
The Future of Religion in the Anthropocene Era

CELIA DEANE-DRUMMOND,
SIGURD BERGMANN,
& MARKUS VOGT

The heated public intensity around the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris (COP 21) shows that the complex political, social, and religious issues surrounding questions of climate change continue to remain high on the agenda. Within the sciences, the term *Anthropocene—the Age of Humans*—is gradually moving into the discourse of climate change; so far, however, there has been relatively little critical engagement with this concept from the perspective of the environmental humanities. The Anthropocene poses a tremendous challenge for the humanities not least because the human sciences bring tools that can assess the diverse scientific and cultural narratives. For theology and religious studies this includes an assessment of implicit religious narratives, or whether there are social and ethical implications, especially for environmental ethics.

The geological notion of the Anthropocene is meant to denote the current geological era as a new geological epoch in which the collective imprint of human activities is so pervasive that the Earth System, most notably that associated with climate change, is destabilized. Related assessments suggest that humanity is now close to passing several other planetary boundaries and tipping points. These notions have stirred up vigorous discussions in the earth sciences, where research now focuses on a rigorous understanding of humanity's interaction with the biophysical Earth System. Treating humanity as a whole in this way has also come under serious critique

from social science, given the disparity of impact between different human cultures and groups. Kathryn Yusoff, for example, has coined the term “Anthropogenesis” to suggest that Anthropocene narratives are mythic in content and are orientated towards the Anthropos as either world-maker or destroyer.¹ Furthermore, nominating the Anthropocene fosters a material, evolutionary narrative of human origins and endings within a geological and not just biological time scale.

While the lively scientific debate mainly deals with the content of the geological concept and the lack of historical consensus about its beginning, the humanities and social sciences mine deeper into cultural and ethical dimensions and reflect self-critically on the advantages, or potential damages, that various versions of this concept might produce. While scientists, for example, tend to neglect the skill of power accumulation among humans and might simply expand their worldview universally to global society, voices in the environmental humanities are able to explore a triangular reciprocal net of relations between society-culture-nature-subjectivity. Another critical point of discussion emerges with regard to the future; can we think at all about the future in narratives of the Anthropocene? While Abrahamic religions always operate more or less strongly with images of the future, Anthropocene narratives, at least those born by geological sciences, seem to lack self-critical skills with regard to power, history, and ethics.

This collection of essays explores these and similar questions from different disciplinary perspectives within the humanities and social sciences, taking critical account of the religious, philosophical, theological, and ethical challenges and opportunities different narrations about the Anthropocene pose. Not all of the authors agree with each other and, therefore, this volume provides an important framework for further discussion and analysis. Insofar as such discussion has not yet been incorporated into a serious multidisciplinary study, this book also represents cutting edge research on a theme that will be of increasing importance, given the ongoing and escalating effects of human induced climate change. So far, theological and ethical discussion has tended to focus on socio-political discussions on climate change, rather than viewing such changes as part of a broader systems narrative.

In the first section, *Setting the Stage*, Michael Northcott’s contribution “On Going Gently into the Anthropocene” argues for the particular relevance of theology. Drawing on an analysis of John Ruskin’s work, Northcott argues that those who advance the idea of the Anthropocene share with Ruskin a common apocalyptic perspective. However, he argues that the

1. Yusoff, “Anthropogenesis.”

global horizon of risk opened up by the Anthropocene carries an ethical and political challenge far beyond that posed by Ruskin. He believes that if the Copernican turn decentered humanity in relation to the destiny of the earth, now through science and technology humans are once again becoming aware that they are central to the earthly networks of agency and being which stretch from the rocky substrata to the skies. The Baconian mediation of the Anthropocene means that far from representing a new spiritual communion between humans and other life, Crutzen's proposal represents an enhancement of a Baconian worldview in which humans now consciously take charge of the Earth System as a "vast machine." Hence, it represents yet another refusal to accept the hybrid mixing of culture and nature which is intrinsic to human planetary existence and a refusal to take account of the intrinsic worth of other species. Northcott's theological assessment is striking: we have replaced the Pantocrator image of Christ with the anti-christ—*Homo industrialis*. He argues political and theological communities are called to witness to an alternative by exercising near-term sacrificial constraint. Green religious communities, transition towns, and other social activist movements, Northcott insists, are part of a movement of love best fostered by religious communities.

In the second chapter, Bronislaw Szerszynski discusses how he used a series of linked "theory-fictions" to explore possible futures for religion in a new geological epoch, using the notion of a possible "Second Axial Age" based on a radically different metaphysics. Szerszynski argues that any understanding of paths to the Anthropocene has to take account of the emergence of Axial cultures, but he cautions that this has to be done with care. On the one hand, Axial cultures seem to have held in check systematic attempts to exploit and transform the Earth because of their belief that the role of this world is largely to symbolize or prepare for the transcendent realm. On the other hand, Axial cultures were particularly suited for imperial expansion, promoted the idea that the human being has a privileged status within the cosmos, and could be said to lay the ground for the development of technological thinking. Szerszynski then introduces the concept of theory fictions and summarizes his own use of the genre in three pieces all set in a fictional future spanning a period from the mid-twenty-first to the late-twenty-second century. He then critically explores contemporary claims that a Second Axial Age of global consciousness is emerging in the twenty-first century due to increased dialogue between faiths and cultures. While these are claims of a renewal of First-Axial-Age themes of transcendence and universality, the Second Axial Age described in his own theory-fictions moves in a radically new direction. In his imagined future revolution in human thought, matter is active and self-organizing, difference is an explosive

force within things, time is produced by material processes themselves and is multiple and intertwining, and the ways that worlds organize themselves undergo moments of bifurcation. He concludes with an exploration of what this might entail through a discussion of “sacred work.”

Christopher Baumgartner, in the third chapter on “Transformations of Stewardship in the Anthropocene,” addresses the question of how proponents of the notion of the Anthropocene ascribe to humanity the responsibility to act as planetary steward. For some authors, stewardship is a decisive characteristic of a new stage of the Anthropocene. His question relates to what precisely it might mean to take responsibility as planetary stewards in the Anthropocene and which specific moral obligations are included in this stewardship. Thus, he offers a philosophical conceptualization and critical analysis of the notion of planetary stewardship in the Anthropocene. On the basis of a comparison with the religious notion of stewardship that is part of Christian traditions, he demonstrates that the concept of stewardship is profoundly transformed within Anthropocene discourse. He gives particular scrutiny to assumptions about past, present, and future in stewardship concepts and how these influence the justification and the scope of our moral obligations in the context of climate change. Such an approach helps to identify, understand, and philosophically reconstruct the transformations of the concept of stewardship in the Anthropocene and critically analyze its strengths and limitations in a planetary context.

The fourth chapter by Sigurd Bergmann deals with eight perceptions of religion in climate change discourse. He argues that our awareness about anthropogenic climatic and environmental change represents one of the core assumptions in Anthropocene discussions. The concept of the Anthropocene was anticipated historically. He begins with a short summary of Alexander von Humboldt’s view of nature as a *Naturgemälde* (painting of nature). He then explores eight different perceptions of religious belief systems and their significance. Bergmann draws on the work of social scientists, including Robin Globus Veldman, to show that religion has a variety of modes: as worldview, source of morality, institution, and skill of connectivity. He adds to this perspective the *passiological*, i.e., the response of religion to suffering and violence, the aesth/ethical, the economic, and the spatial dimensions. Faith communities respond in specific ways to suffering and violence. They express beliefs that are beyond rational and ethical conventions in a diversity of aesthetical ways in ordinary life. Late capitalist fetishization of money, which, according to Bergmann, is a key driver behind climate change, represents a substantial threat to religious belief. One common earth and one common future is an emerging spatial and temporal consciousness that challenges different religions to revisit their

understanding of life as a gift. Bergmann emphasizes both the multiplicity and ambivalence of religious responses to climatic change as well as the way in which religious traditions are able to make participants feel-at-home and contribute to creative adaptations to acute problems of climate change in the Anthropocene.

The second section deals with historical questions in more recent history and deeper into the evolutionary history of human beings. Franz Mauelshagen's chapter on the history of ideas related to the Anthropocene goes deeper into historical precedents touched on by Northcott and Bergmann. Over a long period of modern scientific practice, a "great divide" has opened up between the natural sciences and the humanities/social sciences. Back in the 1950s, C.P. Snow discerned two separate cultures of practice between the sciences and humanities. These "two cultures" are now clashing in the unfolding interdisciplinary debate on the Anthropocene. Among other things, the meaning of the *anthropos* is highly controversial. The humanities struggle with definitions of the human as a biological species that seem to dominate in scientific accounts of the Anthropocene. Though scientific explanations are obviously insufficient to explain the dynamics of anthropogenic global change today, it is precisely at this point, in engagement with scientific definitions of the human, where the humanities and social sciences are challenged to question their own tradition of systematically excluding "nature" from their accounts of human affairs. The current "crisis of nature" is also a "crisis of human nature" and its conceptual traditions, predominantly in Western cultures. In his contribution Mauelshagen argues that it is neither sufficient nor convincing to hold on to conventional forms of critique. The social sciences and humanities are invited to enter an open, trans-faculty debate on the Anthropocene that is likely to fundamentally change the disciplinary realm of academia.

In the sixth chapter, anthropologist Agustín Fuentes brings an evolutionary anthropological perspective and considers the significance of the Anthropocene through the lens of deep history. If we confine our thinking about the Anthropocene to the Great Acceleration after World War II, or to the changes since the Industrial Revolution, then an opportunity is missed to think about humanity's past, present, and future trajectory as a species and lineage and how that might inform human endeavors. He insists that we have not arrived at an "end point" in human evolutionary history. Rather, humans were "evolving" in the past and are doing so even now and will continue to do so in the future, which means that humanity is in a constant state of becoming. This is highly relevant when considering the planetary role of humans. He argues that humanity must recognize deeply rooted, ongoing, dynamic, and malleable processes in its midst; by recognizing this, we derive

insight into what we could and should be doing appropriate to humanity's current place in the world. The insights derived from evolutionary anthropology attest that human communities have and continue to "make it" in the world via niche construction, cooperation, collaboration, and creative solutions to current challenges. In the Anthropocene, this awareness has different implications than it did in the earlier eras of the Holocene or the Pleistocene. Over the last twenty to forty centuries, the global rate of human population growth, density, and impact has increased remarkably and in the last few centuries, has become exponential. Fuentes argues on this basis that we may be on the brink of changes that are distinctive and even novel, which may bring potentially catastrophic repercussions for humanity, other species, and the global ecosystem. Human evolution is not, in the manner sometimes interpreted, in a straight line. Human niche construction has broad and deep effects not just on landscapes and environments but also on the myriad of other beings sharing space with us. In the Anthropocene, this extends to the entire planet.

The third section develops philosophical analyses from three very different perspectives. Maria Antonaccio's "De-moralizing and Re-moralizing the Anthropocene," the seventh chapter, assumes two descriptive features of the Anthropocene noted in other chapters: humanity is now a geological force influencing planetary processes and nature and human society can no longer be seen as belonging to incommensurable domains. Antonaccio contends that this description does not inevitably lead to either of the dominant polarized responses: that we should resist the Anthropocene and attempt to regain some measure of nature's independence from human influence or that we should embrace the Anthropocene and capitulate to the idea of a totally humanized world, a hybridized "socio-nature." The Anthropocene concept cannot bear the weight of these moralized responses. Her aim is to rescue the Anthropocene from the sometimes overheated rhetoric surrounding it by disentangling descriptive from normative claims in the two most prominent narratives (often referred to as the "bad" and "good" Anthropocene) and by exposing to critical scrutiny their underlying premises about humanity and human-Earth relations. By seeking to "de-moralize" the Anthropocene she does not deflate ethical and religious questions. Beneath the surface of the debate lies a deeper, quasi-theological debate about the sources of the normativity by which humanity orients itself in the world. In particular, the Anthropocene raises the question of whether it is time to give up on the idea of a singular and independent Nature. She argues that the label "quasi-theological" is appropriate because Nature, especially in the American context, has long been understood as a site of otherness that exists beyond human control, desires, and interests. It has been the centerpiece of

a non-anthropocentric value scheme that regards Nature's intrinsic value as inviolable and worthy of human protection. Insofar as the debate over the meaning of the Anthropocene is about whether we should "give up" on this idea, it is a debate about the potential dangers of relinquishing an oppositional force that has served as a restraint to human power.

Stefan Skrimshire, in the eighth chapter entitled "Anthropocene Fever," asserts that one of the most significant implications of Anthropocene discourse for theology and philosophy is its claim that this epoch of the human will be in some sense legible to a future "reader" of the planet. Whom do we imagine will be this reader: other humans, alien life forms, God? Do we imagine that this data will be the subject of divine judgment? Or will it be a monument to our cosmic legacy? Skrimshire believes that thinking about the Anthropocene as an archive brings a host of problems familiar to scholars of deconstruction, in particular Derrida's warnings about "archival violence." Evoking the archive might represent a disavowal of the shocking thought of the *unreadable* nature of our legacy to the future. Skrimshire explores theological responses to such a fear by illuminating the concept of memory and the archive, in relation to St Augustine's reflections on the transience of material life via a discussion of memory and forgetting in *The Confessions*. He contends that a connection can be made between this early debate and a discussion about eschatology, finitude, and extinction in contemporary eco-theology. The chapter will thus have implications for wider religious, environmental, and political thought in its critique of the current obsession of Anthropocene as a melancholy, readable trace. This, he argues, can be understood as an ideological form of distraction from the ethical and political task of mourning or lament, as understood in theological traditions, for the irreversible losses of present ecological life.

Francis Van den Noortgaet's chapter explores the philosophy of William Desmond. Drawing on Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, and resonating with Northcott's arguments, he begins with the idea that the Anthropocene is in continuity with, is a culmination of, and is made possible by modernity. Thus, reflecting on ethics in the Anthropocene always in some manner will imply a commentary on modernity. Van den Noortgaet recovers Desmond's metaxological philosophy and his critique of modernity as a way of informing environmental ethics in the Anthropocene. The dualism of being and the good in modernity is at the root of Desmond's critique. The devaluation of being in a world that seems to have become a matrix of resources renders the ethos we live in seemingly worth-less apart from its instrumental value. An "incognito of the good" pervades and shapes our late modern condition. Desmond, however, also emphasizes a pre-reflective, experiential intuition of the goodness of being. He thereby appeals to a lived, immediate

ontological intimacy with being as good, prior to any conceptualization or subject/object dichotomizing. He discerns possibilities for a renewed astonishment towards the givenness and origin of being. The main justification of such originary questions lies precisely in this intuitive experience of the goodness of being, for it allows for the generosity of its non-determinate origin. Desmond's philosophy uncovers being in the Anthropocene as continuously, and more acutely than ever before, at a bifurcation: either remaining in the (late) modern decoupling of being and the good that leads to an erosion of the worth of being, including human being, or—experientially—calling its counter-intuitive presumptions into question and then drawing on a pre-conceptual astonishment about the goodness of being. The latter, for Desmond, opens up the possibility to begin again in an ethics of gratitude and hermeneutical generosity, after having nearly “come to nothing” at the inception of the Anthropocene.

The fourth section on theological trajectories more explicitly explores aspects of religious and theological literature while still taking account of philosophical concerns. In chapter 10, Celia Deane-Drummond picks up some of the issues raised in Fuentes's chapter and contrasts the differences between *deep history*, which deals with the evolutionary anthropology of early human origins, and *big history*, which charts global scale cosmic changes. She considers some of the reasons why ecotheologians have concentrated on big history and not deep history. In the first section, she critically examines Bruno Latour's anthropology of the moderns in the context of the Anthropocene, arguing that he has forgotten deep history. The second section engages closely the philosophical analysis of the Anthropocene and its ethical implications in the work of philosopher Joanna Zylinksa as a way of opening up an alternative theological reading. Using the idea of theological markers, Deane-Drummond suggests that semiotic markers inspired by ancient theological wisdom, such as that of divine image bearing, provide openings for new interpretations in dialogue with evolutionary anthropology's account of deep history through the category of performance. Her position contrasts with a more recent theological turn among ecotheologians away from using the language of image bearing at all, on the basis that it merely reinforces problematic portrayals of human beings as separate from the rest of the natural world. Like Antonaccio, Deane-Drummond is alert to the quasi-theological dimensions of this discussion, though her analysis concentrates on the potential theological import of the Anthropocene concept, rather than, in Antonaccio's case, its capacity to undermine idealized concepts of Nature that are serving in a quasi-religious mode. Given the potential of the Anthropocene to become a universalizing and perhaps even totalizing narrative that has quasi-theological overtones in a manner

that goes beyond the accusation of Christian rhetoric on image bearing, she argues that it is important to engage in ethical critiques of the underlying rhetoric.

Like Deane-Drummond, Petra Steinmair-Pösel, in chapter 11, “Cooled Down Love and an Overheated Atmosphere,” also engages with anthropology but focuses particularly on the work of cultural anthropologist René Girard. In *Battling to the End*, Girard characterizes our present world as an apocalyptic era when both the threatening and saving potentials of humanity are growing. Though his main focus is not the destruction of human habitats through anthropogenic global warming but rather violence escalating to the extremes, his prophetic voice can nevertheless contribute to understanding the ambivalent role of religions—especially the Judeo-Christian tradition—in the Anthropocene. Steinmair-Pösel argues that Girard’s mimetic theory sheds light on the more fundamental dynamics underlying our ecological crisis, which lead to a never diminishing sense of scarcity, ever-expanding needs, and reluctance to downsize or renounce demands. This applies even if from an epistemic perspective there is acceptance that the Western ecological footprint exceeds Earth’s capacities. Girard’s challenging conclusion is this: while Christian revelation stands at the beginning of the unleashing of human desires, it also indicates the only way out of the crisis. However, this way out is connected to a genuine conversion. Steinmair-Pösel discusses the significance of Girard’s approach in the light of her earlier work tracing a profound connection between Christian social ethics and spirituality.

Chapter 12, by Matthew Eaton, works more explicitly in the domain of systematic theology and offers an internal critique of traditional Christianity in the Anthropocene. While the role religion plays in conceptually undergirding the Anthropocene is beyond simplistic genealogical analysis, Eaton identifies the logic of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation as contributing to the possibility of such a geological epoch. He is highly critical of the benefits of traditional incarnational theologies; argues that insofar as such theologies restrict the revelation and manifestation of divinity on Earth to a single human, or even to humanity in general, they betray an implicit idolatry of the human form and consequently divinize humanity and establish value hierarchies in support of human domination of Earth. For Eaton, it is necessary to re-imagine Christianity’s central doctrine apart from any inherent metaphysical anthropocentrism. He is inspired by the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, especially his wartime essay, “La Vie Cosmique.” For Eaton, Christologies of deep incarnation, including those of contemporary theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen, do not go far enough to ameliorate anthropocentrism. He believes that they continue to harbor

traces of a metaphysical anthropocentrism that normalizes the human that makes anthropogenic planetary destabilization possible. Therefore, he radically re-imagines Christology apart from metaphysical anthropocentrism by reconfiguring a theological understanding of divine/material entanglement. He draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and philosophy of subjectivity. Following Merleau-Ponty, as well as developments in modern physics that understand existence as a shared mixture of matter, energy, and information, he argues that the human form is not unique in incarnating divinity. Such a theology insists that subjects do not exist within the confines of simple, embodied boundaries but instead penetrate one another in a chimerical world. Eaton argues that this theology provides a spiritual optics better equipped than classical Christology to combat the anthropogenic destruction inherent in the Anthropocene.

Marisa Ronan's chapter 13 deals with some of the dangers associated particularly with the eschatological perspectives of branches of American Evangelicalism. She explores why, after almost a decade since the Evangelical Climate Initiative's (ECI) call to action, so little progress has been made in recognizing human-induced climate change as a serious issue for evangelical Christians. Through an exploration of Tim LaHaye's and Craig Parshall's Christian fiction collection, *The End Series*, Ronan analyzes the wider political implications of the belief that the Anthropocene is a biblically ordained apocalypse that is God-made, not human-made. *The End Series* challenges the notion of human caused climate change within a narrative of the apocalypse. It charts the President of the European Union's creation of a Religious Global Treaty on Climate Change. The writers interpret this as evidence of a biblically prophesied, One World Order that will lead to the End of Days. The series admits an increase in global temperatures but asserts that this is attributed to a short-lived trend, resulting from global volcanic events. This push against the belief in anthropogenic climate change is reflected in real-world political affairs. In his discussion of natural disasters and weather patterns, Senator James Inhofe, Chair of the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, publically stated that he thought climate change was a hoax. Senator Inhofe is not alone in this view: the Public Religion Research Institute's 2014 findings in their Religion, Value and Climate Change Survey showed that white evangelical Protestants are more likely than any other religious group to engage in climate change skepticism. Ronan argues that while there was a short-lived call to action through the ECI, this has now dissipated. In its place is a rising distrust of the very notion of the Anthropocene, coupled with a codification of climate change within apocalyptic narratives that reassert biblical inerrancy. For American Evangelicalism, then,

the Anthropocene represents not a human-made problem but a welcome, God-made, and biblically prophesied conclusion.

The fifth section of this book more explicitly deals with ethical aspects of living in the Anthropocene. Markus Vogt, in chapter 14, explores human ecology as it has been interpreted in Catholic Social Teaching. The term *human ecology*, or “the ecology of humankind,” has a special meaning in the Catholic church and arguably is the leading concept of environmental ethics in Catholic social teaching since 1991. It was originally the subtitle for the first draft of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Human ecology means recognizing that all human understanding of self and world depends on specific ecological and social contexts. Vogt insists that environmental ethics in the Anthropocene must understand these dynamics, rather than simply formulating conservation rules to protect specific natural entities like animals, plants, or landscapes. Human ecology is a research approach between the humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and ecology as a scientific discipline on the other. It is also at the boundary of an individual, personal approach and a more systemic approach. Human ecology, incorporating humanities, social sciences, and science, is therefore pivotal for addressing the insecurities regarding today’s notion of science and the contemporary self-conception of humanity. Consequently, human ecology plays a special role in the search for new models of science and ethics in the Anthropocene. It brings the perspectives on human being from the perspective of society, understood as a “geographic factor” in Earth System research, together with the cultural constructive approach of the humanities. Vogt develops a trans-disciplinary sustainability and a contextually-driven, spatially-informed ethics. He argues that the spatial-ethical approach to human ecology might help dissolve the current dichotomy between biological and socio-ecological approaches and be an important facet of a new theory of environmental ethics in the Anthropocene. Taking account of specific contexts can enable ethics and theology to understand the difference between cultures better and build bridges between them in a pluralistic world. Based on this perspective, human-ecological ethics as a spatial-contextual and intercultural approach combines the analytical perspective of the “spatial turn” with the normative perspective of “spatial justice,” a central dimension that is also explored in Bergmann’s chapter.

Anders Melin in chapter 15 examines the place of non-human beings in the Anthropocene and asks how much room we should leave for other life forms. One of the major consequences of current anthropogenic impacts on the environment is the reduction of biodiversity. Most scientists agree that the current rate of species extinction is much higher than pre-industrialization levels. According to a recent estimate, the current rate of

extinction is 1,000 times higher than natural background rates of extinction and future rates may be 10,000 times higher. Melin argues that in order to act responsibly, humanity needs to make conscious decisions about how much room on Earth, both literally and metaphorically, we should leave for other life forms. He discusses from a theological perspective the following two questions: 1) What reasons should be given to protect threatened species? and 2) To what extent should humanity protect threatened species? As for the first question, Melin rejects the traditional belief that other life forms exist only for the sake of humanity, and that we ought to protect only those species that have a material and immaterial value for humans. Instead, he states that we should regard other species as having an independent relationship with God and that we have reason for protecting species even if they have no instrumental value. Regarding the second question, he claims that we should maintain the level of species diversity. He is skeptical of the view that humans ought to act as “co-redeemers” of evolution and that we ought to eliminate all anthropogenic extinction.

The sixth and final section of this book on sociopolitical transformations treats two vital topics: one that contests the good life of technological modernity by Ian Barns and the other that deals with the future of diplomacy by David Wellman. Barns’s chapter 16 considers the socio-political consequences of the extraordinary expansion of global, technological modernity over the past two centuries, especially over the past fifty years. He argues that learning to live within the safe operating space of planetary boundaries is and will continue to be a central challenge. His primary aim is to explore the distinctive contribution that Christian believers can make to this daunting collective task. He suggests that a transition to an ecologically sustainable world will involve shifts at three inter-connected levels: first, in relation to the practical challenge of adapting the complex socio-technical systems that provide the infrastructure of modern life; second, in relation to the adaptation of the global political economy needed to bring about unprecedented levels of cooperation between the present global patchwork of nation-states and the reform or replacement of the presently dominant order of neoliberal capitalism; and third, in relation to re-narrating the story of technological modernity as one of learning to live within ecological limits rather than attaining human mastery over nature. He focuses on Christian engagement in this fundamental task of imaginative re-narration. A dominant secularist narration of modernity, shared by “light green” supporters and “dark green” opponents alike, inhibits significant Christian theological contributions in public debates. To contest this, he draws on Charles Taylor’s and Bronislaw Szerszynski’s revisionist post-secularist accounts of modernity and technology. Both authors argue that modernity has involved

an ongoing dialectic between the processes of secularization and reformations of the sacred. Dealing with the post-Christian return of the sacred becomes central to the task of coming to terms with planetary limits, and Barns considers various ways that Christians can foster this alternative. He believes, like Northcott, that a pre-condition of this is a Eucharistic political economy of Christian community, a form of Christian communal praxis that can creatively contest the dominance of consumerist forms of life.

It is fitting that this volume concludes with a chapter addressing the crisis in international relations occasioned by living in the Anthropocene. Wellman believes that, while normative discourses exploring the ecological dimension of international relations often view nation-states through a classical *realpolitik* lens, a new discourse is emerging which focuses on the opportunities for transnational peace-building presented by the deepening of the global ecological crisis. His chapter explores some of the predominant opportunities and challenges presented to traditional and non-traditional practitioners of diplomacy in the age of the Anthropocene. This new discourse is emerging through the work of individuals and communities who have dedicated themselves to building bridges across transnational boundaries distinguished by religious and political difference with the goal of realizing concrete ecological transformation. While the historic language of diplomacy was French, many today who are most dynamically promoting the work of conflict resolution and peace-building are drawing on the common vocabulary of our shared ecosphere that describes “potable water,” “arable land,” and “breathable air.” These common realities call attention to what a secular worldview might call a “language of the ecosphere” and, for the more theologically inclined, a “language of Creation,” both of which describe the ontological connectedness of all members of the ecosphere. Wellman argues that as the language of ecosphere/Creation becomes clearer in the Anthropocene via the multiple unfolding ecological crises that mark this era, a powerful corrective to the dominance of the language of commerce, finance, and human-assigned value is emerging. This alternative worldview holds the potential to open the door to new approaches in sub-state diplomacy and transnational bioregional relations. In this light, nation-states have the potential to diminish the importance of the national borders that separate them. On a broader scale, the Anthropocene presents regional groupings of nation-states, such as the European Union, with new opportunities to go beyond the limitations of relying so heavily on the economic dimension of international relations and recognize the bioregional dimension as a more powerful source of common identity and basis for cooperation.

The belief in the significance of humanity and its capacity to understand itself and, in fact, also to act as a sovereign ruler over all in the world could, in the age of the Industrial Revolution, be proven true by empirical science. Nevertheless, the suggestion of geologists and geoengineers to name this situation as the Age of Humans—the Anthropocene—remains provocative, as all the chapters of this volume show. Especially the normative implications of distinct Anthropocene narratives remain in our eyes ambivalent: they can *either* lead to new humility towards both human and other life forms and an adequate new agenda of research questions *or* to a new triumphalist self-understanding of humankind and a utilitarian agenda with human techno-economic management of non-human (and also other human) life forms solely for the sake of humanity's own interests. Even if the introduction of the term and its historical predecessors, fortunately, has tended to follow a humbler approach, one can also trace a certain degree of a self-aggrandizing and socio-engineering attitude to the human/cultural/social/spiritual spheres of life. For the environmental humanities in general and scholars of religion and theology, this ambiguity is painful. Even if the transdisciplinary potential of Anthropocene discourses are without a doubt present and might encourage deeper cooperation of the humanities and sciences on questions of “the anthropogenic,” the term also might serve as a catalyst for hyper-anthropocentric self-understandings in science and technology, such that it could become even more difficult to focus on the deep dependence of humanity on nature. Will the dominant Anthropocene narratives, then, hinder or enhance reflection on nature's complex gifts of life to the human, what religions compress into the language of “respect for,” “wisdom about,” and “compassion and wonder within” nature?

There are no easy answers here and this book does not attempt to shirk such dilemmas. Not all the religious studies scholars and theologians contributing to this volume agree on how far and to what extent traditional Christian teachings need to undergo revision and change in order to respond adequately to such challenges. For some, a retrieval of elements from traditional, ancient, or modern resources or practices is enough. For others, a moderate re-interpretation is needed. Still others press for a radical re-reading of theology. The ambiguities present within religious discourse become most obvious when considering millennial Evangelical interpretations of the Anthropocene as that initiated by divine agency. Either way, the significance of religious traditions to this discussion cannot be dismissed. Even secular discourses around the Anthropocene bear quasi-religious elements that deserve careful philosophical and theological analysis. With humble expectations and hopes of continuing to deepen these challenging

questions, from which the easy way out definitively should not be sought, we hand over this book to the committed reader.

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