuses on a white man who lied about Indigenous descent. Jankunis states that although there are important, interesting issues regarding ethnocultural identity, cultural authenticity and appropriation, he objects ‘to the fact that a philosophical case for increased environmental awareness has been largely, if not completely forsaken on account of the ethnocultural identity claims of the person making it’ (p. 125). This comment follows a discussion of Grey Owl’s racial imposture potentially being alternatively interpreted as an attempt to bring himself into alignment with his true self, much as how trans-identities are sometimes construed. Jankunis highlights that Grey Owl sought to authenticate his preferred image and identity (p. 124). Such suggestions cannot be glossed over, given the immensely problematic political implications and vastly different circumstances regarding the politics of trans identities as opposed to that of racial imposture.

Although a chapter helpfully nods to settler culture and motifs (Kowalsky) and the final chapter robustly engages with Indigenous claims to what settlers refer to as knowledge, the volume leaves much to be desired in terms of adequate attention to the politics of oppression and the import of diverse perspectives. Out of the twelve chapters that are solo authored, ten are by men and two are by women. Out of the thirteen chapters only one richly engages with Indigenous issues. Ecofeminism does not serve as a primary ground for any of the analysis. Until there is inclusion of more intentionally diverse voices and themes coming from the experience of the oppressed, including intersectionally oppressed, collections of philosophical work will be epistemically impoverished in precisely the ways Fellows highlights.

### *References*

Atwood, M. 1972. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. House of Anansi Press.

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