

GOUESBET, GÉRARD. *Violences de la nature*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016. ISBN 978-2-343-08982-9. Pp. 324. 33 €.

This is the first major work of philosophy written by Gouesbet, a physicist. It is the first installment of a tetralogy that examines the “victoires de la violence” and the “défaite des doux” from a scientific and objective lens (9). This interdisciplinary essay blends modern science, philosophy, literature, and theology in order to understand the complex and paradoxical nature of the many forms of violence that occur throughout the universe. Although Gouesbet received most of his formal academic training in the hard sciences, he demonstrates a formidable grasp of both ancient and contemporary philosophy from many different traditions. Moreover, the author possesses a veritable plethora of knowledge about Eastern and Western forms of spirituality. Gouesbet’s main premise in this philosophical treatise inspired by scientific erudition is that the roots of aggression are cosmic in nature. Building upon the theories of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and placing them into the context of the inner workings of the biosphere, the author posits that the opposing ecological forces of “love” and “strife” ground our very being. In simple terms, “l’Amour et la Haine” are the basic building blocks that are emblematic of life in all of its divergent forms (28). In an interconnected and interdependent cosmos in which every sentient and non-sentient entity has the same ontological essence from an empirical standpoint, Gouesbet maintains that our evolutionary penchant for destructive, violent behavior is inextricably linked to the indiscriminate, turbulent, chaotic forces that spawned all life on this planet and that still lurk beneath the surface. Gouesbet reminds us that chaos still reigns supreme in a universe in which order is the temporary exception to the rule. Although other contemporary philosophers like Michel Serres cover similar ground, perhaps Gouesbet’s greatest contribution to ongoing discussions in the environmental humanities is his focus on the role of entropy and the repercussions of the second law of thermodynamics in general. All of our efforts to decrease this gradual decline of energy for ourselves come at the expense of increasing entropy for everything else around us. After pinpointing entropy as the “source principale et ‘fondamentale’ de la violence,” Gouesbet underscores the innate parasitic impulses that compel all living creatures to stave off the forces of death for as long as possible (153). Since entropy cannot be avoided in a closed system, Gouesbet describes the earth as a “royaume démoniaque pour d’autres succions et d’autres dévorations” (153). In the final lines of the essay, Gouesbet offers no facile optimism that there is a remedy for this cosmic aggression that renders our continued existence in this ontological shape possible. However, Gouesbet’s theories represent an important part of the environmental conversation in the wake of the anthropogenic ecological crisis. *Violences de la nature* is an accessible, thought-provoking, provocative essay predicated upon the basic tenets of modern science that illustrates the urgency of rethinking the nature of violence and our attempts to minimize it.