



The Trouble with Technology: Ethics and the Problem of Techno-Optimism to Achieve Water Justice

Stephen Gasteyer

The challenge of access to safe, sufficient, affordable water without discrimination too often is transformed into a discussion of technological solutions for water delivery, treatment (of water itself or the inputs that render water unsafe), or occasionally accounting and renumeration. An ethical approach to addressing water management and access, however, requires the consideration of issues that go beyond technical feasibility and application of technologies. Indeed, as water governance scholar David Groenfeldt (2021: 105) has asserted, they must make “existing norms of water governance more explicit and identify value gaps and synergies.” Social power is embedded in access and use of water, and decisions about participation and values must become central to ethically grounded initiatives to address global water challenges. This flash talk uses case studies of water disputes in marginalized US communities and Israel/Palestine to demonstrate how approaches to addressing water crises without considerations of governance principles that include remediation of power imbalances, as well as the principles of nondiscrimination, access to information, participation, and accountability, could, in fact, exacerbate water inequality and water injustice. Consideration of water ethics requires that technological solutions to water problems be embedded in processes of social inclusion and justice.