

What is Water? An Ethical Perspective

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The Water Resources

- Sea Water
- Snow-bound
- Freshwater:
 - Blue Water:
 - Surface
 - Groundwater
 - Green Water
- Recycled
- **Question: To what do we refer?**

How Should Water be Considered?

- A Resource?
- A Commodity?
- A factor of production/ an input?
- A source of life?
- A need?
- A right?
- A variety of wet substances (waters)
- A set of metaphors/representations/meanings

Observation and Questions

- All the views of water are pertinent
- How can all of them be accommodated?
- Can the different conceptualizations of water be useful in practice?, and if so, how?

The Human-centric Approach1

- Water is essential for life
- The amounts needed for sustenance are miniscule
- These can be termed 'basic needs' and viewed as a basic right – a humanitarian right
- Practical implication – these amounts should be supplied to all at all times regardless of cost

The Human-Centric Approach²

- Humans are entitled to more than subsistence – to a ‘decent’ level of living
- Question – what is a ‘decent’ level of living?
- Options for answering the question:
 - Aggregative approach – enumerate activities and identify their water ‘requirements’
 - Comparative approach

On the Water Needed for a 'Decent' Level of Living

- Aggregation of activities and their water 'requirements'
- Difficult to agree on what these activities are or what the 'requirements' would be, particularly as these may vary across places as function of climate and culture
- By comparison – agree that the level as seen in place X is 'decent', and take that amount as a measuring rod

The Geneva Workshop Outcome

- Chenoweth undertook the comparative approach; his work was used as a basis
- Malta has the lowest domestic water use levels among developed countries, and is located in a semi-arid environment
- When including 'standard' water losses 60 M³/person/year can be considered as a normative domestic need

But narrow human-centric approach can be challenged

- Genesis 1 vs. Genesis 2
- Humans as stewards (Genesis 2; Anarchist conceptions)
- Humans as first among equals (bio-centric views)

The Rights of Nature for water

- Basic environmental needs – the minimal amounts needed to sustain ecosystems or species (prevent their immediate collapse)
- The amounts (and patterns) needed to maintain a healthy and viable ecosystem

The Unique Needs of Humans

- **Spiritual:**
 - Often symbolic
 - Usually miniscule in quantitative terms
 - Importance of location, degree of human interference
- **Social:**
 - The importance of community
 - Water is necessary in some cases for maintaining communities

The Social Needs

- The water needed to maintain social structures? (is this always desirable, or does this reinforce inequities?)
- The maintenance of a community? (yet communities adapted and changed throughout the ages – so isn't this fossilization?)
- Arguably – *the water needed to allow communities whose livelihoods are based on the primary sector, and who do not have an alternative source of livelihood, to continue to exist*

What about food?

- Food supplied in a global market
- ‘Virtual’ water flows balance out discrepancies between the distribution of people and the distribution of land and water resources needed for food production
- Today water for food is an input in market processes – in contrast to past

What about other uses of water

- 'Needs' vs 'Wants'
- 'Wants' = economic demand (function of willingness to pay)

What does the differentiation between need and want imply?

- Needs – normative
 - Supply regardless of cost
 - Subsidization
- Wants – market demand
 - Commodity
 - Full cost pricing (including social cost)

Are all the water sources equal?

- Free-flowing
- Diverted
- Pumped
- Recycled
- Desalinated

Conclusions

- Water should be differentiated – waters, but not back to historic views
- By degree of human intervention in supply
- Normative use (needs) vs market use (wants)
- By type of needs – there can and should be a prioritization of needs: basic human, normative domestic, spiritual, basic environmental, social, other environmental