

Environmental Ethics

Resources

Attfield, Robin, *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999)

Bryant, John, *et al* (eds.) *Bioethics for Scientists*, (Chichester: John Wiley, 2002) Chs 3-5. Ch.3 on relevant areas of ethical theory, Ch.4 on the rainforest as a case-study, Ch.5 on case-studies on nuclear power and the use of DDT.

Carson, Rachel, (1962) *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962). Early classic which did much to catalyse the growth of environmental thinking.

Deane-Drummond, Celia, *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2004) Tries to deploy virtue ethics as part of a cautious view of new technologies.

Leopold, A, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, 1969)

Light, Andrew, and Rolston, Holmes, III (eds.) *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). Wide-ranging resource. See especially the introductory essay by Clare Palmer.

McMichael, AJ, *Planetary Overload: Global Environmental Change and the Health of the Human Species* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

McNeill, John *Something new under the sun: an environmental history of the twentieth century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000)

Park, C. *Tropical Rainforests* (London: Routledge, 1992) (see especially chapter 6)

Porritt, Jonathan *Playing Safe: Science and the Environment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) See Ch.3 on risk

Rolston, Holmes, III, *Environmental Ethics* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988) key book particularly on the analysis of instrumental and intrinsic value.

Conserving Natural Value (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994) develops Rolston's view of systemic value.

Sessions, G (ed.) *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995). Includes a reprint of Arne Naess's classic early essay which led to the development of 'deep-ecological' thinking.

Environmental Ethics – some key definitions:

Instrumental value: the value an entity or system has in terms of its usefulness to human beings (usefulness may include scientific, recreational and aesthetic uses as well as commercial)

Intrinsic value: the value a non-human entity is deemed to have in and of itself, without reference to its usefulness

Systemic value: the (intrinsic) value of a biological system in nature as a whole system rather than as the sum of its parts.

Anthropocentrism: an attitude which focuses its concern exclusively or mainly on human interests

Biocentrism: an attitude which endeavours to consider the interests of all organisms, not just human beings

Some key quotations:

'To be credible an environmental philosophy needs to have four key components. These consist of:

- a) a theory about what nature is
- b) a theory about human beings
- c) a theory about value and evaluation of human action
- d) a theory of method, or standards against which claims can be tested or confirmed'

Deane-Drummond, C, *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell 2004), 31

The 'land ethic' of Aldo Leopold:

'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise'

Leopold, A, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, 1969) 224-5 – see Rolston, H, *Environmental Ethics* Ch.5

Problems with a biocentric model like the 'land ethic':

- We continually have to do things which perturb ecosystems, just in order to sustain ourselves
- Who is to say which things we may or may not do? Is there not a strand of ecofascism lurking behind statements like the land ethic? May human rights, and the interests of other individual creatures, not suffer in pursuit of the good of the system?
- Talk of integrity and stability gives a misleading impression of ecosystems, which modern ecology describes in much more dynamic terms.