

Jamieson, Dale. *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*.
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. 221. \$29.99 (paper).

Jamieson's new book is both an introduction to ethics and an introduction to how we should value the environment, with an emphasis on ethical evaluation. Throughout the book, Jamieson alludes to, and sometimes takes up, economic, aesthetic, and political values. These form a broad picture of what concerns we should consider when we want to know how we should deal with the environment. The book is lucid and balanced, and so seems suitable for introductory classes, not only in philosophy but in environmental studies generally. Overall, it strikes me as a clearer version of Bernard Williams's *Morality*, focused on environmental questions. Yet Jamieson's book is hindered by his reticence to articulate his own position, and this in turn detracts from the book's value as an introduction to philosophy.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

One of the virtues of Jamieson's book is that it steps back farther than many introductory books in order to elucidate basic things. To take an extreme example, Jamieson spends a page in his preface discussing his use of italics and punctuation and his reasons for relying on Web site references. This is a good idea when incoming undergraduates know how to write less well as each year goes by and yet spend more and more time online.

In chapter 1, Jamieson explains what the term "environment" means in various contexts, how it became associated with nature, and how it is different from the meaning of "nature." He does not let the reader feel lost, and his use of sources is excellent, showing judgment that can school even a specialist in environmental ethics. The first chapter continues by summarizing a number of important angles to take up when considering environmental matters—for example, the scale of such problems, their causes, technological fixes, and so on—key angles to consider when discussing the environment. Although Jamieson's progression through them lacks a systematic argument, they let Jamieson explain the sense in which he will approach environmental ethics: "My purpose is not to insist that environmental problems are really ethical, rather than economic, technological, or whatever, but rather to suggest that these problems present themselves to us as having important ethical dimensions" (24–25).

What dimensions? Chapter 2 defines "morality" and explains why philosophical reflection on it is important. Echoing Williams, Jamieson takes on three challenges to morality—amoralism, theism, and relativism. His discussion of each is clearer than Williams's. The section on theism, geared toward the resurgence of contemporary theism in popular culture, is especially well argued, and I found compelling its argument that a world without God lacks neither moral motivation nor moral content. Summing up the lessons learned from the chapter, Jamieson writes: "There is a lot to learn from these challenges to morality. . . . Morality is ubiquitous and difficult to escape for even the most hard-bitten of men. . . . Morality does not need the support of God. . . . Morality is not culture-bound" (44).

The introductory reader should now feel comfortable doing ethics (Jamie-

son uses “morality” and “ethics” interchangeably, unlike Williams). Yet how is ethics done? In chapters 3 and 4, Jamieson takes the reader through an introductory ethics unit. Chapter 3 looks at meta-ethics, while chapter 4 looks at normative ethics. The remaining chapters, 5–7, take up environmental ethics proper. So chapters 2–4 form an abbreviated introduction to morality that at times takes the reader far away from explicitly environmental questions and into the nature of ethics itself. In fact, although examples from the environment are used during the entire discussion, we don’t do environmental ethics proper until halfway through the book (102ff.). Jamieson doesn’t want to assume a lot.

I found chapter 3 on meta-ethics to be especially strong. Jamieson seems gripped by the discussion, and the argument is as vigorous as in any other section of the book—with the exception of Jamieson’s treatment of factory farming in chapter 5. After distinguishing meta-ethics from normative and practical ethics, Jamieson takes the reader through realism and subjectivism, showing how each family of views remains unconvincing. In simple terms, realists take moral claims to be grounded in facts of the matter, whereas subjectivists take moral claims to be grounded in attitudes. Although Jamieson finds a number of difficulties with each family of views, his most important concerns are that realism does not explain moral motivation adequately, whereas subjectivism does not explain moral objectivity adequately.

These concerns lead Jamieson to discuss what he calls “the sensible center”—a family of meta-ethical views seeking to incorporate insights from both realism and subjectivism. Jamieson’s own view resides here, although it is vague. “Let us begin with the assumption that value arises in a transaction between valuers and the world, and is not solely attributable to one side of this divide or another. Once we look at matters in this way, we may find it more natural to think that what is central is valuing as an activity, rather than values as entities” (66).

Jamieson omits a contemporary alternative to the dilemma he spent the chapter explaining: moral language should be analyzed by understanding its relation to intentions. If, for instance, “goodness” assumes a discourse of agents striving for ends, then motivation comes with it. Whenever I ask what’s good and mean it, I am deliberating about what to do. The terminus of my deliberation is an action or a readiness to act in appropriate, future situations. Taking up realism’s demand, too, facts of the matter concern how this good thing does or does not relate well to other ends I have. For instance, lying is bad, because it undermines trust, which I and everyone else need to have a stable world in which to act. That’s true.

The remainder of chapter 3 analyzes the various senses in which something can be said to have “intrinsic” value. Here, Jamieson steers close to environmental ethics proper, since intrinsic value has been historically one of the central areas of environmental ethics in the academy. Jamieson’s analysis is clear and precise. This section could be excerpted as an aid to discussions of intrinsic value in environmental philosophy classes or seminars.

Chapter 4 rounds out the overview of general ethics by taking readers through a now-standard pattern for introductory ethics units. After recapitulating what normative moral theory is, Jamieson takes us through consequentialism, virtue ethics, and Kantianism. These sections are historically well informed for

an introductory chapter and solid enough. They lay the ground for the second half of Jamieson's book.

Chapter 5 takes up territory for which Jamieson is known: our ethical relation to animals. After exploring speciesism in a level way and taking us through the contrasting responses of Singer and Regan, Jamieson turns to the most gripping and useful section of the book, "Using Animals" (120–42). For twenty pages, Jamieson's discussion cloaks some of the best discussion I've seen of the ethical question of animals in abbreviated, introductory language. His discussion of factory farming (120–26) is especially useful. It is factually grounded, sober, and shows the many ways eating factory-farmed meat, eggs, or dairy products contributes to a whole set of environmental problems. This leads Jamieson into a discussion of killing, causing pain, and ultimately the ethics of eating (the latter of which will be especially useful for introductory classes). Although he does not directly apply the normative ethics discussed in chapter 4, we can sense its application at many points. For the most part, Jamieson looks at consequences. The tail end of the chapter turns to a theme that I will discuss below: moral complexity is a result of value pluralism.

Chapter 6 moves from animals to nature on the wings of value pluralism. Jamieson uses an introductory discussion of biocentrism and ecocentrism to open up the larger issue of the many ways we value nature. Among these, he explicitly discusses prudential, aesthetic, and what he calls "natural" values—that is, the values we associate with things being wild. "What I am suggesting is that we value what is natural[,] because we value nature's autonomy. . . . She 'does her own thing'" (166). The plurality of values he's laid out allows Jamieson, in the end of this chapter, to move through a series of case studies wherein we see how environmental problems are difficult to resolve, due to how many values are at stake in them. "Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep versus mountain lions," "feral goats versus endemic plants," "natives [i.e., native species] versus exotics"—these case studies demonstrate Jamieson's overall point about moral complexity and act as casuistical aids. Indeed, resolving any one convincingly would earn someone a doctorate or an excellent journal article.

The last chapter, 7, looks to the future. In it, Jamieson discusses large-scale challenges confronting us due to the ways we are massively altering the composition of our planet's biosphere—for example, overshooting the planet's life-support systems or causing global warming. Much of the chapter reviews the data indicating these changes, although the second part touches on questions of justice arising when looking ahead. The book ends with three visions of the future: "environmental catastrophe; continuing and increasing global inequality and environmental degradation; or a change in the way of life of the world's most privileged people" (196). Jamieson thinks that each of these scenarios takes place now in different parts of the world and that each may, to some extent, come true in the future.

MORAL COMPLEXITY IS A RESULT OF VALUE PLURALISM

Although Jamieson's book lacks a systematic, author-driven argument, a theme does recur. The theme fits introductory ethics well, angling toward sophisticated moral judgment. Jamieson thinks that "we live with multiplicity; the trick is to

understand it, and to deploy our concepts productively in light of it" (5). Here, Jamieson speaks of the many ways environmental problems can matter to us. Later, he deepens this perspective: moral life is complex, in large part due to the many ways we value things, even the same things, even at once. The half chapter on trade-offs (e.g., "feral goats versus endemic plants") illustrates his point. Moral complexity arises due to value pluralism.

Jamieson thinks pluralism is a feature of human thought. "I agree that we take different perspectives on nature and the environment on different occasions, and sometimes, perhaps, even simultaneously; and that it is a challenge to understand these phenomena and to bring them together. In my opinion, however, this is not peculiar to our thinking about the environment, but reflects deep tendencies in human thought" (5). That is an interesting idea, and one suspects Jamieson's worked-out position reflects it. Moreover, it is an idea that seems especially pertinent to environmental problems. These problems are notorious for their many dimensions, and anyone responsibly handling environmental matters will have to think with the kind of pluralistic complexity Jamieson assumes and to some extent illustrates. I wish Jamieson had set up his book to develop and bring home even more his central idea about pluralism and moral complexity.

TAKE A STAND

Jamieson's book lacks a strong author-driven argument. As Jamieson said, "I have attempted to rein in my tendency to be pedantic" (x). Possibly he reined it in too much, since the first half of the chapter on meta-ethics and his discussion of factory farming and the ethics of eating are the most likely to inspire philosophy in readers. Yet they are the most original and definite in terms of the author's position showing through the summary. They show philosophy, instead of simply stating it. The rest of the book might have used their different forms of passion. Primers should prime students to have a worked-through view.

There's another issue here as well. "What has given [environmental ethics] urgency and focus is the widespread belief that we are in the early stages of an environmental crisis of our own making. Many biologists believe that the sixth major wave of extinction since life began is now occurring, and that this one, unlike the other five, is being caused by human action" (6). Given the severity of our planet's environmental situation, it is surprising that Jamieson adopts the detachment he does throughout the book. He doesn't shy away from stating relevant facts and expressing what he thinks really is a problem, but I am not sure his detached approach is appropriate. Millions of lives and 30–70 percent of the world's species are at stake over this century. An introduction to ethics needs to prime people to take a stand when needed, and to see what is salient. I was left unsure whether Jamieson's book does this well on its own. Not only patterns of moral complexity must be seen, but convictions must be held in order to teach people how to approach moral life for themselves. This is especially true in a world devastating life.

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