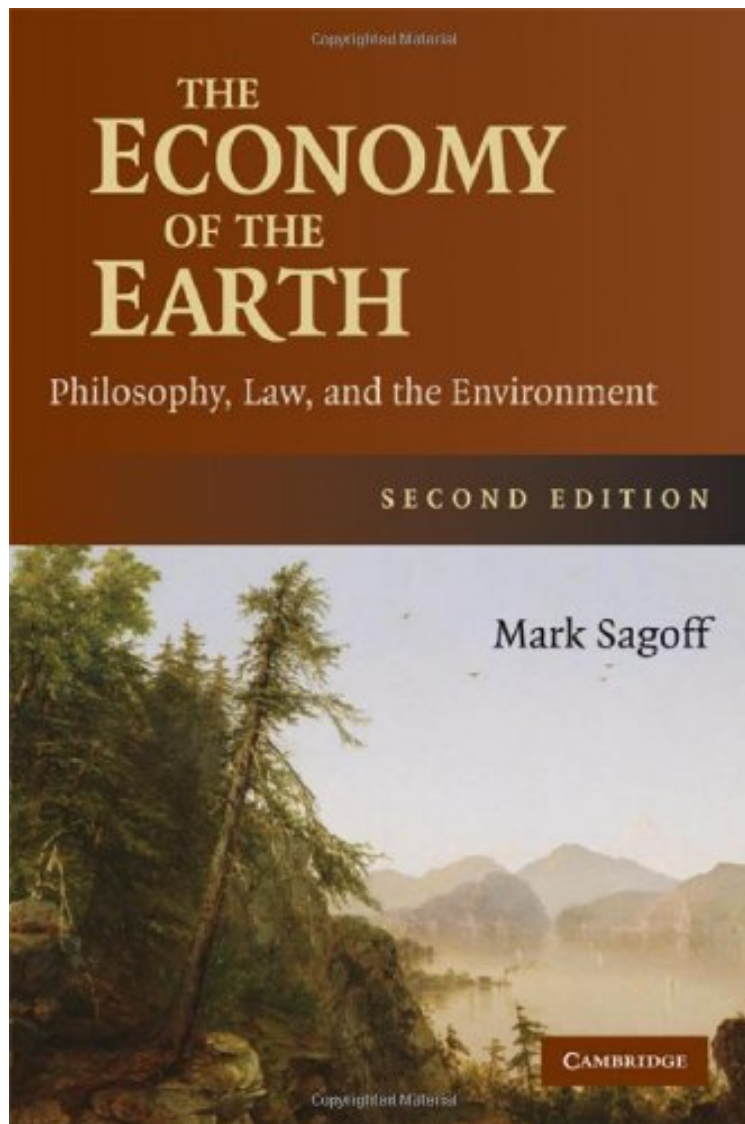


(Download pdf) The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy)

The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy)

Mark Sagoff

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Mark Sagoff : The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Critique of cost-benefit analysis for environmental mattersBy David

SchorrProf. Sagoff demonstrates the problematic nature of an economic approach to environmental decisionmaking. Even granting that we could quantify environmental values in dollar terms, he raises the important question of why we would want to do such a thing. The author argues that questions of balancing environmental values against other "goods" should be decided in the public political arena, and not by reference to people's private willingness to pay. Somewhat puzzling is Sagoff's adherence to a utilitarian philosophy; I'm still waiting for someone to point out the obvious liberty and distributive-justice problems with cost-benefit analysis in the sphere of environmental regulation.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. economy of earthBy Kindle CustomerIn *The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, c. 1988), Mark Sagoff urges us to develop stronger ethical and legal norms as to preserve the environment through social regulation. Taking issue with those who would reduce all environmental issues to economics and its concern for commodities and profit/loss data, he argues "that these problems are primarily moral, aesthetic, cultural, and political and that they must be adnot;dressed in those terms" (p. 6). Those who mindlessly espouse the notion that "you can't legislate morality" might as well close Sagoff's book at page six, for that's exactly what he thinks we must do! Central to his endeavor is the task of dislodging "cost-benefit analysis" from the center of policy-making, law-shaping endeavors. Surely there are goods and services, entities and experiences, which cannot be measured by or reduced to dollars and cents! And surely such things have intrinsic worth which transcends personal preferences. To establish moral and legal weight for intangibles such as community bonds or scenic beauties, and to discover objective criteria for allegedly subjective moral judgments, is Sagoff's task. He does so, in part, because once "we accept the theory that values are subjective, that they are just 'wants,' we must also accept the idea that managers--whether they be therapists, lawyers, or cost-benefit analysts--are in the best position to handle them for us. We must also accept the idea that we all want the same thing, namely, the satisfaction of as many preferences as possible, taking their intensity into account" (p. 48). Sagoff rejects such utilitarianism because it so easily allows the welfare state to function with little regard for anything but physiological/economic concerns. "We cannot permit welfare economics to replace the moral function of public law. The antinomianism of cost-benefit analysis is not enough" (p. 49). There is, in fact, an important difference between preferences and judgments. To reduce moral judgments to economic preferences renders one (whether as a person or as a society) incapable of making decisions in accord with what should be done, whether or not it gives me (or us) pleasure. Natural "resources" such as timber have too frequently been parceled out unwisely, satisfying certain persons' or corporations' desires but illustrating poor long-range judgment. Allowing the "bottom line" to dictate environmental policies, ignoring the fact that precious scenes or wildlife or pure water have worth and dignity which cannot be reduced to money, forces us to forego making genuinely moral judgments. Conversely, when environmentalists champion wilderness preservation, they argue for its "culnot;tural importance and symbolic meaning," articulating "a conviction and not a desire" (p. 94). Sagoff strongly emphasizes the importance of this distinction. Some things are clearly right, other things clearly wrong. He cites a New Yorker carnoot;toon which shows Satan welcoming entrants to hell with these words: "You'll find there's no 'right' or 'wrong' here, just what works for you" (p. 99). What we must recover, if we're to stop earth's destruction, is a clear consciousness of absolutes--some things are simply wrong! Beliefs, convicnot;tions, need neither be reduced to nor confused with subjective preferences. In a chapter entitled "nature and the national idea," Sagoff reflects upon the nation's history. The Pilgrims and Puritans, with few exceptions, saw the wilderness as a foe, something to be conquered. In the words of Michael Wigglesworth, creation was a "Devil's den": "A waste and howling wilderness / Where none inhabited // But hellish fiends and brutish men / That devils worshiped" (p. 125). Such comments prodded Perry Miller, the great historian, to say ""that the founders had no qualms about doing harm to nature by thrusting civilizanot;tion upon it." Indeed, ""They reasoned in terms of wealth, comfort, amenities, power, in terms which we may conveniently call, though they had not been derived from Bentham, "utilitarian"" (p. 126). Yet, alongside this utilitarian tradition has grown a quite different perspective, evident as early as Jonathan Edwards, who saw nature suffused with poetic symbols of God. Religious thinkers like Edwards, plus an assortment of literary figures, have espoused a "covenant" relationship with creation. In Sagoff's opinion: "The covenant we have made with nature, which is as much an obligation to use well our natural environment as to protect it--and, in any case, not to destroy it wantonly or in a wasteful manner--historically had religious rather than economic or even literary and artistic origins. Ever since Edwards in *The Nature of True Virtue*, published together with his *Dissertation* in 1755, defined true virtue as 'benevolence' or 'love for being in general' and distinguished it sharply from love or benevolence for the things that pernot;tain to oneself, including beauty, family, country and the like, we have been found to recognize that our virtue as a people depends to a large extent on our benevolence toward our natural environment" (p. 141). Could we but make central, rather than peripheral, the "love for being in general" Edwards espoused, we could establish a basis for environmental ethics and law. At the moment, given the state of American jurisprudence, where everyone's "rights" must be given an equal hearing if not absolute protection, where "rights" reflect personal preferences rather than perspicacious judgments or prudence, there's little hope for environmental policnot;ies which elicit widespread, lasting support. Though Sagoff writes clearly enough for non-philosophers and non-lawyers to follow his argument, *The Economy of the Earth* addresses more of a select, scholarly community than the public at large. The book is carefully argued, factually precise, full of references to

important court decisions as well as philosophical argument. Those of us interested in social and political thought, those of us concerned with public policy, will share one reviewer's judgment: "His book serves as an outstanding example of how applied philosophy should be done, and it should be compulsory reading for every economist working in the field of public policy" (The Times Higher Education Supplement). # # #2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The New and the Old SagoffBy Paul B. ThompsonPotential customers should note that The Economy of the Earth was released in an extensively revised second edition in 2008. When I checked the site in September, they were selling the first edition as a hardback and the second as paper. Both editions are worth reading. The first edition contains discussions of property rights and environmental politics dropped from the new edition, while the new edition includes discussions on ecosystem services, consumption and conservation science not included in the first.

Mark Sagoff draws on the last twenty years of debate over the foundations of environmentalism in this comprehensive revision of *The Economy of the Earth*. Posing questions pertinent to consumption, cost-benefit analysis, the normative implications of neo-Darwinism, the role of the natural in national history, and the centrality of the concept of place in environmental ethics, he analyses social policy in relation to the environment, pollution, the workplace, and public safety and health. Sagoff distinguishes ethical from economic questions and explains which kinds of concepts, arguments, and processes are appropriate to each. He offers a critique 'preference' and 'willingness to pay' as measures of value in environmental economics and defends political, cultural, aesthetic, and ethical reasons to protect the natural environment.

"The second edition incorporates the increasing engagement of mainstream and evangelical religious communities with environmental protection into his argument for a democratic environmentalism not constrained by either economics or science. Sagoff's carefully reasoned and wide ranging arguments will infuriate economists, ecologists and elite environmentalists equally, but the book is essential reading for anyone interested in the future of environmentalism." -Dan Tarlock, Chicago-Kent College of Law
"The Economy of the Earth presents a masterful synthesis of Mark Sagoff's seminal contributions to the theory of environmental policy analysis. Sagoff argues that good policy design requires accommodation between strongly held, incommensurable moral values. Yet the techniques of policy analysis rest on strong and sometimes naive ethical assumptions. Sagoff shows how careful philosophical reasoning can reform the practice of policy analysis to better serve the democratic process. This provocative book deserves a central place in the environmental studies literature." -Richard B. Howarth, Dartmouth College
"The first edition of *The Economy of the Earth* staked out a position that many felt but few had said: the most important reasons for protecting nature are moral and aesthetic, not economic and instrumental. In the second edition, massively revised and updated, Sagoff preaches the same sermon but even more clearly and eloquently. The second edition of *The Economy of the Earth* is as vital to debates about environmental policy as the first edition was in its time."-Dale Jamieson, Director of Environmental Studies, New York University
"The new editions of *The Economy of the Earth* does go much farther than anything else Sagoff has given us in the way of a positive statement of his environmental philosophy and of its links to other sources in the philosophical canon. It merits a careful reading by environmental philosophers..." Environmental Ethics, Paul B. Thompson, Michigan State University
From the Back Cover
This is a book about government social policy in relation to the environment, pollution, the workplace, and public safety and health. The question it poses are: How justified is government in interfering with the wishes of individuals?
About the Author
Mark Sagoff is Interim Director and Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, College Park. The author of *Price, Principle and the Environment* (2004), he has published widely in journals of law, philosophy, and the environment. Dr Sagoff was named a Pew Scholar in Conservation and the Environment in 1991 and was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in 1998. He is also a fellow of the Hastings Center and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.