

## INTRODUCTION

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Today we are witnessing what may be the first effects of global warming on sustainability of the planet and its life forms, security, and community. We could ascribe any one of the following phenomena, taken in isolation, to normal environmental fluctuations. Together, they indicate that we may—and the emphasis is on “may”—be witnessing hints of the future.

On the intrastate, interstate, and international levels, water is fast becoming a scarce resource. Chronic drought is already forcing some communities in Tennessee to import potable water because reservoirs have dried up. Large cities like Atlanta, Georgia, have less than three months of water supply left. Rivers in Georgia that provide water to other states, such as Alabama and Florida, are already being contested as the needs of wildlife and human sustainability clash.

Costal and near-coastal cities and states in the United States have not significantly invested in desalination technologies, partly because those that are available are horrendously expensive to install and maintain. Yet earth’s oceans and seas remain the most likely source of water needed directly by future populations and indirectly for agriculture. The practice of draining aquifer waters already has resulted in an incredible lowering of the aquifer level in the Midwest United States’ Ogallala sandstone; Mexico City’s subsidence due to a similar practice is well known.

Another water-related global warming effect threatens coastal cities. A recent issue of *Catalyst: The Magazine of the Union of Concerned Scientists* reports on research that indicates:

sustained warming between 1.6 degrees C and 5.2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels could initiate widespread destabilization of the Greenland and West Antarctica ice sheets, leading to sea level rise between 12 and 40 feet. While the full increase may take centuries to occur, even an increase of one meter . . . would threaten major cities including Mumbai, New York, and Tokyo, and inundate some small islands. Rising seas also magnify the destructive potential of coastal storms; projections show a mere 7- to 14-inch rise could produce coastal flooding in Boston and Atlantic City, New Jersey, equivalent to today’s 100-year flood almost every year on average. . . . In the continental United States, drought-prone ecosystems are projected to expand approximately 11 per cent in area for each degree Celsius of additional warming. Worldwide, 1 to 2 billion people would be at risk of increased water scarcity. (Fall 2007, p.3)

Admittedly, the recent warming trend in Greenland has improved quality of life for its more temperate communities. Gardening has recently sprung up, with individuals now producing vegetables apart from potatoes now being produced as the growing season has increased in length. Distribution by boat will be facilitated as the Arctic ice sheet recedes and the Northwest Passage opens to near year-round traffic. Individuals who have lived in climates with severe winters should experience milder weather for longer periods of the year.

Our commitments to one another implied by the ethics of community, while they enable us to rejoice at good fortunes of some, do not authorize us to shrug at the misfortunes of others. Responsibility-shifting schemes such as carbon credits tend to foist burdens on to those whose fortune is only now on the rise and to insulate those whose behaviors are causally implicated in global warming. Territorial “up-river” claims of privilege have long been contested in inter- and intrastate water law, for good reasons. The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River will displace over a million Chinese citizens and drastically alter the area’s biosphere.

For too long we have been inattentive to issues of sustainability. Population growth, increasing global trade, the demand for energy, and the unfortunate-in-the-long-term abundance of coal and oil, have all brought us to the point of serious long-term consequences.

Whether we can back away from ecological disaster is debatable. Whether the projections of consequences of global temperature increase are accurate in magnitude and time projections is debatable. But justice dictates that we take steps to forestall possible negative long-term consequences of our carbon and water economy by acting to prevent what damage we can and minimize that which we cannot entirely avoid. Caution also dictates that we proceed with care, that the steps we take not themselves be causes of other intolerable climate changes.

Reality dictates that we also turn our attention to willful challenges to global security via terrorism and other forms of hate-based behavior. Just as physical borders are often seen as “ours” or “theirs,” psychological boundaries also exist. We can find these boundaries in the form of religious ideologies, language, racial viewpoints, gender viewpoints, and economic levels. Any boundary that can create within a human being a sense of “us” versus “them” can, and often will, result in hate-based behavior. We must understand these boundaries without condoning them. We must explore the limits of these boundaries without creating new ones. We must create a balance between individual and community that achieves an optimal level of distinctiveness from which all can proudly proclaim membership in unique human sub-communities and the collective global community of humanity.

In this rich and complex collection, melding the results of two international conferences, finding a unifying theme is a challenging task. On the one hand, the task includes assessing the impact of technology and population growth on Planet Earth. James Lovelock’s 1979 work, *Gaia: A New Look at*

*Life on Earth*, and Lynn Margulis' 1998 book, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution*, together suggest that we can regard Earth as a living organism (Lovelock) or as a huge ecosystem composed of a series of interlocking ecosystems (Margulis). Lovelock's latest book, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (2006), suggests that our failure to accept the Gaia hypothesis has led to a looming crisis of irreversible degradation of the super ecosystem and a consequent massive loss of habitable land. This suggests looking at human beings as a kind of planetary cancer, a reemergence of very ancient themes once explored by Reinhold Niebuhr in his 1944 work, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*. Here is one theme that can help readers see unity in the present volume's diversity.

Another approach to reading this present collection, perhaps more philosophical than the Gaia hypothesis, would be to use the concept of global or planetary ethics and the challenge of extending the work in ethical theory of recent years to apply to the set of issues that are explored in this volume. For example, John Rawls' 1971 *A Theory of Justice* introduced several seminal methods of evaluating the justice of some possible arrangement of social and economic structures. Rawls posited use of what he called the veil of ignorance to test whether a social structure would be just. We are to imagine being plunged into that structure ignorant of our own position, gender, race, wealth, station, and to ask whether that structure would be acceptable to us. Recognizing that inequalities might be desirable, he argued that inequalities would be just only when they bring maximal benefit to the least well off. So part of the discussion of global ethics would be to show how these concepts are to be applied in assessing the kinds of questions that arise in the present volume's foreign policy critiques.

Whatever "filter" the reader chooses to interpret the elements of this collection, the general tenor of all the essays in the present volume is that of a multifaceted crisis coming to maturity in the near future. Regardless of the academic, individual, philosophical, or moral perspective of the authors, the theme of global community is common to them all. We cannot achieve global security while individuals, governments, factions within countries, or dominant political parties are able to create new boundaries that further separate us as human beings. Instead, we need new constructs that provide us with a universal theme of global community from which to operate. Until we come to see "ourselves" as an integral part of the "other," we cannot achieve the symbiosis needed between global community and global security. We cannot stress enough the importance of this work at this time.

This work is a manual not only for the improvement of human sustainability, but also for the actual survival of humanity.

