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Robert L. Nadeau: *Rebirth of the Sacred: Science, Religion, and the New Environmental Ethos.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 194 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-994236-7 (hdbk) \$29.95 £18.99.

This book attempts to provide a scientific underpinning for its call to arms, in its final, pamphlet chapter, of prophets who are willing to fight nonviolent battles (using protests, rallies, town meetings, boycotts, and political campaigns) with climate change contrarians and proponents of “false gods in the religion of The Market” (p. 154). However, it will most probably not convince a broad group of people from a variety of cultural and political backgrounds, and only be appealing to a subgroup of religious environmentalists who already share the author’s view that we need a supranational system of federal government. The book is positioned in an American setting and very critical of US politics. It is also very critical of the United Nations, which can never work, in the author’s view, in solving global environmental problems, since the basis of political power in the UN is the sovereign nation-state.

Nadeau disqualifies the possibility that sovereign nation-states may be able to solve global environmental problems together. He argues, following Peter Singer, that “the present system of international government is premised on dogmatic beliefs associated with the construct of the sovereign nation-state that are no longer commensurate with the terms of human survival” (p. 89). He claims that the construct of the sovereign nation-state is based on unscientific assumptions and furthermore that “a sovereign nation-state has never endorsed an agreement that privileges the goal of achieving a sustainable global environment over its own perceived vested interests” (pp. 84–85).

However, there are both logical and empirical problems with this disqualification of the possibility to deal with global environmental problems through the United Nations and/or bi- and multilateral agreements between sovereign nation-states. The logical problem is that it does not follow from the provenance of the construct of the sovereign nation-state that – as Nadeau implies – “it is not possible in a system of international government in which the only source of political power is the sovereign nation-state to implement the scientifically viable public policies and economic programs required to resolve the environmental crisis” (p. 77). The empirical problem is that there *are* some examples of effective global and regional environmental agreements. To give two examples from the UN: agreements that will ultimately save the ozone layer (nowhere mentioned in Nadeau’s book) and agreements that have cleaned the air in Europe (one of which is mentioned, but strangely, and without giving reasons, Nadeau says that it “made a mockery of the scientifically based solutions”, p. 86). It seems to me that it is really the US government’s position in climate negotiations which leads to Nadeau’s pessimism regarding the UN.

Unfortunately, the book is very sloppy about the details of its main case, climate change. In the introduction, the tone is overly alarmist with many unfounded claims made and too much attention paid to one very unrealistic Pentagon scenario from a decade ago. In chapter 1, it is assumed that the whole climate science community is adequately represented by one particularly vocal climate scientist, James Hansen, and the errors made in the 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are erroneously portrayed. In chapter 5, the role of the IPCC (versus that of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) is misunderstood. And in chapter 9, there is confusion between the Kyoto Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Kyoto Protocol is misportrayed.

The least problematic chapters of the book are two chapters on classical and neoclassical economics, respectively, which naturally flow from two earlier books by the author (*The Wealth of Nature: How Mainstream Economics Has Failed the Environment*, 2003, and *The Environmental Endgame: Mainstream Economics, Ecological Disaster, and Human Survival*, 2006). Nadeau offers a well-reasoned interpretation of Adam Smith's invisible hand, which is seen as a "natural law" of economics and as created by a deistic god. This explains "why the true believers in the benevolent machinations of the invisible hand . . . assume that market forces that allegedly result from the operations of these natural laws are part of a sacredly ordained providential plan and should not be interfered with by government or any other agency" (p. 105). And he shows convincingly that neoclassical economics is predicated on "unscientific assumptions about the lawful dynamics of market systems" (p. 105) inappropriately copied from mid-nineteenth century theory in physics.

Subsequently, Nadeau points out in the second last chapter that not the natural laws of economics (and their neglect of the environment) should be regarded as sacred, but that a new theory of economics is needed in which "[t]he ecosystem . . . would be viewed as the source of all life, and preserving and protecting the capacity of this system to sustain the richness and diversity of life would be a sacred and nonnegotiable responsibility" (p. 134). He ends that chapter by promoting "ecological economics", which he oddly pits against "environmental economics", though he sometimes uses the terms interchangeably. Again, the author is very negative about the US, and Sweden, Denmark and Germany are hailed by him as positive examples of nations that "have attempted to create some semblance of a steady-state economy" (p. 133).

Most interesting about this book is that it aims "to make a convincing case that these massive changes in our political and economic institutions could occur if sufficient numbers of environmentally concerned people in the five great religious traditions of the world enter the new dialogue between the truths of science and religion" (pp. 7-8). In three chapters, Nadeau tells the new scientific stories on humanity, physics and biology. This leads him near the end of the book to formulate a new environmental ethos with a profound spiritual dimension: "all aspects of physical and spiritual reality, including human life and consciousness, are emergent from and embedded in a single significant whole" (p. 146). Then it becomes possible, according to Nadeau to discover that it is

possible “to love life enough to save it” (E.O. Wilson), viewing love as an art that requires “discipline, concentration and patience” (Erich Fromm).

Although the book will strike a chord with some, I am afraid the case has not been made.

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