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978-0-521-68284-8 - Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction

Dale Jamieson

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Ethics and the Environment

What is the environment, and how does it figure in an ethical life? This book is an introduction to the philosophical issues involved in this important question, focusing primarily on ethics but also encompassing questions in aesthetics and political philosophy. Topics discussed include the environment as an ethical question, human morality, meta-ethics, normative ethics, humans and other animals, the value of nature, and nature's future. The discussion is accessible and richly illustrated with examples. The book will be valuable for students taking courses in environmental philosophy, and also for a wider audience in courses in ethics, practical ethics, and environmental studies. It will also appeal to general readers who want a reliable and sophisticated introduction to the field.

DALE JAMIESON is Director of Environmental Studies at New York University, where he is also Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy, and Affiliated Professor of Law.

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For Béatrice

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“One of the real mistakes in the conservation movement in the last few years is the tendency to see nature simply as natural resources: use it or lose it. Yet conservation without moral values cannot sustain itself.”

George Schaller

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Preface

Environmental philosophy is a large subject that involves epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, and history of philosophy, as well as such obviously normative areas as ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. The main focus of this book is environmental ethics, but I discuss the normative dimensions of the subject generally, including issues in aesthetics and political philosophy. My hope is that this book will be used in classes in environmental philosophy, but I also hope that it finds a wider audience in courses in ethics proper or in environmental studies. In addition, I hope that it will be read by philosophers, environmental scientists, environmental policy specialists, and others who simply want a reliable and relatively sophisticated introduction to the field.

Over the past twenty-five years I have taught courses on environmental philosophy to thousands of students at six different colleges and universities on three continents. Ultimately, this book is the product of these courses. More proximately, it is based on lectures that I gave at Princeton University in spring, 2005. It is a pleasure to thank Princeton, and particularly the University Center for Human Values, for inviting me to spend the academic year 2004–5 as Laurence R. Rockefeller Visiting Professor for Distinguished Teaching. I am especially grateful for the personal warmth and intellectual vigor of my colleagues, both in the Center and in the Princeton Environmental Institute. I expanded and rewrote the lectures the following summer while living in France. I thank Béatrice Longuenesse and her family for making this such a happy and joyful time. I completed the book in New York under less favorable circumstances, and I am grateful to my sturdy community of scattered friends who would drop everything at a moment's notice to help me through the hard times. My home institution, New York University, has been consistently generous in granting me the leave that allowed me to take up the Princeton professorship, providing the sabbatical during

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which I revised the lectures, and assisting me in various other ways both personal and professional. I am especially grateful to Dean Richard Foley for his unwavering support.

That this book exists at all is due to Hilary Gaskin's kind (and persistent) invitation to contribute to the series in which it appears. That it is better than it would have been is due to the kind (and again persistent) interventions of many friends and colleagues including Phil Camill, Ned Hettinger, Béatrice Longuenesse, Jay Odenbaugh, Reed Richter, Sharon Street, Vicki Weafer, and Mark Woods. I am especially grateful to the (formerly anonymous) reader for Cambridge University Press, Steve Gardiner, for many helpful suggestions. While there are further acknowledgments in the notes, I am certain that I have forgotten to thank some who will find echoes of their ideas or marks of their influence in the text. For this I apologize in advance.

In the interests of precision I have used some technical terms and adopted various conventions. I use italics for book titles and for non-English words. I use single quotation marks when discussing words, and double when reporting words and for other related purposes. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'environment' as "the objects or the region surrounding anything." I indent and number sentences whose uses I wish to discuss. I capitalize these sentences, but in most cases I punctuate them as if they were simply part of the text. However, when these sentences are exclamations or questions, I use double punctuation. For example, I say that on some views a perspicuous reading of

(1) It is wrong to eat animals

is

(2) Do not eat animals!

Finally, when discussing the divisions that rend our planet, I talk about the rich and poor countries, the north and south, and the first and third worlds. I dislike all of these contrasts but I think it is clear what I'm talking about when I use these terms.

Although I have tried to be precise in ways that matter, this book is intended as an introduction and I have attempted to rein in my tendency to be pedantic. I have focused on ideas and controversies rather than on authors or cases. Among other advantages, this has allowed me to get quickly to the heart of various views, but often at the cost of oversimplifying them

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and not properly crediting those whose work has advanced the discussion. When it comes to references, I have sometimes cited passages as they are quoted by other authors. While I disapprove of this as a scholarly standard, I think it is permissible in a book of this type. Those who go on in the subject will find the original sources; those who do not go on will not care. I offer a similar justification for often referring readers to websites rather than texts that are stored in libraries.

I have been selective in the topics that I discuss. For example, although I mention some themes broached by deep ecologists and ecofeminists, I have not discussed their work in detail. This omission does not imply a judgment about the value of this work, but is only a concession to the finitude of life, books, and attention spans.

Returning to the source, I thank the students to whom I have taught this subject over the years. Whatever hope I have for the future rests to a great extent on their energy and enthusiasm. I also want to acknowledge the love and support of my parents, which lingers beyond the grave: anything that I do that is of any use was made possible by their sacrifices. Finally, I would like to thank two Pauls: one for teaching me how to do philosophy, and one for showing me something about life.

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New York