

Review of Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good*. Oxford University Press, 2016. 248 pages

Jared Call

Preview

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Daniel Scheid confesses the perspective of Catholicism, specifically Catholicism’s social teaching and social thought, to approach social issues regarding an imperilled earth’s needs. He creates a suitable— non-anthropocentric—framework that broaches, as well as answers, basic questions of humanity’s role on earth and in the cosmos, and the value of nonhuman creatures. He places the ecological crisis in context both globally and locally, accepting that “human products and lifestyle choices could fundamentally alter the patterns of life for nonhuman creatures” (1), and insisting that there is no ethical issue that is more pressing and interconnected in our modern world than climate change. For this reason, Scheid argues that theological traditions have a pivotal role to play in the discussion of climate change that now transcends specialized scientists and spans academic disciplines. For the crisis is not merely a policy failure, an economic conundrum, or our inability to develop more advanced

¹<http://www.noaa.gov/news/noaa-2017-was-3rd-warmest-year-on-record-for-globe>

²Note that some news agencies put the number much higher, over \$300 billion.

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technology to address and even curb ecological issues; instead it signifies a common lack of moral good. This is why Scheid contends that “a proper response to imperilled earth must include a renewed ethical vision” and that we must look for solutions not only in revising technology but in “a change of humanity” (1).

Scheid presents these social issues as a pervading focal point in two main ways: first, by representing the Catholic concept of the “common good,” whilst also engaging other religious traditions, as one response to the ecological crises; second, by testing the principles of the Catholic common good (or his ecologically expanded principles of Catholic social thought) for the adequacy and relevancy of an interreligious ecological ethic (119). Part One, “The Catholic Common Good,” lays out the interrelated moral crises of religious traditions while offering various sources of guidance for the more obvious ecological crises of our imperilled earth. Scheid introduces a fivefold common good as taught within the Catholic tradition: the ultimate good of creation to glorify God; the good of individual creatures pursuing their own perfections; the good of creatures for other creatures; the good of a diversity of creatures; and the good of the order of creatures (46-60). Scheid carefully explores classical sources within his own tradition’s most esteemed thinkers, Augustine and Aquinas, and introduces their view that creation exists to glorify and serve God, and states that this is in fact its “ultimate good” (46). Scheid examines how measure (associated with the Father), number (the role of the Son), and weight (the work of the Spirit) are the source of creaturely unity and points to this as the connection between human and nonhumans (48). This fivefold approach presents a theocentric valuation for the cosmic common good, rejecting the long-standing anthropocentric view that much of humanity has assumed with respect to creation and nonhuman creatures.

Part Two presents a “cosmic” ecological dialogue spanning from his own religious tradition, Catholicism, to non-Christian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous traditions, specifically those of North America. As Scheid notes, Pope Francis has expressed, and even encouraged, dialogue among faiths and all people on earth. This book is a great starting point for interreligious dialogue on matters that directly affect all of us. Scheid does an exceptional job at proposing a provocative approach to comparative theology and interreligious ecological concerns—specifically, in underscoring that ecological concerns pose questions that transcend traditions. He provides a creative and engaging approach to not only have these necessary interreligious conversations, but also a fruitful method to “reframe

humanity's proper relationship to the cosmos and the earth" (123). Especially remarkable is his impartial consideration that these traditions are essentially ecologically friendly, more so than Christianity has been. He invites these traditions into a dialectical conversation with each other, calling for theologians and ethicists from various traditions to come together and "compare notes" and draw on the principles from their traditions to establish a multi-traditional conversation of looking at the "cosmic common good as ground for ecological ethics" (124).

We do not all share the same faith, but we all share the same planet, and, therefore, we share the moral responsibility to care for it, despite theological differences. Now is a time for ecological activism, and Scheid does an exemplary job of anchoring the crusade of ecological ethics in a hopeful and expansive interreligious approach to the challenges facing us. Scheid's book is a well-written and detailed groundwork for how we can face such challenges through a focus on the "cosmic common good."

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