
Editor's Introduction

As we close out 2018 we have occasion to celebrate. Here we conclude the twelfth year of our publication and highlight that despite many of the changes and challenges we have faced throughout the past years, scholarly production related to the nexus of nature and cultures, and their religions, continues to proliferate. And even so, the symptoms of ecological decline continue to proliferate as well. As scholars we should continue to ask difficult questions about whether and in what ways our scholarship may contribute to addressing these ecological challenges, or whether, in fact, our scholarly efforts have little or no effect. Of course, many of those who are readers of this journal likely imagine that indeed our efforts do further conversations (whether local, regional, national, or international), or that they challenge perceptual frameworks which contribute to such degradation, or that our scholarship contributes to re-imagining knowledge practices which may move us toward more sustainable societies. But how do they do so, and how can these efforts specifically contribute in fostering sustainable and resilient societies?

The articles in this issue primarily consider *practices* that individuals and societies employ which may foster more environmentally oriented behaviors or engender greater environmental concern. John Studley's article addresses the ways in which lay participants can be more effectively included in the protection of sacred natural sites on the Tibetan plateau. His hypothesis is that the revival of religious practices in those areas has contributed to greater environmental protection. But Studley's participant observation has led to his perception that most publications related to the Tibetan plateau have come from metrics of biodiversity, or interviews with Buddhist and Bon institutions in that region. This tendency, says Studley, has contributed to a rather narrow perception of the ways in which conservation proceeds in this area. He suggests some ways in which lay individual and non-institutional agents might contribute more forcefully to the conservation of these obviously fragile places and their resident societies.

Barbara Jane Davy and Stephen Quilley's article similarly focuses on ritual practices, situating them in an historical context. The authors note several scholars who have highlighted the somewhat artificial (and recent) separation of economies from social and ecological well-being. They posit that the retrieval of ritualized modes of exchange, as in gift-giving, might provide an avenue by which humans can revive the ecological conscience. Drawing on Graham Harvey and others, they point toward the 'new animism' as one possible model for this. Such approaches to other-than-human persons attempt to reimagine the agency of the other-than-human creatures with whom we share our worlds, and who, indeed, may be formative for our moral sensibilities.

The next essay by Nevedita Nath works in two movements which attempt to challenge and reform the ways in which specific cultural practices in the Western Himalayas are related to notions of the sacred. First, she recounts the ways that colonialist notions of 'the sacred' have simultaneously worked to separate the sacred and profane and to reify upper class concepts of the sacred. Second, the article cautions scholars against imagining that colonialist impositions of ontology are in some sense 'real'. Rather, they are attempts to cordon off certain places for political (and I would add other economic or social) purposes. Nath proposes that everyday cultural practices might foster a non-anthropocentric ethical orientation to the world, provided they are not imagined as somehow separate from peoples' lifeways.

Finally, Rose Caraway's piece focuses on the ways in which nongovernmental organizations in Cuba promoted activities such as agroecology, the development of permaculture, and other sustainability initiatives in the post-Soviet era. Specifically, the article focuses on the *Centro Cristiano Lavastida de Servicio y Capacitación* (Christian Lavastida Center of Service and Training) and its connections to both Cuban state organizations and international organizations such as the World Council of Churches. In part, Caraway highlights the ways in which civil society organizations can fulfil some of the functions of state institutions as their power and influence erodes.

The issue concludes with a number of book reviews, most of which focus on historical developments related to religion and nature. They include an amazing range of topics, from hospice care, to Quaker abolitionists, to cultivating hope in the Anthropocene, to new edited volumes which highlight the diversity of our field of study. As we approach the thirteenth year of our publication, as always, we invite our readers to contribute their own interesting research to the journal. We would also like to continue to cultivate special issues which fall within the scope of the journal's mission. If you have participated in a conference panel

which you feel is well suited to our aims or would like to gather together some colleagues for a relevant issue, please contact one of our editors (Bron Taylor, Joseph Witt, Lucas Johnston, or Amanda Nichols) for more details on the proposal process. We are grateful for your ongoing support of the journal, and its affiliated academic society, the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture. We sincerely hope you can join us for our upcoming conference, 13–16 June 2019 at the University College Cork, Ireland. If you have not been to one of our conferences, I assure you that we have a good amount of fun!

Lucas F. Johnston
Co-Editor