

The Ethics of Sanitation: Its Realms and Prospects

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Sanitation is not only limited to technology and the environment, but it is also embedded in society and culture. Although the sanitation issues have been studied mainly in the natural sciences and engineering, recently some of the social sciences and humanities discussed the sanitation issues, and several pioneering works emerged especially in the ethics of sanitation. This presentation shows the three topics on the ethics of sanitation and their importance in sanitation studies as a multi-disciplinary.

First, the ethics of sanitation contains the question of how sanitation technology should be. It is insisted that sanitation technology for low- and middle-income countries should not only be safe for humans and the environment but also low-cost and low-tech for sustainable development and wide implementation. Where this opinion is appropriate or not, the important point is that this opinion is explicitly based on a value judgment for sustainable development and it opens up the possibilities of a new discussion for examining the validity of value judgments themselves and the consequences derived from them.

Second, the ethics of sanitation involves the question of who and how should be done for sanitation work. Sanitation workers are suffered from stigmatization and health risks due to their works in some areas. In other words, the stigma and health risks from sanitation work are unevenly allocated to specific groups in a certain society. In addition to reducing the stigma and health risks as maximum, for example, it may be considered for the compensation in the form of honor and the assignment of economic benefits.

Third, the ethics of sanitation encompass the question of what sanitation facilities are appropriate as a basic human right. Appropriate sanitation facilities are not equal to mere latrines or toilets, but also should contain the consideration of privacy, gender, and the cultural context. It would require further study to assess the current situation is appropriate for these criteria and examine their validity.

The ethics of sanitation allows reexamining the value judgments which are a basis for the policies and technological developments on sanitation in the international community or in each country. It also contributes to better sanitation through the assessment of whether the current situation is appropriate or not in terms of a particular value judgment. In this context, the ethics of sanitation can explore a new field in sanitation studies as a multi-disciplinary.

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