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Hydrology and Earth System Sciences
Discussions

Interactive comment on "Reconstructing the duty of water: a study of emergent norms in socio-hydrology" *by* J. L. Wescoat Jr.

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What a pleasure it was to read this excellent paper! It's a veritable tour de force, both in its breadth of scope and its admirable economy of words.

The author, James Wescoat, begins with a personal touch, recounting his experience years ago at a doctoral qualifying exam and draws from that episode to answer a series of significant questions he now realizes he ignored at his exam. The resulting essay is a lucid and historically profound inquiry into the concept of "duty of water," a term that is not often encountered in the modern literature on water.

Prof. Wescoat draws on his extensive knowledge of two disparate water-short and heavily irrigated regions, the South Asian subcontinent and the western United States.

Recounting the origins of steam-engine use in England and citing masterfully from histories of pre-British–in fact, pre-Mughal–India and from primary-source technical documents by 19th century British engineers and colonial officials, he reconstructs the rationale for and prevailing techniques to achieve efficient modes of irrigation.

Wescoat goes on to create a similar depiction of the evolution of the duties-of-water concept in 19th and early 20th century western North America.

But not content with a pair of illustrative narratives–useful as they may be–Wescoat tackles the deeper questions he terms "values" and "justifications." What he is really after, he maintains, is a means to "re-balance the duties of water in socio-hydrologic systems." To this end, he acknowledges a host of ethical considerations, including responsibilities to non-human environmental entities. This pursuit provides a much-needed counterbalance to commonly prevailing modes of analysis that emphasize economic valuation and quantifiable efficiency.

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