

Avatar and Nature Spirituality

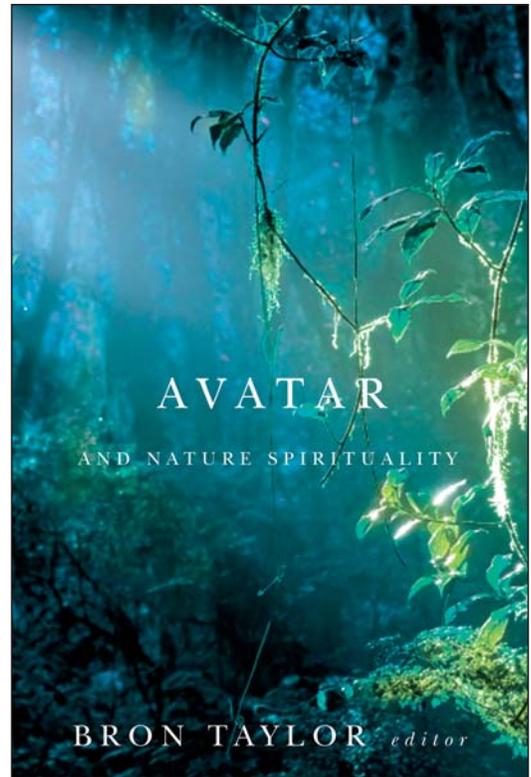
Bron Taylor, editor

\$38.99 Paper • 350 pp. • 978-1-55458-843-5 • August 2013 • Environmental Humanities series

Avatar and Nature Spirituality explores the cultural and religious significance of James Cameron's film *Avatar* (2010), one of the most commercially successful motion pictures of all time. Its success was due in no small measure to the beauty of the Pandora landscape and the dramatic, heart-wrenching plight of its nature-venerating inhabitants. To some audience members, the film was inspirational, leading them to express affinity with the film's message of ecological interdependence and animistic spirituality. Some were moved to support the efforts of indigenous peoples, who were metaphorically and sympathetically depicted in the film, to protect their cultures and environments. To others, the film was politically, ethically, or spiritually dangerous. Indeed, the global reception to the film was intense, contested, and often confusing.

To illuminate the film and its reception, this book draws on an interdisciplinary team of scholars, experts in indigenous traditions, religious studies, anthropology, literature and film, and post-colonial studies. Readers will learn about the cultural and religious trends that gave rise to the film and the reasons these trends are feared, resisted, and criticized, enabling them to wrestle with their own views, not only about the film but about the controversy surrounding it. Like the film itself, *Avatar and Nature Spirituality* provides an opportunity for considering afresh the ongoing struggle to determine how we should live on our home planet, and what sorts of political, economic, and spiritual values and practices would best guide us.

Bron Taylor is a professor at the University of Florida and a fellow of the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, Germany. His books include *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (2010), and he is the editor of the award-winning *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2005) and the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. His website is www.brontaylor.com.



Taylor's new exciting volume gets at the heart of where most West-erners are engaging religious and spiritual life today: the realm of popular culture. The book's contributors lead us on a compelling journey through a complex cultural ecology of religion, politics, fan forums, ethics, ecotopian promise, corporate violence, and troubling notions of the "native." At the end, we emerge with an altered eye, appreciating the power of narrative brought alive through the transformative semiotics of visual culture. Accessible for the uninitiated and yet interesting to the specialist, *Avatar and Nature Spirituality* is just one of a new generation of books that are shifting the very way we conceive of religion. As traditional congregational studies gather dust, vanguard scholarship that attends to the global "congregation" of mass culture will bring the study of religion into a new era, and this volume contributes to that important turn.

— **Sarah McFarland Taylor**, Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Environmental Policy and Culture, Northwestern University

If, as ecocinema scholar Adrian Ivakhiv suggests, a film is not only what happens between the dimming and brightening of theatre lights, if it is also what happens in our discussions about it, then this collection brilliantly takes the measure of the conversations surrounding the highest-grossing blockbuster of all time. Better still, the book draws you back into the dialogue, and asks you to reconsider what you think you know about a film so provocative that it has taken centre-stage in the global imagination.

— **Joni Adamson**, Arizona State University, co-editor of *American Studies, Ecocriticism and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons*

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