

THIRD EDITION

Environmental Ethics

Edited by Michael Boylan



WILEY Blackwell

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Preface to the Third Edition

In 2007 when I was a senior research fellow at the Center for American Progress, a progressive policy think tank in Washington, DC., I spent some time on the Environmental Policy Team. This team had as its goal the creation of various papers that would be listed on the Center's website and be distributed to appropriate committees in Congress to influence public policy.

At the time it *did seem* like the country and the world was on the way to combatting the causes of global warming: CO₂ and other chemical emissions that were creating a "greenhouse" effect that was moving us to climate disaster. In 2009 there was the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in which plans were laid for creating a cooperative international structure for implementing some of the policy recommendations of the Kyoto Protocol (1997).¹ Progress was made to identify options for various countries to play their part in this project (the details to be negotiated later) and a goal was set to respond to climate change in the short and long term. To this end, a "red line" was established to avoid allowing the average global temperature to rise 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Procedurally, developed countries like the United States (US) promised certain levels of funding so that the goals might be achievable for poorer countries. Methods of measurement were agreed upon and finally there were new agencies created under the auspices of the United Nations to help administer and monitor these goals.

At the Center for American Progress there was general hope that we were finally on the road that would lead us to

our goal of halting global warming and thus averting the climate disaster that we all saw as imminent.

Not everything worked out as planned, so in 2015 a new gathering of nations in Paris tried to address means of getting to the goals of the Copenhagen Conference more effectively. Each nation was to work on a 5-year plan that would be evaluated in 2020 and be legally binding (though voluntary). Benchmarks were to be set out at first provisionally and then in a more binding format.

The Paris Agreement provides a framework for *financial, technical, and capacity building support* to those countries who need it. I was no longer at the Center for American Progress, but from those former colleagues there was even more general hope that we had fixed the difficulties involved with Copenhagen and that *this time* things would be different. The new short-term targets were “zero-net-emissions.”² This mindset could be achieved by each unit of national organization: individuals, communities, businesses, and the nation. Everyone could get on board to avoid the 2° Celsius red line.

Then came the 2016 US presidential election of Donald J. Trump. Trump believed that the climate crisis was all a hoax. It would cost the US (one of the leading polluters in the world) lots of money and be bad for business by creating onerous regulations. (Little regard was given to how catastrophic climate disaster would affect US business—but if the whole thing is a hoax, then there will never be a disaster.) Such assertions were not backed up by science. Indeed, science has been behind the international summits that have been regularly occurring since 1972 in Stockholm.

Trump played upon an “anti-science” sector of the country that has been around and popular among many at least since the “Scopes Trial” in 1925. There are various theories

behind why this is the case. Often, the answer reverts back to the 400-year antagonism between Christianity and Science.³ Another possible source of skepticism is the rise of public paranoia about political forces stronger than themselves that are “taking over.”⁴ Some of these folks become anti-vaccination people (some who believe that Bill Gates is injecting micro-probes into their arms when they get COVID-19 shots in order to get control of them).

Certainly, the anti-science folk (for whatever reason) are the foot soldiers that Donald Trump used to walk away from the Paris Accords and to eliminate automobile emission guidelines and manufacturing emission guidelines. These actions moved the US and the world away from responsible climate policy.

Now that Trump is no longer president, we may move back in the other direction and once again regain the justified hope that I (and others at the Center for American Progress) once felt. We have still got a chance to get this under control, but there isn’t much “wiggle room” left.

Notes

Michael Boylan

¹ For details on this conference see:

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-conferences/copenhagen-climate-change-conference-december-2009/copenhagen-climate-change-conference-december-2009> (accessed 18 May 2021).

² For details on the Paris Climate Agreement see:

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement> (accessed 18 May 2021).

- 3 One account of the modern versions of “anti-science” sentiment in the United States can be found in Sahotra Sakar, *Doubting Darwin: Creationist Designs on Evolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).
- 4 One contemporary account set primarily in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic explores several versions of anti-science and public paranoia: John Bodner, Wendy Welch, and Ian Brodie, *Covid-19 Conspiracy Theories, QAnon, 5G, The New World Order, and Other Viral Ideas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020).

Details on the Third Edition

Environmental Ethics is one of my three texts on applied ethics (the other two being *Business Ethics* and *Medical Ethics*). The idea behind each book is to begin with theoretical material about ethics, in general, and then some comments on the underpinnings of this particular direction of applied ethics. Next, the texts take up important issues in the practice of the given area of practice (the environment, the business community, the practice of medicine). Finally, are chapters on contemporary issues in public policy.

What is new to this third edition:

- Eight new chapters focused mainly on public policy.
- A new theoretical chapter by the author, “What is ‘Nature,’ and Why Should I Care?”
- The inclusion of Garrett Hardin’s “The Tragedy of the Commons” in the theoretical section.
- The inclusion of Steve Vanderheiden’s “Globalizing Responsibility for Climate Change” in the Sustainability section.

- A new student feedback piece in the online instructors' manual that will assist professors and students in achieving the skills to address challenging cases that correspond to the sections of the book. This includes the new public policy section that guides students into creating a personal manifesto that they can share with policymakers.

I am hoping that this third edition will be even more action-oriented and meet the needs of “active education.” As time goes on, we must heed the cries of Greta Thunberg seeking action on the frontlines of environmental change. Perhaps, this book will nudge students forward in seeking action in this critical area of public policy that aims at saving the planet.

I would like to thank all the new contributors to this volume along with the referees and their helpful comments. I would also like to thank Marissa Koors, Charlie Hamlyn, Will Croft, and the rest of the Wiley-Blackwell team for helping to bring forth this third edition. Their dedication to this project has helped immensely. Finally, I'd like to thank my family: Rebecca, Arianne, Seán, and Éamon. They sustain me in my life.

Michael Boylan

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Steve Vanderheiden PSQUAD TO SUPPLY

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- A multi-step set of instructions on writing case study essays on the topics set out in the book. The essays are staggered so that they follow the progression of the text.
- The culmination of the multi-step process is a “manifesto” which the student will write on *solving* or *improving* public policy on a particular area of environmental ethics that they find most important. This manifesto can also be shared via blog to the general public or as an epistle to their political representatives.
- Further readings that might be useful to those wishing to continue their research beyond the essays presented in the book.

It is the hope of the editor that this Companion Website will provide added-value to instructors when presenting his or her course.

Thanks for choosing *Environmental Ethics* 3rd edition, for your course!

Part I

Theoretical Background

1

Ethical Reasoning

MICHAEL BOYLAN

What is the point of studying ethics? This is the critical question that will drive this chapter. Many people do not think about ethics as they make decisions in their day-to-day lives. They see problems and make decisions based upon practical criteria. Many see ethics as rather an affectation of personal taste. It is useful only when it can get you somewhere. Is this correct? Do we act ethically only when there is a *win-win* situation in which we can get what we want, and also appear to be an honorable, feeling, and caring person?

A Prudential Model of Decision-Making

In order to begin answering this question we must start by examining the way most of us make decisions. Everyone initiates the decision-making process with an established worldview. A worldview is a current personal consciousness that consists in one's understanding of the facts and about the values in the world. It is the most primitive term to describe our factual and normative conceptions. This worldview may be one that we have chosen or it may be one that we passively accepted as we grew up in a particular culture. Sometimes, this worldview is wildly inconsistent. Sometimes, this worldview has gaping holes so that no answer can be generated. Sometimes, it is geared only to perceived self-interest. And sometimes, it is fanciful and can never be put into practice. Failures in

one's personal worldview model will lead to failures in decision-making.

One common worldview model in the Western world is that of celebrity fantasy. Under this worldview, being a celebrity is everything. Andy Warhol famously claimed that what Americans sought after most was "fifteen minutes of fame."¹ Under this worldview model we should strive to become a celebrity if only for a fleeting moment. What does it mean to be a celebrity? It is someone who is seen and recognized by a large number of people. Notice that this definition does not stipulate that once recognized the object is given positive assent. That would be to take an additional step. To be seen and recognized is enough. One can be a sinner or a saint—all the same. To be recognized is to be recognized. If this is the end, then it is probably easier to take the sinner route. In this way, the passion for celebrity is at heart contrary to ethics.

Another popular worldview model is one of practical competence. Under this model the practitioner strives to consider what is in his or her best interest and applies a practical cost-benefit analysis to various situations in order to ascertain whether action x or action y will maximize the greatest amount of pleasure for the agent (often described in terms of money). Thus, if you are Bernie Madoff (a well-known financial swindler) you might think about the risks and rewards of creating an illegal Ponzi scheme as opposed to creating a legitimate investment house that operates as other investment houses do. The risks of setting off on your own direction are that you might get caught and go to prison. The rewards are that you might make much more money than you would have done under the conventional investment house model. Since you think you are smarter than everyone else and will not get caught, the prudential model would say: "Go for it!" Madoff did get caught, but who knows how many others do not? We cannot know

because they *have not been caught*. But even if you are not caught, is that the best worldview approach? The prudential model says yes.

Possible Ethical Additions to the Prudential Model

Some people, including this author, think that the prudential model is lacking. Something else is necessary in order to have a well-functioning worldview by which we can commit purposive action (here understood to be the primary requirement of fulfilled human nature). We first have to accept that the construction of our worldview is within our control. What I suggest is a set of practical guidelines for the construction of our worldview: “All people must develop a single comprehensive and internally coherent worldview that is good and that we strive to act out in our daily lives.” I call this the personal worldview imperative. Now one’s personal worldview is a very basic concept. One’s personal worldview contains all that we hold good, true, and beautiful about existence in the world. There are four parts to the personal worldview imperative: completeness, coherence, connection to a theory of ethics, and practicality. Let us briefly say something about each.

First, *completeness*. Completeness is a formal term that refers to a theory being able to handle all cases put before it, and being able to determine an answer based upon the system’s recommendations. In this case, I think that the notion of the good will provides completeness to everyone who develops one. There are two senses of the good will. The first is the rational good will. The rational good will means that each agent will develop an understanding about what reason requires of one as we go about our business in the world. In the various domains in which we engage this may require the development of different sorts of skills. In

the case of ethics, it would require engaging in a rationally-based philosophical ethics and abiding by what reason demands.

Another sort of goodwill is the affective good will. We are more than just rational machines. We have an affective nature too. Our feelings are important, but just as was the case with reason, some guidelines are in order. For ethics we begin with sympathy. Sympathy will be taken to be the emotional connection that one forms with other humans. This emotional connection must be one in which the parties are considered to be on a level basis. The sort of emotional connection I am talking about is open and between equals. It is not that of a superior “feeling sorry” for an inferior. It is my conjecture that those who engage in interactive human sympathy that is open and level will respond to another with care. Care is an action-guiding response that gives moral motivation to acting properly. Together sympathy, openness, and care constitute love.

When confronted with any novel situation one should utilize the two dimensions of the good will to generate a response. Because these two orientations act differently, it is possible that they may contradict each other. When this is the case, I would allot the tiebreaker to reason. Others, however, demur.² Each reader should take a moment to think about his or her own response to such an occurrence.

Second, *coherence*. People should have coherent worldviews. This also has two varieties: deductive and inductive. Deductive coherence speaks to our not having overt contradictions in our worldview. An example of an overt contradiction in one’s worldview would be for Sasha to tell her friend Sharad that she has no prejudice against Muslims and yet in another context she tells anti-Muslim jokes. The coherence provision of the personal worldview imperative states that you should not change who you are

and what you stand for depending upon the context in which you happen to be.

Inductive coherence is different. It is about adopting different life strategies that work against each other. In inductive logic this is called a sure loss contract. For example, if a person wanted to be a devoted husband and family man and yet also engaged in extramarital affairs, he would involve himself in inductive incoherence. The very traits that make him a good family man—loyalty, keeping your word, sincere interest in the well-being of others—would hurt one in being a philanderer, which requires selfish manipulation of others for one's own pleasure. The good family man will be a bad philanderer and vice versa. To try to do both well involves a sure loss contract. Such an individual will fail at both. This is what inductive incoherence means.

Third, *connection to a theory of being good, that is, ethics*. The personal worldview imperative enjoins that we consider and adopt an ethical theory. It does not give us direction, as such, as to which theory to choose except that the chosen theory must not violate any of the other three conditions (completeness, coherence, and practicability). What is demanded is that one connects to a theory of ethics and uses its action guiding force to control action.

Fourth, *practicability*. In this case there are two senses to the command. The first sense refers to the fact that we actually carry out what we say we will do. If we did otherwise, we would be hypocrites and also deductively incoherent. But, second, it is important that the demands of ethics and social/political philosophy be doable. One cannot command another to do the impossible! The way that I have chosen to describe this is the distinction between the utopian and the aspirational. The utopian is a command that may have logically valid arguments behind it, but are

existentially unsound (meaning that some of the premises in the action-guiding argument are untrue by virtue of their being impractical). In a theory of global ethics, if we required that everyone in a rich country gave up three-quarters of their income so that they might support the legitimate plight of the poor, this would be a utopian vision. Philosophers are very attracted to utopian visions. However, unless philosophers want to be marginalized, we must situate our prescriptions in terms that can actually be used by policymakers. Beautiful visions that can never be should be transferred to artists and poets.

How to Construct Your Own Model

The first step in creating your own model for which you are responsible is to go through personal introspection concerning the four steps in the personal worldview imperative. The first two are types of global analyses in which an individual thinks about who he or she is right now in terms of consistency and completeness. These criteria are amenable to the prudential model. They are instrumental to making whatever worldview one chooses to be the most *effective* possible. This is a prudential standard of excellence. What constitutes the moral turn is the connection to a theory of the good: ethics.

Thus, the third step is to consider the principal moral theories and to make a choice as to which theory best represents your own considered position. To assist readers in this task, I provide a brief gloss of the major theories of ethics.

Theories of Ethics

There are various ways to parse theories of ethics. I will parse theories of ethics according to what they see as the ontological status of their objects. There are two principal

categories: (1) the realist theories that assert that theories of ethics speak to actual realities that exist³ and (2) the anti-realists who assert that theories of ethics are merely conventional and do not speak about ontological objects.

Realist Theories

Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a theory that suggests that an action is morally right when that action produces more total utility for the group as a consequence than any other alternative. Sometimes this has been shortened to the slogan: “The greatest good for the greatest number.” This emphasis upon calculating quantitatively the general population’s projected consequential utility among competing alternatives appeals to many of the same principles that underlie democracy and capitalism (which is why this theory has always been very popular in the United States and other Western capitalistic democracies). Because the measurement device is natural (people’s expected pleasures as outcomes of some decision or policy), it is a realist theory. The normative connection with aggregate happiness and the good is a factual claim. Advocates of utilitarianism point to the definite outcomes that it can produce by an external and transparent mechanism. Critics cite the fact that the interests of minorities may be overridden.

Deontology. Deontology is a moral theory that emphasizes one’s duty to do a particular action, because the action itself is inherently right and not through any other sort of calculations, such as the consequences of the action. Because of this non-consequentialist bent, deontology is often contrasted with utilitarianism, which defines the right action in terms of its ability to bring about the greatest aggregate utility. In contradistinction to utilitarianism, deontology will recommend an action based upon principle. “Principle” is justified through an understanding of the

structure of action, the nature of reason, and the operation of the will. Because its measures deal with the nature of human reason or the externalist measures of the possibility of human agency, the theory is realist. The result is a moral command to act that does not justify itself by calculating consequences. Advocates of deontology like the emphasis upon acting on principle or duty alone. One's duty is usually discovered via careful rational analysis of the nature of reason or human action. Critics cite the fact that there is too much emphasis upon reason and not enough on emotion and our social selves situated in the world.

Swing Theories (May be Realist or Anti-Realist) ***Ethical Intuitionism***

Ethical intuitionism can be described as a theory of justification about the immediate grasping of self-evident ethical truths. Ethical intuitionism can operate on the level of general principles or on the level of daily decision-making. In this latter mode many of us have experienced a form of ethical intuitionism through the teaching of timeless adages, such as "Look before you leap" and "Faint heart never won fair maiden." The truth of these sayings is justified through intuition. Many adages or maxims contradict each other (such as the two above), so that the ability to properly apply these maxims is also understood through intuition. When the source of the intuitions is either God or Truth itself as independently existing, then the theory is realist. The idea being that everyone who has a proper understanding of God or Truth will have the same revelation. When the source of the intuitions is the person herself living as a biological being in a social environment, then the theory is anti-realist because many different people will have various intuitions and none can take precedent over another.