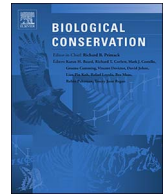




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Review

Just conservation: What is it and should we pursue it?

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to realize conservation are often met with stakeholders contending that particular conservation actions are unfair for conflicting with their basic interests. A useful lens through which to view such conflict is social justice, which may be considered the fair treatment of *others* judged according to three principles: equality, need, and desert (noun form of deserve). We formally demonstrate that (i) the subject of social justice (*others*) includes many non-human elements of nature and (ii) realizing conservation that is also socially just requires being guided by a non-anthropocentrism principle, whereby *no human should infringe on the well-being of others any more than is necessary for a healthy, meaningful life*. The concept, “healthy, meaningful life” is less vague and subjective than might be presupposed. That concept is for example subject to considerable objective reasoning through social and behavioral sciences. We indicate how realizing socially-just conservation requires another guiding, safeguard principle: *If a significant and genuine conservation interest calls for restricting a human interest, that restriction should occur except when doing so would result in injustice. When the restriction would be unjust every effort should be made by all involved parties to mitigate the restriction to the point of no longer being unjust*. This principle covers concerns often raised when conservation is opposed – e.g., financial costs, loss of cultural tradition. We explain how these two principles are neglected or excluded by many methods for resolving conservation conflicts and collaborative governance of natural resources.

1. Introduction

Consider a big cat in a person's backyard and the risk of it doing something problematic. Perhaps it's a lion and perhaps, being hungry, it kills the person's cow. Although the lion might be equally valuable to conservation irrespective of whose cow it kills, one's disposition toward this loss are surely affected if that cow was the only one owned by an impoverished person whose livelihood depended on its survival, or whether it was one of many owned by a wealthy rancher or pastoralist. We imply neither that poverty is a virtue nor wealth an offence, but simply that the circumstances of the cow's owner are an element of the human dimension to the problem and that this element affects the analysis of the arguments to be considered in seeking a fair outcome. This is one of myriad examples where social justice meets conservation.

A propitious path into this meeting of disciplines requires a common, if not provisional, conceptualization of those disciplines. Thus a necessary, first step is to define some key terms. We begin with considering a particular understanding of *sustainability*, which can

usefully be defined as meeting human interests in a socially-just manner without depriving species, native ecosystems or native populations of their health (Vucetich and Nelson, 2010). This particular verbiage is closely related to other widely-appreciated definitions of sustainability (e.g., WCED, 1987; Callcott and Mumford, 1997; NRC, 1999). Nor does setting this definition exclude the value of other conceptualizations of sustainability. Rather, we will be building ideas and relationships that depend on readers knowing the precise meaning of certain key phrases as we use them.

Insomuch as *conservation* may be usefully understood as maintaining and restoring the health of ecological collectives – namely, species and native populations and ecosystems (Vucetich and Nelson, 2013; Sandbrook, 2015); then, conservation is a constituent element of sustainability. Further suppose *human interests* – as used in the definition of sustainability – is any endeavor that any individual or group desires to pursue and may be characterized by its position on a spectrum ranging from vital to trivial interests.

Consider *social justice* to be the fair treatment of others, where

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fairness is judged according to well-reasoned application of three principles: equality, need, and desert (noun form of deserve) (Miller, 1999; Sandel, 2009; see also Appendix A). *Equality* may refer to concern for public procedures and processes (e.g., equality of opportunity), and it may refer to concern for the outcome of public processes (e.g., a concern to avoid extreme inequality of wealth). *Need* does not refer to any conceivable claim. Rather needs would be judged by an impartial observer as being necessary for realizing a healthy, meaningful life. A well-established sense of these needs include, for example, health care, education and political freedom. (This understanding of *need* is common among justice theorists. Behavioral scientists also have important insights about one's perception of one's own needs, see Discussion). Matters of *desert* should be judged with care; for example, with respect to considerable variation in agents' native abilities, which are not necessarily deserved. In other words, many fortunes in life are importantly attributable to one's inherited circumstances – ranging from inherited wealth to genetically inherited cognitive or physical abilities. In spite of the need to handle desert with care, the concept is considered useful to theories of social justice.

The study of social justice is sufficiently well-developed that well-reasoned application of these sometimes competing principles often yields broadly appreciated solutions. Yet, it is not so thoroughly developed as to preclude two well-reasoned applications that lead to disparate judgments.

The subject of social justice is “others,” which is often implicitly taken to mean other humans. More precisely, “others” refers to any agent entitled to fair treatment and treatment with at least some concern for their wellbeing, i.e., any agent who is entitled to direct moral consideration or possesses intrinsic value. That at least some non-human elements of nature are entitled to direct moral consideration is the foundation of various forms of non-anthropocentrism, such as biocentrism (Taylor, 1983) and ecocentrism (Callicott, 1989). Those non-anthropocentric perspectives have broad cultural support as indicated by sociological research (e.g., Bruskotter et al., 2017) and a growing number of laws, policies, and formal declarations by local and federal governments (Vucetich et al., 2015). Support for non-anthropocentric views is further supported by robust scholarship (reviewed in Vucetich et al., 2015). The appropriateness of including animals as subjects of social justice has also been explained by those within the community of social justice scholars (e.g., Nussbaum, 2006, 2012; Armstrong, 2012; Schlosberg, 2007; Coeckelbergh, 2009; Cripps, 2010; Horta, 2013; Pellow, 2014; Jones, 2015). Yet, the development of justice frameworks that account for both humans and non-humans lag behind human-focused frameworks of justice (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina, 2015).

These generalized conceptualizations of social justice, conservation and sustainability indicate that the values of social justice can, at least on some occasions, conflict with the values of conservation (Fig. 1). Generic cases that raise at least a prima facie concern about conflict between conservation and social justice include:

- 1) Should livestock owners be restricted from killing predators that threaten to kill livestock? If the restriction is observed, is it sensible to compensate the loss of livestock? If so, who should bear the cost of compensation?
- 2) Should land owners be restricted from managing their lands (e.g., via particular practices of logging or agriculture) in ways that harm the habitat of conserved species (e.g., spotted owl, red-cockaded woodpecker)? If the restriction is observed, is it sensible to compensate the landowner? If so, who should bear the cost of compensation?
- 3) Should indigenous people be restricted from activities – such as hunting of endangered species for food, rites of passage or traditional regalia – on protected lands?
- 4) Should business owners be restricted with respect to externalities created by their business as a by-product of producing some public good? A general example would include pollution or habitat

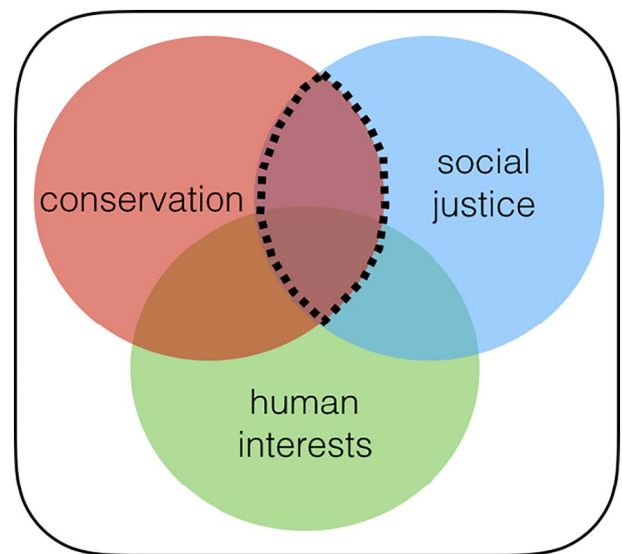


Fig. 1. A simple model that highlights sustainability as the union of value sets. Each value set is defined in the Introduction and Appendix A. Because any particular human interest may or may not be judged vital or worthy, sustainability may or may not include the union of all three value sets. Hence, sustainability may lie in either of the two areas circumscribed by the dotted line. The model accounts for economics implicitly. That is, in this model, economics are no more than a *means* by which any of the values might be advanced or compromised. We define social justice broadly enough to encompass animal welfare. However, when it is important to acknowledge that social justice (as it concerns only humans) sometimes conflicts with the wellbeing of non-human animals, then this Venn diagram model can be modified to represent social justice and animal welfare as separate circles. The model can also, if useful, be shifted from its focus on sustainability and conservation to a focus on human-wildlife conflicts that do not entail a significant conservation focus (e.g., common wildlife species that damage property).

degradation resulting from the production of food or energy.

The generalized structure of these examples (i.e., questions about compensating an agent whose behavior was restricted) highlights a common structure beneath what would otherwise be taken as a disparate set of cases and will help us see how these cases can be usefully treated with the aid of just a few principles.

One approach to these cases is to deny that they represent genuine conflict at all and simply *assert* that a restriction should be imposed without compensation because doing so does not violate the principles of social justice. While we acknowledge such a disposition, the meritorious concern is that some stakeholder will perceive the case as representing conflict and that stakeholder is owed an explanation for the resolution imposed by decision-makers.

Many efforts to resolve conservation conflict are ad hoc and led by decision-makers with sundry experiences in managing public conflicts. Conflict resolution is, however, a formal framework for managing these situations with a well-developed history independent of conservation (Ramsbotham et al., 2011; Wallensteen, 2015). Formal elements of conflict resolution have recently been introduced to conservation (e.g., Daniels and Walker, 2001; Young et al., 2010; Redpath et al., 2013; Madden and McQuinn, 2014; see also Mishra et al., 2017). Here, we outline some essential features of conservation conflict resolution (CCR). A primary objective of this paper is to explain how that framework can be modified to provide more robust adjudication between conservation and social justice.

2. Relationships

Our assessment supposes that conservation and social justice are sufficiently independent sets of values (in the parlance of ethical discourse, or “societal goals” in parlance more fitting to social scientists) that they sometimes conflict. The veracity of such a relationship

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