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BOOK REVIEW

The Right to Science: Then and Now edited by Helle Porsdam and Sebastian Porsdam Mann

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Codified in Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, referred to as the *right to science* within the book, has long been overlooked. The right however, as argued in this volume, provides a potential tool for governments and human rights advocates working in diverse areas from food to education from which to consider problems of inequity and injustice. The appointment of Farida Shaheed as the first Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, the context of covid-19 pandemic, and the expansion of our digital lives mediated through technology, has reenergized discourses on the place of cultural rights within the wider human rights discourse. *The Right to Science: Then and Now*, edited by Helle Porsdam and Sebastian Porsdam Mann has arrived at a critical time for us to examine the relationship between science and the human experience.

The Right to Science: Then and Now brings together commentators from academia, human rights advocates, ethicists, UNESCO staff, and, notably, a comment from the former Special Rapporteur on cultural rights. The editors have constructed a 310-page, 15-chapter, tour of the right to science in three parts: firstly, an examination of the history and origins of the right, secondly, the right's contemporary applications, and thirdly, an agenda on how the right can be developed and applied. Readers gain an insight into the place of the right to science in the pantheon of human rights, how it has been both understood and misunderstood, the potential of the right to be utilised to improve the lives of peoples, and how human rights can respond to the dual-edged nature that advances in science inevitably present.

The first section offers a comprehensive history into the origins of the right to science: from its inclusion into the Draft Declaration of the International Rights and Duties of Man, to its revised presence in the UDHR and ICESCR. The section lays

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out an account of the changing formulations of the right to science within the context of the negotiations of each instrument. It also outlines the origins of UNESCO as the premier institution within the UN system with a mandate regarding scientific ethics and collaboration.

The second section of the book addresses the contemporary state of the right to science. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recently issued General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social, and cultural rights (UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/25) on 30 April 2020, which brings the first articulation of the right to science in any detail by a human rights monitoring body. This book is one of the first to explore the implications of General Comment No.25 capturing discussions with the former Special Rapporteur on her work in Chapter 6 (*On the Right to Science as a Cultural Right*). This section explores the right to science within the context of the schema of cultural rights, the UNESCO agenda, and its implication in the contemporary moment of the covid-19 pandemic. In Chapter 9, Valerie J. Bradley delves into the relationship between the right to science and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The chapter highlights the special relationship that persons with disabilities have with science and, broadly, the multifaceted relationship that people can have with the sciences: as practitioners, beneficiaries, subjects, victims, and collaborators. Bradley argues that a human rights frame provides a philosophical basis to guard against the excesses of the "greater good" in the practice of science. The chapter thus offers an insight into the intersections between the right to science and other avenues of international rights development, collaboration, and advocacy.

The third section is composed of a series of forward-looking chapters that seek to set out an agenda for exploration of the right to science, its potential applications, and the systems and structures that can facilitate its operationalisation; for example, the special role of National Science Academies in the implementation of the right to science. In Chapter 14, authors Mike Frick and Gisa Dang delve into how the right to science can be used as a tool for advancing global health equity. In Chapter 15, Andrea Boggio and Brian Gran propose a set of indicators to monitor the realization of the human right to science to understand the gap between proposed standards and their implementation.

Throughout the volume there is an acknowledgment of the thorny problem of defining what *science, scientific knowledge* and the *benefits of scientific progress* are. Science is not a simple or singular notion, and its place within the realm of cultural rights is tied up with the complicated history of science itself, as a philosophy of knowledge creation and application, in both its brighter and darker moments. The volume's content, however, is notably lacking in two aspects: firstly, in an examination of the place of science in international legal discourse and how courts and other authorities have come to understand the place of science and scientific evidence in the human rights system, and secondly in providing more diverse views on the right to science e.g., feminist or Global South perspectives, in addition to the admirable chapter looking at the relationship between the right to science and the CRPD.

Right to Science: Then and Now delivers a helpful introduction for students of cultural rights and a meaningful complement to the literature on cultural rights. It presents an accessible summary of the history, contemporary moment, and potential

future of the right. Students of subjects that are related to science and innovation – health, technology, law –will find useful avenues for exploration within this text. Given the potentially broad meaning of science, the relevance of the right holds wide-ranging potential. As part of the Cambridge Core's open access collection, *The Right to Science: Then and Now*, and in the spirit of the right it is dedicated to, is available for anyone to read. Those interested in the history of human rights may be particularly attracted to Part I and the origins of the right. Advocates working on diverse topics such as media disinformation, health, education, and expression may find the new ground set out in this book at Parts II and III both useful food for thought, and a useful overview of the current state of discourse. The covid-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on the meaning of benefiting (or not) from scientific progress. The right to science, as this collection suggests, deserves greater attention, and this admirable contribution opens avenues for future scholarship.