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## The Human Right to Science

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The Human Right to Science  
Brian Gran

The human right to science may truly change the world. While every human right has potential to shape the ways we live, the human right to science may affect nearly every aspect of our lives. This human right may modify our norms and expectations, our values and practices in our families, communities, societies, and across the globe.

What is the human right to science? Simply put, the human right to science is the right to benefit from scientific progress and applications. A closer look, however, reveals many questions whose answers may fundamentally change how we live together.

Does the human right to science lead to everyone having a right to scientific education? Does this right demand elimination of discrimination when it comes to doing science? Does the human right to science not only prohibit censorship when it comes to disseminating scientific information and research, but mandate that national governments support international collaborations of scientists? Does this human right entitle everyone to scientific information and research? Does the human right to science ensure that everyone can access scientific products and technologies? The answer to all of these questions is “*perhaps*.” The potential ramifications of this human right are incredible.

This edition of *Societies Without Borders* offers diverse insights into the human right to science while calling on social scientists to give more attention to this human right. The social sciences have made invaluable contributions to studies of science and human rights. Social science of human rights scholarship is called upon to comprehend the manifold aspects of the human right to science, the right’s potential as well as its drawbacks, and political opportunities and institutions that will influence meaning of the human right to science.

Anne Bryden’s “The Human Right to Science and Disability” arises from ongoing research she has undertaken for years on experiences of people who sustain spinal cord injuries (SCI). Bryden’s work calls for greater attention to a key aspect of this human right, access, and how access may empower people to overcome inequities in science and technologies. When it comes to resources people with SCI need, especially technology, the human right to science may be an effective tool to assuring access. To produce more powerful impacts from the human right to science, Bryden calls for human rights education among members of the SCI and disabilities communities.

In “Understanding and Promoting the Human Rights of Autistic People,” Keri Iyall Smith calls for education and advocacy of human rights of autistic people. After studying three models of disability, the biomedical, social model, and capabilities approach models, Iyall Smith concludes that the capabilities approach model provides a powerful framework for advancing and supporting human rights of autistic people. While Iyall Smith reminds us of the importance of allies, she argues that self advocacy is key to advancing the human rights of autistic people in every forum, including the United Nations.

Joannie Jean’s “Political Disaffection and the Struggle against Impunity” is an examination of how understandings of the past influence understandings of the present. A

challenge to employing human rights to advocate for change is how memory is fought over and used to call for justice and truth. Jean's study of contentious relations over memory of past violations, justice and injustice, and how social institutions, including education, contribute to struggles over human rights, reminds us that the human right to science will not work in a vacuum. Even as advocates push for implementation of human rights and change, their work will have to contend with successes and failures of governmental and other leaders in bringing about change based in human rights.

It comes as no surprise that Mark Frezzo originally developed and organized this issue on the human right to science. Mark passed in May 2020, which is a great loss to Sociology of Human Rights scholarship, and to activists who work hard to advance interests and well-being of people everywhere. In so many ways, Mark was at the forefront of Sociology of Human Rights scholarship, including the human right to science. He recognized how the right will matter, from climate change to conflict and war to saving lives. In Spring 2020, Mark and I co-authored a commentary on the human right to science for the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Mark was a member of the Council and Steering Committee of the Science and Human Rights Coalition of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Mark not only cared a great deal about the hard work of the Science and Human Rights Coalition, he enjoyed contributing to the complex and stimulating conversations about the human right to science among Coalition members. Mark sought to expand these conversations to other arenas, from the classroom to international research conferences, including the International Sociological Association. Mark was a mentor to many social scientists, human rights scholars, and activists. He inspired many people, students and colleagues and others, to persevere and to think big.

Mark was the previous editor of this journal, along with Keri Iyall Smith and David Brunnsma. Together Mark, Keri, and David strengthened *Societies Without Borders* while at the same time extending its boundaries to welcome and include broad ideas and surprising evidence around human rights. Since then, the journal, particularly under the leadership of Lacey Caporale and Colette Ngana, has continued to strive to think big while welcoming new authors, new ideas, and new scholarship. Thank you to Lisa Peters for her on-going support and professionalism. Thanks to Deans Jessica Berg and Michael Scharf, whose support has been crucial and greatly appreciated.

"It's déjà vu all over again." *Societies Without Borders* welcomes Keri Iyall Smith and David Brunnsma as its new Editors. Without a doubt, Keri and David will lead the journal to new questions, new evidence, new answers, and greater heights and impacts. I am grateful, once again, to Keri and David for their support and leadership. Thank you to Joe Custer for assisting with this transition. I thank Colette for her ongoing leadership and service as Managing Editor.

It is fitting that the last issue on which I have the honor to serve as Editor concentrates on the human right to science. This issue is important to me for many reasons. One reason is the connection with Mark, whose friendship and good humor continue to shape how I think and live. Another reason is because of my belief that the social sciences can provide fundamental insights

into all aspects of human rights, especially the human right to science. A third reason is that I am keen to see whether and how the human right to science can make the world a better place. It will not arrive a moment too soon.