

Philosophy 2070 - bottled water assignment

Due in Week 7 tutorial (Feb, 26-28)

Many people think that bottled water should be banned from campus. In fact, there is a movement afoot in Ontario to remove bottled water from high schools and universities. Guelph is very much at the centre of this controversy. Nestle, one of the largest bottling companies in the world, has a large facility in Aberfoyle, just outside of Guelph. Nestle obtains its water from the same aquifer that supplies water for the City and surrounding industries. They call this product “natural spring water” because it technically is supplied by a spring. But then, so is all of the water that we use in Guelph.

The question that I want groups to consider is whether there should be a ban on bottled water at the University of Guelph. Each group should present both a pro and a con position. They should also explain why they settled on a particular view. Students should therefore meet outside of class and research both sides of this issue. They can present both sides as a group, or, they can structure their presentation as a mini-debate, with one side pro and the other against a ban.

Each group must submit a short report (3-4 pages) outlining each side of the debate. The report should include a final statement of where the group stands at the end of the exercise. Are they divided? Unanimously for or against? Explain why or why not.

I encourage students to visit the Nestle website as well as the Wellington Water Watchers for opposing views on this issue. Both sites are easily found online with a quick search. You are also encouraged to expand your search more broadly to see what sorts of information you find.

Let me provide a very basic glimpse into the two sides of this issue. This is just a cursory summary - your presentations and reports should go into more detail.

Critics of a ban on bottled water tend to raise the following sorts of issues:

- Nestle consumes less water than other comparable industries in Guelph. Yet, it receives disproportional criticism for doing so.
- Nestle decreases its consumption rate in times of drought.
- Bottled water is the most efficient use of water compared to other bottled beverages.
- University students, when faced with the choice of which beverage to purchase, should have the option of choosing water. It is the healthiest choice.

On the other hand, proponents for a ban raise the following sorts of issues:

- Water is a public good and should not be sold as a commodity.
- Bottled water is a major source of pollution.
- In some regions of the world, water extracted for bottling deprives local communities of their access to water.
- We shouldn't have to pay for something that is necessary for life.

These are by no means the only arguments for and against bottled water. Again, I encourage students to conduct their own research on this issue and discuss it among group members.

Make sure to note that the question to be debated is whether bottled water should be banned from campus. One might agree that bottled water is harmful, but argue that it is the responsibility of individual students not to purchase it. That is, one might place responsibility on the consumer rather than on the supplier. Or, one might argue that bottled water isn't such a big issue after all. I leave it to the groups to consider how they want to structure their debates. The side opposing the ban should make clear which position(s) they are defending.