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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

After some delay owing to teaching and service obligations, it is with great pleasure that we present this inaugural volume of *The Chautauqua Journal* as a natural outgrowth of Eastern Kentucky University's interdisciplinary Chautauqua Lecture Series, which is now well into its second decade. We intend to continue to publish volumes of invited essays, articles and creative works in conjunction with the changing themes of the series. *The Chautauqua Journal*, like the series itself, is a collaborative effort, and special thanks go out to everyone involved with the series and everyone involved with the editing and preparation of the present volume.

Each year, the EKU Chautauqua Lecture Series, founded by Bruce MacLaren, later headed by Minh Nguyen, and now coordinated by the author, brings nationally and internationally renowned scholars, newsmakers, adventurers, and popular figures together with Eastern Kentucky University students, staff and faculty, and the broader community of Central Kentucky, in the exploration of a significant chosen theme approached from an interdisciplinary variety of perspectives. The lectures, which are always free and open to the public, are meant to stimulate intellectual curiosity and to challenge our assumptions and attitudes, for progressive ends and within the bounds of civil discourse. Each lecture or presentation concludes with an interactive question-and-answer session. Generally, lecturers attend smaller round-table discussions with students and faculty in the afternoon prior to the evening's presentation, and they often grant interviews for WEKU, the university's National Public Radio affiliate station. The theme of each annual lecture series is also the focus of a national juried art exhibition held at Eastern Kentucky University's Fred Parker Giles Gallery.

The papers gathered in this inaugural volume are drawn primarily from the 2010-2011 Lecture Series on the theme, "Nature's Humans." In addition to the philosophical essays, social commentaries, and scientific analyses that were originally presented as part of the series, we have included herein a selection of creative works (poems and stories) that complement the interpretive discussion of the art exhibition, which itself incorporates

images from the juried show; and we have included a chapter of selected photographs that stand on their own. Thus, this inaugural volume, true to the interdisciplinary spirit of EKU Chautauqua, contains a range of approaches to the question of the relation of human beings to nature.

Section One presents a variety of “Philosophical and Cultural Investigations,” beginning with Peter Singer’s consideration of “Ethics and Animals: Extending Ethics beyond Our Own Species.” In this continuation of his seminal, in some sense now canonical work in the field, Singer challenges us to make decisions regarding our relations to animals (including especially what we eat and how our food is produced) that move beyond many long-held and deeply-ingrained prejudices of Western culture, that is, beyond “speciesism,” and ultimately thereby beyond cruelty and suffering. Next, biologist Jonathan Balcombe invites us to reconsider the nature and significance of “animal sentience,” through analyses of animal emotions, awareness, communication, and morality (pleasure and virtue in the animal world), in support of his proposal that we move beyond “intellicentrism” and, in light of the evidence he presents, that we responsibly adopt a vegetarian diet. Matthew Pianalto’s ranging and subtle essay, “Ethics beyond Sentience,” takes issue with Singer, Balcombe, and others who tend to prioritize “sentience” as the key to defining human relations to animals specifically and to natural phenomena generally. Finding this stance too limited, Pianalto seeks a broader, in many ways more intuitive and mystical, but also more exacting measure of the “universal respect” which we owe to all things as a result of our immersion in the mysterious experience of nature as a whole. Justin Smith’s “Folk Ontology and the Moral Standing of Animals” continues the discussion of the relations of human beings to animals. After a critique of Lessing’s analysis of the “use of animals in fables,” Smith outlines his notion of “folk ontology” (related to pre-scientific, broadly shared cultural understandings) and discusses in compelling fashion the contrast between the tendency to “dehumanize” entire species on the one hand, and seeing *individual* animals on the other hand (note his discussion of elephants, especially) as “morally relevant beings, with the same rights that flow from this individual moral status that human beings are held to deserve.” If Singer, Balcombe, Pianalto, and Smith all encourage us to transform our given attitudes and relationships with animals and the natural world, Robert P. George, in “Natural Law,

God, and Human Dignity,” seeks to articulate and reassert the value of a more traditional approach to such questions, invoking Aristotle and Aquinas and emphasizing the priority of reason and freedom in the definition of both morality and human dignity.

The “Artistic Explorations” of “Nature’s Humans” presented in Section Two take a variety of forms, starting with Esther Randall’s both descriptive and analytical discussion of key works in the Chautauqua National Juried Art Exhibition. Randall’s evocative and vivid prose enables readers to envision the works in question, and her keen sense of aesthetic symbolism, use of materials, and artistic logic helps us to appreciate the significance of these works in relation to the theme, as she identifies a series of interconnected “currents and motifs” that emerged from the show, including, especially, certain “metaphorically biomorphic forms, such as nature/human hybrids, humans in nature, and nature in humans.” As complement to the exhibition, we present a number of literary works that expand our understanding of the human relation to natural phenomena in a variety of ways, written by a host of accomplished creative writers. These include personal, philosophical, political, and psychological poems by Harry Brown, Dorothy Moseley Sutton, Frank X. Walker and Young Smith; a Grand Canyon short story, “To the Bottom,” by Julie Hensley; a haunting, idiosyncratic, postmodern, meditative essay about (among other things) the interpenetration of the psyche with the forces of nature, called “Wind, Water, Wall-Woman,” by filmmaker, composer, and writer, Trinh T. Minh-ha; and, finally, photographs selected by Chris Jackson, and grouped under the title, “Nature’s Humans: Presence, Absence, Transformation.”

Section Three presents a set of essays, reports, and analyses under the heading, “Scientific Interventions,” meant to emphasize the ways in which humans investigate and interact with nature, and intended in particular to accent the hope that we may move forward from the problems of the present in an informed manner to have a positive transformational impact on the planet, the biosphere, and all of its inhabitants. This section begins with a lesson about bias from the annals of natural history, in Lee Alan Dugatkin’s account of “Thomas Jefferson versus Count Buffon: The Theory of New World Degeneracy.” Dugatkin’s fascinating reconstruction of the debate reveals the dogged and determined ways in which Jefferson, as statesman and scientist, with the aid of a certain prize specimen (a moose), sought to convince Buffon, the leading authority of

the day, that his influential theory—that the fauna of the Americas was inferior and “degenerate” by comparison to European species—was in fact incorrect. Next, in many ways reminiscent of Wordsworth’s poem, “The World Is Too Much With Us” (“Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;— / Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”), Carol Kaesuk Yoon exposes some of the distressing ways in which our contemporary *umwelt*—the “shared perceived world” that is ever-increasingly constituted by consumer habits and practices—distances us from nature and threatens to undermine what arguably used to be a more intuitive and intimate relation to the environment and the natural world surrounding us. Yoon hopes that, by reinforcing already changing attitudes, we might re-instill in the next generation something of a more authentic sensibility. In “The Bonobo Mirror Project,” Laura Newhart works from an interest in existentialist philosophy—specifically Jean Paul Sartre’s approach to the problem of the existence of other minds—to establish a framework for observations in the field, in order to determine “whether human visitors to the bonobo exhibit at the Cincinnati Zoo provide behavioral evidence that they recognize they are in the presence of another mind,” and in this way adding incrementally to the still developing discourse about the question of primate consciousness. The last two authors present surveys of specific ways in which human beings have begun to respond to particular challenges and crises—in the food supply, and in the planet’s dangerously increasing levels of carbon—and ways in which positive trends can be capitalized upon and continued for the benefit of both humanity and the planet. Lisa Markowitz outlines many recent innovations and creative solutions, in the United States and elsewhere, to various problems of food insecurity, distribution, production, and quality; in these responses, which are admittedly still partial and in some sense fledgling, Markowitz nevertheless sees certain ‘seeds of renewal.’ Finally, in “Avoiding Extinction,” Gabriela Chichilnisky, who was one of the prime movers behind the Kyoto Protocol, continues to think big about what is perhaps the planet’s most profound long-term concern: climate change and its potential consequences for human life. After presenting an alarming assessment of the current global situation (which has only grown more serious in the interim), Chichilnisky moves on to detail what she argues is a “realistic plan that involves market solutions in both industrial and developing nations [and that simultaneously

resolves] the problems of economic development and climate change and help[s] overcome the global wealth divide.” Chichilnisky’s analysis reminds us that the solutions to problems that might at first seem overwhelming and insurmountable are actually within our grasp—if we think globally and act progressively together as a species, as “Nature’s Humans.”