Environmental philosophy has long been focused on conceptualising the human place in environments, especially when this is pursued as a trans-disciplinary topic requiring dialogue between the natural, social and human sciences. It is therefore no surprise that the concept of ‘the Anthropocene’ – that humanity as a species is becoming the primary driver of environmental change – has become popular for philosophers and other scholars in the environmental humanities.

Duncan Kelly’s *Politics and the Anthropocene* approaches one element of this concept: the relationship between the Anthropocene and contemporary political theory. At the heart of Kelly’s investigation is the connection of time and democracy. For the humanities and sciences alike, the Anthropocene raises fundamental questions concerning timescales, insofar as it rests on the encounters between accelerated timeframes, human-scaled ‘democratic’ ones and longer, deeper senses of time. Kelly suggests that the Anthropocene raises two challenges for politics in the face of time. First, that the implications of the Anthropocene means politics must be more intentionally ecological. Second and more radically, however, the emergence of the Anthropocene requires us to rewrite political theory itself, in order to expose how ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ interconnect in political systems. As he writes, ‘Can modern politics be ‘Anthropocenised’, so to speak, in order to take the measure of what sort of political futures are at least plausible scenarios for a new Anthropocene time?’ (p. 5).

*Politics and the Anthropocene* meditates on how democracy continues in the midst of the time(s) of the Anthropocene. The book’s first chapter sets up the argument by deliberating on timescales. The concept of the Anthropocene promotes optimism or creates despair in the face of climate change and the other environmental crises we face. This, in many respects, is a question of how we approach time: from deep to accelerated, natural to human-oriented. Just like the Anthropocene, the politics of modernity has its own time. While not always recognised, the changes in political structures have been intertwined with our knowledge of the natural world, the influence of fossil fuels, and the rise of contemporary technologies. In other words, Kelly argues, democracy itself is grounded on the fact that our political timings are not independent of other interpretations of time – and that the speeding up (and simultaneous elongating) of time in the Anthropocene complexifies this relationship. For this reason, it is clear that the science of the Anthropocene quickly becomes a competition of how we see time. But Kelly also thinks that the Anthropocene brings with it a few tasks: there is an urgent need to map the crises of geological time onto
the artificial sense of *political* and *democratic* time, as well use the historical knowledge that deep time offers to envision new, alternative interpretations of futures.

The remaining chapters of Kelly’s short book investigate different questions that arise from our need to rethink the timings of human political life with the new times of the Anthropocene. Chapter 2 looks at how energy and information are dispensed in ways that create ecological inequalities. Chapter 3 takes up questions of colonisation and growth, and all that growth entails (resource use, political structures, population, etc.). The next chapter investigates the application of the language of debts in understanding ecological problems; profits and how debts are financed create new problems in the politics of the Anthropocene. Chapter 5 examines population trajectories in light of planetary limits and earth systems. Taking up the challenges found in these particular questions, the final chapter suggests that the only real way to fully understand the relationship between Anthropocene and political times is to address value. Chapter 6 thus attempts to show how the Anthropocene brings with it new questions of political value, which can balance past senses of politics with ecological needs. For some, this will mean extending the discussion of value past superficial markers like GDP. For others, the Kelly argues, it will require re-envisioning the meaning of the Earth itself.

Kelly’s work is provocative. Indeed, the Anthropocene is a challenge to how we interpret power and human society. The dialectic Kelly suggests between aspects of political theory and interpretations of nature provides a good deal to reflect upon. At the same time, in order to reach its conclusion, the book suffers from some difficulties. Kelly’s prose is dense and (to me as a reader, at least) the argument was in places a bit too indirect to fully uncover what is imperative about the topic. Part of the problem might be that the audience of the work is not fully defined – at times the work is narrowly related to the history of political thought, while in other places the ramifications of the argument are shown to be pertinent for researchers in the environmental humanities and sciences. Comparing Kelly’s work to books such as legal scholar Jedidiah Purdy’s *After Nature* (Harvard University Press, 2015) or even novelist Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) is instructive here. While these works tread somewhat similar ground – the intractable complexity of human political and economic life in the face of climate change – they also are recognisable of offering fuller contexts for arguments of the Anthropocene across disciplinary boundaries.

A more fundamental issue with Kelly’s work stems from how the discourse of the Anthropocene in general is overly abstract and conceptual, stifling the need to acknowledge local, diverse human and more-than-human worlds. Many discussions of the Anthropocene fall in a trap of a variation of misplaced concreteness: humanity (or more especially, the small subset of humans who theorise the Anthropocene) not only materially overwhelms the planet,
but through talk of the Anthropocene also conceptually overwhelms it. Kelly might be seen to be reinforcing this, by focusing on abstract political structures rather than the lived politics of diverse communities of humans and non-humans alike. The next step of discussing politics and the Anthropocene, then, will require moving past such abstract theorising, and toward a more embodied embrace of what ecological politics might look like.

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