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William A. Reiners, and Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *Philosophical Foundations for the Practice of Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 212 pp.

The uncertainties of the postmodern world pose unique problems for practitioners of science. This is especially true for scientists who adhere to extreme objectivist or realist ways of knowing the world. Postmodernism rejects the very notion of objective truth upon which much of modern science depends. The gap between such divergent epistemologies may seem to constitute an unbridgeable divide, a divide not only between scientists of different opinions, but between the humanities and sciences as well. In roughly two-hundred pages, William A. Reiners and Jeffrey A. Lockwood propose a solution to the seemingly irreconcilable clash between extreme subjectivism of the kind advocated by some postmodernists and the severe objectivism advanced by some scientists. The authors suggest that ecologists claim a sort of philosophical middle-ground between these two extremes, a stance the authors term “constrained perspectivism” (6). What makes Reiners’ and Lockwood’s solution compelling is that it takes the best of both worlds, so to speak—it acknowledges the insights of both the sciences and the humanities.

Considering the complexity of their chosen topic, Reiners and Lockwood write with remarkable clarity and simplicity. And while the authors do not spend excessive time defining basic concepts of philosophy or ecology, they do provide sufficient explanations of discipline-specific language to make the book comprehensible to the layman. Indeed, though this book is ostensibly about the often neglected philosophical foundations of ecology, it might just as well serve as an introduction to both disciplines. A helpful appendix of philosophical terms increases the value of this book as a sort of primer on the fundamentals of philosophy. Reiners and Lockwood also manage to incorporate humor in a text that might otherwise be dry and overly academic (in the pejorative sense). The authors’ passion for, and mastery of, both ecology and philosophy emerge through their work. The combination of wit and zeal make this book accessible despite the intricacy of its subject matter.

Concrete examples and an abundance of diagrams illustrate some of the book’s more abstract points and improve its clarity. To illustrate the epistemological difficulties and confusions within the science of ecology, for instance, the author’s provide a survey of the word “theory” and how it has been defined by various ecologists throughout time. The text abounds with such examples that serve to both illustrate and bolster the author’s claims. The book’s illustrations are similarly helpful—diagrams drive home complex concepts. For example a helpful figure clarifies the threefold division of philosophy (“what is

beautiful” [aesthetics], “what is true” [axiology], and “what is right” [ethics]) that the authors employ throughout their work (74).

This book may be of special interest to ecocritics and others concerned with the intersection of the sciences and humanities. Indeed, the authors treat both science (in the form of ecology) and the humanities (in the form of philosophy) thoughtfully, artfully, and respectfully. Also, the author’s plea for ecologists to embrace constrained perspectivism in order to avoid fruitless contention and foster the growth of this still relatively new science seems to call implicitly for the very sort of interdisciplinarity advocated by many ecocritics. That this book grew out of an “*ad hoc* graduate seminar on ecology’s philosophy of science” (1) should come as no surprise given the authors’ focus on educational concerns throughout the book. In fact a whole chapter, “What Constrained Perspectivism Offers to the Teaching of Ecology,” is devoted to exploring the relevance of the authors’ work in the educational arena.

Reiners and Lockwood manage to cover a lot of ground in relatively little space. In some two hundred pages readers will find a survey of ecology and philosophy as well as an in-depth discussion of how these two divergent fields might benefit one another. The only downside of compressing such a vast discussion into so small a space is that, occasionally, names of historically significant philosophers and ecologists appear in such great numbers as to border on name-dropping. Still, references to influential thinkers within both fields are generally well developed and justified. Overall, Reiners’ and Lockwood’s text is nothing short of a scholarly, replete with valuable observations and brilliant analyses of the bearing of philosophy on modern science. With respect and thoughtful consideration of both disciplines, the authors arrive at a means of incorporating the insights of philosophy and ecology in a manner that preserves the integrity of each and which promises to foster their development well into the future.