

Environmental Ethics

Readings in Theory and Application

Second Edition

Louis P. Pojman

United States Military Academy

1998



Wadsworth Publishing Company

I(T)P® An International Thomson Publishing Company

Belmont, CA • Albany, NY • Bonn • Boston • Cincinnati • Detroit
Johannesburg • London • Madrid • Melbourne • Mexico City
New York • Paris • Singapore • Tokyo • Toronto • Washington

Contents

Preface vii

INTRODUCTION

On Ethics and Environmental Concerns 1
What Is Ethics? 4

PART ONE

Theory 11

CHAPTER ONE

Western Philosophy of Nature: The Roots of Our Ecological Situation 12

- 1 Genesis 1–3 13
- 2 LYNN WHITE: The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis 15
- 3 LEWIS W. MONCRIEF: The Cultural Basis of Our Environmental Crisis 21
- 4 PATRICK DOBEL: The Judeo-Christian Stewardship Attitude to Nature 26

CHAPTER TWO

Animal Rights 31

- 5 IMMANUEL KANT: Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth 33
- 6 BERNARD ROLLIN: Sentience as the Criterion for Moral Worth 35
- 7 PETER SINGER: A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation 39
- 8 TOM REGAN: The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights 46
- 9 MARY ANNE WARREN: A Critique of Regan's Animal Rights Theory 52
- 10 J. BAIRD CALLICOTT: Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair 57

CHAPTER THREE

Does Nature Have Intrinsic Value?
Biocentric and Ecocentric Ethics and Deep Ecology 69

DOES NATURE HAVE INTRINSIC VALUE? 70

- 11 HOLMES ROLSTON, III: Yes, Value Is Intrinsic in Nature 70

- 12 ERNEST PARTRIDGE: Values in Nature: Is Anybody There? 81
- 13 HOLMES ROLSTON, III: Values at Stake: Does Anything Matter? A Response to Ernest Partridge 88
- 14 ERNEST PARTRIDGE: Discovering a World of Values: A Response to Rolston 91

BIOCENTRIC ETHICS 93

- 15 ALBERT SCHWEITZER: Reverence for Life 93
- 16 PAUL TAYLOR: Biocentric Egalitarianism 98
- 17 KENNETH GOODPASTER: On Being Morally Considerable 110

ECOCENTRIC ETHICS 117

- 18 ALDO LEOPOLD: Ecocentrism: The Land Ethic 117
- 19 J. BAIRD CALLICOTT: The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic 124

DEEP ECOLOGY 134

- 20 ARNE NAESS: The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement 134
- 21 ARNE NAESS: Ecosophy T: Deep Versus Shallow Ecology 137
- 22 BILL DEVALL AND GEORGE SESSIONS: Deep Ecology 144
- 23 RICHARD WATSON: A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Ethics 149
- 24 MURRAY BOOKCHIN: Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology 155
- 25 JAMES P. STERBA: Environmental Justice: Reconciling Anthropocentric and Nonanthropocentric Ethics 163

CHAPTER FOUR

Ecofeminism 173

- 26 KAREN J. WARREN: The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism 173
- 27 MARGARITA GARCIA LEVIN: A Critique of Ecofeminism 183

CHAPTER FIVE

The Gaia Hypothesis and Biospheric Ethics 189

- 28 JAMES LOVELOCK AND SIDNEY EPTON: The Quest for Gaia 190

INTRODUCTION

On Ethics and Environmental Concerns

Human beings have lived on Earth for about 100,000 years, a very short time in relation to the age of the universe (15 billion years) or even to the life of our planet (4.6 billion years). Civilization developed only 10,000 years ago, and the wheel was invented 4,000 years ago. If we compact the history of Earth into a movie lasting 1 year, running 146 years per second, life would not appear until March, multicellular organisms not until November, dinosaurs not until December 13 (lasting until the 26th), mammals not until December 15, *Homo sapiens* (our species) not until eleven minutes to midnight, and civilization one minute ago. Yet in a very short time, say less than 200 years, a mere .000002% of Earth's life, humans have become capable of seriously altering the entire biosphere. In some respects, we have already altered it more profoundly than it has changed in the past *billion* years. Paraphrasing Winston Churchill's remark about the British air force during World War II, we may say, "Never have so few done so much in so short a time." In the last 100 years or so, we have invented electricity, the light bulb, the telephone, cinema, radio, television, the automobile, the airplane, the spaceship, the refrigerator, the air conditioner, the skyscraper, antibiotics, heart transplant machines, the birth control pill, the microwave oven, the atom bomb, nuclear energy, and the digital computer. Through the wonders of science and technology, we have enabled millions of people over the face of Earth to live with more freedom, power, and knowledge than our ancestors could dream of. Only in science fiction were the wonders of modern life even hinted at.

Yet with this new freedom, power, and knowledge has come a dark side. The automobile kills hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world each year (more Americans have died in automobile accidents than on all the battlefields in all the wars our nation has fought). It produces chemical pollution that degrades the atmosphere, causing cancer, and is bringing on dangerous global warming, the greenhouse effect. Refrigerators and air conditioners enable us to preserve food and live comfortably in hot seasons and climates, but they also use chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which rise into the stratosphere and deplete the thin ozone layer that protects us from harmful ultraviolet radiation. The

result is an increase in skin cancer, especially melanoma, and harmful effects on plankton, which forms the base of much of the food chain of marine animals. Nuclear power could provide safe, inexpensive energy to the world, but instead it has been used to exterminate cities and threaten a global holocaust. Disasters like the nuclear plant steam explosion at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union have spread harmful radiation over thousands of square miles and cause public distrust of the nuclear power industry. Nuclear waste piles up with no solution in sight. But our modern way of life does require energy, lots of it. So we burn fossil fuels, especially coal, which, unbeknownst to the public at large, is probably more dangerous than nuclear energy, causing more cancer, polluting the air with sulfur dioxide, and producing acid rain, which is destroying our rivers and lakes and killing trees. Medical science found cures for tuberculosis and syphilis and has aided in greatly lowering infant mortality, but in the process we have allowed an exponential growth of the population to produce crowded cities and put a strain on our resources. The more people, the more energy needed; the more energy produced, the more pollution; the more pollution, the more our lives are threatened by disease.

And so the story goes. For each blessing of modern technology, a corresponding risk comes into being, as the tail of the same coin. With each new invention comes frightful responsibility. It is hard to get it right. It's hard to live moderately, wisely, and frugally; it's hard to conserve our resources so that posterity will get a fair share.

Environmental ethics concerns itself with these global concerns: humanity's relationship to the environment, its understanding of and responsibility to nature, and its obligations to leave some of nature's resources to posterity. Pollution, population control, resource use, food production and distribution, energy production and consumption, the preservation of the wilderness and of species diversity—all fall under its purview. It asks comprehensive, global questions, develops metaphysical theories, and applies its principles to the daily lives of men and women everywhere on Earth.

In this work we consider readings in both environmental theory and practice. Treating "Theory" first (Part 1), we'll focus on the debate over the causes of our environmental crisis. To what extent has our Judeo-Christian religious tradition contributed to the present crisis? Has our religious heritage created a dangerous sense of alienation by emphasizing the domination of nature by humanity? Or is Western technology the primary culprit? We begin our first chapter with the first three chapters from the Book of Genesis, the source of Judeo-Christian attitudes toward creation. Then we enter the controversy as to whether our religious tradition or technology is the cause of our environmental malaise.

Next, in Chapter 2 we examine rival theories on the locus of intrinsic value, especially in regard to the wider animal kingdom. What makes something valuable or morally considerable? Is it being human or rationally self-conscious, as Kant and most Western "anthropocentric" philosophers have held, or is it *sentience*, the ability to have experiences and, specifically, to suffer? What are our duties to animals, who are sentient, but (for the most part) not rationally self-conscious?

In Chapter 3 we go beyond rationality and sentience and inquire whether nature itself has intrinsic value. Do we need a broader environmental ethic that incorporates nature as a good in itself? Several theories are treated here: biocentric ethics, ecocentric ethics, and deep ecology.

In Chapter 4 we examine ecofeminism, the theory that joins feminism with radical eccentric ethics, claiming that the model of patriarchal dominance is the main source of the oppression of both nature and women.

In Chapter 5 we consider the Gaia (pronounced GUY-uh) hypothesis, the theory that Earth is a single, interactive, self-regulating, organism.

In Chapter 6 we examine the value of endangered species, the wilderness, and natural objects and consider both the moral, aesthetic, and institutional recognition of these objects (e.g., granting trees and ecosystems legal rights).

In Chapter 7 we go beyond Western horizons and view environmental ethics through non-Western eyes and theories. Environmental concerns are global concerns, so we must learn to see issues from various cultural and national perspectives. Our readings present viewpoints from Nigeria, Kenya, Ceylon, India, and the Arab world.

In Chapter 8 we take up the difficult philosophical issue of responsibility to future generations. Do we, and if so, on what basis do we have responsibilities to those not yet born? Most moral theory holds that obligations only hold toward concrete individuals, so how can we have duties to nonexistent entities?

In Part 2, "Applications," we turn to practical concerns. First (Chapter 9) to population growth: How serious is the rapidly growing global population?

Doomsdayers claim it is the number one problem. The more people we produce, the more resources we will use up, and hence the more pollution that will be produced. Doomsdayers predict that decreasing resources and increasing pollution will make life unbearable for future generations. On the other hand, the optimistic Cornucopians argue that population is nowhere near a serious problem. They say that we have the resources to accommodate reasonable needs if only we all live morally. If we distribute our resources justly, there will be enough for all and plenty more.

The debate over population comes to a head in Chapter 10 where we discuss whether we should feed the world's poor. Doomsdayers like Garrett Hardin argue that feeding the poor in an overcrowded world is like feeding a cancer. If we are to survive, we must use tough love, however hard it may be. Others disagree and argue that we can both help the starving and solve our demographic problems.

After a short debate on the relationship between population and pollution in Chapter 11, we turn to the problem of pollution itself, to its causes, effects, and types. The next three chapters deal with issues related to pollution. Should we use pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers? On the one hand, by doing so, we have been able to increase food production enormously. On the other hand, such practices have created life-threatening pollution. We also consider the debate over acid rain and the greenhouse effect.

In Chapter 15 we consider the troubling matter of disposing of hazardous waste, which is piling up at an alarming rate and threatening our soil and water and the people who use them.

In Chapter 16 we examine the debate over nuclear energy. No one seriously questions that coal-burning power plants emit dangerous pollutants (sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxide, and particulates), but what is the alternative? Although the disaster of Chernobyl has dampened the debate over nuclear power, many scientists contend that it can be made safe and play a vital role in future energy policies. Other scientists and ecologists argue that nuclear power is a dangerous Faustian bargain, which we should reject.

In Chapter 17 we examine the relationship between economics and the environment. Can the entire panoply of our value assessments be reduced to economic cost-benefit analysis? Is the classical free-market view of economics an adequate guide for protecting the environment? Or, do we need a new more socialist or nature-centered approach?

In the last chapter, we look at some practical ways we can work to maintain a sustainable, ecologically responsible society. For instance, what should we do about the powerful tool of advertising, which helps fuel the consumer society, a society that is environmentally harmful? Should we de-emphasize automobile transport and instead support mass transport and bicycle

use? How can we get beyond a throwaway, nationalistic society to a recycling, sustainable, global society?

We cannot cover every environmental theory or issue in this anthology, but you will have many vital intellectual and practical issues to keep you thinking and act-

ing for a long time. I hope the challenging readings will provoke you to be more informed, to think more deeply, and to act morally in the quest for a better environment.

It's your world—to save or lose.