
Introduction

The intention behind this journal, and the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* project which preceded it, was to both deepen and complicate inherited understandings of the complex relationships between what people construe as ‘religion’ and ‘nature’. Some of this has had to do with revisioning a host of things related to beliefs about the cognitive, emotional, and religious distinctions between humans and other animals. An early foray in this regard was the famed primatologist Jane Goodall’s (2005) speculations about ‘primate spirituality’ published in the encyclopedia. A few years later, in the *JSRNC*, after wrestling with conventional definitions of religion (2011), in ‘The Case for Primate Spirituality’, James Harrod (2014) advanced even more strongly than did Goodall an argument that non-human primates also have what can be understood as religious perceptions and practices.

These were not, however, the earliest or only scholarly efforts to take seriously the possibility of what Stewart Guthrie (2002) called ‘animal animism’ and that a growing number of other scholars suggested, or asserted, demonstrate that at least some other-than-human organisms have affective experiences and display practices that resemble if not exemplify what is commonly understood by the word ‘religion’ (e.g., de Waal 1997, 2013; Haraway 1989; Midgely 1994; Schaefer 2012, 2015).

In his two-part contribution to this issue, Paul Cunningham enters the fray, presenting a detailed argument, grounded in the evolutionary and cognitive sciences, titled ‘The Case for Animal Spirituality’. In Part One he posits that Charles Darwin’s (1896: 125–27) ‘hypothesis of affective, behavioral, and psychological continuity among species’ may offer an important starting point for understanding the capacity of nonhuman animals to have spiritual experiences (p. 189). Cunningham’s nuanced discussion notes limitations to the study of animal spirituality including that ‘species differences matter’ (p. 189), especially when it comes to consciousness (p. 203), awareness (p. 204), and meaning-making capacities (p. 209). As one of his reviewers put it, this discussion will ‘enhance readers’ ability to see...whether any nonhuman animals might feature some sense of what we [humans] signal to each other with the words “spirituality” and “religious”’. In

Part Two, Cunningham builds a case on scientific evidence and reason that in fact many nonhuman animals do have experiences and practices that resonate with human religions, while exploring what sort of 'practical consequences' should flow from such evidence and reasoning. His provisional answer is that if behavioral patterns, psychological capabilities, and neurological structures are similar between human and nonhuman animals, applying the terms 'spirituality' or 'religion' to help 'understand the meaning and purpose of an animal's behavior is a reasonable heuristic strategy' (p. 226). Cunningham also suggests that such recognition may help us to better understand both our interactions with nonhuman animals and the evolution of our own species.

In 'Catholic Sisters and Cornfield Activism', Mark Clatterbuck contributes an insightful analysis of the Pennsylvania based grassroots movement Lancaster Against Pipelines, a non-profit, grassroots organization that emerged in 2016 to protest a gas pipeline carrying fossil fuels produced via fracking. The movement included activists from the Adorers of Blood of Christ, an international order of Catholic women. The Adorers were inspired by the indigenous #NoDAPL movement and understood their efforts as part of a kindred, global resistance to environmental injustice (Johnson and Kraft 2018; Estes 2019; Gilio-Whitaker 2019). The sisters facilitated religious resistance to the pipeline that included civil disobedience and they also contended that the federal courts should halt the pipelines to protect 'religious liberty' (p. 265). Clatterbuck argues that their campaign 'exposed a deep divide between the [Sisters'] ecologically informed faith and an all-male Catholic hierarchy' (p. 265). Clatterbuck not only provides evidence for the ongoing efforts by some women in Holy Orders to promote social justice, and how this sometimes has strong proenvironmental dimensions, but he also contributes to the evidence of those who claim that religion-based environmental resistance is on the rise in the United States.

We conclude this issue with a number of book reviews that illuminate the diversity of scholarship exploring the religion, nature, and culture nexus. From environmental histories to climate futures, from human religious practice to nonhuman spiritualities, and from the cognitive sciences to emotions and evolution, these reviews will, as usual, help *JSRNC* readers to keep abreast of this fascinating, undisciplined, field.

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