

MORAL THEOLOGY (II)—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Ecological Theology  
Convenor: Christina A. Astorga, University of Portland  
Moderator: Christine McCarthy, Fordham University  
Presenters: Scott G. Hefelfinger, University of Notre Dame  
Brian Bajzek, Regis College, University of Toronto  
Luis G. Vera, Mount St. Mary's University

Scott G. Hefelfinger's paper, "When God Speaks Out of the Whirlwind: Integral Ecology and the Common Good in the Book of Job," raises the question of anthropocentrism in the context of Pope Francis' conception of integral ecology in *Laudato Si'*, which treads a narrow path between an unsparing critique of tyrannical anthropocentrism and a denunciation of the marginalization of human persons, especially the most vulnerable. Drawing from various sources, he probes the question on the place of the human being in the created world, in the light of the divine speeches in the Book of Job. One source is the work of Kathryn Schifferdecker, which concludes that the divine speeches are radically non-anthropocentric. Humanity is not at the center of the created order.

Hefelfinger probes further by drawing on both scientific and theological wisdom to cast light on the order of the cosmos and the human's place in it. Evolutionary theory, in particular, evolutionary biology, highlights the genetic kinship between human and non-human animals but fails to account for the good beyond that of the individual to the common good of the species and beyond. For Aquinas the whole universe is ordered to and reflective of God, but humanity as created *ad imago Dei* is at its center. What, then, does anthropocentricity mean for Aquinas? It means to be centered on the cosmos and its Creator. Anthropocentricity, thus, is cosmo- and theocentricity. In this light, the divine speeches are not about decentering but recentering humanity. To be properly *anthropos* is to be centered beyond *anthropos*—beyond the individual good to the common good, the good for all of creation, especially for the most vulnerable. To be *anthropos* is to be oriented to the highest and most lovable good.

In his paper, "Enfleshing an Ethics of Alterity: Incarnation, Intersubjectivity, and Animality," Brian Bajzek connects the writings of M. Shawn Copeland to the Levinas/Lonergan discourse. Lonergan's pre-intentional and psychic "we" connecting all subjects prior to the individuation of "I" is linked with Levinas's arguments for the primordial, pre-reflective responsibility for the Other. The gaze of the Other ruptures the horizons of one's self-satisfied subjectivity. Instead of understanding the Other and the similar as irreconcilable, one identifies them as alterity and similarity in creative tension of interdependent poles.

In this movement to the Other, one is compelled by the obligation to care for the weak, the poor, the widow, and the orphan. This same concern for the Other permeates Copeland's entire project. In her theology of enfleshment, she presents Christ as shattering all reductive paradigms of alterity and similarity. As the one who prioritizes the hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, Christ redeems by his particular body, which he shares with humanity, and he draws all into communion with God, a gift wholly beyond (and in a sense, 'other' than) created human capacities. Bajzek concludes that this turn to the Other is also a turn toward all members of the earthly animal environment—an

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expanded anthropological framework which includes a turn towards those who are so radically different others.

In his article, “*Pokéman Go* Anywhere: Augmented Reality Media and The Ethics of Ecological Perception. Luis G. Vera asserts that crucial to the cultivation of an integral ecology is an adequate confrontation with “augmented reality” devices. Mobile apps like *Pokéman Go*, which operate by reducing the world to manipulable information, gets users to go outside and explore the world around them. The paper interprets and evaluates the role of augmented reality practices in cultivating a certain way of seeing and interacting with the world.

Vera calls our attention to the deeply ambiguous character of augmented reality devices. Encouraging people to explore their natural or human environments, these devices, by design, both in their content and form, influence and shape cultural ecology. They are integrated into our way of life, as practically extensions of our bodies. But depending on how we approach and use them, our worldview may be reduced to manipulable information resulting in a knowledge myopia and impoverishment of meaning. Because augmented reality operates by drawing us out into the world, we must build our internal scaffolds in terms of cultivating habits of mind and of heart that enable us to discern truth and interiorize meaning.

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