



BOOK REVIEWS

Scheid, Daniel P. *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016. 248 + xiv. ISBN 978-0-19-935943-1. \$31.95.

Daniel Scheid's argument for an interreligious cosmic common good is a worthy, constructive theological effort to "voice a definitive answer to the basic questions of humanity's role on Earth and in the cosmos and of the value of nonhuman creatures" (5).

Driven by an intense sense of peril, this large-hearted first book ambitiously consolidates a decade of reflection (the author acknowledges that "each chapter could be its own book," 181). Within the framework of Roman Catholic social teachings, part one expands the common good to include "non-human creatures and the Earth itself" (43); part two explores the commonalities of this "enlarged" conception with elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and (guided by the work of George Tinker) American Indian religions.

Although Scheid grounds part one in the creation theologies of Augustine, Aquinas, and Thomas Berry and presents it as a natural outgrowth of "the dynamism of Catholic social thought" (43), his project of lifting commitment to the common good out of the negotiable

context of well-ordered social practice is a bold and not unproblematic venture. This cosmocentric vision of "the numinous origin" and goodness of all creation (re) assigns value. Scheid bridges the gap to the normative by reconceiving the virtue of solidarity to include solidarity with the Earth (chapter five) and augmenting Catholic commitment to human rights with a list of eleven "earth rights," the bearers of which include the Earth, abiota, biota, degraded nature, wild nature, and domesticated nature (chapter six).

Part two—after offering a compact, lucid overview of comparative theology and comparative ecological ethics—pursues a dual purpose. On the one hand, Scheid modestly asks how the valuation of nonhuman nature in the selected other religions might "confirm, challenge, or modify a Catholic vision of the cosmic common good" (116). On the other hand, he advances the much more potent claim that "the cosmic common good emerges as a feasible ground for interreligious ecological ethics" (11)—that is, for a global ethics. He explores Hindu dharmic ecology for its "intense rejection of anthropocentrism" within an alternative theocentrism. His interest in Buddhist traditions lies primarily in dependent co-arising, interdependence, and dynamic "mutually influencing processes" (145).

The Lakota tradition is privileged in three ways not quite symmetrical with the treatment of the other two because in this case dialogue yields not only insights but also “key warnings” (10). Scheid affirms that “indigenous relationships to the Earth still [represent] the closest examples we have to ‘sustainability’ and to the cosmic common good” (164). But in addition the Lakota raise the “voice of the victim,” which must be heard if a Catholic cosmic common good is to be socially as well as ecologically sensitive (164). Moreover, the contrast between Lakota spatiality and “amer-european” temporality, captured in Lakota relationships with the land, functions as a way of resisting the “universalizing tendencies in a cosmic moral vision” (177).

Scheid identifies two specific areas for further exploration. First, he commends on-going exchange among Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Native Americans “to verify the extent to which the resemblances I have identified in fact hold” (181). Second, he also commends “concrete and specific application of this ethical vision to issues” (ibid.). The latter is especially important because the present argument, proceeding at a high level of abstraction, finesses many issues of conflict, cost, weighting, and selection that will inevitably have to be engaged in situations where action will necessarily realize some goods and not others from among the often staggering array of contending values.

To these two lines of development I would add two others. First, it is not

self-evident that cosmology and morality cohere as neatly as the author assumes; a subset of this issue is the question of whether the author has inadvertently identified the cosmic common good with the particular planetary configuration of interlocking ecosystems existing prior to (roughly) the industrial revolution. Second, there needs to be clearer placement of fear, horror, revulsion, threat, destruction, and cataclysmic change in relation to wonder, harmony, and beauty.

Diane Yeager

Diane.Yeager@georgetown.edu