

Ethics and the Environment

Second Edition

This new edition of a widely used and cited introduction to ethics and the environment offers a broad and lively discussion of nature's future, focusing on climate change, conservation, and justice for both our contemporaries and future generations. It discusses the nature of environmental problems and their relationships to economics, religion, technology, and aesthetics. It includes incisive discussions of our moral relations with other animals, and of how animals are used in our food systems. It also provides a deep discussion of the value of nature, which takes up ecofeminist and deep ecology views as well as sentientism and biocentrism. It discusses the plurality of values, and applies this analysis to some conflicts from the author's home state of California. The volume is comprehensively revised and updated, with several new chapters, and concludes with a compelling discussion of the question "How should I live?" in this new epoch of the Anthropocene.

Dale Jamieson is Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy Emeritus at New York University. He is the author of *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed – and What It Means for Our Future* (2014); *Morality's Progress: Essays on Humans, Other Animals, and the Rest of Nature* (2002); and coeditor of *Environment and Society: A Reader* (2017).

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An Introduction

Second Edition

DALE JAMIESON

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Dale Jamieson
Frontmatter
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For Healy and Yiyang
And for Béatrice (again)

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 focus of this book is environmental ethics, but I discuss the normative dimensions of the subject generally, including issues in aesthetics and political philosophy. Normative philosophizing does not float free of the facts, and so I do not hesitate to stray into such fields as environmental history, conservation biology, environmental science, and environmental law when the topic demands it.

I am grateful that the first edition of this book was widely used in classes and also found a broad audience of philosophers, environmental scientists, lawyers, environmental policy specialists, and others. This second edition is substantially revised and updated, and I hope that it too will be read by anyone who wants a reliable and relatively sophisticated, even opinionated, introduction to the field. This edition is composed of eleven chapters instead of seven, and includes substantial new material. Among the most obvious changes, there is now an entire chapter devoted to food and another to how I should live. In addition, there is a dedicated chapter discussing cases of environmental conflict in my home state of California. The entire book has been updated, from individual sentences to references. Quite a lot has changed since I wrote the first edition, and, sadly, when it comes to the environment, mostly not for the good. One thing that has not changed is that this second edition, like the first, provides a substantial introduction to philosophical ethics. I include this material because, in my opinion, much of the popular discussion of ethics, justice, and the environment seems relatively uninformed by the centuries of reflection in moral philosophy. Those who already have this background or disagree about its importance can skip these chapters.

During almost half a century of teaching, I taught courses on environmental philosophy to thousands of students at six different colleges and universities on three continents. This book is a product of these experiences and I owe an enormous debt to my students. I have also benefited from introductions to the field that were published after the first edition of this book, including those by Marian Hourdequin and Simon James. New York University, where I was a professor for almost twenty years, has been a supportive institutional sponsor, especially my colleagues in the Department of Environmental Studies and my former dean, Richard Foley. This book would not exist at all without Hilary Gaskin's kind (and persistent) invitation to write the first edition, her generous invitation to revise it for a second edition, and her Job-like patience in waiting for me to deliver the manuscript. Kyle Ferguson's contributions to the second edition are beyond any hope of adequate acknowledgment. He was a sophisticated philosophical interlocutor throughout the entire process, as well as a radically overqualified research assistant. He generously made time to work on this project despite the pressures of developing his own academic career.

We are living in a time in which language is a site of great contestation. When discussing the divisions that rend our planet, I try to use terms that are as descriptive and neutral as possible. However, in part because of these divisions, it is almost impossible to write in a way that is not offensive to someone; if not today, then tomorrow. I hope that readers will recognize the intentions behind my word choices, and focus on the issues that I am trying to address rather than the almost inevitably clumsy way in which I sometimes address them.

One division that divides us is between those who say they "follow the science" and those who seem to believe in "alternative facts." This division may not be as stark as it seems. We come to understand important truths through simple images and comparisons, and it is easy to find those that are quantitative and science-based, but not literally true. So, for example, people say that it takes 600 gallons of water to make a hamburger and only 6 gallons to make a veggie burger. But which burgers are they talking about? The one I bought today at Whole Foods, or the one I ate yesterday at White Castle? Where are these specific burgers, how are they produced, and under what conditions? We can't possibly know the answers to these questions and do the precise calculations, much less extrapolate them to the world of burgers as a whole. What is important and true is that hamburgers are vastly more

water-intensive than veggie burgers, but quantifying this and presenting it in a snappy image that is scientifically defensible is another matter entirely. I have tried to steer a middle course. I sometimes use numbers and images that I would be hard-pressed to defend in detail in order to convey important truths. I am, after all, in the business of communicating. But when I have done so, I have tried to be careful and measured in how I present these numbers and images.

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 quotation marks 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!.

Generally, I have tried to be precise in ways that matter, but since this book is intended as an introduction to some difficult and profound questions, I have attempted to rein in my tendency to be pedantic. This has led to some simplifications, and I have sometimes adopted practices that I would disapprove of as a scholarly standard. For example, I sometimes cite passages as other authors quote them. 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 referring readers to websites rather than texts that are stored in libraries, and popular accounts rather than original research.

Writing a book like this requires something more like a metropolis than a village and I cannot possibly thank everyone who has helped along the way. While there are acknowledgments in the notes and in the Preface to the first edition as well as this one, many people will find echoes of their ideas or marks of their influence insufficiently acknowledged. For this I apologize. As always, I must acknowledge the love and support of my parents, which

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linger beyond the grave; the two Pauls, one for teaching me how to do philosophy and one for showing me something about life; and Chunmei Li for showing me how much life there is in the joys of domesticity.

Now about the dedication. I have a complicated family that is both extended and fragmented, and we don't worry too much about the semantics of kinship terms. I have two nieces, who since their births in 2017 and 2019 have very much occupied my mind. Healy lives in Colorado, Yiyang in Beijing, and their common home is this marvelous blue planet, which they share with a dizzying plenitude of other living things. If any of this is to survive, they are going to have to get along with each other, as well as with the other inhabitants of planet Earth. Their elders have bequeathed them some important goods (e.g., smallpox eradication) along with various gadgets and distractions (e.g., social media). But more profoundly we have bequeathed them the power to destroy all life on Earth and very little by way of moral guidance about how to avoid using it in this way. I hope this book helps Healy and Yiyang in coming to terms with this, if only by letting them know that their uncle understands, regrets, and apologizes for the mess he has left for them. All of us can and should be doing more, and there is no justification for our not doing so. Finally, this edition, like the first edition, is also dedicated to Béatrice, who was there at the beginning and has remained close ever since.