**Chapter Summary**

*Ethical Choices*, Third Edition

Richard Burnor and Yvonne Raley

Chapter 18: Obligations to Future Generations

Chapter 18 opens with the tragic (imaginary) New World Water War, a future result of past failures to manage water adequately. This raises the question of present obligations to future generations. It seems we can have moral obligations to both past and future people. For instance, future people being presently non-existent does not matter if they will become actual people, since our actions now can affect them. Nor does it matter that they are presently indeterminate if they will be actual and determinate later. But do we have a moral obligation to ensure future human generations at all? There is no obligation to those who never exist. But there may still be other moral obligations: to preserve the species and/or to protect the future impact of people’s life ventures. Since obligations to present and future people can conflict, we need to balance our present and future obligations. The chapter’s last section offers some principles intended to help us with that.