Water Valuation and Weaponization

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The article discovers the multiple values of water as a key element of the Biosphere and a vital natural resource that sustains the equilibrium of the global ecosystem and human well-being. Different approaches to classifying and justifying values and various interpretations of the concepts of intrinsic, instrumental, and relational values in the context of the valuation of water are considered. Values are important for the efficient sustaining, management, and protection of water and water-related ecosystems globally and locally, and just access to water resources. Understanding the role of values and their respect or neglect is crucial in times of crisis, wars, and other conflicts that affect water. By accepting the consensus about three main classes of values (intrinsic, instrumental, and relational), water weaponization, and referring to some facts of the current Russo-Ukrainian war, it is shown that military actions exacerbate most of the challenges to environmental sustainability and human life. War also aggravates the conflict between water values. Water weaponization is considered one of the forms of instrumentalization of water that has multifaceted negative impacts on the environment, human rights to water, and human welfare. It is concluded that the way to reduce the negative environmental, economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural consequences of the weaponization of water is to stop the Russian aggression in Ukraine as soon as possible.

Keywords: water and water-related resources, values, Russo-Ukrainian war, water weaponization**.**

Introduction

Water, or the hydrosphere, is an integral part of the Earth's system and the biosphere. About 94-97% of the global seawater is held in the oceans, and 3-6% belongs to underground and surface freshwater from rivers, lakes, reservoirs, the atmosphere, and the cryosphere (glaciers, snow cover, ice caps, and permafrost). Water constitutes more than half of the mass of organisms of all living beings, and sometimes its share in the body is 95-99%. As a key element of the Earth's system and biosphere, water sustains the equilibrium of the global ecosystem, climate, the existence of all living beings, and the life and well-being of humankind.

Nowadays changes in the global water cycle, natural and anthropogenic disasters, wars, and other social conflicts contribute to water pollution and water scarcity deepening the global environmental crisis and injustice (GEO-6 2019). Military conflicts disrupt the functioning of water ecosystems, water infrastructure, and people's access to safe water resources, with multiple negative and far-reaching consequences. Despite the attention of international organizations (UN, UNICEF, World Bank), academic research on the impact of conflict on water systems is scarce (Schillinger, Özerol, Güven-Griemert, Heldeweg 2020). This asks for rethinking the value of water and searching for efficient solutions to the problems humankind faces to ensure people's well-being, the survival of non-human species, and sustaining the biosphere as a whole. This question belongs not only to the sphere of policy and management but also to ethics.

Since water and water-related ecosystems form coupled social-economic systems, values are important in understanding of such kinds of systems (Jones, Shaw, Ross, Witt, Pinner 2016), for efficient management and protection of water ecosystems and other water-related resources and the equitable and just access to the water resources for the present and future generations. Understanding the role of values and their respect or neglect is particularly important in times of crisis, wars, and other conflicts that affect water, resulting in multiple negative consequences for impacts on the environment, non-human species, people, and society.

The focus of this article is the consideration of water violations during the current Russo-Ukrainian war from a theoretical standpoint of values and water ethics. In this article, the term 'water' includes water as a natural chemical substance as well as water-related ecosystems and water resources.

Water as a value

Ethical discussions about the value and valuing of water and other water-related resources employ different approaches to the classification of values and the justification of the value of water under the umbrella of water ethics. Water ethics encompasses all problems, concerns, and challenges humans face, and is relevant to many issues like survival, flourishing and welfare, peace, safety, development, social and environmental justice, rights of humans and the more-than-human world, freedom, cooperation, health, education, etc., and involves different knowledge, practices, and actors, as well as particular aspects of values. Thus, being "valuable, like being colored, takes many forms and shades." (Rolston 1981: 115).

Water ethics is concerned with valuing water and the ways of introducing these values into human practices and behavior (Groenfeldt 2019) and may provide an important analytical instrument in searching for answers about values that are at stake when we address the water challenges, and who is affected by these water challenges and who is responsible for them (Doorn 2022).

Since value represents the numerous ways in which things matter to humans (O'Connor and Kenter 2019: 1249), water, in its various forms of existence, can be valued from different perspectives. Water has multiple functions, such as vital, sacred, symbolic, economic, scientific and educational, recreational, inspirational, aesthetic, and strategic ones, and as a condition for the future existence of the biosphere and the sustainable life of future generations. The vital or life-supportive value of water means its importance in securing the existence of human and non-human species on the planet and providing important ecosystem services to sustain the biosphere, humans, and society.

The fact that water performs diverse functions or serves many goals determines its values. These values can also be defined as instrumental or utilitarian. They are important to people and society as a means and require ethical consideration. The instrumental values are a matter of research of value per value or in their combinations, depending on the purpose of the particular research. Instrumental values are also called extrinsic and are considered in opposition to intrinsic value.

Values are derived from and defined by the properties of certain entities or objects. Intrinsic values are inseparable from intrinsic properties or features that consist of intrinsicness. As emphasized in the introduction to "Companion to Intrinsic Properties" (Francescotti, 2014), the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties plays "a major role in a variety of philosophical debates and many areas of philosophy" (Ibid.: 1). In many cases, it is difficult to capture the intuitive idea of intrinsic properties in a "sufficiently plausible definition", and the concept of intrinsicality (intrinsicness, intrinsic values) has long been a topic of debate in the field of ethics (Ibid.). Despite that intrinsic value is considered one of the key concepts for environmental and water ethics, this class of values is often perceived as highly abstract and widely generalizable (O'Connor and Kenter 2019: 1252).

According to D. Jamieson, intrinsic value means that it is not just one value among others, but a value that takes precedence over others and serves as the "gold standard" of morality. For the explanation of this meaning of intrinsic value, D. Jamieson metaphorically compares intrinsic value as a measure of other values with gold as a measure of all currencies: "Just as gold is of ultimate monetary value, so what is of intrinsic value is what is of ultimate value. In the case of both money and morality, other things obtain their relation to what of the ultimate value" (Jamieson 2008: 69). From this follows that members of the moral community mark certain values as intrinsic and draw the distinction between them and 'mere things'. Intrinsic value can also be defined as an inherent value, that is, "the value of something depends entirely on what is inherent in this thing itself" (Jamieson 2008: 69). It does not depend on other values and evaluation because it is self-sufficient and does not rely on anything else for its value or existence. As a value that does not depend on an evaluator, intrinsic value is also defined as objective value (Stålhammar & Thorén 2019, 1203). The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic or internal and external implies a distinction between what an object is 'in itself' and its dependence on other things (Hoffmann-Kolss 2014, 157).

The various interpretations of the concepts of intrinsic and instrumental or extrinsic values indicate that these two categories form a conclusive value dichotomy. In environmental ethics, it might be relevant to the dichotomy of the non-anthropocentric and anthropocentric approaches to nature and its entities. Intrinsic value represents a first approach, while extrinsic or instrumental values are derived from a second approach.

Another major difference between these two categories of values is that objects of instrumental value are, in principle, substitutable for other things that fulfill the same purpose, while objects of intrinsic value are irreplaceable and belong to non-derivative goods: "If no apples are at hand, other fruits can provide the same nutrients and enjoyment." (Deplazes-Zemp 2023: 7). However, if there is no water, there is nothing that can be a substitute for water and fulfill its primary functions concerning the vital needs of human and non-human species. However, wind or sun can be used as a substitute for water as an energy source, and railways can substitute rivers for shipping goods.

The intrinsicality of water is defined by its molecular structure, containing one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms, which are connected by covalent bonds.

Nevertheless, the existence of water and its various properties depends decisively on many external physical factors. For water to appear on planet Earth, many physical and chemical characteristics that were not present on other planets of the Solar system had to coincide. Similarly, many natural facts should support the stable functioning of the Earth's hydrosphere and water-related ecosystems. Nowadays, however, water is affected by many anthropogenic factors, which result in water scarcity and threaten the lives of human and non-human species. Climate change induced by human activities (pollution, military and other social conflicts, and overuse of water resources) compromises vital and other water values.

It may seem that water has mainly instrumental values, which play an ambivalent role in human communities and their relations with others. Both traditional (pre-industrial) and industrial uses of water ecosystems are instrumental, whether these ecosystems are used for the survival of the former or the economic development of the latter. However, in both cases, the instrumental values differ by the level of impact on the water ecosystems and the lives of different groups of people. For instance, the Colorado River protected indigenous people from the European colonizers. One of the reasons to build the Hoover Dam was to control and use the river and its basin more intensively for economic development, despite the vital and spiritual needs of indigenous people. The dark side of the Colorado River industrial instrumentalization was the flooding of surrounding tribal lands, leading to a loss of heritage and traditional ways of life. Similarly, the Dnipro River in Ukraine formed traditional water use, lifestyles, and experiences (like escorting ships through the Dnipro rapids) and protected Ukrainians from invaders. After the construction of the Dnipro Hydropower Cascade, which started from DniproHes (1927-1932), many people from surrounding lands were displaced, and their villages were flooded. On the one hand, the ecosystem of the Dnipro River was changed drastically; on the other hand, the new economic infrastructure of the Dnipro River basin was formed. These examples also illustrate the relativity of instrumental values depending on the approach of evaluators. In both cases, the rivers were obstacles to the ambitious governmental economic plans and state power over the rivers and people from surrounding lands. From this position, traditional instrumental values of rivers looked backward. In contrast, for indigenous people and local communities, the construction of dams was the destruction of the entire system of values associated with the river.

It is people who decide how to use water. This is why the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental or extrinsic values, and different forms of instrumentalization of water, might be important to avoid the reduction of the role of water entirely to the set of means for approaching certain purposes according to an anthropocentric worldview, since the non-anthropocentric approach emphasizes intrinsic value. According to A. Deplazes-Zemp, this distinction helps us to understand why and how nature is considered valuable and where value disagreements and conflicts arise (Deplazes-Zemp 2023).

Being inseparable from the holistic life system of Earth and an integral part of all living organisms, water can be considered a life-supportive instrument. Life itself represents intrinsic value, since “the natural world is seen as valuable in and of itself, independent of its benefit to humans” (O’Connor and Kenter 2019: 1252). From this point of view, the same can be said about water and natural water-related ecosystems, adding that without water, nothing can provide life-supportive services, neither for humans nor for non-human species, nor the Biosphere as a whole. To fulfill vital life-supportive functions on the planet, water should exist, and this attributes it to an existence value. On the one hand, water is equal to its vital value and the value of life; on the other hand, as was mentioned above, water's instrumental values largely depend on humans, and humans depend on water resources, and thus water scarcity threatens many aspects of physical, social, economic, and cultural life.

From this follows the partial overlapping of the value of existence on intrinsic value. Existence value may include intrinsic value, but it does not mean that these types of values are equal, since the value of existence also can be instrumental (Attfield 1998). For instance, hydro-engineering provides humans and the economy with electricity and strongly depends on the existence of rivers. In other words, hydro-engineering instrumentalizes the value of the river's existence. However, water as a source of energy can be replaced by other sources. At the same time, nothing can replace the existence of a particular river and its life-supportive role for plants and animals that inhabit it. The same concerns the sacral or spiritual meanings of a river for Indigenous people or local communities, which may be illustrated by the cases of the construction of the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River and Dnipro Hydropower Cascade, mentioned above.

In many cases, the distinction between intrinsic and the different types of instrumental values can be unstable, and water valuation outlooks are dynamic and dependent on many circumstances. People can apply diverse approaches to valuing nature and water as a part of it, whether they are anthropocentrists, biocentrists, ecocentrists, rationalists, sentimentalists, etc. Moreover, the same thing can be valued intrinsically or non-intrinsically depending on the context of an evaluation (Jamieson 2008: 154). For instance, the aesthetic beauty of a certain water-related ecosystem like a lake, river valley, or canyon, and its recreational value, can be considered intrinsically in terms that none of the other waterscapes can substitute for inspiration and pleasure. At the same time, the argument for protecting these natural objects can be qualified as instrumental, because it serves the particular needs of some groups of people. Not all people are sensitive to the beauty of water-related nature or enjoy leisure time by contemplating nature and waterscapes. Moreover, the period of hydroengineering booming was marked by the fact that the grandeur and beauty of engineering constructions and human-made things began to be valued more than the natural beauty of waterscapes. The same concerns the sacral or spiritual meanings of a river for Indigenous people or local communities. Thus, the intrinsic and instrumental distinction is complex (Stålhammar & Thorén 2019: 1203).

The complicated visions of water values ask for the "need to formulate ethical principles to help us navigate through our values" (Groenfeldt 2019: ix). Probably, contradictions in valuing water might be resolved through the development of an approach that does not require us to express everything by the same measure (Doorn 2018: 9), based on the unidimensional perspective that does not take into account the variety of ways in which people value water and water-related ecosystems (Jones, Shaw, Ross, Witt, Pinner 2016). Instead, a pluralist, or multidimensional, perspective acknowledges that people hold diverse values and thus accept that the environment and its components are valued in multiple ways (Ibid. 2016).

Seb O'Connor and Jasper O. Kenter emphasize the necessity for a more context-specific approach to the consideration of values, taking into account not only the human but also the "more-than-human world". This is why the better integration of intrinsic values with other values is for the development of more efficient answers to the world's water challenges (O'Connor and Kenter 2019: 1252), and a broader contextual approach to values is desirable since human systems often interact with other vital systems (Doorn 2018).

One of the approaches to the resolution of the conclusive dichotomy between intrinsic and instrumental values is the introduction of the conception of relational values understood as "values that do not directly emanate from nature but are derivative of our relationships with it and our responsibilities toward it" (Pascual et al. 2017: 11). Relational values represent a third class of values, alongside intrinsic and instrumental ethical values. The introduction of this class of values provides a broader approach to the analysis of values, taking into account specific contexts and circumstances and focusing on the particular topic of research. Proponents of the conception of relational values believe that it can help overcome long-standing contradictions about the value of nature and provide a conceptual basis that is flexible enough to accommodate the plurality of values and worldviews (Stålhammar, S., Thorén 2019).

For humans, nature is not only a source of satisfaction of vital needs and well-being, admiration, inspiration, and pleasure. Nature is also a powerful carrier of hostile and negative feelings, and the source of "antagonistic sentiments to a degree as great as any encountered in human experience" (Kellert 1996: 24-26). This is also true for water elements and water-related ecosystems and objects, which might cause disasters, conflicts, hunger, and diseases in the case of floods, natural cataclysms, etc. S. Kellert proposes the classification of basic values as a way of organizing and describing people's feelings and beliefs about animals and nature, and among others highlights negativist values (Kellert 1996: 6). He describes them as a source of aversion, fear, dislike, etc., that may provoke "anxious reaction in many people under widely varying circumstances" (Kellert 1996: 24-26).

Hence, there is a need for a more holistic and integrated theory of values that acknowledges that "natural processes and products always have the standing possibility of valuation (or disvaluation)" that is "to categorize them in terms of possibilities when humans come on scene." (Rolston 1992: 251). The term 'disvalues' refers to "values with a negative valence" and, among others, concerns aspects of nature that diminish well-being (instrumental disvalues) (Lliso et al. 2022).

Thus, there is a rather broad variety of approaches to understanding, defining, and classification of values in ethics, especially in water ethics. This reflects the complexity of the problem of values and valuation and the lack of consensus among ethicists about how to classify values. Despite the general acceptance of three main classes of values (extrinsic, instrumental, and relational), the boundaries between them are dynamic, nuanced, and dependent on many factors and contexts.

Accepting the generally agreed-upon division of values into the classes mentioned above, water weaponization will be considered and ethically assessed in the next section.

Water as a Weapon

Water and water resources are not only precondition human well-being and prosperity, and the flourishing of non-human species: they can also be a source of natural disasters or accidents caused by people's activities. From ancient times, in daily practice and policy, people have used different properties of water and water-related ecosystems in diverse ways. Water was used not only for well-being but also as an instrument to impact others. This is about both positive and negative (negativistic) values, or values and disvalues. Discovering and understanding the nature and complex structure of such phenomena (Swain 2016) is critical for water conservation, natural disaster and conflict prevention, and equitable and sustainable water distribution and use.

One particular form of instrumentalization of water is weaponization, which carries multiple consequences for the environment, society, and human welfare. Weaponization means the use as a weapon of something that is not comprehended under the generally accepted meaning of the word weapon (King 2015). Past and current experiences of social conflicts and wars (including the current Russo-Ukrainian war) provide many of facts about the weaponization of different resources and objects of civic infrastructure. Water and water-related infrastructure, for instance, hydropower plants and dams, are among them. Specifically, water weaponization means the manipulation of water for political instability, gaining an advantage in battle or defense, for terror and blackmail of the population, etc. In other words, water becomes a weapon when water resources, water ecosystems, and water infrastructure are used as a tool in a violent conflict and as a part of warfare (Water Conflict).

Both the attackers and those who were attacked have used the properties of water ecosystems and the power of water elements to weaken their adversary. Historically, rivers, lakes, marshes and the like were natural barriers that protected communities from their enemies. Cases both from the past and our time illustrate this. The first example is the strategy the Dutch used in 1573, flooding land to break the siege of Spanish troops on the town of Alkmaar, and to protect Leiden in 1574. The second case is from the early days of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (February-March 2022), when Russian armored forces were moving toward Kyiv. The Ukrainian branches cut a dam on the Irpin River, flooding a large area of land to help stop the assault. At the same time, attackers can use the biophysical characteristics of the environment to block, isolate, deplete resources, and weaken the resilience and resistance of those attacked. These examples illustrate the different ways of instrumentalization of the same property of water ecosystems and their relational values.

Throughout history, both state and non-state actors have used water and water-related infrastructure to subjugate civilians or gain an advantage in combat, and water-related violence continues to be a global and regional problem (Gleick and Heberger 2014). Water weaponization involves the practices of attacking and destroying wells, dams, reservoirs, treatment plants, or pipelines, or manipulating water resources by contaminating them with disease-causing agents, etc. (Kohler 2020). Water weaponization is a particular case of water instrumentalization that reduces water to a tool of killing and blackmail. Such a reduction neglects multiple positive values of water.

The Pacific Institute mentions 1298 conflicts where water and water-related infrastructure were a trigger of different conflicts, scarcity of water, or violence from 2500 BC till now. This list also includes cases of using water as a weapon and when water was a "victim" or casualty of wars and other conflicts. The current Russia-Ukraine war offers the latest and most brutal examples of water weaponization (Gleick 2022). There are eighteen accidents mentioned in the Water

Conflict Chronology of the Pacific Institute between 2014–2022. However, after 24.02.2022, the numbers in this list increased drastically (Water Conflict Chronology). This list is not complete concerning data after 24 February 2022, since the situation has been changing day by day.

Despite a growing body of evidence of the exploitation of water during wars and other conflicts, this phenomenon remains largely unexplored. The security implications are unknown, and the quantitative assessment of the global scale is seriously underestimated. The use of water and water infrastructure as a weapon can destabilize whole societies, as all human life is based on water resources and water-related systems (Kohler 2020).

There are several ways to use water for political or military advantage. They include s*trategic weaponization,* which presumes the use of water to control large or important land areas or facilities to fulfill the vision of the power or conquer over these lands by targeting or destroying large population centers, industrial facilities, etc. The use of water as a weapon on a small local scale to get an advantage on the battlefield, immediate support of military operations, or against targets of strict military value, belongs to *tactical weaponization*. A particular way of water weaponization is *psychological terrorism* to create fear among non-combatants of restriction of water access or contamination of the water supply, which can be used at both strategic and tactical levels. Manipulation of water supply or restriction to water access by occupiers to gain trust or to reward support from the "occupied" population is another form of water weaponization (King 2015). Unfortunately, water is usually an indiscriminate weapon that causes collateral damage to the natural ecosystems, livelihoods, and leads to the displacement of civilians.

The Russo-Ukrainian war, which began with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the partial occupation of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (2014) and continued with full-scale aggression (24 February 2022), has seen all the mentioned methods of water violation and weaponization.

One of the outcomes of the intentional and unintentional weaponization of water and water-related infrastructure is not only harm to people but also damage to water and water-related ecosystems. As seen in the Water Conflict Chronology of the Pacific Institute, water weaponization and water victimization are intertwined processes. The dramatic multidimensional consequences of water weaponization are explicit in the case of the destruction of a major dam in the Kakhovka Hydro Power Plant in Ukraine (KHPP) (6 June 2023), which has been occupied by Russians since the first days of the large-scale invasion. This resulted in the contamination of the Dnipro River, Black Sea, and surrounding lands, e.g., farmlands (about 10,000 hectares), by motor oil and other pollutants and, probably, the irreversible loss of a unique part of nature (e.g., virgin steppe, wetlands of international significance, and nesting places for many bird species). The existence of many rare species of flora and fauna in the South of Ukraine was threatened. Around one million people were left without fresh water and lost their houses and other property (Schauenberg 2023). The rescue of people and animals took place under constant shelling from the Russians. It is hardly possible to realize and assess the humanitarian and environmental cost of this disaster, but it is already obvious that it corresponds to the criteria of ecocide (Gardashuk 2023). This can be witnessed on multiple levels, including but not limited to the integrity of ecosystems, people's quality of life and livelihood, national economy, and culture.

Thus, this act of water weaponization violated the life-supportive, socio-economic, and other positive values of water.

The overall negative impact of the weaponization of water is increasing due to the specific features of the economic structure of Ukraine. The extensive and critical water infrastructure of the country includes large multi-purpose reservoirs, hydropower dams, cooling facilities for nuclear plants, water reservoirs used for industry and mining, and extensive water distribution canals and pipelines for irrigation and household purposes. The majority of this water infrastructure is located in the eastern and southern parts of the country, areas of intense agricultural production and key industrial activities such as metallurgy, coal mining, and chemical production, and it is the direct target of the aggressor (Gleick 2023; King and Hardy 2023; Shumilova et al. 2023).

The undermining of the KHPP is almost unanimously defined as the instrumentalization of the negative power of water caused by the weaponization of water infrastructure. However, discussions about the future of the KHPP and the affected territories seem more related to relational values. The following visions, which represent the values of the different interest groups, can be briefly outlined. The government and energy sector aimed to rebuild the KHPP for electricity production and other economic needs. Some groups of ecologists advocate the restoration of the natural flow of the Dnipro River and the renaturalization of the surrounding areas that correspond to the restoration of the river's intrinsic value. Local communities are primarily interested in security and the sustainable and equitable supply of water and electricity. An in-depth analysis of this discussion is, however, the subject of a special study within the framework of the values of water.

Now, the data about water weaponization and harm to water and the water-related ecosystems and infrastructure, and their environmental, humanitarian, and socioeconomic consequences, are incomplete as the war is ongoing. Part of the territories affected by water weaponization are still under occupation or hardly available for data collection and investigation due to intensive territory mining, risk of shelling, and other military actions.

Not only are the water ecosystems of Ukraine suffering from this war. It also impacts the whole of Europe directly through transboundary watercourses, and indirectly due to the massive emissions of CO2 and other harmful substances. Despite concerns of the national and international communities about the environmental consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the role of freshwater in this military conflict and the impacts of the war on Ukraine's water resources and infrastructure are little addressed in the media, and little understood by the public (Gleick 2022).

Conclusion

Today, with freshwater being one of the scarcest vital natural resources in the world, the practice of using water as a weapon has become more dangerous locally, nationally, and globally, and should be prevented at all levels. Global awareness of the weaponization of water and water-related infrastructure needs to be fostered not only among global governance institutions and national governments (Kohler 2020) but also among scholars, environmental activists, journalists, and ordinary people. The case of water violation and weaponization during the current Russo-Ukrainian war and their impact at the national and transboundary levels should be more intensively included in the sphere of international research, since during previous years, most studies were conducted on countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (Schillinger, Özerol, Güven-Griemert, Heldeweg 2020, 15).

The key question is how to prevent water from becoming weaponized. P.H. Gleick and M. Heberger believe that the answer may lie in the realm of "broader lethal causes of water conflicts overall, especially conflicts over equitable access to water, strategies for sharing during shortages, and water contamination" (Gleick and Heberger 2014, 161). From this follows the imperative to respect and preserve water as a natural resource with multiple values for the human and more-than-human world. Instrumentalization of water's negative (negativistic) characteristics in the form of weaponization opposes the use of the same properties of water for human well-being and prosperity, for instance, through the use of the power of river flow for electricity production, recreation, and education. Even when water and water-related infrastructure are used for protection against enemies, it causes damage to ecosystems and losses for people (for instance, flooding houses and farmlands, as it was with the Irpin River during the defense of Kyiv from the Russians in Spring 2022).

The ethical consideration of water weaponization includes at least two aspects. The first aspect concerns the protection of *water's rights* (or *the right of water*) within the broader concept of the rights of Nature as Nature's right to exist. This approach is based on the recognition of intrinsic, existential, and vital values that take precedence over other instrumental values and represent a non-anthropocentric approach to nature. Within this approach, Nature is considered a rights-bearer or an entity that "has a certain *status* or intrinsic worth deserving of respect" (Gilbert et al. 2023: 368). The recognition of the rights of Nature represents a significant paradigm shift from nature being seen as a resource or object of protection to a subject of rights on its own (Ibid.). The second aspect deals with the *right to water* as a people's inherent right. People's right to water is seen as an integral part of the human right to a healthy and safe environment, as it is acknowledged in many international documents, reports, and policy papers (About Water and Sanitation; Gleick 2007; Scanlon, Cassar, Nemes 2004). This right is also fixed in the legislation of many countries. The consideration of water through the lens of human rights is at the intersection of its vital, instrumental, and relational values. However, *water's rights* and the *right to water* are closely intertwined since the latter is inseparable from the former.

Water weaponization can also be defined as a form of neglect of the existing international humanitarian law that has failed to adequately address and protect critical basic civilian infrastructure, especially water resources and managed water systems, because the laws themselves are insufficient or inadequately enforced (Gleick 2019). Destroying civilian water infrastructure is illegal under international law and immoral from ethical and humanitarian points of view. From this follows that the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the water weaponization demonstrate blatant disregard for international conventions (King and Hardy 2023), ethical norms and ethics of care about water, the environment, humans and non-human species.

Thus, stopping the Russian aggression in Ukraine as soon as possible and achieving just peace is the way to reduce the negative environmental, economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural impacts of water weaponization in Ukraine at the national and transnational levels.

Another important step is to develop an efficient strategy of water rehabilitation, remembering the rehabilitation of water ecosystems for their own sake and environmental sustainability, as well as the renovation of water infrastructure for human needs. This strategy should be based on the idea that water management and governing are all about values (Groenfeldt 2019: 5).

Water may and should be used not as a trigger for conflict but as the foundation for cooperation and peacebuilding. The methodology of post-war rebuilding, nature rehabilitation, and natural resources restoration will be the topic of further substantial research. Simultaneously, there is a crucial need to enforce the legal instruments and expand international legal systems to better regulate and disincentivize the abuse of water resources for political and military aims (King and Hardy 2023).

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