Water Ethics Working Group Proposal

15 July 2016

Describe how the group would be transdisciplinary, and international (250 words)

The Water Ethics Working group comprises of a wide range of experts in different water-related fields spanning 10 countries of North America (Mexico, US, and Canada), Europe (Germany , e   and Netherlands), Asia (India, China and Japan), Africa (Nigeria) and Australia. Experts in this group have many years of research and engagement with the ethics around water-related issues, ranging from the human right to water, sustainable water management, and social and environmental justice agendas. The members of the Water Ethics Working Group come from a variety of disciplines including geography, philosophy, law, geosciences, engineering, chemical engineering, anthropology, history, and health. Of our 19 members, one is a PhD student, 14 have full-time university or research appointments, and 4 are with NGOs or think tanks. The gender break-down is 8 women and 11 men. There is one Indigenous member (Dr. Darlene Sanderson).

Since both water and ethics are connected to so many disciplines and themeswe would like to expand the Working Group to include the creative arts (e.g., literature and land/water art), psychology, and urban design, as well as stronger Indigenous representation. Geographically, we are missing South America, and have only one African member. However, the already established Water Ethics Network (waterethics.org) has very broad geographic coverage, and links to civil society, government agencies, and the business community, so there is an existing channel for connecting the Working Group to a broader set of water ethics stakeholders.

Short summary of research activity (250 words)

Our research activities will focus on the establishment of theoretical and conceptual foundations of water ethics, relevant methodologies, and policy and practice relevant outputs (policy briefs, white papers). As a comparatively young field which is not yet well defined, there is much to do. Key research activities we anticipate addressing are the following:

- Developing a conceptual framework for water ethics
- Documenting current ethical norms within water use sectors (e.g., agriculture, urban supply, etc), or ethics categories (discussed below).
- Advising the ongoing development of a global water ethics charter;
- Documenting and evaluating methodologies for analyzing or applying water ethics;
- Developing an "ethics-based decision support tool" for water policies or investments;
- Assessing the relevance of new lines of research to water ethics (e.g., Science and Technology Studies);
- Outreach and capacity-building through reports, social media, blogs, and webinars and expanding the target audience to include civil society organizations, and businesses, among others.

Short description of research activity including scientific rationale, key questions and expected output (1000 words)

The purpose of the Working Group on Water Ethics will be to explore, define, and establish the field of "water ethics" as a body of theory, a research agenda, and methods and strategies for implementation. How can water ethics enhance the effectiveness of water governance? At what levels (local government, watershed, river basin, national, transboundary, sectoral, etc.), and through what institutions, can water ethics best be applied? Our larger purpose is to harness the analytical insights and social energy of ethics in guiding water policies toward outcomes that are sustainable, resilient and fair.

Key Questions and Topics:

1. What constitutes the field of water ethics? Our premise is that there is not a single core (e.g., the subfield of Environmental Ethics) but rather multiple traditions, clusters, and categories. As an initial analytical framework, we will use the five categories of water ethics, viz., environmental, economic, social, cultural, and governance, articulated in the v.2.0 draft of the Water Ethics Charter (http://waterethics.org/the-water-ethics-charter/), along with major water use categories , viz., ecosystem services, agriculture, urban/domestic, energy, and extractive/industrial. By exploring these dimensions, plus associated "ethical value chains" (e.g., agricultural water ethics is tied to the ethics of the agricultural system which agricultural water use makes possible), and interactions among value categories (e.g., agriculture provides social and cultural values as well as economic values), we will map the conceptual terrain of water ethics.
EXPECTED OUTPUTS - White Paper: "A Conceptual Framework for Water Ethics"

2. What norms *are* being applied (descriptive), *could* be applied (propositional) or *should* be applied (normative) to this ethical terrain? Ethics are intertwined in water policies and practices, both explicitly and (more often) tacitly. Our research will document the range of water ethics currently operating in various industries, societies, and use-sectors, and identify contradictions and synergies. We will also promote discussion and debate about new possibilities and normative prescriptions.
EXPECTED OUTPUTS - Report series: "Case Studies on Water Ethics". Each case study would follow a specified format, and would focus specifically on a use sector (e.g., agriculture, mining, urban water supply, etc.) or ethics category (e.g., environmental, social, economic, cultural, governance).

3. Developing a Global Water Ethics Charter. The ongoing development of a universal water ethics charter (http://waterethics.org/the-water-ethics-charter/) provides an opportunity for applied studies to contribute to the initiative. The Working Group could serve as a de facto advisory committee to the Initiative, and could undertake specific research to advise on the content, development process, or outreach and implementation strategy. Governance of the Water Ethics Charter Initiative, however, would remain in the hands of the already established Steering Committee. The role of the Water Ethics Working Group would be limited to advisory services.
EXPECTED OUTPUTS - The Working Group could elect to issue formal guidance in the name of the group, or individual Working Group members could submit comments individually.

4. What methods, approaches, or tools can be used to analyze water ethics and/or to foster ethical reflection and imagination in the process of water decision-making? What are the methodological best practices that have been used for analyzing individual and societal values related to water? What is known and not known about influencing public opinion about water use, access, and governance? What has been the experience with codes and charters in shaping public opinion and influencing water behavior?
EXPECTED OUTPUTS - Report Series: "Water Ethics Methodology Briefs", short reports outlining promising methodologies for analyzing or applying water ethics. The Briefs would follow a common format.

5. How can ethics become routinized into water-related decision making processes? Can we develop an Ethics-Based Decision Support Tool that can serve as an operational checklist to identify ethical issues and trigger more in-depth evaluation? [Water-Culture Institute and University of Arizona are actively working on this issue; see World Water Day media release: http://tinyurl.com/EBDST-media-release].
EXPECTED OUTPUTS - White Paper, "An Ethics-Based Decision Support Tool for the Water Sector". [A short version could also appear as a Water Ethics Methodology Brief, as discussed in Item #4, above.]

6. Broadening disciplinary contributions to water ethics: From environmental history to psychology, communications, science and technology studies, as well as literature and the creative arts, there is a wealth of knowledge that can be applied to enhancing both basic understanding and operational practice of water ethics. Our proposed working group is already strong in water history (e.g., Matsui, Zheng, Meine, and Schmidt). We anticipate linking to psychology and the arts as the Working Group evolves.
EXPECTED OUTPUTS: (a) Working Group members will be invited to contribute short (2-3 pages) reports on their particular discipline's connection to water ethics; and (b) Where a discipline or theme shows promise but is not represented within the Working Group (e.g., the topic of community art projects to influence water ethics) we will seek to commission short reports as part of the "Water Ethics Methodology Briefs" series (See Item #4, above).

Other expected activities/outputs include the following:

- Initial Workshop for the Group (in conjunction with a major international water conference, or as a stand-alone activity). As a newly formed group, it will be important to hold an initial in-person meeting to meet each other, set priorities, develop a work plan, and develop a financing plan.

- Outreach and Internet Presence: Since there is an existing website and social media (Twitter and Facebook) through the Water Ethics Network (waterethics.org), the WaterFuture working group could build on those resources and link to WaterFuture, or develop a WaterFuture web presence, and link to the Water Ethics Network. A regular blog will provide an opportunity to highlight the diversity of approaches to water ethics (weekly or bi-weekly posts).

- Webinars: Two types are anticipated: (1) Water Ethics 101 (basic issues and examples to present the concept) and (2) Briefings accompanying each report of White Paper produced by our group. Both types of webinars would be marketed broadly,

with particular emphasis on Civil Society Organizations which lie outside the normal orbit of water-related email list-serves.

How does the Working Group theme fit with the priorities of Sustainable Water Futures?

Water ethics provides a systematic approach to ensuring that the human values of freshwater systems are being addressed. Ethical decisions about water are both desirable and necessary. Imagine a water future that is NOT guided by ethics, and it is easier to see its importance. Without ethics, what is to prevent water injustice? Laws, of course, help, but only if they are based on proper ethical concepts. Ethics is so fundamental to water governance that it is easy to overlook. Future water decisions will be increasingly critical to get right, and ethics provides a framework for defining desirable norms and reflecting on the complex implications of possible behaviors.

Ethics can also drive innovation and creative solutions by establishing design parameters. Safeguarding riparian ecological function is critical for water security, but water is also needed for irrigation. Rather than viewing this as a trade-off, ethics highlights the importance of both irrigation and riparian function, motivating a search for solutions that can meet both needs. Nexus dilemmas become design challenges for solutions that can serve multiple functions. Ethics does not solve the problem but clarifies priorities to suggest where to look for solutions.