

## PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WATER GOVERNANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN INDONESIA

### FUNDAMENTOS FILOSÓFICOS DA GOVERNANÇA DA ÁGUA E DA JUSTIÇA AMBIENTAL NA INDONÉSIA

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#### Abstract

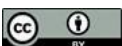
Water resource management in Indonesia has deep philosophical significance, closely related to constitutional mandates, social justice, and ecological and humanitarian responsibilities. This study examines how the values of Pancasila and John Rawls' principles of justice provide a basis for balancing water management as a shared resource and a fundamental right that must be protected. Using a qualitative approach and analyzing philosophical and ethical concepts, this research reveals the ongoing inequality in access to water, the threat of commodification through privatization, and the urgency of adopting environmental ethics that value water as a moral entity with intrinsic value. Integrated approaches such as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and green infrastructure emerge as a middle ground capable of uniting social justice, ecological sustainability, and community rights. This study emphasizes that equitable water management requires a legal and policy framework that is not only technical but also strong in ethical values, community participation, and respect for human rights and environmental sustainability, for the welfare of present and future generations.

**Keywords:** Water Governance, Justice Theory, Human Right to Water, Ecological Ethics.

#### Resumo

*A gestão dos recursos hídricos na Indonésia tem um profundo significado filosófico, intimamente relacionado a mandatos constitucionais, justiça social e responsabilidades ecológicas e humanitárias. Este estudo examina como os valores da Pancasila e os princípios de justiça de John Rawls fornecem uma base para equilibrar a gestão da água como um recurso compartilhado e um direito fundamental que deve ser protegido. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa e analisando conceitos filosóficos e éticos, esta pesquisa revela a desigualdade persistente no acesso à água, a ameaça de mercantilização por meio da privatização e a urgência de adotar uma ética ambiental que valorize a água como uma entidade moral com valor intrínseco. Abordagens integradas, como a Gestão Integrada dos Recursos Hídricos (IWRM) e a infraestrutura verde, emergem como um meio-termo capaz de unir justiça social, sustentabilidade ecológica e direitos comunitários. Este estudo enfatiza que a gestão equitativa da água requer um marco jurídico e político que não seja apenas técnico, mas também sólido em valores éticos, participação comunitária e respeito pelos direitos humanos e pela sustentabilidade ambiental, para o bem-estar das gerações presentes e futuras.*

**Palavras-chave:** Governança da Água. Teoria da Justiça. Direito Humano à Água. Ética Ecológica.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Water resource management in Indonesia has a philosophical dimension that is closely related to the mandate of the constitution and the principle of social justice. Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution states that the earth, water, and natural resources contained therein are controlled by the state and used as much as possible for the prosperity of the people. This principle is in line with the values of Pancasila, which emphasizes justice and mutual prosperity, so that water management is not merely of economic value, but must also take into account ethical, justice, and sustainability aspects (Rideng *et al.*, 2022).

However, the reality of water management in Indonesia shows tension between nationalist ideology and economic liberalization. Several policies, such as Law No. 7 of 2004 on Water Resources, have sparked controversy because they are considered to open up opportunities for privatization and ignore the basic rights of the community to water. This conflict reflects a philosophical dilemma between viewing water as a common good that must be managed by the state versus an economic commodity that can be managed by the private sector (Agus Susilo *et al.*, 2016).

In addition to ideological issues, ecological and social challenges reinforce the urgency of philosophical reflection in water management. Population growth, urbanization, deforestation, and degradation of water catchment areas have led to increasingly limited water availability, especially on the island of Java, which is home to more than 60% of Indonesia's population. This imbalance in distribution has ethical implications regarding equitable access to vital resources, which should be the right of all citizens (Kasim & Anindyajati, 2023).

From a sustainability perspective, the philosophy of water management requires integration between ecological, social, and economic approaches. Strategies such as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the use of green infrastructure are seen as efforts to harmonize development needs and ecosystem sustainability. This approach is not only technical in nature, but also reflects the ethical value that humans have a moral responsibility to maintain the balance of nature for future generations (Sutrisno & Pasandaran, 2012).

Furthermore, water management from a philosophical perspective requires recognition of human rights. Water is a fundamental need inherent to human dignity, so any policy that reduces people's access to water can be seen as a violation of human rights. Therefore, water resource management in Indonesia must be framed not only by technical regulations, but also by a philosophical framework that affirms water as a public right, a means of social justice, and part of global sustainability ethics (Akbar Bayhaqy *et al.*, 2023).

Based on the background described above, the problem in this study can be formulated as follows: How can John Rawls' theory of justice be used to assess the distribution of and access to water resources in society?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Pancasila, particularly the fifth principle of social justice, forms the philosophical basis for water resource management in Indonesia. This concept emphasizes that water, as a source of life, must be managed for the common good, not just for the benefit of individuals or corporations. This is in line with the principle of the common good, whereby vital resources must be managed by the state for the welfare of the people (Wijaya *et al.*, 2025).

The implementation of the fifth principle in water resource management is that every citizen has the same right to access clean water and proper sanitation (Astriani *et al.*, 2020). The state has an obligation to ensure the availability of sufficient, affordable, and quality water for the entire community, especially vulnerable and poor groups. This can be achieved through water subsidy policies for the poor, investment in clean water infrastructure, and sustainable and equitable water resource management (Astriani, 2018). In addition, there needs to be strict supervision of the use of water resources by the private sector so as not to harm the interests of the wider community (Santosa & Quina, 2020).

However, the reality on the ground often shows a gap between the idealism of Pancasila and the practice of water resource management. Water privatization, environmental pollution, and land conversion pose serious threats to water availability and quality (Winarno, 2020). Conflicts of interest between industry, agriculture, and

domestic needs also often trigger tension and injustice (Arinto Nurcahyono, Husni Syam, 2015) . Therefore, it is necessary to internalize the values of Pancasila in every aspect of water resource management, from planning and implementation to supervision (Winarno, 2020) . This requires a strong commitment from the government, active community participation, and strict law enforcement against violators (Githua, 2021) .

To achieve social justice in water resource management, Indonesia needs to develop a participatory, transparent, and accountable water governance model (Winarno, 2020) . Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) can be an effective approach to achieve these goals (Githua, 2021) . IWRM emphasizes the importance of integrating social, economic, and environmental aspects in water resource management, as well as involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process (Dawwas & Azzahra, 2023) . In addition, local wisdom and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples also need to be recognized and integrated into water resource management (Arsyad, 2023) . Thus, water resource management can be carried out in a sustainable, equitable manner and in harmony with the values of Pancasila (Iskandar, 2014) .

Rawls' theory of justice, particularly the difference principle, can be used to assess whether the distribution of water resources in Indonesia is fair. This principle states that inequality can only be justified if it benefits the weakest groups. In the context of water, distribution and policy must ensure that poor and vulnerable groups continue to have adequate access to clean water (John Rawls, 1999) .

From an environmental philosophy perspective, humans have a moral responsibility to maintain the sustainability of water ecosystems. The concept of deep ecology emphasizes that water not only has instrumental value for humans but also intrinsic value for the sustainability of life in nature. Therefore, damage to river basins or water pollution can be seen as a form of ethical violation against nature (Widdatallah & Abdallah, 2025) .

Water is considered a fundamental human right. From a human rights perspective, access to clean water is not only a biological necessity but also part of human dignity. This theory emphasizes that the state has a positive obligation to ensure the availability, affordability, and quality of water for all citizens. Any form of privatization that restricts access to water can be seen as a violation of constitutional rights (Hamel, 2021) .

The philosophy of sustainability emphasizes the principle of intergenerational justice. This means that water management should not only be oriented towards current needs, but must also consider the rights of future generations. Within this framework, the concept and approach of green infrastructure becomes a philosophical and practical strategy for maintaining a balance between development and nature conservation (Rideng *et al.*, 2022).

### **3 METHOD**

This paper uses a qualitative research approach with descriptive analysis methods. Descriptive analysis is used to describe and interpret various philosophical, ideological, and ethical concepts related to water resource management in Indonesia.

The data used in this study was sourced from: Literature Study: In-depth search and analysis of various relevant literature, including: Legislation (e.g., 1945 Constitution, Law No. 7 of 2004, Law No. 17 of 2019 concerning Water Resources. Philosophical works, scientific journals, books, and research reports related to water resource management. Concept Analysis: Identifying and analyzing key concepts such as social justice, common good, human rights, sustainability, and Integrated Water Resources Management. Interpretive Approach: Interpreting data and information obtained from literature studies and concept analysis to understand the philosophical and ethical implications in water resource management.

### **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Water as an ethical and moral entity**

In the context of contemporary environmental philosophy, water is not only understood as a natural resource, but as a moral entity that has intrinsic value. This perspective is in line with the ideas of ecofeminism and ecocentrism, which reject the anthropocentric view. According to Sitorus, the relationship between humans and water must be based on respect and ecological responsibility, not merely a relationship of exploitation (Fried, 2008) . Thus, water management policies that emphasize

commercialization without considering moral values violate the principle of ecological justice.

Furthermore, ecosentrisme, as developed by Arne Naess, emphasizes that water as part of the ecosystem has the right to exist independently, without always having to be measured based on its benefits to humans (Rohman *et al.*, 2024) . This approach encourages humans to see themselves as part of an interconnected web of life, where the exploitation of water for purely economic interests can disrupt the global ecological balance. Naess argues that recognizing the intrinsic value of water will promote a more holistic environmental ethic, avoiding the reduction of water to a mere commodity.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Karen Warren describes water as an entity that is vulnerable to patriarchy and capitalism, which often ignore humans' emotional and spiritual connection with nature. Warren highlights how anthropocentric views reinforce the exploitation of water, especially in marginalized communities, and urges that water management be based on principles of gender and ecological justice (Mulyana, 2023) . This means that water policies must consider their impact on the most affected groups, such as women and indigenous peoples, in order to achieve a more equitable harmony.

David Schlosberg, in his work on ecological justice, asserts that water is not a neutral entity, but rather a subject that has moral claims on humans. Schlosberg argues that the commercialization of water, as occurs in the privatization of resources, often exacerbates social and environmental inequality (de Souza *et al.*, 2025) . He advocates for an inclusive water management model, where the intrinsic value of water is respected through the participation of local communities, thereby preventing violations of ecological and social rights.

Aldo Leopold, in "A Sand County Almanac," teaches that water has intrinsic value as part of a broader "land community," in which humans are merely ordinary members, not rulers. Leopold emphasizes a "land ethic" that requires humans to treat water with respect, avoiding actions that damage ecosystems (Sonny Keraf, 2007) . This approach is relevant to modern water policy, where over-exploitation can lead to environmental degradation, and Leopold encourages a moral responsibility to preserve water for future generations.

Finally, Val Plumwood expands on this idea by criticizing the human-nature dualism that underlies anthropocentrism, suggesting that water should be seen as an entity

that is interdependent with humans. Plumwood argues that recognizing the intrinsic value of water will transform exploitative relationships into respectful ones, which is essential for overcoming the global water crisis (Rahmawati A., 2023) . In this context, ethical water management policies must integrate spiritual and ecological aspects, not just economic ones, to ensure long-term sustainability.

An in-depth view of water as a moral entity in environmental philosophy, emphasizing its intrinsic value and rejecting anthropocentric views. To expand on this discussion, I will add a critical analysis that integrates additional perspectives from leading environmental philosophers, empirical examples of the global water crisis, and policy implications. This discussion aims to strengthen the argument that ethical water management must go beyond commercialization, focusing on ecological justice, community participation, and long-term sustainability.

Callicott, in his work on environmental ethics, expands Aldo Leopold's concept of "land ethic" by emphasizing that water is not only part of the "land community" but also a subject in an interdependent web of life (Callicott, 1989) .

This means that the exploitation of water for economic interests, such as in the mining industry or intensive agriculture, not only violates the intrinsic value of water but also threatens the integrity of the ecosystem as a whole. For example, the case of the drying up of Lake Aral in Central Asia due to large-scale irrigation projects shows how an anthropocentric view can cause irreversible environmental degradation, affecting millions of people and species (Micklin, 2007) . Callicott advocates a holistic approach in which humans act as "ordinary members" of the ecological community, promoting policies that prioritize water conservation through international regulation and ethical education.

This is in line with Warren's argument that the dominance of patriarchy and capitalism ignores humans' emotional relationship with water, especially for women who are responsible for managing household water in many cultures (Warren, 1997) .

Plumwood argues that recognizing the intrinsic value of water can transform exploitative relationships into respectful ones, which is relevant for addressing global water crises such as industrial waste pollution of rivers in India or drought in Sub-Saharan Africa (Plumwood, 2002) .

In this context, ethical policies must integrate spiritual aspects, such as water rituals in indigenous cultures, to build intergenerational moral responsibility. Sonny Keraf, quoting Leopold, adds that this "land ethic" can be applied in national legislation, such as Indonesia's Water Resources Management Law, which must be reinforced with sanctions against excessive exploitation (Keraf, 2007) .

The 2022 IPCC report emphasizes that climate change is exacerbating the global water crisis, with increased frequency of droughts and floods threatening the intrinsic value of water as an ecological entity (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022) . This reinforces Naess's ecosentrist argument, whereby the exploitation of water for fossil fuels or intensive agriculture contributes to climate instability, necessitating a transition to a management model that respects water's right to exist independently.

Additionally, an article by Johnson *et al.* titled " in Environmental Ethics analyzes how Warren's ecofeminist perspective can be applied to post-COVID-19 water policy, where the pandemic has exposed inequalities in access to water in marginalized communities, encouraging women's participation in decision-making for gender and ecological justice. This study shows that recognizing the intrinsic value of water is not only ethical but also practical, reducing the risk of social conflict such as that occurring in the Middle East due to competition over water resources (Johnson *et al.*, 2023) .

Water as a moral entity requires a multidimensional approach: ecological, social, and spiritual. The exploitation of water for commercialization, such as in the bottled beverage industry or hydroelectric power, often disregards its intrinsic value and exacerbates inequality, as seen in the UN report on the water crisis (Nations, 2023) . By adopting the perspectives of ecosentrisme and ecofeminism, water management policies can promote ecological justice, ensuring that water is not reduced to a commodity but respected as a partner in the web of life.

John Rawls' description of justice is considered the most comprehensive theory of justice to date. (Darmodiharjo, 1995) Rawls' theory of justice itself can be said to have originated from utilitarianism. John Rawls' theory of justice was greatly influenced by the thinking of Jeremy Bentham, JS Mill, and Hume, who are known as the founders of utilitarianism. Furthermore, Rawls proposed a fair way to unite various different interests through a balance of interests without giving special attention to any particular interest.

This theory is often referred to as "*Justice as Fairness*." Rawls then formulated a specific conception of justice into two principles of social justice. 1. *The greatest equality principle*, that everyone should have equal rights to the most extensive basic freedoms, as extensive as the same freedoms for everyone. This is the most fundamental (basic) right that everyone must have. This means that only with the guarantee of equal freedom for all people can justice be realized. 2. *The principle of inequality*, which states that situations of (socioeconomic) difference must be regulated in such a way as to be most beneficial to the weakest members of society (those with the least opportunity to achieve welfare, income, and authority).

This second principle is actually a combination of two principles, namely *the principle of difference* and *the principle of fair equality of opportunity*. (Darmodiharjo, 1995) The essence of *the first principle* is that everyone has the same right to the widest possible basic freedoms, as wide as the same freedoms for everyone. Meanwhile, *the second principle* is that social and economic inequality must be regulated in such a way that (a) it can be expected to benefit everyone, and (b) all positions and jobs are open to everyone. (Darmodiharjo, 1995) John Rawls then refers to *justice as fairness*, which is characterized by the principles of rationality, freedom, and justice.

Therefore, principles of justice that prioritize the principle of rights over the principle of benefits are needed. Rawls further explains that in human cooperation, the only acceptable principle is the principle that accepts inequality only if it is for the benefit of those who are least fortunate. Rawls writes:

*"There is no injustice in the greater benefits earned by a few provided that the situation of persons not so endowed is thereby improved"* (, The Liang Gie, 1979).

Furthermore, after the two principles of justice have been established, all that remains is their application in practice through the formulation of social institutions. According to John Rawls' theory of justice, the task of social and political institutions is to maintain and improve individual freedom and welfare. (Pranata, 2023) Thus, this theory of justice is very relevant for analyzing and answering how the principles of social functions in the field of water resources should be regulated in order to realize equitable community welfare. This is because the essence of the community's rights in the

utilization of natural resources, especially water resources, is the existence of fair treatment in utilizing and managing water resources wisely and sustainably for the benefit of the wider community and future generations. Therefore, in the management of natural resources, all groups and members of the community have equal access to participate in determining policies and enjoying the benefits of natural resources.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Water is not merely a natural resource that can be exploited for economic gain, but rather an entity that has moral and ethical value that must be respected. Various perspectives of environmental philosophy, such as ecocentrism, ecofeminism, and environmental ethics, demand that water be managed with respect, ecological justice, and community involvement, especially vulnerable groups. In addition, John Rawls' theory of justice, which emphasizes fair treatment and favoritism towards the weakest, is highly relevant in realizing sustainable and equitable water resource management.

Thus, water management must integrate ecological, social, and spiritual values, steering clear of harmful commercialization and inequality. Water must be treated as a source of life that deserves respect, so that its existence and benefits can be enjoyed together, not only by the current generation but also by future generations. It is this wise and equitable management that will bring harmony between humans and nature, as well as true social justice.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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