

Laurier professor writes Canada's first environmental ethics textbook

WATERLOO – Laurier Professor Byron Williston has authored an environmental ethics textbook for students, considered to be the first of its kind in Canada. Previously, no other textbook dealing with the key theoretical questions in environmental ethics was available specifically for Canadian students.

The textbook, titled *Environmental Ethics for Canadians* (Oxford University Press), is a comprehensive introduction to the core ethical questions and theories shaping contemporary environmental debates. It contains classic essays in environmental theory, cutting-edge work by Canadian philosophers, and numerous case studies about the evolving Canadian environmental scene. It also includes commentary by Williston that provides clarification of complex concepts and draws attention to environmental issues affecting various regions across Canada.

“This book is in some ways the product of my frustration with teaching theories of environmental ethics to Canadian students over the years,” said Williston, an associate professor of philosophy. “It’s always best to illustrate theories by pointing to real world examples of environmental problems or challenges. Unfortunately, the existing literature is focused almost exclusively on the American environmental context. This had the effect of alienating many Canadian students from the issues and I wanted to change that.”

Williston has been a professor at Laurier since 2002. His current research focuses on the ethics of climate change, and how to define climate change as an ethical issue.

“Too often we see climate change as a problem to be solved by economists or engineers or bureaucrats,” he said. “These approaches can help us see what to do about the problem, but they cannot say what exactly the problem is. We need to be clear that our current heavy reliance on fossil fuels is undermining the moral rights and interests of future generations. Philosophers ask how this behaviour can be rationally justified. If it can’t be, then we have a moral duty to change our ways, perhaps radically. I think that when people see the challenge laid out this way, they can become motivated to act.”

In addition to his new textbook, Williston has been published in several journals, including *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Journal of Value Inquiry*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Journal of Global Ethics* and *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*.