

# Acknowledgments and Description of the Genesis and Evolution of the Encyclopedia

The idea for this encyclopedia was hatched by Jeffrey Kaplan who suggested it to me over lunch during the American Academy of Religion meeting in San Francisco in November, 1997. He became interested in the relationships between religion and nature when noting some interesting similarities in the nature spiritualities that could be found within two distinct, radical subcultures in Europe and America, that of the racist right, which he had been studying for years, and radical environmentalism, a movement with which I had conducted extensive field work. He knew I had been focusing broadly on “religion and nature” and thought that given his extensive work with major reference works – including his own *Encyclopedia of White Power* (2000) and as a graduate student assisting in the production of *The Fundamentalism Project* (Marty and Appleby 1991–1995) – that we could produce a valuable reference work. I agreed and began to work up a prospective list of entries.

It was obvious from the outset that the field was very broad and that to do it justice we would need to reach widely across disciplinary lines. During the next two years we brainstormed over 400 entries and contributors, began issuing invitations to those we hoped would agree to be associate or assistant editors, secured a publisher, and brought Sean Connors on board to develop a beautiful website for introducing and administering the project, which was set up at [www.religionandnature.com](http://www.religionandnature.com). Connors became a web guru in the subsequent years, and I am grateful he stuck through this project. He did so graciously despite many pressures, and moreover, has put in a significant amount of *pro bono* time.

A number of scholars were invited to a November 1998 meeting in Boston, immediately before the American Academy of Religion meeting, to think about the project. The night before, during a conversation over what name would be best for the encyclopedia, of many options, “religion and nature” was offered up, and it quickly appeared to provide the broadest trope for the project, superior therefore to the more common “religion and ecology” appellation. The next day some twenty scholars joined in a day-long discussion of the breadth and framing of the project, as well as its specific entries and contributors. From there we developed lists of cooperating editors and an additional list of entries to pursue. After the meeting the amalgamated list was distributed to all of

those then involved in the project. These scholars were then asked what entries, contributors, and perspectives were missing. Throughout the project, I invited newly identified contributors to consult the online lists of entries (which could be sorted and reviewed in a number of ways) and suggest how we could strengthen it. This encyclopedia has, therefore, been shaped by a snowball methodology. Snowball it did, to nearly 1000 entries and over 500 contributors.

Throughout the project we sought to provide broad coverage of the subject matter, both chronologically and with regard to religious type, geographical region, and a number of other themes (such as science, religion, and nature). With the enthusiastic help of the University of Tennessee’s Rosalind Hackett, who served as conference chair for the 2000 International Association for the History of Religions in Durban, South Africa, I convened a series of sessions on religion and nature. These sessions helped to ensure that the African continent would not be neglected, and led to many valuable connections. I also had many meetings and a great deal of correspondence with all of the collaborating editors and many of the encyclopedia’s contributors. I followed up every suggestion that seemed promising.

This is not to say that the encyclopedia succeeded at being comprehensive – there are some regions where I failed to find able and willing contributors; North Africa west of Egypt and Antarctica come immediately to mind as examples. We did cover more ground than I thought would be possible at the outset, however. It turned out that there are many scholars who, when asked, can analyze religion and nature in the regions or traditions or periods they are most familiar with, even if they had not previously focused their view in this direction. Nevertheless, some readers will no doubt wonder why one subject and not another was covered. There may be justifiable criticisms along these lines, although most of the subjects likely to be identified as missing were probably pursued without success. More importantly, however, is the recognition that today no reference work can be entirely comprehensive, so perhaps a better test of an encyclopedia’s efficacy is its success at demarcating the territory to be covered and analyzing carefully a representative sample of the phenomena in question.

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One incurs many debts in orchestrating a scholarly project like this and I wish to acknowledge the many and sometimes extraordinary contributions that have been made. First, I would like to thank those I have, in agreement with Consulting Editor Jeffrey Kaplan, designated Executive, Associate and Assistant Editors. These decisions were based on their overall contributions to the project. Associate Editors played significant roles in shaping a sub-area in the encyclopedia, often helping to identify entries and recruit contributors and providing peer reviews of entries in their own areas of expertise, as well as making substantial contributions of their own to it. Assistant Editors provided significant assistance in recommending entries and/or recruiting contributors, sometimes played a role in reviewing submissions, and usually contributed their own entries. They are listed immediately after the title page of this encyclopedia. Three scholars who deserve special recognition have been designated Executive Editors: Michael York, Adrian Ivakhiv, and Laura Hobgood-Oster. They have done everything the other editors have done but more of it, and always in an exceptionally good-natured and timely manner.

Many of the 518 contributors, in addition to their own writing, provided suggestions and leads which enriched the project significantly. I cannot remember where all such good ideas came from, but wish to thank those who provided them. I would also like to thank those contributors who, at one point or another, went out of their way to find a prospective contributor, a bibliographical reference, or provided a peer review of one or more entries. These extra efforts represented extraordinary kindness, which I will not forget. Every standard entry in this encyclopedia was fully peer reviewed, not only by Jeffrey Kaplan and myself, but by one or more scholars familiar with the subject under scrutiny. I also wish to thank the fine scholars who reviewed and helped me improve my own contributions to this encyclopedia, including Sarah McFarland Taylor, Becky Gould, Sarah Pike, Graham Harvey, Arne Kalland, Michael York, Adrian Ivakhiv, Michael Zimmerman, Curt Meine, Ron Engel, Les Sponsel, Stephen Humphrey, and Anna Peterson. Having such friends and colleagues is one of the great rewards of this kind of collaborative scholarship.

I would like to thank the pioneers of the emerging

scholarly fields which have most often been labeled “environmental ethics” and “religion and ecology.” Some of these figures have entries about them, for their contributions have been seminal. Many others (but not all who could have been mentioned) appear in RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, or other entries. These scholars provided the foundational work that made this project possible, and in some ways timely and necessary. They were the ones who raised many of the questions that are probed in these pages.

I also need to thank a number of student assistants who have assisted in this project, often for short periods of time, but without whom this encyclopedia would not have been completed as promptly as it was. A number of these were involved with the Environmental Studies program at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, where I was before I moved to the University of Florida (in 2002) to help develop a graduate program that has an emphasis in Religion and Nature. Now settled in, I have had the able assistance of several exceptional graduate students, Todd Best, Gavin Van Horn, Luke Johnston, and Bridgette O’Brien, who handled, with scrupulous attention to detail, many of the production tasks. I have also, already, learned a great deal from my new colleagues in Florida, including through their contributions to this encyclopedia; eight faculty members and three graduate students have contributed articles to it.

As is usually the case, the greatest debts of gratitude that accumulate during a scholarly project are to those who have suffered the most from it. I wish to underscore, therefore, my gratitude to Jeffrey Kaplan for seeing through this project. Over its course it more than doubled in size. Despite this unwelcome increase in workload, he read nearly every entry (sometimes several times). With his broad, history of religion training, he made regular and substantial contributions to its quality. I am grateful, as well, to Jeff’s wife, Eva. She has been remarkably gracious considering the hours this project has consumed that might otherwise have been more family focused. Finally to my children, Anders, Kaarin, and Kelsey, and to my wife Beth, I owe the greatest measure of thanks, for their long forbearance and support, which affords me the luxury of pursuing the issues engaged in these pages.

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