Introduction: Paris in View

In November 2015, 337 whales were found beached in Chile; the presumed cause of death (though not confirmed) was a toxic red tide from sewage and fertilizer contamination, resulting in an anaerobic environment (Howard 2015). In December 2015, the UK’s Met Office predicted that 2016 would be the hottest year on record: 1.1 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels, inching ever closer to the 1.5-degree maximum agreed upon by international consensus in Paris at the end of 2015 (Carrington 2015). These are but a few signs of distress. The popular author Daniel Quinn used a metaphor to describe the emerging Anthropocene: place a frog in a pot of warm water and gradually heat it up, and the frog will blissfully boil to death, seemingly unaware of its imminent expiration (Quinn 1996). Can we imagine some of the indicators that our cultural habitat is about to ‘boil’? Worldwide 25% of mammals, 33% of reef corals, and in some cases entire animal taxa are threatened.¹ At the very least, the water seems to be warming. Recognizing anthropogenic impacts is not simply about tackling climate disruption or about preserving other species—it is also about our own survival. There is a clear if under-scrutinized link between the perceived security of human communities and the sustainability of the global system, of which almost no part remains unaffected by human behaviors. Many human-induced disasters are perhaps incorrectly categorized as ‘natural disasters’, as was the case with the 2015 floods in Chennai, India, where factories, businesses, and services were rendered inoperable, with over 5000 homes awash and over 400 dead (Tharoor 2015; Al Jazeera News 2015).

To illustrate, on 13 November 2015, a series of terrorist attacks in Paris shocked the world. Members of the terrorist organization known as the

Islamic State claimed responsibility (Callimachi 2015). In response, France instituted martial law, even as authorities prepared for one of the largest gatherings of heads of state and dignitaries in history to begin the 21st Committee of the Parties—the ongoing climate negotiations initiated in 1994 as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) came into effect. It seems likely that the timing of the attacks was not accidental, but rather was intended to intimidate and make more difficult coordinated efforts by both industrialized nations and the developing world to come to agreement. Some scholars and investigative journalists have noted that resource scarcities ultimately lie behind the emergence of groups like the Islamic State and behind much of the emergence of violent extremism in general (Fountain 2015; Hammer 2013; Welch 2015; Klare 2008, 2012). Indeed, groups like the Islamic State thrive in destabilized conditions, where they can exploit resource scarcity to facilitate the radicalization of disaffected individuals. In this particular case, they have been able to move some of these scarce petroleum resources to amass unprecedented (at least among terrorist organizations) financial gain and to control vast territories. It is appropriate, then, that we open the tenth volume of this journal ruminating on the link between sustainability and security and looking ahead with both hope (as the culminating agreements from COP 21 take effect) and uncertainty (as we realize that more ambitious and wide-reaching measures are necessary to reach the goals generated by international consensus).

Many who are readers of this journal know well that there are several scholars who have argued that religion is a crucial ingredient in the search for sustainability, providing moral force to the quest. Others have been critical of some of this work, which has focused solely on the so-called ‘world’ religions, arguing that studies often concentrate on the liberal mainstreams of these traditions and that such a narrow purview misses much religious cultural production occurring outside the boundaries of the world religions that can be considered environmentally salutary (Taylor 2005). This JSRNC issue tackles some of these ongoing questions with a special set of articles devoted to Confucian environmental ethics. Joseph Wilson, the editor for this selection of articles, provides a succinct introduction to them, and there is thus no need to detail their contents here, except to say that the primary article to which the other authors respond challenges a Neo-Confucian ethic grounded in interrelatedness (i.e., Tucker and Berthrong 1998), while the responses

2. See, for example, http://fore.yale.edu/religion/ to explore the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology and its associated publications.
wrestle with the implications of such claims in an era in which international deliberation on environmental and security issues becomes increasingly crucial. The need for such critical studies is becoming more acute, for as this issue goes to press, China has just issued its first air pollution ‘red alert’, requiring students and workers to stay indoors (Te-Ping and Spegele 2015). One other featured article (Jansen et al.) contributes to Bron Taylor’s call (2011) for a more robust social-scientific assessment of the greening of religion hypothesis and investigates the religious dimensions of environmental policy in the Netherlands and the framing of values in nature-oriented discourse.

These articles kick off volume 10 of the *JSRNC* but also appear at a pivotal time, as unprecedented international cooperation is required both to prevent catastrophic climate disruption and to combat violent challenges emerging from destabilized or failing states. We will continue to explore these themes following the return of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture returns to Gainesville, FL, the site of its first conference in 2006, for its ten-year anniversary. We encourage all scholars interested in the nexus of religion, nature, and culture to support our mission to produce both a high-quality journal and leading edge, scholarly work.

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**References**


