



1947 ad from Pennsylvania Salt Manufacturing Company (now part of Arkema), International Society for Environmental Ethics, <http://iseethics.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/ddt-is-good-for-me.jpg>

## Pollution, Values, Justice

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## Pollution

- ◉ contamination or defilement of some resource

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## Is this pollution?

- ◉ cyanide extraction of gold from ore
  - ◉ cyanide compounds have low persistence in environment
  - ◉ toxic to certain waterfowl
  - ◉ uncontrolled release
    - ◉ destroyed a small amount of forest
    - ◉ plant life comes back
  - ◉ water, fine sand, some heavy metal sediment
  - ◉ children play on dry parts of the flat

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## Is this pollution?

- ◉ heat-assisted extraction of gold from ore (roasting)
  - ◉ arsenic trioxide
  - ◉ soluble in water
  - ◉ absorbed through skin
  - ◉ persists in body
  - ◉ fine particulate
  - ◉ people scrape it off windows

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## Is this pollution?

- ◉ methyl mercury in water
  - ◉ concentrates in fish
  - ◉ estimated 50 to 100 years to dissipate
    - ◉ now thought to be longer
  - ◉ causes irreversible nervous system and brain damage

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## Mercury dumping

- ◉ English and Wabigoon Rivers
  - ◉ Raleigh Lake to Lake Winnipeg to Hudson Bay to Arctic Ocean
- ◉ 10 tonnes of mercury dumped between 1962 and 1970
  - ◉ discharge continued until 1975

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## Mercury poisoning

- ◉ English and Wabigoon Rivers
  - ◉ commercial fishery shut down in 1970
    - ◉ but not sport fishery
- ◉ Lake St. Clair
  - ◉ **all** fishing closed for the same reasons
- ◉ is this the right way to handle mercury pollution?

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## Mercury poisoning

- ◉ Grassy Narrows and White Dog First Nations
  - ◉ 850 people
  - ◉ told fish was unsafe to eat
    - ◉ lodge owners blocked fishing in other areas
    - ◉ frozen fish from Manitoba “mushy and bland”
  - ◉ “compensation”
    - ◉ \$8000/person in 1985
    - ◉ \$250-\$800 month
      - ◉ only for those who meet disability threshold

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# Mercury poisoning

- ◉ the conflict
  - ◉ fish unsafe to eat
  - ◉ warning signs removed to not scare off tourists
  - ◉ tourists eat the fish
  - ◉ if the fish is good enough for tourists to eat, why should First Nations not eat the fish?

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# Optimal pollution?

- ◉ William Baxter, *People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974)
  - ◉ what is a “natural state”?
    - ◉ atmosphere
    - ◉ lake water
  - ◉ why limit pollution?

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# Money and resources

- ◉ human activity requires resources
  - ◉ labour, technological skill, capital goods, natural resources
  - ◉ money is a claim against some of these resources
  - ◉ resources are limited
  - ◉ money is limited only because resources are
  - ◉ we need to choose how to allocate resources

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# Principles of human organisation

- ① Freedom
  - ◉ “every person should be free to do whatever he wishes in contexts where his actions do not interfere with the interests of other human beings”

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## Principles of human organisation

### ② Efficiency

- “none of those resources, or labors, or skills, should be wasted—that is, employed so as to yield less than they might yield in human satisfactions”

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## Principles of human organisation

### ③ Equality (right wing view)

- “**Every** human being should be regarded as an **end** rather than as a means to be used for the betterment of another. **Each** should be afforded dignity and regarded as having an **absolute claim to an evenhanded application** of such rules as the community may adopt for its governance.”

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## Principles of human organisation

### ④ Fairness

- “Both the incentive and the opportunity to improve his share of satisfactions should be preserved to every individual. Preservation of incentive is dictated by the ‘no-waste’ criterion and enjoins against the continuous, totally egalitarian redistribution of satisfactions, or wealth, but subject to that constraint, everyone should receive, by continuous redistribution if necessary, **some minimal share of aggregate wealth** so as to avoid a level of privation from which the opportunity to improve his situation becomes illusory.”

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## Humanity and nature

- most humans only think about humans
- humanity depends on non-human parts of nature
  - can still have voluntary individual privation or sacrifice

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# Humanity and nature

- ◉ “Our decisions are either private or collective. Insofar as Mr. Jones is free to act privately, he may give such preferences as he wishes to other forms of life: he may feed birds in winter and do less with himself, and he may even decline to resist an advancing polar bear on the ground that the bear's appetite is more important than those portions of himself that the bear may choose to eat. In short my basic premise does not rule out private altruism to competing life-forms. It does rule out, however, Mr. Jones' inclination to feed Mr. Smith to the bear, however hungry the bear, however despicable Mr. Smith.”

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# Humanity and nature

- ◉ only humans can participate in community decision-making
  - ◉ penguins and salamanders can't vote
  - ◉ pine trees can't ask questions
  - ◉ who can legitimately and faithfully represent other life forms?

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# Humanity and nature

- ◉ we should still mitigate environmental impact
  - ◉ as long as we benefit from it
    - ◉ sewage treatment plants
  - ◉ non-human elements of environment may also benefit
    - ◉ reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions

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# Whose values?

- ◉ individual
- ◉ community
- ◉ culture
- ◉ nation
- ◉ corporation

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## Valuing values

- ◉ different communities
  - ◉ different values
  - ◉ different ways of carving up the world
- ◉ what one community values, another can belittle or despise
  - ◉ a pig farm next to a mosque?
- ◉ conflicts of values
  - ◉ understanding our values helps us understand others'

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## Devaluing values

- ◉ McGregor, p. 326:
  - ◉ “Because the already established (and stereotype-based) frame of reference held by researchers is so different from that of the Native people they are learning about, the aboriginal voice is frequently discredited, distorted, or ignored. Since information provided by aboriginal voices often does not fit into the stereotype-based ideological frameworks of non-Native researchers, **aboriginal people are routinely seen as less valid sources of information** than other non-Native researchers. In this way, stereotypes act as a major barrier to learning about aboriginal peoples.”

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## Values and justice

- ◉ need to understand history of interactions between cultures
  - ◉ treaty rights of First Nations
  - ◉ duties of the Crown
  - ◉ rights infringed; duties neglected
    - ◉ disregard of values
    - ◉ a matter of justice

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## Waste and pollution

- ◉ transforming resources into goods produces waste
  - ◉ we have limited resources
- ◉ capturing waste is an additional cost
  - ◉ costs are expressed in dollars
  - ◉ dollars are claims against resources
  - ◉ takes additional resources to capture the waste

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# Values and pollution

- but resources are limited
  - what else can we use those resources for?
  - which would we rather put the resources toward?
  - what do we value more highly?

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# Externalised costs

- suppose we don't capture waste
  - pushes cost of managing waste to others
    - this is an externalised cost (Cragg and Schwartz, p. 310)
    - doesn't show up on our books anywhere
    - takes someone else's money/resources to address

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# If the cost is too big ...

- sometimes even government walks away
  - Picher, Oklahoma
    - piles of tailings containing heavy metal dust
    - water is polluted
      - acidic
      - heavy metals
    - town at risk of subsidence
    - remediation not possible in a cost-effective way

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# If the cost is too big ...

- push the cost along
  - Picher, Oklahoma
    - federal government buying out homeowners
    - land will revert to a First Nation
      - they have the problem of cleaning it up
      - paving companies want the tailings
      - government won't permit sales

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## Costs and values

- ◉ costs can be small or large
  - ◉ a piece of paper
  - ◉ a home or farm
  - ◉ a city
- ◉ can all costs be monetised?
  - ◉ costs are losses of something valued

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## Costs and conflicting values

- ◉ Mattagami River hydroelectric redevelopment (Cragg and Schwartz, pp 312-14)
  - ◉ Ontario Hydro's values in environmental assessment
    - ◉ minimum water levels to protect habitat
    - ◉ new spawning grounds for fish
    - ◉ compensation for trappers and subsistence users

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## Costs and conflicting values

- ◉ Mattagami River hydroelectric redevelopment (Cragg and Schwartz, pp 312-14)
  - ◉ First Nations' values
    - ◉ obligation to the land
    - ◉ treaty rights
    - ◉ control over the land for subsistence
    - ◉ obligation to the Creator, traditional way of life, and aboriginal rights
    - ◉ health of the land as part of well-being

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## Costs and conflicting values

- ◉ First Nations' values and outstanding justice matters were deemed out of scope
  - ◉ not a matter of environmental assessment
    - ◉ can we justify separating these from environmental disruption?
    - ◉ what ethical considerations come into play?
  - ◉ these are costs to the First Nations
    - ◉ not taken on by ones who benefit

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## Damned if you do; damned if you don't

- ◉ pollution and development have costs
- ◉ not developing also has costs
- ◉ if we value sustainability, how far are we willing to take it before we suffer?
  - ◉ what valued things will we give up?

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## Consume locally; pollute globally

- ◉ pollution knows no boundaries
  - ◉ even natural physical boundaries can be crossed

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## Consume locally; pollute globally

- ◉ pollution is cheap disposal
  - ◉ what doesn't migrate by natural processes, we export
    - ◉ electronic waste shipped from Canada to China
    - ◉ people salvaging metal and components get sick
  - ◉ causes harm to salvagers
  - ◉ but benefits the producer and consumer

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## Global justice

- ◉ one aspect of justice:
  - ◉ relationships between persons, groups, and states
- ◉ in global context of one "heterogenous mega-society", internal rules of that society apply
  - ◉ problem: we're making them up as we go
  - ◉ how do we share rights and duties?
  - ◉ how do we share harms and benefits?
- ◉ need transnational distributive justice

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# Global values

- this comes back to values
  - addressing environmental degradation in a global context requires:
    - understanding what values we share
    - using shared values to forge common goals
- this will only be done by the willing

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# Global environmental justice

- environmental justice
  - does the environment itself have rights?
    - problem of representation
  - perhaps if we limit human use of nature
    - Penz, p. 391: refrain from imposing foreseeable international environmental harm
      - includes culpability and compensation for accidents or negligence

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# Review questions

- In what ways can pollution be seen as an externalisation of costs?
- What ethical considerations influence the decisions about how much pollution can be tolerated? Consider both consequentialist and rights-and-duties perspectives.
- How might a decision to pollute be understood as an expression of values?
- Essay: Is pollution a justice issue? Why or why not? Give reasons and an argument for your answer.

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