

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a path in a forest. The ground is covered in fallen autumn leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The trees are tall and have green and yellowing leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

The Good in
Connecting Science,

Nature and
Religion, and Spirituality

Humanity
with the Natural World

Edited by
Stephen R. Kellert and
Timothy J. Farnham

About Island Press

Island Press is the only nonprofit organization in the United States whose principal purpose is the publication of books on environmental issues and natural resource management. We provide solutions-oriented information to professionals, public officials, business and community leaders, and concerned citizens who are shaping responses to environmental problems.

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Nature and Humanity

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Dedicated to the memory of H. Boone Porter, who did
so much to reveal the good and the God in nature and humanity

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Preface

This book, and the conference that inspired it—“The Good in Nature and Humanity,” held at Yale University in May 2000—originated in the conviction that the root causes of modern society’s environmental and spiritual crises cannot be understood nor effectively resolved until the split between religion and science, or, more generally, between faith and reason, has been effectively reconciled. By comprehending and strengthening the bonds between spirituality, science, and nature, we may come closer to achieving an environmental ethic that better equips us to confront two of the most imperiling crises of our time—global environmental destruction and an impoverished spirituality. By bridging the gap between rationality and religion through the concern of each for understanding the human relation to creation, we may better pursue the quest for a more secure and meaningful world.

Scientists traditionally examine the natural environment in seeking knowledge that enhances our physical and mental security. The religious or spiritual practitioner analogously pursues an understanding of creation that points the way toward meaning and salvation. For both scientists and the spiritually and religiously inclined, the recognition grows that in our abuse of the earth we diminish our moral as well as our material condition. This mutual realization forges an understanding of the link between an environmentally degraded planet and a spiritually depauperate humanity. Conservationists, ever more cognizant of this connection, have increasingly acknowledged that both scientific and spiritual understandings are necessary in achieving an ethical sensibility capable of confronting the global crisis of pervasive environmental pollution, resource depletion, atmospheric degradation, and enormous biodiversity loss.

This book is based in the premise that neither science nor religion by itself can resolve the prevailing malaise of environmental and moral decline. The contributors to this volume pursue an ethic of right relation between nature and humanity that balances theory with practice and relates each to the enormous challenge of generating a practical ethic for managing the natural envi-

ronment. Scientists, theologians, spiritual leaders, and writers, working with foresters, farmers, fishers, wildlife managers, and land developers, embrace an environmental perspective that links utilization of nature with the preservation of its beauty, health, and integrity. A basic objective is to advance human wisdom in order to avert environmental catastrophe but, more affirmatively, to achieve a more harmonious human relationship with the natural world that moves us toward a measure of goodness and grace. The phrase *the good in nature and humanity* reflects the realization that in pursuing a more nurturing relationship with the natural world, we see our own salvation in the preservation of the health, integrity, and beauty of creation.

The book originated, as noted, in a conference, organized by the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Yale University Divinity School, The Wilderness Society, and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. Over a period of four days, some seven hundred participants confronted issues of science, religion, spirituality, and the natural world and the related challenge of ethical environmental and resource management. Most of the conference speakers contributed to this volume. Some not represented in the book include Sylvia Earle, Paul Gorman, Gary Nabhan, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, occasionally cited in the chapters that follow.

The volume is organized in three parts. Corresponding chapters are introduced in greater detail at the beginning of each part; what follows is a brief overview. Part I, “Scientific and Spiritual Perspectives on Nature and Humanity,” explores how science, spirit, and religion can guide our experience and understanding of the good in nature and its relevance to our ongoing relationship with the natural world. Richard J. Wood, former dean of the Yale University Divinity School, introduces this part with a thoughtful reflection on the relevance of traditional philosophical approaches to ethics in the generation of an environmental ethic grounded in both scientific and religious understandings of creation. Part II, “Linking Spiritual and Scientific Perspectives with an Environmental Ethic,” written largely by resource managers and users, focuses on how the integration of science and spirituality can equip us to make wiser choices as procurers and consumers of resources obtained from the natural world. William H. Meadows, president of The Wilderness Society, introduces this part by calling for a land ethic wherein advocacy based in moral passion leads us to land and resource use that honors the sacredness of the earth. Finally, part III, “From the Perspective of the Storyteller,” embraces a more narrative understanding of the relation between science, spirit, and nature.

Stephen R. Kellert and Timothy J. Farnham

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This book, and the conference that preceded it, came into being as a result of the considerable assistance and inspirational guidance of others. We owe particular thanks to Robert Perschel of The Wilderness Society, Paul Gorman of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, and Dr. Richard J. Wood, dean emeritus of the Yale University Divinity School, all of whom were instrumental in the organization and realization of the conference. The original concept and implementation of the meeting benefited greatly from the creativity, commitment, and hard work of Greg Hitzhusen, a joint degree student at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Yale University Divinity School. Richard Fern, a professor at the Yale University Divinity School at the time, was an important intellectual force in the conference's development. We owe special thanks to Nature Johnston, a student at the Yale University Divinity School, for her remarkable energy and competence in helping to organize the conference, as well as the invaluable assistance of many other students at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. We also received material and moral support from Professor Mary Evelyn Tucker of Harvard University's Forum on Religion and Ecology and Gus Speth, dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Additionally, we thank Nathan Garland for his superb design of the conference program and poster. Finally, we very much appreciate Barbara Dean's invaluable editorial suggestions and advice in the development of this book.

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