

Preface

The systematic study of people and their natural and artificial environments is more popular than ever. Such study is evident across almost all academic disciplines and in many interdisciplinary enterprises, not least of which is 'environmental science'. This book aims to offer the most comprehensive introduction to the spectrum of ways that the non-human world impinges on the world of people, and vice versa. The lack of such an introduction is precisely what spurred its conception and completion. The book's contents amount less to a coherent whole and more to a kaleidoscope: this volume presents readers with different angles of vision on human-environment relations that reach across the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.

This kaleidoscopic companion reflects the diversity of environmental studies. The diversity is less a sign of intellectual disarray than of the many legitimate perspectives that exist on a large, complex and dynamic world of plants, animals, ice, water and much more besides. Yet, if one thing holds these multiple perspectives together, it's a sense that human impacts on nature are of such scale, scope and significance that humans now need, through research and dialogue, to consider new and better ways of inhabiting the Earth. The challenge is not to reduce these perspectives to a single, overarching one in a grand act of synthesis. Instead, it is to learn from the diversity as we ask what sort of Earth we want to bequeath to future generations. Scientific approaches can tell us much about material causes, effects, changes and about technological problems and solutions. But vital questions arise about the human relationship with the non-human world that science alone cannot answer – questions that are moral, aesthetic, and spiritual, and that require answers based on often divergent values relating to concepts like rights, duties, entitlements, virtue, equity, justice, and so on. The social sciences and humanities are places to look for some of these answers, but so too are all sorts of places outside universities – such as major religions and minority cultures in countries like Brazil, Nepal or Canada.

We want to thank our many contributors for writing their chapters (more or less!) on time and for being responsive to editorial suggestions for change. Sadly, though, a number of commissioned chapters did not get written. If a second edition of this book is published in future we hope, as editors, to make amends. We'd like to acknowledge the superb assistance offered by the following people. Craig Thomas, at Manchester University, provided initial support in contacting contributors and fielding their questions.

Taneesha Amos-Hampson, at the University of Wollongong, then provided essential help when the book was almost ready to be handed over to the publisher. She undertook the prodigious task of formatting over 150 chapters, checking permissions for use of visual aids, collecting abstracts for chapters, soliciting ORCID identifiers, and doing much more besides – all this as a Dean's Scholar tasked to assist Noel Castree. The index was first drafted by Felicia Liu and Hannah Collis, Master's students at King's College, London.

Noel would like to dedicate this book to N-M B, THC, FMB and his mum, Christine. A very special mention goes to RO: JMZ. Mike would like to dedicate it to the many colleagues around the world who have helped him convert from an environmental scientist to an environmental humanist; he thanks in particular his Fellowship at the Rachel Carson Centre in Munich. Jim honours the last decade of courses and conversations with students at Lewis & Clark College that have both inspired and challenged him to help them build better frameworks for environmental studies; he also acknowledges brief sabbatical leave provided by Lewis & Clark College to work on this and related publications.

Noel Castree, Mike Hulme and Jim Proctor