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Water and ethics: A values approach solving the water crisis. Routledge.
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BOOK REVIEW

Groenfeldt, D. 2013. Water and ethics: A values approach solving the water crisis. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-62644-6 (Hardback), 978-0-415-62645-3 (Paperback). 216 pp. £24.99

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THE CHALLENGE

Water was associated with the 'just' community as long ago as Plato's inclusion of it in several passages of *The Laws*. Concern for fairness, and not just productivity, has been embodied in laws governing water distribution in countries around the world since ancient times (Ingram et al., 1983). Unfortunately, the rise of the modern paradigm of 'pushing water around' in the 20th century (Conca, 2006) submerged ethical questions in a flood of optimism that good engineering could float all boats and that difficult value trade-offs could be avoided by good management practices. An international network of water professionals emerged, first to spread the gospel of dams and diversions, and later to address the unanticipated consequences of development. Today, a much more diverse and enlightened global water professional network embraces integrated water resources planning and management. While values more varied than economic progress, including the environment, and women's and indigenous people's rights, are acknowledged, the same 'conspiracy of optimism' (see Hirt, 1994 for application to Forestry) prevails. The 'Nirvana' illusions continue to dazzle, and to displace fundamental rethinking. As Molle (2008) explains in the first issue of this journal, "[such illusions] represent a vision of a 'horizon' that individuals and societies should strive to reach. Although, just as with nirvana, the likelihood that we may reach them is admittedly low, the mere possibility of achieving them and the sense of 'progress' attached to any shift in their direction suffice to make them an attractive and useful focal point" (p. 132).

Ethics can be powerful correctives to magical thinking in that it disciplines reasoning to address hard choices: How should the interest of future generations be weighed against those of the present? How can and should the interests of the non-human be taken into account? To what extent should prior wrongs be redressed, and by whom? How can people and communities be compensated for water-related injuries and losses without generating additional animosities? How can empathy be fostered in water decisions, and how might disadvantaged water-dependent communities be empowered? (see Feldman and Whitman, 2010.)

The challenge of this book review is to address how well David Groenfeldt's book handles these and other questions, and more importantly, how well it frames ethical reasoning to stand up against prevailing technical, economic and political approaches. First, however, it is important to set out what the author intended to do and how he accomplished his task.

THE BOOK

David Groenfeldt's intent is to provide the reader with descriptive ethics probing how values play out in different contexts. He writes in Chapter 1, "[e]very decision about water reflects values and sets of values (ethics) about the relative importance of different water uses, impacts and outcomes. Making an effort to understand what tacit values we are bringing to our water decisions (e.g. whether to build the dam) will help us make better decisions because we will understand our motivations more clearly" (p. 4). He writes, "[w]ater ethicists can take a cue from the role of investigative journalists, who uncover motives, but are expected to produce an objective report. Simply by exposing ethical inconsistencies (e.g. between economic and environmental values), the water ethicist can provide a valuable service without sounding overly moralistic" (p. 48). His aim, he says is not to add something new to conceptual development, but instead to prioritise ethical analysis as a crucial step in the water management process.

The domains of ethics or values (he makes no distinction) that the author chooses to explore begin with what he terms the most obvious domain, economic, to which he adds social, cultural and environmental ethics. Along with these four ethical domains, four categories of water management (ecosystems, water use, governance arrangements and indigenous water management) provide what the author describes as "the conceptual framework of this book". The layout of chapters of the book follows management contexts including manipulating rivers, water for agriculture, urban and domestic water use, water for industry, water governance, and indigenous water ethics. The last two chapters of the book are entitled 'toward a new water ethic', and 'conclusions'.

Throughout the book can be found small gems of information, examples, or ideas coming from disparate places that describe how ethical issues are being addressed, such as flood control in New Mexico, and village water institutions in Pakistan. Much of the best information is displayed in boxes. For instance, the box on multifunctional agricultural water in Asia describes how paddy agriculture from Bangladesh to Japan provides a wide range of values including social, cultural, spiritual and psychological benefits. Gathering in one place a variety of water-ethics-related concepts, such as the water footprint, environmental flows, human rights to water, agroecology, ecological services, and the treatment of water in the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous Peoples is helpful. The book includes information about on the ground actions, such as the Water Ethics Network, launched in 2011. Like any book that tries to cover a lot of territory, however, things are missing that one might expect. The very unequal distribution of water-related benefits and burdens from energy development, particularly oil sands extraction, does not get attention, nor does the highly contentious pattern of rural to urban water transfers that reflect very unequal economic and political power among the parties.

David Groenfeldt explicitly endorses the dominant perspectives embraced by the global professional water network including Integrated Water Resources Management, the Global Water Partnership and the Dublin Principles. The book does not take issue with the definition of water embedded in this perspective that water is an economic good that should be distributed and used with maximum possible efficiency even though that value is often inconsistent with other principles of equity and sustainability. Water is nowhere discussed as a public or common good. The book optimistically portrays a global water ethic as emerging, and does not sceptically question what it means to simply add on another set of values to an already large, unwieldy and unbalanced load of values that water is supposed to serve.

THE CRITIQUE

The literature on water equity and ethics is too thin. The excellent book on water and environmental ethics published by David Feldman (1991) over two decades ago was not followed by an outpouring of substantial conceptual and theoretical books dedicated to examining social equity and fairness to

indigenous peoples. Instead, there have been numbers of initiatives by international organisations, case studies and edited collections and other helpful contributions such as this book that keep the issue on the scholarly agenda. Therefore, this is a welcome addition to a literature that needs to grow, and it is clearly worth reading.

The crucial flaw of the book lies in the overbroad and descriptive framework adopted by the book that led the author to discuss, sometimes redundantly, domains of water management and domains of values/ethics. Had the author narrowed the focus to social, and indigenous people's equity, and organised the book around rules and principles, those who wish an ethical approach to stand up better in face of more developed economic, environmental and political approaches would have more ammunition. If Groenfeldt had considered how institutions and practices either preclude or pre-empt encompassing and actually addressing or treating equity, there would be a clearer path for change. Above all, what is really lacking is a picture of what a just system of water governance might look like.

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