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### On a “Just” Transition

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## On A Just Transition

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The article by Adrian Martin et al. “*Just*” *Transformations to Sustainability: Why and How?* focuses on justice as a fundamental element of any discussion of societal transformations leading to sustainability. They describe how in a broader context of environmental deterioration and socioeconomic inequality, the economic stress produced by the global pandemic has damaged businesses, tempted governments to set environmental protections and regulations aside, and as the situation has become dire perhaps also cracked open the door to “a radical, transformative change that combines sustainability and justice.” They ask what a “just transformation” to sustainability would look like. Reformist and transformative approaches to overcoming the environmental crisis are contrasted, and the growing movement of groups including the IPBES, the IPCC, and UNEP towards a path not based on increasing consumption is explored. Martin et al. consider the multilevel perspective that suggests local-level innovations (e.g. alternative food networks, and wind turbines) are capable of gaining momentum and eventually becoming disruptive change agents at a higher level, and the contrasting viewpoint that what needs to take place is society-level change including redistribution of power to marginalized groups. A central part of their discussion includes the concepts of *distributive*

*justice, procedural justice, and justice as recognition*, and examines the necessity of recognizing the linkages between them. These approaches to justice are explored using concrete examples that make power relationships clear, including the Dakota Access Pipeline and deforestation and REDD+ approaches, and they are related to other concepts including the understanding of power by conflict transformation scholars, and the capabilities approach to environmental justice.

There are other concepts related to justice in the environmental literature (eudaimonistic value, contextual justice, interactional justice, cognitive justice, health equity and health disparities, instrumental value, fundamental value, and others) but especially one rather different approach to environmental justice that could be added to their multidimensional array, *restorative justice*. The temporality and forward-looking nature of restorative justice set it apart and may make it a hopeful conceptual pathway to follow. It is related to the conflict transformation that Martin et al. discuss (“...engages with the underlying roots of disputes, seeking justice through the rectification of wrongs and the creation of respectful, equitable, and intercultural relationships”) but which does not focus on the explicitly forward-looking perspective of restorative justice. Restorative justice is best exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established after the apartheid regime ended in South Africa. Contemporary issues standing in the way of transformative (or even reformist) change to environmental sustainability, which include racial discrimination, gender discrimination, wealth inequalities, health disparities, the “the anti-modernity and decolonial agenda of indigenous peoples’ struggle for environmental justice,”<sup>1</sup> violations of territorial rights, and others, will also require reconciliation to a radical degree. As Humphreys et al. note<sup>2</sup> “... the goal is conflict resolution and social reconciliation... In working through a restorative process, one then attempts to identify who was harmed, who did the harm, and what community was involved. The

purpose is not to assign blame but to identify needs. The emphasis is to live rightly within the multiple relationships a person experiences and maintains. Understanding what living rightly means becomes apparent as the process unfolds. While admitting the importance of acting on principle, restorative justice also looks to the future as an intentional exercise focused on bringing forth the greatest level of well-being for those involved.”

Most usefully in terms of discussing just transformations towards environmental sustainability, incorporating restorative justice as a model adds a historically effective, conceptually developed, and practical approach for moving forwards<sup>3</sup>:

Implementing restorative justice... juxtaposes two very different conceptions of responsibility... In the liability model a person is held responsible for their individual actions... in the case of a social connection model, we are also responsible for one another... wrongs that one might do to another are situated within larger social contexts... a social connection model focuses on judging background conditions... social structures relating to both harms and actions intended to do justice... focused on problem solving ... An ethical analysis of these various harms would be lacking if they did not consider justice for all victims of past and current harms as well as mitigation of harms that might otherwise occur in the future. Doing justice is therefore a matter of temporality... a process that addresses the past and present while looking to a future in which victims would enjoy a greater measure of justice... Implementing restorative justice requires that those experiencing or anticipating harm and those performing actions that bring about harm face one another directly. Knowing the steps to take to address harms develops as one interacts with those involved... The ethics of restorative justice is therefore based on the primacy of conscience rather than mere conformance to a specific

moral principle or aim... a matter of coming to know one's moral responsibilities through the experiences one has within multiple relations, where an informed conscience is at the heart of moral knowing and discernment.

The process of restorative justice will eventually involve the personal narratives of those who have suffered harms as well as those whose actions have promoted harms, as well as social analysis, scientific analysis, ethical analysis, and ethical praxis & policy implementation. When taken as a cyclical process the four analyses have been called the Iterative-Praxiological Method, and constitute an example of strategic interdisciplinarity.<sup>4</sup> The cyclical nature of this methodological formulation is crucial to note, as information is gathered, personal narratives expressed, conversations extended, the process iterates its way towards increasingly sophisticated understandings. Stories matter enormously here, ongoing analyses accompanying the discussions do as well<sup>5</sup>: “Scientific, social, and economic analysis become part of a restorative process in ways supplemental to the narratives of those who have been, are, or expect to be harmed. Scientific, social, and economic data becomes important as factual considerations but beyond that, also serves to inform the conscience of those involved. The ethics of restorative justice, rooted in the primacy of conscience, makes informing one's conscience a moral imperative.”

Incorporating *restorative justice*, to accompany *distributive justice*, *procedural justice*, and *justice as recognition*, adds another distinctive perspective to Martin et al.'s already rich discussion of what “Just” Transformations to Sustainability means. It is perhaps self-evident but worth reiterating, that the gulfs in our world are now so wide, the partisanship often so bitter, the reversion to nationalism so potent in many places, the inequities in wealth and resource access so vast, that it will take all the tools we can muster to move forwards towards the goals of

organizations such as the IPBES, the IPCC, the UNEP, the IUCN, and to promote the UN SDGs. As Martin et al. say, “The failure to reorient environmental governance toward a wider understanding of justice principles has served as a barrier to progress toward sustainability.” We need to use all the tools that exist to overcome the barriers if a just transition to sustainability is to be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodríguez, Iokiñe & Mirna Liz Inturias (2018) Conflict transformation in indigenous peoples’ territories: doing environmental justice with a ‘decolonial turn’, *Development Studies Research* 5(1): 90-105, DOI: 10.1080/21665095.2018.1486220

<sup>2</sup> Humphreys, M.L., Reiter, M.A. and Matlock, G.C. (2014) ‘Doing justice: the role of ethics in integrated ecosystem management and the implementation of the integrated assessment and ecosystem management protocol’, *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review* 15(2/3):183–192.

<sup>3</sup> Kolmes, S. A., Humphreys, M. L. & Kolmes, S. K. (2018). Ethical Analysis of Stakeholder Values in Revealing Complexity. pp 81-99 In: Will Focht, Michael A. Reiter, Paul A. Barresi, and Richard C. Smardon (Editors) *Education for Sustainable Human and Environmental Systems: From Theory to Practice*. Routledge Press.

<sup>4</sup> Butkus, Russell A. and Steven A. Kolmes (2003) Strategic Interdisciplinarity: A Scientific-Theological Analysis of Salmon Recovery in the Lower Columbia River Basin. *Colorado School of Mines Quarterly* 103(1): 19-32.

<sup>5</sup> Kolmes, S. A., Humphreys, M. L. & Kolmes, S. K. (2018). Ethical Analysis of Stakeholder Values in Revealing Complexity. pp 81-99 In: Will Focht, Michael A. Reiter, Paul A. Barresi, and Richard C. Smardon (Editors) *Education for Sustainable Human and Environmental Systems: From Theory to Practice*. Routledge Press.