

Ethics Text Analysis
Ethical Decision-Making in Public Health

The Ethics of Environmentally Responsible Health Care

**By Jessica Pierce and Andrew Jameton
New York: Oxford University Press, 2004**

- **the analysis will summarize the ethical theories &/or practices presented, their value and their relationship (if any) to the Sinclair/Kohlberg paradigm**

I do not believe that any relationship between this book and the Sinclair/Kohlberg paradigm actually exists. I feel that the Sinclair/Kohlberg paradigm is driven by the individual and the ethics of the character of that individual while Pierce and Jameton (2004) take a very Utilitarian approach in that actions should be taken which provide the most intrinsic good for everyone affected. While the Sinclair/Kohlberg paradigm is great to practice for leadership where one must be more aware about their actions and ability to make ethical decisions, Utilitarianism, as presented by Pierce and Jameton, really looks at the consequences of society making ethical decisions which benefit the environment and the earth, while justifying potential sacrifices to the current way of life of the developed world.

In Pierce and Jameton looking to find balance between the current state of health care and finding sustainable health, they reveal the significant dilemma of which approach to take - that which prioritizes public health ethics, or one which prioritizes medical ethics. While it is clear that they side with the public health ethics approach which favours maximizing benefit in terms of both a healthy population *and* environment (instead of a medical ethics approach which they frame as looking after individuals with minimal overall global benefit), they still address the ethical challenges of looking at either option. Pierce and Jameton work hard to provide concluding points at the end of each chapter which aim to provide guidance on what is necessary to meet their proposed goal of environmentally responsible health care; however, they are unable to provide clear recommendations on how to achieve this.

Pierce and Jameton's Utilitarian approach also addresses the dilemma of how to balance sustainable health while dealing with social justice. They share concerns over how both the wealthy and the poor citizens of the world can equally achieve good health while following an environmentally responsibly framework; the current gap of disparity within the United States alone is overwhelming enough even with the astronomical spending of health care dollars by that country. It is difficult to fathom how better, more equitable health care could be provided if it was scaled down to a more basic, modest level. Again, while points are made by the authors as to where practices and procedures are lacking, they are unable to provide a succinct response on how to achieve sustainability in addition to health and justice for all.

- **comment on the relevance of the book to any hands on applicability re both your professional & personal life (i.e. what, if any, is the direct value of this book to those working in the field of public health? what might be the personal usefulness to similar people? how does the book help address the various objectives of this course?)**

I definitely found this book relevant to both my professional and personal life. Professionally, ethics certainly has a place in my research and I am attuned to its importance in using sound research methods in addition to presenting my findings and recommendations. The strong bioethics focus of this book is very relevant to those of us working in both public health as well as those in health care for similar reasons; while I believe that there is a strong message from the book that promotes health promotion and prevention of disease and ailments, it also brings attention to the issues regarding sustainability of health care and the current cost and significant waste involved with caring for sick individuals. If anything, I believe the relevance of this book is even more profound for those working in the pharmaceutical industry, public health policy, or in hospital administration than for those who are general public health practitioners. This book provides a lot of insight to the importance of environmentally responsible health care while invoking awareness to potential moral dilemmas. However, this book is also controversial, especially for a jurisdiction such as Alberta where an environmentally driven approach to sustainable health care would have considerable political hurdles to jump in regards to the perspectives and ethical theories practiced by those in the powerful energy sectors.

While using the lense of bioethics is not that strong in my specific career area, this is where my personal interests were able to find applicability in this book. My research focus when completing my masters in public health surrounded many of the concepts revealed by Richard Louv in his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2008) which focuses on the important relationship between nature and a child's health and wellbeing. This theme presented by Louv reiterates the premise shared by Pierce and Jameton, in addition to that shared by James Owen in *Cowboy Values* (2008), which focuses on the close relationship between the environment and health - both community and individual.

Furthermore, my experience growing up in the country and on a farm provides me with a certain perspective regarding the value of the environment in terms of what it provides us, what we take from it, and how we can encourage a balance between the two. The information shared by Pierce and Jameton about growing food, using pesticides and raising animals was interesting to me and brought an unexpected dynamic regarding the practice of vegetarianism and veganism, but only within set parameters as to not further deplete the land through that practice. Anybody who is interested in knowing more about the farm to table process would definitely find sections of this book valuable and relevant to their lives.

In regards to if the book helps to address the various objectives of this course, I do not believe that it does. While an interesting read which delves into various bioethical dilemmas, it does little in providing solutions or recommendations for creating sustainable health. It does an excellent job of raising awareness to ethical dilemmas related to health care, but I cannot see how it can influence my leadership abilities as a public health professional. On the other hand, I do believe that just by enabling me to acknowledge the ethical problems faced by health care in relation to the environment, allows me to better see the big picture or looking at individual health versus public health and inspires me to look for opportunity to promote an integrated approach to public health which looks through that bioethics lense; by looking at the importance of addressing conditions of health, not only symptoms of ill-health, I believe I am better able to

analyse role models and provide guidance to colleagues which may influence their ethical performance while meeting the expectations of our organization.

- **the analysis will also include a general comment on the overall degree of readability and interest that the book possesses, aside from any direct applicability to this course &/or the public health field – for example, some assessment should include whether the book should be recommended to members of Parliament (including the Senate), members of provincial legislatures as well as senior public servants at both major levels...**

This text requires a high level of literacy and I would consider the readability to be challenging which may narrow the audience. A prior understanding of environmental science, ethical concepts and theories, and health care would be beneficial in examining and digesting this text, however having only interest in these subjects should be enough to encourage a reader to pick up the book.

Due to the broad principles covered by the Canada Health Act, I believe that this book is worth the read to anybody in the health care industry. Fiscal responsibility and sustainability are constantly on the agenda for the Cabinet or any governmental department or agency, and this book provides the platform for raising consciousness surrounding environmentally responsible health care and could be used to begin conversations regarding the problems acknowledged in the text among various ministries. The lense of sustainable health is one that should be used to view numerous issues within agriculture and agri-food, environment, and industry, just to name a few ministries, in addition to health.

As revealed in the text, health care has many upstream and downstream influences and outcomes which connect closely with other areas of government; It is important that these various departments and agencies are aware of these connections and allow for the ethics of environmentally responsible decision making. For these reasons, I also believe that all members within the various levels of both provincial and federal government should be aware of the issues surrounding environmentally responsible health care in order for an integrated approach to public health to be achieved and maintained.

Finally, considering her current role as Minister of the Environment and former role as Minister of Health, I think the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq should have read this book prior to entering the House of Commons in 2008. It is Cabinet shuffles such as Ms. Aglukkaq's that would further reinforce the transparency of environmental issues between ministries.

References

Louv, R. (2008). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC, USA: Algonquin Books.

Owen, J. P. (2008). *Cowboy Values: Recapturing What America Once Stood For*. Los Angeles, CA, USA: Lyons Press.

Pierce, J., & Jameton, A. (2004). *The Ethics of Environmentally Responsible Health Care*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.