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## Editors' Introduction

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As this issue goes to press international tensions grow: from tariffs levied on the United States by their closest allies (Canada) and global competitors (i.e., China), to the separation of children from their families and their subsequent detention on the US's southern border. The ostensible reason for the latter is border security and the rule of law. But many of the families who are separated and detained are not from Mexico, our neighbor to the south, but are rather asylum seekers from other Meso-American countries fleeing violence and terror in their native terrain. Contestations over the policies of nation-states capture the headlines. But societies and cultures are not mere products or accompaniments of national policies. Underlying such national headlines are multiple, contested narratives of place and identity which belie the easy generalizations offered by most media outlets. In this issue we highlight some of these local narratives and examine historical practices which illustrate our deep dependence on other-than-human creatures and their importance for normative consideration.

First, readers will encounter ethnographic data gathered by ethnologist Judit Farkas about Hungarian ecovillages—intentional communities striving to minimize their ecological footprint. She notes that citizens of these ecovillages typically participate in multiple communities of accountability, groups which enact a variety of worldviews and values. But in many cases, Farkas argues, they exhibit eco-friendly instantiations of neopagan practices and perceptions. Such movements are no doubt flourishing in multiple locations across continents.

The second featured article by Brian Hernandez highlights local, grassroots movements which he believes represent a new emergent global worldview grounded in the epistemic contests over concepts such as 'development', 'globalization', and 'well-being'. The metaphors and tropes he picks out from these movements indicate that multiple constituencies in diverse places are responsive to narratives which imagine that the Earth is sacred and worthy of reverent care.

It is also our pleasure to include here a revised version of the essay which received the award for 'Best Student Paper' at the 2016 conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture. Lily Zeng explores the concepts of 'purity' and 'timelessness' in the protection of sacred groves in Xishuangbanna, China. The groves are protected by the Dai, a minority population, and Zeng illustrates the ways in which both the Dai and outside political actors deploy narratives related to purity and history in contrary ways for their own ends. Zeng describes how such discourse is utilized to manufacture identities as some populations struggle with the implications of 'modernization'.

Finally, Abraham Shemesh offers an interesting analysis of the ancient and medieval Jewish practice of ornithomancy, or the systematic interpretation of bird behaviors as omens. It was common practice to imagine that bird cries and flight patterns could be used as divinatory tools. Some written texts, however, offered prohibitions on the practice, which may indicate how widespread the practice might have been. Shemesh details the interpretations of two medieval Sephardic rabbis, Maimonides and Nahmanides, and demonstrates how their views diverge. While Maimonides followed the prohibitions against ornithomancy, Nahmanides combined such practices with astrology to arrive at what he believed was practical knowledge.

The issue wraps up with a variety of book reviews which touch on ethical approaches to animals, food ethics, environmental hermeneutics, so-called 'intelligent' design, Henry David Thoreau, international inter-faith organizations, and J. Baird Callicott's admonition to think like a planet—drawing of course on the famous naturalist Aldo Leopold's conception of 'thinking like a mountain'. Those who attend our regular meetings of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture (ISSRNC) will know that Callicott was the first recipient of that organization's lifetime achievement award.

For readers who have not been to one of our conferences, we encourage you to attend! The next conference will take place at the University College, Cork, Ireland. We are grateful, as always, to our members and participants who help us to continue our tradition of holding stimulating conferences in unique locales. Jenny Butler, at University College, Cork, helped to organize this next meeting. We hope that you will join us there and that you will submit your own research to the *JSRNC*.

*Lucas Johnston and Joseph Witt*  
Co-Editors