
BOOK REVIEW

Edited by Amanda Machin and Marcel Wissenburg: *The Handbook of Environmental Political Theory in the Anthropocene*, United Kingdom: 2025, Edward Elgar Publishing ISBN: 978 1 80220 894 8 (HC) £230.00. 480 pp.

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This book review considers the recent publication *The Handbook of Environmental Political Theory in the Anthropocene*, highlighting its comprehensive contribution to the literature as a text that is likely to appeal to both budding and seasoned academics. The strength of this text—its versatility—lies in the deft manoeuvring of both critique and compliment of the Anthropocene framework. Thoughtful engagement from all contributors to this text makes it well-worth the read, even as it might benefit from deeper intra-textual engagement across chapters and sections. With an unparalleled depth of engagement with the Anthropocene, the only area for improvement would be deepening reader loyalty to this framework over the other various alternatives mentioned, including the Plantationocene, Cthulucene, Wastocene, and Capitalocene. The breadth of topics that this text weaves together is admirable, and sure to inspire future research. Overall, this book presents an impressive collection of robust research and theoretical grounding that will serve future scholars well in their advancement of the field.

Keywords: anthropocene; book review

The Handbook of Environmental Political Theory in the Anthropocene offers a comprehensive compendium on the Anthropocene and environmental politics. This text presents a range of diverse theoretical perspectives on both topics, with a range of critiques and strengths of the Anthropocene presented. Because of the breadth of expertise and depth of the themes covered, this handbook offers newcomers with an extensive introduction, while also enriching and nuancing seasoned academics' understanding of the Anthropocene and its future socio-political implications.

The intersections of the Anthropocene with the environmental humanities are explored throughout the book's four parts, comprising a total of 39 chapters. The structure of the book is akin to a pyramid, with each section building on the previous concepts introduced and refining the sphere of conceptual application. The first part focuses on establishing the key concepts foundational to environmental political theory and the Anthropocene, with expansive and philosophical reflections on topics such as nature, sustainability, and democracy. The second

section of the book further develops these ideas and applies them through the assessment of different schools of political thought on this matter. Part three further tightens theories to focus on the levels at which different agents operate within these structures. Finally, in a departure from the tightening conceptual flow, the final part of the book presents critical responses and reflections on the ideas introduced in the first three parts.

As can be seen in the range of topics covered, this book serves as a knowledge resource for both the new and seasoned academic interested in the Anthropocene. In addition to the strength presented through the breadth of coverage, this book's critical engagement with both the theoretical perspectives it presents and the overarching conceptualisation of the Anthropocene constitutes another key strength. This book does not shy away from acknowledging the debates surrounding the term and concept of the Anthropocene. Instead, the text embraces these discussions and offers insight into how historical inequalities between nations in shaping the modern era also links with the inequalities in who suffers the most as a result of global warming. The books' active and continual engagement with critique ensures that the concept of Anthropocene is never elevated above others presented in the text but rather treated—even

with its flaws—as a robust framework for understanding the world. Considering the relative credibility afforded by engagement with critiques of the Anthropocene, however, the text could do more to shore up its defence of the Anthropocene as a concept when compared to alternative propositions such as the Plantationocene, Cthulucene, Wastocene, and Capitalocene. Each of these terms is introduced over the course of the text to examine alternative conceptualisations to the Anthropocene, yet none are argued against in a long-form manner, raising the spectre of them as alternative frameworks without fully dismissing their conceptual utility.

Despite the text's strength as offering significant breadth and depth on a range of socio-political topics and their intersections with and future implications for the Anthropocene, the range of topics also creates a weakness within the coherence of the text. Each chapter reads like its own miniature academic article, which, while offering a rich theoretical grounding upon which to coalesce existing literature and develop new ideas, leads to a slightly disjointed congregation when read together. The flow of internal chapters follows the intuitive logic of well-written work; however, the cumulative flow between chapters jars and clashes at times, as definitions are rehashed and critiques re-stated. To some degree, of course, this is inevitable and allows for the strength that each chapter may stand on its own. As a reader of the entire collection, however, the duplication of previously stated critiques without providing a deepening context or acknowledging the intersection of critique amongst other theoretical perspectives highlights a missed opportunity. Indeed, while several authors reference other chapters in the book as examples, the book lacks inter-chapter dialogue and critique. This comes as disappointing, given the contradictory nature of some of the theoretical perspectives that the text draws upon. While more seasoned academics would be able to navigate this deftly with their own comparative critiques and understandings of the dialogues that might take place between the schools of thought, this might pose a challenge for newer academics who are less familiar with how to independently draw such conclusions or make such contrasts.

Indeed, despite the presence of a first chapter that summarises the book's flow, editorial narrative is largely absent from the book, with no transitional chapters between the parts of the book to re-situate the reader or to summarise the chapters and their intersections. It is perhaps in this absence that students and newer academics will struggle the most, as it results in a void that the reader must themselves fill. The result is that while the book is comprehensive in scope and something that would deeply immerse any experienced academics looking to delve into the new topic of socio-political understanding of the Anthropocene, it is also less digestible for newer scholars and more apt for usage within a classroom context, where deeper meanings and connections can be explored through guided interaction. Individual chapters would also serve scholars well in the event they wish to focus or build on any specific theoretical lens discussed in this text, providing a foundation for a future generation of literature.

Even considering the broader structural reservations I had in reading the book, I would still recommend it based on the conceptual strength and depth offered by each individual chapter. Perhaps the only exception to this is the sub-section of a chapter that discussed eco-feminism—not because the writing or its development was lacking, but because I wished it had been longer and more comprehensive instead of relegated to only a portion of a chapter. Ecofeminism presents an area—among others—that I see future editions of this handbook developing and building out, particularly as demand for and scholarship within such perspectives grows.

With the caveats mentioned above, *The Handbook of Environmental Political Theory in the Anthropocene* is sure to inspire and ignite a plethora of future literature and courses focusing on the socio-political implications of the Anthropocene. Future scholars will no doubt integrate this as a key text on critiques and perspectives of the Anthropocene, and utilise it in expanding, critiquing, and exploring the Anthropocene.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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