PART IV:

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING
CHAPTER 22

An Applied Ethics Reading Buffet

Most of us were brought up to clean our plates at the dinner table. We find the lesson hard to unlearn. We apply this to books as well – if we haven’t time to read the whole thing, we don’t pick it up at all. In this chapter, I offer a list of heavy, very thorough books as a buffet – suggesting that you read only the parts that interest you. Then, I list a few shorter ones offering easier reading but still filled with ideas and insights. Many of these will be valuable for people wanting to lead discussions and workshops on applied ethics.

A book review is usually timely, coming out shortly after publication. Because a few of the items in this essay have been around a while, all I can say is, “Better late than never.” First come five general works with broad scope. Next are five excellent reference volumes on ethics as a whole, environmental ethics, and religion and the environment. Following are several applied volumes dealing with public administration, forestry and environmental ethics, and business ethics. Finally, for dessert, I review a series of shorter works.

FIVE ON THE BIG ISSUES


David Callahan makes a strong story out of many themes related to his subject in The Cheating Culture. Callahan relies on a large body of information. Most troubling are the surveys of college students, in which many students say they have cheated and see nothing wrong

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with it. In sports, rock music, the world of finance and law, and among top corporate executives, the cash rewards for being at the top are so immense that some people cannot resist the temptation to cut corners. Also, Callahan points to the ubiquitous perception that people will “get away with it.” He notes the examples of criminals who served time or were fired for fraud or other crimes and were later rewarded with lucrative book contracts. Callahan’s book contains far too many anti-commerce clichés and slogans. Is this evidence of bias? Perhaps. But the overall picture is a sobering one and the information is generally, although not always, well buttressed with citations. If even half of what Callahan says is true, we all have a major chore ahead of us. We are not only seeking improvements in professional behavior, but we must engage in a major cultural change in order to achieve it!


Anita Allen, in a rich series of almost conversational essays, *The New Ethics*, supplies abundant thinking material for ethical reflection. In her introduction, she wonders why we see such “widespread ethical failure against the background of a culture rich with moral resources” (Allen, 2004: xii). One of the ethical resources she points to is the abundance of professional ethics codes and manuals. Yet, they seem to produce only limited results: “...some self-regulating is ineffective in protecting the public’s interest. Ethics codes adopted by professional groups are often high-tone pronouncements aimed at reassuring the public rather than effectively addressing the complex causes of professional conduct” (Allen, 2004: xxvi). Her closing chapter, Agenda for a Better Ethics, offers a twelve-point list that makes an excellent ethical thinking checklist (Allen, 2004: 276).


Rushworth Kidder is a leading author and lecturer on ethical issues and founder of the Institute of Global Ethics in Camden, Maine. In *Moral Courage*, he summarizes survey evidence showing how values of truth, fairness, and respect are widely shared around the world despite wide differences in cultural outlooks. Kidder describes moral courage as action based on principles, involving personal danger or risk, which
is knowingly endured for the sake of those principles. Kidder’s closing chapter, Practicing Moral Courage in the Public Square, draws his argument together with several compelling examples.


Hannah Arendt, a leading philosopher of the last century, became widely known for a book about the trial of Adolph Eichmann, Nazi organizer of the Holocaust. Jerome Kohn has assembled several of her major essays into a short work, *Responsibility and Judgment*, that is worth your serious attention. Arendt’s concerns with the “banality of evil,” the problem of responsibility in a dictatorship, and her reflections on the role of conscience in moral judgment are powerfully expressed.


Stephen Carter, a Yale Law School professor, defines *integrity* as “the faculty that enables us to discern right and wrong.” In his book of the same name, he explores the meaning and application of integrity in a variety of areas of life in an engaging way. This is not a handbook about ethics but instead a compelling essay on one of the groundings of ethical behavior: integrity.

**MAJOR SURVEYS OF ETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**


Few of us want to know as much about ethics as we find in Peter Singer’s *A Companion to Ethics*. It is intended as a compact encyclopedia of the whole field. As such, it deserves a place on a bookshelf for occasional reference. The volume’s 47 chapters are written by specialists in their fields. The writing is not always easy, but the pieces are coherent and brief. Coverage is excellent on the history of ethical thinking and especially so on non-Western traditions – one gets a capsule summary of Islamic, Buddhist, Indian, and classical Chinese ethics, in addition to the Christian and Jewish approaches. A further series of chapters on applications covers the range from poverty to euthanasia. I did not find the chapters on environmental
ethics and business ethics to be very focused, very thorough, or very balanced, but would not discount the whole volume on that account.


Peter Wenz, in his *Environmental Ethics Today*, organizes the work around a number of different approaches to environmental ethics, recognizing that there need not be a single philosophical viewpoint and that readers bring their own philosophies to the subject. He observes,

“I introduce many views and endorse most of them because they have merit. They are proper ways to look at some things at some times. But they are limited. No one view provides an adequate perspective on all issues for all time.” (Wenz, 2001: 15)

We might wish that more authors in this field would consider a similar approach. Wenz’s three principal approaches are: Anthropocentrism, Non-anthropocentrism (which includes a Land Ethic), and Environmental Synergism—which includes a good section on the role of religion.


Roger Gottlieb in his widely used 1996 readings volume, *This Sacred Earth*, offers a vast menu of material drawn from diverse traditions on spiritual concerns and environmental ethics. Purely secular essays are included as well, on topics ranging from vegetarianism to the Gaia hypothesis. This work offers strong representation of native or aboriginal perspectives from North America, Hawaii, and Africa, something not well covered in the other volumes. In Daniel Swartz’s essay titled Jews, Jewish Texts, and Nature: A Brief History, he offers a challenging metaphor:

“To take seriously the notion that we are but leasing the planet from God is to provide ourselves with specific behavioral guidelines. One who leases is called, in general, a shomer, usually translated as a guardian [emphasis supplied]. . .. Harvest a tree? Not without planting another. Farm the land, [but] not without allowing it periodic rest and rejuvenation.” (Gottlieb, 1996: 98).
Modern authors are included, from Barry Lopez to Annie Dillard. Expert essays review traditional religions and their attitudes toward nature, including a valuable summary by Mawil I. Izzi Deen on Islamic environmental ethics, a topic on which little has been readily available in English. Eco-theology, feminism, and deep ecology all find their place.


Thomas Berry’s *The Great Work* argues: “The Great Work now, as we move into a new millennium, is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner” (Berry, 2001). Berry’s essay takes a sweeping view of history. Judging by the frequency of his quotations in things I’ve been reading lately, I suspect his influence in the field of environmental ethics is massive. Berry summarizes what he calls “the wisdom of the traditions” as wisdom of indigenous peoples, of women, of (philosophical and religious) traditions, and of science. He concludes that “[w]e need all of the traditions. Each has its own distinctive achievements, limitations, distortions, its own special contribution toward an integral wisdom tradition . . .”


At times in the past, thinkers in environmental ethics have debated the role of religion in fostering, rationalizing, ignoring, or potentially overcoming environmental degradation. In Berry’s spirit, I suggest a highly readable book by Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, which attempts to summarize various strands of Protestant religious feeling and thought about environmental issues. These range, some might be surprised to learn, across a fairly wide range of environmental sentiment. This book is extremely well written and is refreshingly calm and balanced in discussing contending viewpoints.
EIGHT BOOKS ON APPLIED ETHICS


Terry L. Cooper has done yeoman work in compiling an impressive volume on ethics in public administration, the *Handbook of Administrative Ethics.* People active in professional ethics issues will find much of interest in several essays (e.g., Plant, Bowman) on professional ethics codes for public administrators. Teachers and those active in ethics training will find the Yoder/Denhardt essay and the Menzel piece on Ethics Management useful. Environmental professionals active in volunteer roles on planning boards, school boards, and the like will see interest in parts of this work. One doesn’t need to be a professional public administrator to find a lot here.


Two older volumes on ethics in the public service remain worth a look. Fleishman et al. in their book *Public Duties* supply a broad overview of philosophical issues, administrative theory, and practical ethics. Warwick, in Chapter 4, offers five ethical principles for public servants: (1) a public orientation, (2) reflective choice, (3) veracity, (4) procedural respect, and (5) a restraint on means. A later chapter by Dennis Thompson reviews the ethical challenges faced by city leaders during the New York City fiscal crisis of the mid 1970s. During that period, devices ranging from standard accounting gimmicks to outright misrepresentation were employed to conceal the city’s dire straits from taxpayers and lenders.


Anne Marie Donahue’s volume of readings, Ethics in Politics and Government, is built on published articles from serious journalism sources. It contains well-written essays dealing with, among other things, the Iran-Contra scandal of the mid 1980s. Short essays by serving members of Congress are included. The writing is excellent;
the treatments are issue and news-oriented and not built around technical explanations of ethical theory.


Peter List of Oregon State has edited a strong compilation of environmental ethics and forestry materials, *Environmental Ethics and Forestry: A Reader.* He (and the authors included) will make many foresters angry with some of their assertions, but at least his biases are on the table. He asserts flatly:

“In short, professional forest conservation serves the interests of the capitalist economy of America in domestic and foreign markets.” (List, 2001: 25).

Some foresters may assent to this description, but those who don’t should read on. Despite the familiar campus biases that underlie the book, a few middle of the road writers have been included. This compilation contains an unusual amount of commentary and connective material for a readings volume and, together with footnotes, this book amounts to an excellent source for finding much of the recent literature on the subject. List has obviously taken the trouble to learn a lot about forestry. Some of the criticism in the book is hard for this writer to take. It is either too extreme, too one-sided, or just stated in insulting tones. But it is not a bad reflection of what the general public reads every day in the paper and what is taught every day on campuses nationwide. We should not toss the volume out because we find some statements in it to be irritating or unfair.


The field of business ethics has burgeoned in recent years, although from the exploits of notorious financiers reported in the daily press, one would hardly know it. A helpful readings volume on this topic is always welcome. Snoeyenbos, Almeder, and Humber have updated their *Business Ethics* with this newer edition. Theirs is perhaps the most applied of all of the books discussed in this essay and is certainly one for the bookshelf of almost any practicing forester, in public or private employ. The material is organized around practical topics, for
example, Ethics in Organizations, Employer Rights, Employee Rights, Finance, Consumer Rights, Environmental Issues, and Multinational Corporations. Cases and essays are brief and to the point.


With some uncertainty, I include one work of philosophy. I am not competent to review the work, aimed as it is for specialists in that field. Yet I found it an excellent candidate for the selective reading approach— I did not finish it. Richard B. Miller’s *Casuistry and Modern Ethics* may put many bookstore browsers off by its title alone. As the author notes,

“Casuistry’s basic premise is that virtue is incomplete without the skill of practical deliberation—that appeals to character, integrity, or purity of heart alone are insufficient for ethical theory and the moral life... even the well-intentioned conscience needs practical wisdom about managing day-to-day affairs.” (Miller, 1996: 17).

In addition, the author notes that ethical maxims and practical demands often conflict, so that “it is not always obvious what virtue requires” (Miller, 1996: 17). Miller’s approach resonates strongly for me. He emphasizes the importance of a “fine-grained analysis” of practical facts. This emphasis should certainly be appealing to environmental professionals interested in developing their ethical reflection skills. In a series of chapters, the book offers examples of ethical argument on topics as diverse as the first Gulf War, transplanting human fetal tissue, and violent pornography.


Closely related to the issue of loyalty to employer is the ancient question of whether one’s role in life can suspend moral or ethical responsibilities. The classic example is that soldiers, in the proper circumstances, are exempted from the ancient Mosaic injunction “Thou shalt not kill.” Arthur Applebaum’s *Ethics for Adversaries* (1999) explores this issue in great detail and in a fairly formal philosophical way.
Applbaum opens with an extended discussion of one Charles-Henri Sanson, who served as the official executioner of Paris under the ancient regime and then under the various governments of the Revolution and the Terror. Applbaum titles this chapter, Professional Detachment.


Carol D. Barrett (2001) is a planner who has written about planning ethics for years. Her *Everyday Ethics for Practicing Planners* is a valuable sourcebook for professional ethics in the environmental area. It is essentially a casebook. But what is especially valuable about this book is that Barrett has done a tremendous amount of work to provide full discussions of the cases. There are cases corresponding to 32 different key elements of the planner’s ethics code.

**SOME LIGHTER FARE**

These books may be “lighter” only in comparison to the weight and technical depth of the above-listed items. They are aimed at general rather than specialized audiences; all are well written.


Dave Robinson and Chris Garrett’s *Introducing Ethics* (1997) is a very reader-friendly and thought provoking introduction especially aimed at readers not versed in the philosophies of ethics.


An introduction to ethics that fits in a pocket is badly needed. Simon Blackburn’s *Being Good* (2001) is a pocket sized overview that is well written and thoughtful. For many of us, it is as far as we will want to go into philosophy, at least for the time being. It does not drill down much into conflict of interest, loyalty to client, or other more day to day issues.

A welcome development is the issuance of a second edition of Hugh Mercer Curtler’s *Ethical Argument*, which has been a longtime stalwart in teaching people how to think about ethical problems. His 2004 edition offers the same compact approach to the thought process and includes short cases. Curtler leaves aside the recital of all the different schools of philosophers and gets right down to how to think effectively about solving ethical problems.


No one should serve on a board of directors – private or nonprofit – without reading David Smith’s little gem of a book, *Entrusted*. I have not yet found a better introductory essay on fiduciary responsibility. Smith’s examples are found in the world of issues faced by trustees of nonprofit institutions. As Smith notes, “Trusteeship is a special kind of moral responsibility . . .,” and his book explains in more detail what that means.


Workplace ethics for managers is a huge topic. Raymond Pfeiffer and Ralph Forsberg have provided a useful short introduction with *Ethics on the Job: Cases and Strategies* – and have worked a lot of value into 145 pages. They outline the widely used RESOLVEDD method for analyzing ethical problems. The 45 cases include a wide range of common business problems, from alcohol abuse to fair treatment of employees. These authors, like some of the others noted in this essay, are suspicious of the notion that your conscience will be your guide: “. . . you must still decide for yourself what to do and whether your conscience truly does indicate the best course of action. Further reflection and analysis may be necessary to determine just what your conscience really does indicate and whether the verdict of your conscience or intuitions is correct” (Pfeiffer and Forsberg, 2000: 51).

The Lockheed-Martin Corporation, a major defense and aerospace contractor, instituted a broad ethics program in the wake of bribery scandals in the early 1970s. Daniel Terris, of Brandeis University’s Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life and author of *Ethics at Work*, spent considerable time with the company’s employees studying how its program works. Terris notes, “The defense industry has, to some people’s surprise, the broadest and most sustained set of ethics programs of any sector of American business today.” Terris gives the Lockheed-Martin program high marks for institutionalizing effective ethics at what he calls the “administrative” level. He takes the company to task, though, for compartmentalizing administrative ethics away from the larger ethical questions that ought, he feels, to engage workers in arms plants. His claim that this compartmentalization actually threatens the program (see, especially, pages 141-154) seems overblown. He offers no evidence that conducting major debates about the morality of arms production would improve ethical behavior at any level of the company. We can all agree that in a better world we would have no defense contractors, but I am not convinced that broadening the coverage of business and administrative ethics provides real benefits.


James Surowiecki’s compilation, *Best Business Crime Writing of the Year*, is an excellent topical view of the recent big business and financial scandals. The editor has assembled press accounts of the biggest business crime stories of 2002 – a year that was certainly rich in examples. Revelations of pathological executive greed, reliance on expensive legal hair-splitting by high priced lawyers and accountants, and passive boards of directors and regulators illustrate a massive failure of personal and business ethics.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama offers a highly readable overview of a Buddhist view of ethics in *Ethics for the New Millennium*. Some may wonder what a Tibetan monk may have to say to professional people functioning in a Westernized, secular society. I think, after reading the book, you will agree that the answer is, “a good deal.” Of interest here, he repeatedly returns to his theme of a “need for discernment,” his term for having the practical wisdom to make prudent choices when loyalties, or ethical obligations, conflict. Later in the work, he discusses ethical concerns for the natural world.


“We need not aim for sainthood, but by striving to choose ethically – no matter the success rate – we will have a cumulative wealth of knowledge and experience to draw on that will pay dividends throughout our lives and beyond.” So writes Derrick Bell, in closing his extended essay *Ethical Ambition*, which treats the conflict between career ambitions and our desire to make decisions that advance higher ideals. He calls this the “paradox of success.” Bell has mastered the art of brevity, bringing in his work at 178 pages. He was the first African-American to be tenured at Harvard Law School, clerked for Justice Thurgood Marshall, and served in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. In a chapter titled Courage and Risk-Taking, Bell draws from experiences as an Army officer, a law professor, and a civil rights activist. A major source of courage for Bell is his religious faith, as he explains in the chapter, Evolving Faith. One excerpt:

“The gravitational pulls of our ‘free enterprise’ society urge acceptance of the social system as it is. It counsels us to compete and win by any available means. As needed, we can pretend we are ethical and humane. Our posturing will look like spirit and it will appear sufficient.” (Bell, 2002: 93).

A valuable readings volume on environmental ethics is the Biodiversity Project’s recent *Ethics for a Small Planet*. It is certainly the most reader-friendly of the works noted here. Educators and those conducting ethics discussions will find a wealth of citations and resources. Essays by Bakken, Elder and Farrior, Swartz, and Nelson provide a brief overview of ideas from major cultural and religious traditions. Despite the effort to note a range of ideas in the core essays, some will notice a strong preservationist ideology here. A few clues lie in the fine print, where contributors gloat over alleged defeats inflicted on “Wise Use” groups. As long as environmental ethics remains so closely identified with preservationists and with glib zingers, there will continue to be difficulty in bridging the cultural gap to resource owners and managers.


A more recent entry is Bob Perschel’s *Land Ethic Toolbox*. This toolbox, issued by The Wilderness Society, is loaded with references to literature, organizations, and individuals working on land ethics issues. The cheap editorializing is left aside in this one. This book is something like a Rolodex for the entire subject; readers with a special interest in this topic will want one.


For managers, the problem of building ethical perspectives into daily action – whether in the marketplace, in nonprofits, or in government – is ongoing. Craig Johnson’s *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* (now in a second edition) tries to help, not by giving detailed guidance on every problem, but by suggesting ways to think about ethical problems. The book is built around extensive lists that make it a useful instructional resource. Johnson opens by noting the shadows cast over leadership by power, privilege, misplaced or broken loyalties, and deceit. He offers useful ideas in his later chapters on avoiding groupthink, on creating an ethical climate in an organization, and on cultural diversity.
Johnson offers a number of formats for ethical decision making. One, drawn from Rushworth Kidder’s work, involves the following steps: (1) recognize the problem, (2) determine the actors, (3) gather the facts, (4) test for right versus wrong issues, (5) test for right versus right issues, (6) apply the relevant standards, (7) look for a third way, (8) make a decision, and (9) revise and reflect. This is a sensible and straightforward guide – it attempts to supply a way to think through problems rather than a list of canned answers to canned problems.

Some of the powerful CEOs showcased in Surowiecki’s book may do jail time. If so, they should be required to read Johnson’s book. They may wish they had done so sooner.

**APPLIED ETHICS READING BUFFET**


