

■ **Watersheds: Classic Cases in Environmental Ethics.** Lisa H. Newton and Catherine K. Dillingham. Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, CA, 1994. 192 pp. \$15.95 (paper, ISBN 0-534-21180-1).

Parallel to increased public awareness of environmental degradation has been the emergence of environmental philosophy and ethics, a field that raises, and tries to grapple with, issues of unprecedented depth and breadth. Although those of a philosophical bent understandably relish the theoretical and conceptual debates in which environmental ethics engages, others level the criticism that environmental ethics is too otherworldly and has little to do with “real-world” problems.

Thanks to *Watersheds*, a bridge now spans the gap between philosophical and practical environmentalism. By examining some classic environmental blunders, the authors find ground for discussing environmental problems at both the conceptual and practical, policy-oriented levels.

The authors begin by echoing the assertion of Vice-President Al Gore (and many others) that more technology is not the solution to our environmental woes, that in fact we need to fully understand all facets of environmental problems—including their philosophical dimensions—before we can solve them. In other words, the ultimate solution depends on rethinking long-held axioms. Throughout the book, Newton and Dillingham do just such rethinking as they explore the complexities of contemporary environmental issues.

Newton and Dillingham devote chapters to major environmental catastrophes such as Love Canal, Bhopal, Chernobyl, and *Exxon Valdez*. They also include chapter-length treatments of biological diversity, the Amazonian rainforest, the much-debated ozone hole, the greenhouse effect and global warming, the 1992 Earth summit at Rio de Janeiro, and Northwest forests.

Each chapter follows a specific but individually tailored formula. Chapter 5, “Forests of the North Coast: The Owls, the Trees, and the Conflicts,” offers an apt example. It begins with a series of thought-provoking central questions (e.g., why do the evergreen forests of the Northwest coast—especially the old groves of northern California redwoods—have a special claim on us?), followed by a brief history of specific cases that includes enough major players, facts, dates, and statistics to be complete without being cumbersome. Then we are brought up to speed on the current debate. Each chapter concludes with “Questions for Discussion and Reflection,” suggestions for further reading, and appropriate appendices. The book also contains an extensive bibliography useful for further research.

My only real criticism is that in trying to avoid burdening the text with philosophical jargon and name-dropping, the book as a whole is too light on explication of philosophical issues. For example, the authors mention the views of Aristotle, Adam Smith, and John Locke on private property but tell us nothing of the arguments made, the positions held, or the relevance of these views to the debate. Similarly, they mention the ethical school of thought known as utilitarianism but give no definition or explanation.

On the whole, *Watersheds* is a much-needed book. It would make an outstanding supplemental text in any “environmental” course (I intend to use it in my own classes) and should be recommended reading for anyone wishing to gain a more complete understanding of classic cases in environmental ethics.

Michael P. Nelson
Department of Philosophy
Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YG
United Kingdom