environmental ethics

READINGS IN THEORY AND APPLICATION

LOUIS P. POJMAN

PAUL POJMAN 7e KATIE McSHANE

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Environmental Ethics

Readings in Theory and Application

SEVENTH EDITION

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To Theo Pojman, Declan McShane, Dylan McShane, and all future generations.

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Preface

Paul Theodore Pojman, my son, died September 20, 2012, of lung cancer, at age 45. In his introduction to the fifth edition of this book when he became coauthor, Paul called his father, Louis Paul Pojman [1935–2005], "the single greatest influence on my life in regard to philosophy and environmental thinking and living." Paul's own passion for applying reason to environmentalism extended beyond teaching and writing: he was an avid hiker, kayaker, cyclist, gardener, and vegetarian and instilled in his son Theo a passion for the environment. Toward the end of his life Paul lived in a cooperative farm community within the city of Baltimore which, along with a variety of other groups, was dedicated to raising consciousness on issues related to sustainable living in urban settings. Paul also lent his considerable energy to a variety of other justice and economics-related concerns in Baltimore, and respected his chair at Towson University for encouraging him to help develop a course model that included relevant community service as a course requirement for students.—Trudy Pojman

ENVIRONMENTAL ethics is a field that has undergone dramatic changes since its beginnings in the 1970s. Its earliest writings prodded mainstream ethics to include consideration of environmental issues, arguing that environmental problems should be seen as a legitimate subject for ethical assessment. Since those early days, the field has become more ambitious, both theoretically and practically. Radical changes to ethical theories and to contemporary ways of life have been proposed as necessary for addressing environmental problems, and sophisticated assessments of environmental problems have been offered stemming from work in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Environmental ethics has developed into a truly multidisciplinary field, including philosophers, biologists, ecologists, economists, chemists, atmospheric scientists, geographers, political theorists, and scholars of religious studies, to name a few. Its subject matter has also become more diverse, including questions of which things have value, which things have rights, what a just distribution of environmental benefits and burdens would consist in, what fair participation in environmental decision

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making would look like, and whose interests, values, and concerns should guide environmental policy making. Most recently, the problem of climate change has become a central issue—perhaps *the* central issue—in environmental ethics. Urgent discussions have been taking place around the world about how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, about how to adapt to a changing climate, and about the fairest way to distribute the costs of climate change.

The aim of this book is to provide an overview of the main philosophical debates, issues, and problems in the field of environmental ethics. Following the convention of earlier editions, the text is divided into two sections, Part One: Theory and Part Two: Practice. In practical ethics, of course, theory and practice are interconnected: ethical theories are used to evaluate our practices, but practical problems are also used to point out inadequacies within our ethical theories. Here, the Theory section focuses on general ethical questions about principles, values, rights, duties, and virtues, while the Practice section focuses on the analysis of particular environmental problems facing the world today.

Since the last edition, twenty-three essays have been removed and nineteen have been added. A new introductory reading, "What Is Ethics?," provides an overview of ethical theories and terminology. Additionally, a new essay by Clare Palmer, "Contested Frameworks in Environmental Ethics," provides a more updated overview of the field than the previous introduction (also by Clare Palmer). Chapter 2, "Future Generations," is entirely new. It contains two classic essays, Derek Parfit's "Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem" and Annette Baier's "The Rights of Past and Future Persons," and an overview of more recent literature and positions, "Intergenerational Justice" by Richard B. Howarth.

The previous edition's third and fourth chapters, "Value in Nature Itself" and "Ecological Ethics," have been broken up topically into three chapters: "Nature and Naturalness," "Individualist Biocentrism," and "Holism." The "Nature and Naturalness" chapter includes a new reading, "Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature" by Steven Vogel. Vogel's essay represents criticisms of the concept of naturalness that have been voiced more frequently within environmental ethics in recent years. The "Individualist Biocentrism" chapter contains two new readings, Robin Attfield's "Biocentrism and Artificial Life," raising important questions about how a biocentric philosophy can be brought to bear on emerging biotechnologies, and Jason Kawall's "Reverence for Life as a Viable Environmental Virtue," looking at biocentrism from the perspective of virtue ethics, which has become more popular in environmental ethics in recent years. The "Holism" chapter sees the introduction of two new readings, both classic essays on holism: Lawrence Johnson's non-Leopoldian version of holism, "Eco-interests," and Harley Cahen's criticism of holism, "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems."

The "Environmental Justice" chapter has been moved from Practice to Theory. While environmental justice clearly straddles these two domains, discussions within the field involve careful and important political and ethical theorizing, a fact reflected by this move. We could not secure the permissions for the previous edition's essays by Vandana Shiva and Winona LaDuke, but the chapter now contains a different essay by Vandana Shiva, linking women's social roles

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with biodiversity conservation in a critique of industrial agriculture and agronomic measures of productivity.

The new "Sustainability" chapter brings together material on energy policy and capitalism from the previous edition. A new reading has been added, from the Brundtland Report, which first introduced to the world the concept of sustainable development.

The "Food Ethics" chapter has three new readings: an excerpt from Marion Nestle's classic book in the field, *Food Politics*, describing the political and corporate influences on nutrition advice in the United States from 1900 to 1990; a short essay by Alice Waters on the difference between "fast food" and "slow food" values; and then a series of responses to the question "What is one thing you would change about food?" written by some of today's most prominent food writers.

The "Climate Change" chapter has undergone significant updating. It begins with a new reading by Naomi Oreskes, "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: How Do We Know We're Not Wrong?," which explains the basis of the scientific consensus on climate change. Because of permissions problems, the essay in the previous edition by Stephen Gardiner has been replaced by a new essay by him on the same topic. Two new essays, by David Keith and Christopher Preston, on the emerging issue of geoengineering, have been added to this chapter.

The "Population and Consumption" chapter has a new reading from Elinor Ostrom et al. criticizing Garrett Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons." This essay reflects and summarizes the considerable empirical work done in the last two decades on commons problems and their solutions.

In addition to all of these changes, study questions for many readings have been revised, chapter introductions have been rewritten and updated, and many typographical errors from previous editions have been corrected. Of particular interest to students and teachers alike is the addition of a comprehensive index to make it easier to find discussions of the same issue within different readings.

Perhaps the most notable omission in this edition is the "Greening of Spirituality" chapter. The deletion does not reflect the judgment that religious views are irrelevant to environmental ethics; rather, the field has grown so dramatically since the last edition that we no longer felt able to do it justice here. This field now has its own anthologies, which are better able to represent the vast diversity of viewpoints within it.

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for his guidance through the early stages of planning and preparing the manuscript for this edition. His good advice and philosophically astute editing of the entire manuscript made this a much better book than it could have been without him. My deepest gratitude to the Cengage editorial team: Debra Matteson, Product Manager; Jill Quinn, Content Project Manager; Alison Levy, Associate Content Developer; Alison Goffredo, Product Information Specialist; and Betsy Hathaway, Intellectual Property Project Manager. Thanks also to Kristine Janssens at Lumina Datamatics for running the permissions process, as well as the production editor at Cenveo, Namita Ghatori, and her production team.

Finally, this book would not be what it is without all of the work put into previous editions by the two previous editors: Lou and Paul Pojman. The bulk of the readings in this edition remain ones chosen by them. Their work throughout the many editions of this book has had a significant impact on the field of environmental ethics, an impact that continues to this day.

Katie McShane
Colorado State University, 2015

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Introduction

PAUL POJMAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, as presented in this text, concerns our religions, our economies, our politics, our future on this planet, and our health. It includes problems of race, class, gender, and globalization. It is not separate from our conception of what it means to be human, of our relationship to nature and technology. It is an interdisciplinary field that is of vital concern to us all.

Human beings have lived on Earth for about 200,000 years, a very short time in relation to the age of the universe (13.8 billion years) or even to the life of our planet (4.54 billion years). Humans started domesticating animals and growing crops about 10,000 years ago. If we compacted the history of Earth into a movie lasting 1 year, running 144 years per second, life would not appear until March, multicellular organisms not until July, dinosaurs not until December 12 (lasting until the 26th), mammals not until December 14, *Homo sapiens* (our species) not until 23 minutes to midnight on December 25, and agriculture not until a minute and a half to midnight on December 31. Yet in a very short time, since the Industrial Revolution began 250 years ago, humans—a mere .000005% of Earth's life—have become capable of seriously altering the entire biosphere.

With the Industrial Revolution, a vast acceleration of forest cutting, mining, land development, and fishing began. Industrialized societies saw forests disappearing to fuel the factories, mass migrations of people moving to cities to work in factories, and clouds of pollution hanging over the cities. Many voices lamented this, including most notably Henry David Thoreau (who published *Walden* in 1854), and John Muir (who started the Sierra Club in 1892). Their concerns were echoed in poetry and novels, by unionizers and workplace reformers, as well as by other disparate thinkers and movements. Further complicating matters was the increasing exploitation of newly colonized or conquered societies. The environment was turned into a site of economic competition between the various industrialized nations, continuing up through the twentieth century.

The early twentieth century saw the industrialized nations in the midst of war and economic depression, leaving little time for ideas of environmental awareness. It is notable that the folk singer Woody Guthrie, arguably one of the most passionate voices for social reform the United States has ever heard, saw the

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environment simply as an economic resource. Dam up the rivers and cut down the forests, just give people jobs.

After World War II, with the economy in the United States booming, people finally had a chance to examine where hundreds of years of unrestrained economic development had left us. Aldo Leopold published *A Sand County Almanac* in 1949, arguing for the need to extend our ethical sensibilities beyond the human to include nature. Then in 1962, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, documenting the poisoning of the environment with DDT, achieved national attention. DDT was banned and the American environmental movement was in a sense born.

Since the early 1960s, the environmental movement has changed the United States. It is arguably one of the most successful social movements in human history. Of course, some may argue that this success has been harmful to humans (especially to economic development), and others may argue that the success is too little too late, but nonetheless it has changed the consciousness and the laws in those places where it has taken root. Our children are being taught recycling in schools, environmental science and studies programs abound at colleges and universities, numerous state and federal governmental agencies have been formed, organic food is available in grocery stores (going from nonexistent, to small time, to one of the most profitable sectors of the food industry), and thousands of laws regulate pollution and development. Undeveloped land cannot be developed without an environmental impact study. Endangered species are protected by law, factories and power plants are regulated, streams are sampled, new chemicals are tested, and in every sector of human interaction with the environment there has been at least discussion if not legislation. But on at least two fronts there is new reason for concern. First, the global south and poor in general still suffer a disproportionate impact of environmental problems though contributing less to them and having fewer resources to adequately respond to them. We see this already with the impacts of climate change, and this will only increase as global temperature changes further disrupt ecologies, weather patterns, and ocean conditions. Second, even if the industrial world retools to lessen the use of fossil fuels and nonrenewable resources, it remains to be seen if the "new green economy" leads to a more just and sustainable world or if it becomes simply a new way to justify the exploitative practices of global capitalism.

There is thus an urgent need for the rich and powerful to start listening, and for previously marginalized or quiet voices to start being heard. While indigenous peoples and others outside the global economy have also engaged in unsustainable environmental practices, they also often have a better understanding than colonial and capitalist powers of the problems caused by such practices; increasingly groups around the world are networking and speaking up. One such example is the Kuna.

The Kuna people moved to the archipelago off Panama's Caribbean coast hundreds of years ago to escape disease and interference from others. They have faced constant threats, including oppression from colonial rulers. Yet they have survived with a remarkably intact culture. They still produce much of their own food through fishing and preindustrial methods of agriculture on the mainland which they paddle to in dugout canoes. Communities meet regularly in large halls to debate and discuss social issues as they have done for generations. They face numerous social problems, including the migration of many Kuna to Panama City and the resultant cultural clashes, and increasing dependence on imported goods and technologies with the subsequent need for cash. One of their leaders recently said that for the first time the major threat to the Kuna comes from within.

Yet they are also facing three environmental threats that, although the entire world is facing them, the Kuna confront with a particular vulnerability and urgency: global capitalism, plastic garbage and other toxic pollutants, and climate change. Importantly, the Kuna are providing leadership in their responses to them.

In response to global capitalism, the Kuna have enacted laws preventing outside ownership of their land, recognizing that without these protections their islands would be turned into yet another Caribbean resort center, with mega hotels owned by

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large corporate chains transforming every aspect of the Kuna's identity. The promises of increased wealth, which global capitalism makes to the regions it enters, have been at best mistakes and at worst malicious lies. Rather, the standard of living increases for a few while the rest have their social systems upturned, networks of local production disrupted, and land prices skyrocket beyond the affordability of the people living there. In the words of a Kuna elder, paradoxically, "money causes hunger." The Kuna are one of the few indigenous groups able to so protect themselves.

The Kuna used to have a convenient garbage disposal system; their coconut husks, plantain peels, fish bones, as well as human waste could be dumped in the surrounding ocean with minimal impact. But disposable plastics have entered the islands in the forms of bottles, wrappers, and bags. The coast lines are now often encrusted with debris, both from the Kuna themselves as well as from large cruise ships that dump their garbage at sea. In response, the Kuna have recently passed a resolution working toward the banning of disposable plastics. This is a momentous event in global environmental history. I believe this to be the first governmental resolution of its kind; some cities have banned some plastics, but this is the first comprehensive resolution recognizing the totality of the problem.

In one sense the Kuna are themselves largely responsible for the garbage on their shores, but when we note that virtually every region of this planet has been so affected by the onslaught of plastic debris, that there is a garbage patch twice the size of France in the Pacific Ocean, we begin to realize that there is a global pattern at work here.

The third area of environmental concern the Kuna are facing especially acutely is climate change. Their islands are often only a half meter above sea level. Already storm surges are increasing, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports predict a roughly 5-mm global sea level rise per year for the next hundred years.[1] The Kuna themselves have a low carbon footprint, but as is the case all over the world, the people who have contributed the least to global warming are being impacted the most.

They are still discussing their response. Kuna youth are very involved in global climate change activism, and some are beginning to prepare to move off the islands to the lowland hills on the mainland. They are fortunate to have a land to move to; many other peoples in coastal regions will simply lose everything.

I invite you, as you think about the various issues raised in this text and the enormous challenges we face ahead as we try to move toward a more social just and environmentally sustainable future, to ask, "What would the Kuna do?"; at the very least it is voices such as theirs that may provide the leadership we need.

What Is Ethics?

KATIE MCSHANE

Ethics investigates moral rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness. Ethicists want to know not only which things are right or wrong, good or bad, but also what makes them that way. Of course, many fields investigate human moral behavior.[2] Take lying, for example. Psychology asks what

[1] http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WG1AR5_Chapter13_FINAL.pdf.

[2] Some people distinguish between what they call "ethics" and what they call "morality." In this chapter, I follow the usual practice in philosophy of treating them as meaning the same thing.

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motivates people to lie; sociology asks how social institutions and relationships affect whether we lie or whether we think it's wrong to lie; anthropology asks how beliefs about lying differ across cultures; and so on. What makes ethics different is the kind of question that it asks about lying. Ethics wants to know not whether people think lying is wrong, or what happens to people who lie, or how beliefs about lying differ—ethics wants to know whether lying really *is* wrong. This kind of question is called a normative question.

What is distinctive about ethics, then, is that it aims to answer normative questions and assess normative claims. A **normative claim** is one that makes a prescription (says what should be done) or an evaluation (says what's good or bad). Normative claims are sometimes called value judgments. A **normative question** is one that asks for a prescription or an evaluation. Normative claims are distinguished from descriptive claims. A **descriptive claim** is one that says something about the way the world is, was, or will be—but does not say anything about whether that's good or bad (an evaluation), or about what should be done (a prescription). A **descriptive question** is one that asks about how the world is/was/will be without asking for an evaluation or a prescription. Here are some examples that might help to make the distinction clear:

	Claims	Questions
Normative	It's wrong to tell a lie. You shouldn't tell a lie. Lying is bad.	Is it wrong to tell a lie? Should I tell a lie? Is lying really bad?
Descriptive	75% of Canadians believe that it's wrong to tell a lie. I want to lie. The Ten Commandments tell us not to lie. People who lie are held in low esteem by others. If I lie I am likely to lose my job, and I don't want to lose my job.	Do Canadians think that lying is wrong? Do you want to lie? What do the Ten Commandments say about lying? What usually happens to people who lie? What will happen to you if you lie, and how would you feel about that?

Ethics, then, wants to know not "What do people think is right?" but rather "What *is* right?" It's not that ethicists think that answers to descriptive questions don't matter; it's just that in ethics, they aren't enough to answer to our normative questions.

In this way, ethics is very different from science. Scientists often describe themselves as trying to explain how the world works rather than telling us whether the way it works is a good thing or a bad thing. While scientists do often rely on value judgments in carrying out their work, the goal of science isn't to produce value judgments. Science and ethics also have very different methods. The **scientific method** involves formulating hypotheses, testing them against experimental data, and revising the hypotheses in light of the data. While that might be a good way to find an answer to some descriptive questions (e.g., What usually happens to people who lie?), it doesn't work quite as well for answering normative questions (e.g., Is it really wrong to lie?). After all, what kind of experiment could we run to show that lying really is wrong? We might be able to show that people think lying is wrong, or that they don't like people who lie, or that they don't want to lie. But this isn't the same thing as showing that lying is wrong. Of course, one might wonder: if the scientific method won't work well, what kind of method would show that lying is (or isn't) wrong?

The method that ethics uses is the same one used in other areas of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, etc.): the evaluation of arguments. Roughly speaking, an **argument** is just an attempt to persuade someone of something by offering reasons. The thing you're trying to persuade them of is called the **conclusion** of the argument. The reasons you offer to persuade them of it are

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called the **premises** of the argument. Here is an example of an argument:

(1) If it were raining, the sidewalk would be wet.

(2) The sidewalk is not wet.

(3) Therefore, it is not raining.

In this example, (1) and (2) are the premises, and (3) is the conclusion. When evaluating arguments, philosophers typically look at two things: whether the reasoning is good and whether the premises are true. In evaluating the argument's reasoning, we look to see whether the argument is valid. An argument is **valid** when the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. That is to say, *if* the premises were all true, would the conclusion also have to be true? If the answer is yes, the argument is valid—it has good reasoning. If the answer is no, the argument is invalid—it does not have good reasoning. The previous example illustrates a valid argument. If (1) and (2) are true, there is no way that (3) can be false. We also need to make sure that each premise in the argument is true. Is it really true that if it were raining, the sidewalk would be wet? (It probably depends on where the sidewalk is.) Is it really true that the sidewalk is not wet? (Look carefully.) If the answer to both of these questions is yes, then the premises are all true. When an argument is valid and all of its premises are true, we call the argument **sound**.

So in trying to decide whether it really is wrong to lie, we need to look at the arguments for the wrongness of lying and arguments against the wrongness of lying. We then assess those arguments in order to determine which side has a stronger case.

WHAT ETHICS IS NOT

Ethics is often confused with a number of different related concepts. To understand what ethics is, it is helpful to first get clear about what it is not.

1. *Ethics is not the same thing as religion.*

   Many people regard their religious traditions as an important source of moral wisdom and motivation, and most religions have a lot to say about how one ought to live one's life. And yet ethics and religion aren't quite the same thing. Ethics can be done within religions, but it can also be done independently of them. That is, the arguments for ethical claims can be made without appealing to religious doctrines, practices, texts, authorities, or uniquely religious sources of evidence. As we will see, none of the three main ethical schools of thought in the Western philosophical tradition rely on the claims of any particular religion.

2. *Ethics is not the same thing as individual or cultural opinions.*

   Students who are new to the study of ethics often find it tempting to think that normative ethical claims are mere opinions—matters of taste or preference. On this view, believing that lying is bad is like believing that pickled beets are disgusting: it's not the kind of thing one can be correct or incorrect about. These things are just matters of taste, and tastes differ. In the case of pickled beets, we usually assume that different people have different opinions, and that no one's opinion is better or worse than anyone else's; they're just different. If you think that pickled beets are a special treat, and I think of them as an awful punishment (I do!), we don't assume that one of us has to be wrong. We just say that to you beets are good and to me they are bad; you like them and I don't. **Moral relativism** is the view that ethics works this way too. Moral relativists claim that the truth of ethical claims is **relative** (meaning that it can be different for different individuals or societies depending on what those individuals or societies believe) rather than **objective** (meaning that it applies to everyone, whether they like it or not, and whether they believe it or not). **Individual moral relativism** holds that the truth of ethical claims is relative to each individual's moral beliefs. According to individual moral relativism, if you believe that lying is wrong, then it is wrong *for you*. It would be morally wrong for you to tell a lie. If

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I believe that lying is right, then it is right *for me*. It would not be morally wrong for me to tell a lie. On this view, if we were to ask which one of us has a better opinion about lying, the answer would be that there is no better or worse opinion. Each individual's own beliefs determine what is correct for him or her; there is no "higher standard" that we could appeal to in order to evaluate one person's opinion as better or worse than another person's opinion.

Cultural moral relativists, on the other hand, believe that there is a higher standard, namely the moral beliefs of the society that we happen to live in. **Cultural moral relativism** holds that the truth of ethical claims is relative to each culture's or society's moral views. If you think that lying is wrong and I think it is acceptable, and if we live in a society that deems lying wrong, then according to cultural moral relativism, you are correct and I am incorrect. When a society—let's call it Truthistan—regards lying as morally wrong, then it is wrong *for Truthistan*. If you live within Truthistan, and you believe lying is wrong, you are correct. If you live within Truthistan and you believe lying is acceptable, you are incorrect. However, if a different society—let's call it Lietopia—regarded the lying as morally acceptable, then it would be acceptable *for Lietopia*. Of course, if we were to ask which society, Truthistan or Lietopia, had a better view about lying, the cultural moral relativist would say that neither opinion is better or worse. Each society's views determine what is correct for that society; there is no higher standard to which we could appeal in order to evaluate one society's opinion as better or worse than another society's opinion.

For the individual moral relativist, then, each individual's moral opinions determine facts about what is good, bad, right, and wrong—but only *for that individual*. For the cultural moral relativist, each culture or society determines what is good, bad, right, and wrong—but only *for that society*. Whether individual or cultural, all relativists believe that morality is just a matter of opinion.

Most ethicists reject relativism, for it has some very serious problems. One problem stems from the fact that because relativists believe that your opinions determine which moral claims are correct for you, then whatever those opinions happen to be, they're by definition correct. This strikes many people as implausible. To see why, consider the case of individual moral relativism. When I look back over my life, many of my previous moral opinions strike me as flawed. I am glad I don't have them anymore. But according to the individual moral relativist, if they were my opinions at the time, then they were by definition correct, *for me*, at the time. In fact, any opinion I have is by definition correct, *for me*. Why? Because there is no higher standard above and beyond a person's actual opinions by which we might judge them to be incorrect. The opinions each individual actually has determine what the moral truth is for that individual. And yet, my own opinions don't seem to me to be as infallible as the relativist claims. I reflect critically on my own opinions all the time, and when I do, some seem legitimate while others appear flawed. When I critically reflect on my moral opinions, I apply all sorts of higher standards in assessing them. If I discover that some of them were really based on ignorance, or prejudice, or not wanting to hold an unpopular view, that counts against them. These are just a few possible reasons for thinking that my opinions might not be the right ones to have. The moral relativist would reject this view. According to the individual moral relativist, to say "I know what I believe, but I wonder whether it's the right thing to believe" is to make a kind of conceptual mistake. If you know what you believe, then you know what is true *for you*.

The problem is even worse for cultural moral relativism. Even if you think your own individual opinions are infallible in the way that the individual moral relativist says they are, very few people think that their society's moral views are always correct. But for the cultural moral relativist, your society's views are

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by definition the correct ones, at least for your society. If you say "I know my society thinks lying is right, but I think they're wrong about that," you are making a conceptual mistake. Whatever views your society in fact has are by definition correct.

This feature of relativism leads to a lot of problems for the view. If no society's view is any better or worse than any other society's view, then we must regard the views of societies that, for example, endorse slavery, rape, killing dissidents, persecuting minorities, and so on as not any worse than our own views. If our moral beliefs are infallible, then it doesn't make sense for us to critically reflect on them—careful thinking about moral questions serves no purpose at all. Form any opinion, relativism says, and whatever it is will be right for you or your society. In fact, moral disagreement doesn't make much sense at all if one is a moral relativist. If I say "lying is wrong" and you say "lying is right," either we're both wrong (because we're trying to make objective claims about what is right and wrong in general, not just what is right or wrong for each of us), or we're not really disagreeing (because I'm just saying that lying is wrong *for me* and you're just saying that lying is right *for you*).

Finally, within cultural moral relativism, there is a further problem. Cultures and societies don't divide themselves neatly into distinct groups. Is the society in the United States today the same society as the one in the United States in 1995? 1895? 1795? When does a society change enough that it becomes a new one? Cultures overlap considerably, and they often contain subcultures and sub-subcultures. Their defining characteristics and their boundaries are often very unclear. Is the culture that I belong to a matter of my citizenship, my ethnicity, my religion, or even my family? The cultural moral relativist needs to explain how to individuate cultures and societies and why dividing them a particular way is better than the alternatives. The way one does it matters quite a bit, since it is the opinion of one's society or culture that determines what is right or wrong, good or bad. For example, imagine someone who lives in Parker, Colorado, today. If we considered her culture to be the United States from 1950 to 2015, then we should probably conclude that for her, using marijuana is bad. If instead we considered her culture to be the United States in 2015, then we should probably conclude that for her, using marijuana is OK. However, if we considered her culture to be Douglas County, Colorado, in 2015, then we should probably conclude that for her, using marijuana is bad. Yet again, if we considered her culture to be the whole state of Colorado in 2015, then perhaps we should think that for her, using marijuana is OK.[3]

Because of these problems, most ethicists subscribe to some version of **moral objectivism**, the view that at least some moral claims can be objectively correct, or at least objectively better or worse than others. Note that moral objectivism does not hold that *all* moral claims must be either objectively correct or objectively incorrect, only that some can be so. Nor does moral objectivism contend that if an action is morally wrong, then it must be morally wrong in every case—that context never matters to the rightness or wrongness of one's actions (a view sometimes referred to as **moral absolutism**). All of the articles in this book presuppose some form of moral objectivism. The authors are not just telling you what

[3]This is true because of the way that public opinion about marijuana use has varied, both historically and geographically. Between 1950 and 2013, the majority of people polled in the United States favored outlawing the use of marijuana. In 2013, public opinion polls showed for the first time a majority of people in the United States preferred legalizing marijuana's recreational use. In 2012, the state of Colorado passed Amendment 64, which effectively legalized the recreational use of marijuana. However, some counties in Colorado, including Douglas County, had a majority of citizens vote against Amendment 64. Of course, favoring the legalization of a practice is not the same thing as morally endorsing it, though many people interpret these changes in opinion to reflect changes in moral attitudes toward marijuana use. This reflects a further problem for the cultural relativist, namely what to count as evidence of moral endorsement.

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moral claims they personally believe, but making arguments about what moral claims anybody ought to believe.

3. *Ethics is not the same thing as enlightened self-interest.*

Some people think that ethics is really only enlightened self-interest. Doing the morally right thing, the thinking goes, is really just doing what is best for yourself. One reason this view is attractive is that many moral rules seem to be ones that are, over the long run, advantageous to follow and disadvantageous to break. For example, if you lie, people will soon stop believing what you say; if you hurt others, people will be more willing to hurt you. Some have looked at these cases and concluded that there is really only one moral rule: do whatever best promotes your own self-interest. This view is called **ethical egoism**.

While it is an appealingly simple ethical theory, ethical egoism is a view with many problems, and as a result it is usually rejected by ethicists. The main challenge ethical egoism faces is one of justification: its proponents need to explain why I should care only about my own interests, and not also about the interests of others. After all, it's not as if I *cannot* care about the interests of others. Humans are social animals; we typically exhibit great concern for the well-being of other members of our communities. So if I can care about the interests of others, why would morality tell me not to do so? If all people have similar basic needs and interests, why should I treat my own as if they are the only ones that are important? This is a difficult question, and one that ethical egoists have not been able to answer satisfactorily. Some people further charge that accepting ethical egoism as a theory about what people ought to do would require us to accept logically contradictory claims. Imagine, for example, that you stealing my money would best promote your self-interest. In that case, ethical egoism seems to imply that I ought to accept the claim "You should steal my money" (because you ought to do what best promotes your self-interest, and stealing my money would best promote your self-interest) and the claim "You should not steal my money" (since you stealing my money would harm my self-interest, and ethical egoism tells me to oppose things that are harmful to my own self-interest). But in doing so, ethical egoism is telling me to believe both that you should steal my money and that you shouldn't steal my money: a logical contradiction.

4. *Ethics is not the same thing as evolutionary advantage.*

Another view that some people find attractive is that morality is really just evolutionary advantage. Moral rules, after all, often have effects that enhance people's ability to survive, reproduce, and nurture their young. For example, many moral rules prohibit behaviors (such as lying) that undermine social cooperation. If we all constantly lied to one another, then we couldn't trust one another. If we couldn't trust one another, then we would each need to get the resources we need to survive by ourselves—grow our own food, get our own water, educate our own children, treat our own illnesses, defend our own property—since we couldn't trust other people to do it on our behalf. Even mutually beneficial arrangements (for example, "If you treat my infected leg, I'll give you 10 pounds of potatoes") depend on trust: I have to trust that *if* I give you what you want, you'll hold up your end of the bargain and give me what you said you would. Being able to trust one another greatly enhances humans' abilities to get things done, to use our resources efficiently, and ultimately to survive as a species. Other moral rules (such as those prohibiting child abuse and neglect) mandate the protection of offspring and encourage their proper development. Again, if we didn't ensure the survival of the next generation, we would threaten the existence of our species. Evolutionary biologists note that morality, like all human behavior, is a product of evolution and natural selection. So why not think that

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what is good and right is just a matter of which behaviors best promote our evolutionary fitness, our ability to survive and reproduce?

There are at least two problems with this view. The first is that showing that morality is a product of evolution isn't the same thing as showing that the content of morality is really just a matter of whatever best enhances our evolutionary fitness. Art is a product of evolution too, but that doesn't mean that the notes in Brahms's symphonies or the brushstrokes in Frida Kahlo's self-portraits are only those that best promote evolutionary fitness. Chess is in some sense a product of evolution; this doesn't mean that the reason you can move a bishop only diagonally is that moving bishops diagonally is evolutionarily advantageous. To show that some practice or behavior is a product of evolution isn't to show that its contents are simply matters of evolutionary advantage.

A second problem is that this view seems to involve inferring a normative conclusion from purely descriptive premises. That is, it seems to presuppose reasoning of the following form:

(1) X increases evolutionary fitness.
(2) Therefore, X is right.

or

(1) X decreases evolutionary fitness.
(2) Therefore, X is wrong.

But these are not valid arguments. They involve, as David Hume famously pointed out, inferring an "ought" from an "is." According to this view, the only way to make these arguments valid is to add at least one normative claim to the premises—for example, "Everything that increases evolutionary fitness is right" and "Everything that decreases evolutionary fitness is wrong." But of course these are claims that need to be justified. Are they really true?

This leads to a final problem, which involve reasons for thinking that the premises just added in the previous paragraph aren't actually true. To assume that the right or the good is whatever best promotes evolutionary fitness is to assume that reproductive success is the highest good, the most important moral value. But many commonly held moral views seem to run counter to this assumption. How many people would be willing to accept that if someone can produce more offspring through rape, this makes rape morally acceptable? Likewise, how many people would be willing to accept that if someone chooses to live a life of celibacy and quiet contemplation, he or she is acting immorally? In practice, most societies do not take the view that moral rightness is simply a matter of improving evolutionary fitness. While many people probably wouldn't want to let the human race die out, they don't accept that the highest good is the production of the greatest number of humans in following generations—that the best world is the one with the maximum number of people in it. To regard morality as reducible to evolutionary fitness, however, is to presuppose this value judgment.

WHAT ETHICS IS

In the Western philosophical traditions that are most common in the English-speaking world, there are three main schools of thought in ethics: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. **Utilitarianism** begins by asking "What would make the world a better place?" Many of us do in fact want to make the world a better place, but what would count as making the world better rather than worse? Utilitarianism's answer to this is that a better world is a world with more utility in it. **Utility** in this context means well-being or welfare. The classical utilitarians Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill thought that utility was just happiness. This view is called **hedonistic utilitarianism**. A world with more happiness in it, they thought, was a better world. A world with less happiness, they thought, was a worse world. The right thing to do, they concluded, is whatever produces the greatest amount of overall happiness in the world and the least amount of overall unhappiness.

Modern-day utilitarians don't all agree with Bentham and Mill that utility is just happiness.

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Some of them think instead that utility is the satisfaction of preferences. While Bentham and Mill thought that the happier you were, the greater your level of well-being, **preference-satisfaction utilitarianism** holds that the more your preferences are satisfied, the greater your level of well-being. To see the difference between hedonistic and preference-satisfaction utilitarianism, imagine that for some reason you don't want to be happy. Maybe you did something really awful and you feel guilty about it; you think you don't deserve to be happy and you would prefer not to be. Hedonistic utilitarians would say that even if you don't want more happiness, getting more happiness is nonetheless good for you. Getting more happiness always makes you better off, in their view, even if you don't want to get more happiness. Preference-satisfaction utilitarians, on the other hand, would say that it's getting what you want that makes you better off. If you want unhappiness but you get happiness instead, preference-satisfaction utilitarians will say that you're worse off. You're happier, but you're worse off because what you wanted was not to be happy.

Deontology, or duty-based ethics, begins by asking a different question: "What is it OK or not OK to do?" Many people think that certain actions are morally impermissible—these are the things it's simply not OK to do. Rights theories are meant to capture this idea: it's not OK to treat people in ways that violate their rights. There are other actions, however, that might be morally required—these are things that you have a moral duty to do. Lots of actions, of course, fall in between: these are things that it's fine to do, but it's also fine not to do. One of the central projects of deontology is classifying actions into these categories (forbidden/permitted/required) and explaining the rationale for these categorizations.

Immanuel Kant is probably the best-known proponent of deontology in ethics. Kant argued that it is forbidden to make exceptions for yourself to rules that you want others to follow, that it is required to treat other rational beings with respect, and that it is forbidden to violate their **autonomy** (roughly, their right to make decisions for themselves). This is an oversimplification of Kant's views, which, as you will see in Chapter 3, are rather complicated. Nonetheless, most deontological theories—and much of Western ethics in general—have been greatly influenced by Kant's work.

Virtue ethics begins by asking yet a third question: "What kind of person should I try to be?" Many people say that they want to be a good person or that they are trying be a better person, but what does being a good person amount to? Virtue ethics describes some character traits as **virtues** (good ways for a person to be) and other character traits as **vices** (bad ways for a person to be). There have been many different versions of virtue ethics in the history of philosophy. They can be found in ancient Greek philosophy, ancient Chinese philosophy, and early Christian philosophy, just to name a few. Because of this, virtue ethical theories differ greatly. Early Christian philosophers, for example, considered chastity to be a virtue. Ancient Greek philosophers did not consider it to be a virtue for men, though some do describe it as a virtue for women. Contemporary secular virtue ethicists tend not to regard it as a virtue at all. Despite their differences, all theories of virtue ethics do have some commonalities. First, they all make the evaluation of character traits, rather than the evaluation of actions or states of the world, the focus of their theories. Second, they all give an account of the virtues, including an explanation of which traits are virtues, which are vices, and why; a description of each virtue and vice; and an explanation of how to acquire the virtues and vices—that is, what one can do to become a better (or worse) person.

In Western philosophy, Aristotle is probably the best-known virtue ethicist. Among the traits Aristotle considered to be virtues are bravery, temperance, generosity, friendliness, truthfulness, and wit. Aristotle famously claimed that with most virtues, the virtuous state is the mean between two extremes, where both of the extremes are vices. This view is often called Aristotle's **Doctrine of the Mean** (or sometimes, the Golden Mean). Bravery, for example, is a matter of exhibiting confidence in the face of something frightening. Exhibiting too much confidence (confidently

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walking in front of an oncoming car) is a vice, which Aristotle calls rashness. Exhibiting too little confidence (never leaving the house because of the possibility of getting hit by a car) is also a vice, which Aristotle calls cowardliness. Bravery, the virtue, is exhibiting neither too much nor too little confidence, but just the right amount. Aristotle describes at length what he thinks the right amount of confidence in various situations would be.

Although utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics all start with different questions and offer very different theories about what makes something right or wrong, good or bad, they do agree in their assessments quite often. None of the three theories would endorse causing needless harm to an innocent person; none of them would endorse wasting valuable resources; none of them would endorse taking a callous attitude toward the suffering of others. As the readings in this anthology demonstrate, many writers in ethics draw on the resources of all three theories in assessing the morality of particular actions or practices.

FOR FURTHER READING

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PART I

Theory

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Chapter 1

Introduction

THE THREE ESSAYS in this introductory chapter are meant to provide an overview of the philosophical issues and approaches that one commonly finds within the field of environmental ethics. Clare Palmer's essay explains some of the positions and controversies that have dominated the field since its inception. Thomas Hill's essay challenges us individually to reconsider what kind of relationship we ourselves wish to have with environmental values. Finally, Henry Shue's essay offers a preliminary look at environmental issues from a global perspective.

1

Contested Frameworks in Environmental Ethics

CLARE PALMER

Clare Palmer is a professor of philosophy at Texas A&M University. She has written and edited a number of books on environmental ethics, animal ethics, and ecology and ethics. She also founded the journal Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion.

In this essay, she describes the different views that have emerged within environmental ethics concerning the moral status of nonhuman entities and different approaches that environmental ethicists have taken to ethical theory and methodology.

R. Rozzi et al. (eds.), *Linking Ecology and Ethics for a Changing World: Values, Philosophy, and Action, Ecology and Ethics 1*,
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