Water is Life

Leonardo da Vinci wrote that "water is the driving force of all nature", an inescapable truth that pertains to modern day. A film of life-giving water covers 70% of the earth's surface and serves to moderate climate, cleanse pollutants, and sculpt the land. We ourselves are composed of almost 60% water, most within trillions of cells. This internal ocean and the vast expanse of water across the globe characterize Earth as "the blue planet". However, despite the abundance of this life-driving force, water continues to be one of our most poorly managed resources. Water waste and pollution have contributed to the current global health and environmental issues surrounding the degradation of this natural capital. Unless rigorous conservation and legislative attempts are made to counteract this impending crisis, life as we know it will continue to suffer.

As a global health issue, the lack of sanitary drinking water has been detrimental to countries all over the world. Each year at least two million people die from diseases contracted from unsafe water such as typhoid fever, hepatitis, and diarrhea. The poor availability of sanitary water is the world's single largest cause of preventable illness. In poverty-stricken countries such as Uganda and Sudan, Africans must spend four hours a day waiting in line for often-unsanitary water. Unable to afford to pay for water sanitation facilities, the destitute are condemned into a cycle of hydrological poverty.

In addition to the global health problems created by water pollution, there are also severe environmental consequences involved. The contamination of rivers, lakes, and freshwater streams choke the life out of our planet's natural habitats. Species both exotic and widespread disappear from Earth's living tapestry due to declining water quality. Toxic waste from lead and mercury and runoff of pesticides and oil slowly infect and kill the sea life that fish feed on.

The decline of fish populations negatively affects the predatory birds that feed on them, leaving an entire food web devastated. As they pass through the web, harmful chemicals such as DDT and mercury can become biologically magnified at the top of food chains—we as humans are inextricably linked to the well-being of our environment.

In order to counteract the impending global crisis of water waste and pollution, thorough attempts at conservation and legislation must be made. Simple water conservation at home can include fixing water leaks, using water-saving toilets, and taking shorter showers. Health scientists call for stronger enforcement of the U.S. Safe Drinking Water Act by banning all toxic lead in plumbing pipes and faucets. Also, a global effort to reduce poverty and increase access to purified drinking water is paramount in the struggle against waterborne illness. We have the tools and the resources to find the solutions to our common crisis. What is needed is the belief in the true significance of water as the "driving force of all nature"—only then will the world rise into action.