Addressing a Present or Future Ethical Issue


Assignment: Identify a significant ethical choice relating to our ecological relationships that you are facing in your present or could foresee facing in your future. Describe the situation, its ethical considerations, and what options for action there may be. Compare two or more frameworks for ethically evaluating the options for choice and/or action. Finally, make and explain your recommendation.

Some elaboration on this assignment – the following is intended as clarification:

1) Whether you draw on Leopold’s book or other sources, the focus of the assignment is ethical relationships in regards to earth’s non-human systems and/or inhabitants, as opposed to obligations to other humans, concerning the non-human. Of course, you are not asked to take any particular position on the existence or nature of these focal ethical relationships.

2) The significant ethical choice and/or the situation may be hypothetical, but it should be realistic or at least plausible (real life examples are plentiful!). One possibility is to place yourself in a professional role such as what you are preparing for at WWU. You could also imagine your role as citizen, or in your personal life choices. If you know of an real-life issue and know what role you would want to play in that issue, that can offer another avenue.

3) Your description of the situation, ethical considerations, and options will necessarily include factual and conceptual dimensions (i.e., historical, scientific, social, economic), but exploring the ethical aspects is primary. You can draw from ideas discussed in class, Leopold, other readings, or appropriate outside sources.

4) Frameworks for ethical evaluation of options may include formal ethical theories from class (utilitarianism, deontological theory, virtue ethics, pragmatism, or others), and/or historical perspectives such as a preservationism approach, or a turn-of-the (20th) century conservationism approach. In any case, be explicit about how the frameworks make a difference.

5) In your justification for your recommendation (why you are making it), it may be useful to refer back to the comparison of frameworks, and how you evaluated different options. Reasons against non-selected paths may be as significant as reasons for your choice. You will not be graded according to what position you take, but rather according to the quality of the reasoning you demonstrate in justifying your recommendation.

6) It is possible that you reach roughly the stage of 5) in thinking through this task, and discover you are really not able to make a recommendation. This is acceptable, but only if you are able to explain why no recommendation can be made.
All papers should be turned in electronically AND on paper. For the electronic copy, put your name, the class and assignment in the filename (ie, “Jones.ENVS305.fourth essay.docx”). Electronic submission: email to Gene.Myers@wwu.edu

See general instructions on papers in syllabus, and rubric on last page of syllabus or Canvas. Additional general paper writing resource: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/