

**Déborah Danowski & Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.** *The Ends of the World*. Trans. Rodrigo Nunes. Polity 2016. 180 pp. \$71.95 CAD (Hardcover ISBN 9781509503971); \$23.95 CAD (Paperback ISBN 9781509503988).

In this short but informative book, Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro bring their respective past work on creative readings of modern European philosophy and research on Amerindian metaphysics to bear in a lively introduction to the Anthropocene, understood as a philosophical problem. Although the book concludes with a few helpful reflections on what is living and what is dead in cosmology and philosophical anthropology, it does not pursue any strict thesis. Its purpose is rather to introduce readers to radical environmental changes on Earth which require a reconceptualization of the metaphysics and mythologies that have become standard in modern thought. The guiding premise of the book is that perspectives on the world always bear latent human perspectives, and are therefore grounded in anthropologies that end up being unhelpful for understanding nature. In turn, ill-conceived cosmologies grounded in under-considered anthropologies have a detrimental effect on how we understand ourselves. Over centuries these mythologies have contributed to global human environmental impact that has precipitated in the current climate crisis.

There is a double goal in discussing the ‘ends of the world’: to lay out options for understanding the peripheries of this present age, and also, to offer an anti-correlationist description of this present age as a way of preparation for its end. We are thereby familiarized with the limits of the world, and re-introduced to ourselves as dwellers near these limits.

The first task of showing us the end of the world is a straightforward one, and consists of an introduction of the Anthropocene and a survey of current climate science in chapter two. But what world is ending in the Anthropocene? In fact, the authors argue that many worlds are ending, and that they are not ‘here simply to remark that the *world* has already ended, is ending, or will end soon. There are many worlds in the World’ (120). The Anthropocene is usually defined as the currently ongoing time in which *Homo sapiens* have impacted the geological history of the planet to an extent that is epochal in nature. Whether the Anthropocene began during the Industrial Revolution, as early as the Neolithic agricultural revolution, or at some other point is largely a symbolic decision. Over the course of their history, humans have remade worlds on a scale to match any glacier or tectonic shift. On the other hand, this new world remakes our conceptions of humanity. As Danowski and Viveiros De Castro state, ‘the Anthropocene, in placing us in the perspective of an “end of the world” in the most empirical sense possible – a catastrophic change in the material conditions of existence of the species - has sparked a veritable metaphysical anguish’ (29-30). In particular, metaphysical schemes that in any way position the human as an Other of the world have become increasingly implausible.

The Anthropocene, then, introduces a philosophical dilemma: the human as geological force renders old dualisms of ‘man and nature’ unstable. First, in the most literal sense, we cannot depend on a stasis relationship where the human and the natural maintain a balance. The end of the world could signal the end of *our* world, that is, the continuation of the terrestrial story without human inhabitants; or it could signal our leave-taking of the world. Considering possible endings for the world as we knew it before creating the Anthropocene also raises questions about our beginnings, and a protological forking path. How can we envision the human before the world, or the world as it existed before us, and how does this help to reconceptualize the human?

These four quadrants—world without humanity, humanity without world, humanity before world, and world before humanity—organize the bulk of this essay on our end. After a brief discussion of the familiar story of an Edenic world before us, Danowski and Viveiros De Castro discuss

examples of the ‘world without humanity’ paradigm in work such as Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us* (2007), which considers the gritty details of what might follow sudden human extinction, and the dystopian future barrenness as portrayed in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. On the other hand, we might go on without the world. Technological futurism proposes that humanity will evolve beyond a point of Singularity toward a new post-biological intelligence. Deeper considerations of the world beyond a human perspective, however, comes in philosophies that critique what Quentin Meillassoux calls ‘correlationism,’ or philosophy as a correlating of thought with being (31-3). These new speculative realist options range from the Object-Oriented Ontology of Graham Harman and Levi Bryant, to the sociological research of Bruno Latour. These philosophies are not eschatological per se, but they offer a response to the philosophical tradition that fits naturally into the fundamental problems raised by the Anthropocene. Ultimately, however, ‘the anti-anthropomorphic decision at the root of these two versions of the “world without us” theme reveals itself to be, when all is said and done, obsessed with the human point of view’ (35). This is the difficulty of trying to think in new ways with the Anthropocene.

Finally, the authors discuss a remaining option of ‘humanity before the world,’ where humans are conceived of as ‘empirically anterior’ (63) to the world. Here the authors draw on significant anthropological research that has begun to interpret Amerindian life through Amerindian cosmology, a project in which Viveiros de Castro’s work has been central. Indigenous mythologies recognize personhood throughout non-human nature, and trace this world back to a human origin that ‘was a polynomic multitude; it appeared from the start in the form of an internal multiplicity whose morphological externalization – that is, speciation – is precisely the stuff of cosmogenic narrative. It is Nature that is *born* out of or “separates” itself from Culture, not the other way round, as in our anthropophilosophical vulgate.’ (67) This human cosmos is dubbed anthropomorphism, but not anthropocentrism, because it is a pluralist metaphysics grounded in an originally human morphology. Within such a scheme, the human and the jaguar engage with the world from a human perspective, and the separation of each from the other is only perspectival in nature. The Amerindian cosmos provides a way of viewing the world that privileges intersubjective sufficiency and deceleration from modern forms of life, which is precisely why its embrace in Brazil and elsewhere has been met with such reactionary incredulity (121-2).

This book is adventurous and well worth reading, especially for researchers at the intersection of anthropological and philosophical problems. It introduces a large cast of interlocutors and convincingly frames the still-emerging conversation we face in an age of climate crisis. I remain skeptical, however, of the extent to which we can do away with dualisms dubbed modern, correlationist, etc. in these pages. Ironically, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro end up championing another anthropological dualism in Latour’s distinction between Humans and Terrans, the latter being those post-human Earth dwellers that the book has so painstakingly considered. To put the problem bluntly, even in lumping humanity with the world, it seems that we are liable to split the Humans who don’t lump from the Terrans who do. It may not be fair to say that this reemergence of an anthropological dualism is a damning problem for the thesis of the book insofar as it offers a thesis. But the Human/Terran dualism should, at least, give pause to those who suggest that modern anthropocentrism has been dealt a death blow by its newfound consciousness of the Anthropocene.

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