



Culture and Society

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SUITABLE FOR MASTER OF RESEARCH OR PHD

Anthropocene Extinction and the Ethics of Conservation by Technoscience

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Research area: Environmental humanities

Charles Darwin closes *On the Origin of Species* with an open-endedness on par the phenomenon of evolution itself: “endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved” (1859, 459). His sly slight of poetic hand still holds true: forms are endlessly evolving. Yet, at the advent of the Anthropocene life is being pushed to its limits the world over. Evolutionary biologist E.O Wilson sums up this push in the opening gambit to his book on *The Future of Life*: “the race is now on between the techno-scientific forces that are destroying the living environment and those that can be harnessed to save it” (2003, xii). And yet, through technoscientific conservation, these “endless forms” are being evolved via Assisted Evolution and Synthetic Biology, which aim to increase the ability of coral species to withstand the rate of biophysical change. For the first time in the history of life on Earth, “endless forms” are being evolved through intention: via design and engineering.

So, contra Wilson, what if harnessing technoscience may become part of the “race” between “destroying the living environment” and “forces to save it”? This project considers these issues in the current application of technoscientific conservation, drawing on case studies, which can be selected by the candidate and/or supplied by the supervisor.

Ultimately, the candidate will explore the logical contradiction arising from the question of to what extent will humans “remake” nature in order to “save” it? The potential impact of the research will be on conservation policy and practice, including in current debates around conservation experiments proposed for the Great Barrier Reef.

Darwin, Charles. (1859). *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, Or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: J. Murray, 459.

Wilson, Edward O. (2003). *The Future of Life*. New York: Vintage, xii.



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