



Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability: Redefining Our Relationship with Nature

By Brendon Larson

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Scientists turn to metaphors to formulate and explain scientific concepts, but an ill-considered metaphor can lead to social misunderstandings and counterproductive policies, Brendon Larson observes in this stimulating book. He explores how metaphors can entangle scientific facts with social values and warns that, particularly in the environmental realm, incautious metaphors can reinforce prevailing values that are inconsistent with desirable sustainability outcomes.

Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability draws on four case studies—two from nineteenth-century evolutionary science, and two from contemporary biodiversity science—to reveal how metaphors may shape the possibility of sustainability. Arguing that scientists must assume greater responsibility for their metaphors, and that the rest of us must become more critically aware of them, the author urges more critical reflection on the social dimensions and implications of metaphors while offering practical suggestions for choosing among alternative scientific metaphors.

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Editorial Review

Review

"a beautifully interdisciplinary investigation ... an essential read for practicing scientists, editors and reviewers, students and teachers, policy-makers and funders, and the informed public."

-Science

"Larson engages an impressive amount of scholarship on metaphor to a crucial end: improving the way we envision a more sustainable world."

-Daniel J. Philippon, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and author of Conserving Words

"An original and important addition to the study of science and language."

-Glenn Adelson, Director of Environmental Studies, Lake Forest College

"Larson's treatment of DNA barcoding and invasional meltdowns are superb examples of how the social and linguistic studies of science should proceed. [T]his book will continue to be cited and analyzed for decades to come."

-Steward T.A. Pickett, Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies

"Right on Target (pardon the military metaphor)! Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability sheds light into the darkest corners of value-laden ecology and naturalistic environmental ethics by exploring the metaphors (dead and alive) that drive our valuing of nature."

-Bryan G. Norton, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Science and Technology, School of Public Policy, Georgia Institute of Technology

"This is interdisciplinarity at its best: Larson's project is to explore the assumptions and biases that undergird our thinking about the environment. By exploring metaphorical constructs we routinely employ and by offering new ones, Larson offers the reader both a bold methodology and a renewed hope for environmental reform."

-Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis, University of Florida at Gainesville

About the Author

Brendon Larson is associate professor, Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo. He lives in Guelph, Canada. You can find out more about him on his website: environment.uwaterloo.ca/ers/faculty/blarson/larsonmoredetails.htm.

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