

“Water is Life” Essay

Water, seemingly a simple 3-atom molecule, forms the basis of our life. It is pervasive throughout nearly every aspect of our society, in a historical, social and economic context. Water represents the intersection of the mundane and the more exotic: it is what you drink, what you use to cook, what you wash your car with, but it is also what makes possible the Bellagio fountains, Raging Waters, and what gives fire hydrants a reason for existing. Access to water not only dictates patterns of human settlement, but is also often the cause of numerous conflicts, both recent and in the past. In Mesopotamia and even in the American Southwest, shortage of water is a pressing issue, often resulting in drawn out feuds. While water is an everyday fact of life, more ominously, it is also the harbinger of future conflict.

Questions about the convoluted range of issues involving access, quality and fair use of water require especial attention because of the extreme significance of water to human society as well as nature at large. Water is life and because it is life, it brings with it the good and the bad, the possibility of life and also the conflicts that stem from competition to survive. Water sees use in recreation, leisure and as a means of decoration, but what about its use in more pressing matters: pure drinking water or water for irrigation? Will these crucial functions of water take precedence over recreational use when the supply of water is restricted? Why does wealth play a role in dictating the distribution of water? The answers to these questions may seem obvious, but when viewed on an international scale, we see that access to water is fundamentally unequal. While people in underdeveloped countries walk miles for clean drinking water, those in wealthier countries build swimming pools in the desert or enjoy water parks in the summer. While water’s importance is undeniable, ironically, its importance is the main contributing factor leading to conflicts over its access.

When water is plentiful, its access and available is a non-issue, but when shortages of water occur (as is happening currently and projected to continue into the future), individuals and, by extension, societies are confronted with the moral dilemma of whose satisfaction to value more. An extreme example: allow a child with a terminal disease to fulfill a lifelong dream of going to the water park, or allow a family dying of thirst in a drought-ridden country to survive for one more week? While this problem does not have a definitive answer, all too often, questions involving the availability of water are colored by self-serving tendencies. It is crucial that these dilemmas are dealt with in a non-partisan manner. Conflicts over access to water should not be resolved with the threat of weapons and violence, but rather with a respect for human dignity that is crucial to a permanent and equitable solution.

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