

## Philosophy in Review



# Ben Almassi. "Reparative Environmental Justice in a World of Wounds."

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Volume 41, Number 4, November 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084772ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084772ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

### ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Klikauer, T. & Young, M. (2021). Review of [Ben Almassi. "Reparative Environmental Justice in a World of Wounds."]. *Philosophy in Review*, 41(4), 227–229. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084772ar>

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**Ben Almassi.** *Reparative Environmental Justice in a World of Wounds.* Lexington Books 2021. 186 pp. \$95.00 USD (Hardcover 9781498592062).

We know the philosophical issue of justice not only from John Rawls' work, but also from discussions of distributive justice, global justice, intergenerational justice, international distributive justice, justice as a virtue, retributive justice, and environmental justice. Almassi's astute book is about environmental justice. It covers eight short chapters starting with 'Justice after the Dam Breaks,' and continuing with 'Environmental Injustice,' 'Ecological Restoration,' 'Animal Ethics,' 'Reparative Justice,' 'Reparative Epistemic Justice,' 'Reparative Environmental Justice,' and 'A World of Wounds.'

In his preface Almassi says, 'this book builds upon theories of reparative and restorative justice' (vii). The guiding text for what Almassi writes is Margaret Walker's *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge University Press 2006). Following her, Almassi emphasizes, 'where retribution metes out punishment, and restitution aims to make injured parties whole, moral replay is the task of restoring or stabilising – or in some cases creating – the basic elements that sustain human beings in a recognisable moral relationship' (viii).

Chapter one starts with the surprising note that it was not the well-known Three Mile Island nuclear accident that was the biggest atomic catastrophe in the USA, but the 'dam breach at the United Nuclear Corporation's uranium mill at Church Rock [spilling] 93 million gallons of radioactive liquid' (1)—about 350 million litres, filling about 140 Olympic-size swimming pools. Of course, whenever human beings and the environment are concerned, there is environmental ethics which 'is not over after environmental wrongdoing' (2). Often, 'we fail to respond properly to wrongdoing [which is something Almassi calls] second-order wrongdoing' (3). Environmental justice is also 'akin to Aristotle's corrective justice' (4). It is, however, different from 'retributive justice [which features] three kinds of wrongful acts' (5) deserving a response:

1. Those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, paradigmatically serious crimes, morally deserve to suffer proportionate punishment;
2. It is intrinsically morally good—good without reference to any other good that might arise—if some legitimate punisher gives them the punishment they deserve;
3. It is morally impermissible to intentionally punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionately large punishment on wrong-doers. (5)

Unlike this, 'restitutive justice is less concerned with punishment than with remedy, returning things how they were prior to injustice' (6). In plain words, 'restitutive' can mean the act of restoring to the rightful owner something that has been taken away, lost or surrendered; the act of making good or compensating for loss, damage or injury; and indemnification.

In terms of environmental ethics, restitutive justice means 'bringing about an amount of good that is comparable (as far as it can be reasonably estimated) to the amount of evil to be compensated for' (7). Beyond that, 'the fundamental issue in reparations ... is the moral vulnerability of victims of serious wrongs' (7). Overall, this links to environmental philosophies. These are concerned with 'our moral obligations to each other and the natural world' (9) which, of course, have a long history. Almassi says,

*By the early 1990s, the discourse and values of environmental justice began to see uptake from mainstream institutions. The Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, and*

*Greenpeace added environmental justice to their organisational platforms, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) opened its Office of Environmental Equity (later renamed the Office of Environmental Justice) and US president Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898, directing federal agencies to take environmental justice into account in their work.* (23)

Almassi also emphasizes that ‘environmental justice is about people being able to speak for themselves’ (28). This can be directed towards restorative justice. On this Almassi argues that ‘rather than trying to restore something that (perhaps never really) was, they would have us build something new, something better in the aftermath of injustice’ (29). On restoration, he continues by noting, ‘restoration ... offers us a constructive response to environmental harm with tangible, measurable results’ (37).

Beyond that, ‘restoration refers to repairs that move relationships in the direction of becoming morally adequate, without assuming a morally adequate status quo ante’ (40). Yet, Almassi also admits that ‘a restoration project needn’t be one of perfect replication. Strictly speaking, this might be impossible’ (41). Worse, ‘restoration narrowly construed ... could be just another form of greenwash’ (43).

While avoiding greenwash, ‘ecological restoration can be understood as making amends to past, present, and future people’ (47). Of course, this also indicates a move ‘from animal rights to animal liberation’ (57). This is linked to the ever-increasing impossibility of ‘wild animals [which are animals that] live without human contact, they are outside the realm of justice altogether [yet] climate change and other wide-sweeping environmental damage and degradation means that few, if any animal will count, as fully wild on this definition’ (62).

Global warming will shrink the space of wild animals ever more which, of course, is a moral issue, perhaps even *the* moral issue of our time. And, we are failing massively. Still, Almassi says correctly, ‘as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report (2013) points out, Ethical judgements of value underlie almost every decision that is connected with climate change’ (71). Self-evidently, this ethical challenge carries connotations to inter-generational ethics and the problem that ‘those most responsible for the climatological changes felt now might be long dead, and those most affected by current greenhouse-gas emissions may not yet be alive’ (77). These are the world’s ‘future victims’ (77).

Most likely, none of those responsible for the future victims of global warming are likely to testify on the destructiveness of our current actions once the full impact of global warming impacts. In any case, such a communication between wrongdoer and victims will relate to eight different versions of injustices: ‘testimonial injustice, trust injustice, epistemic objectification, argumentative injustices, testimonial quieting and smothering, interpretive injustice, and discursive injustice’ (93).

General injustice, justice and environmental justice also impact on the integrity, stability, and beauty of a community. On this, Almassi accepts Aldo Leopold’s claim ‘a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’ (139). Perhaps Leopold’s conception marked a good place for Almassi to end his book on ‘reparative environmental justice.’ Unfortunately, his book does not feature a concluding chapter that could have brought the main ideas of the book together while also answering the key questions of all conclusions: *What can we learn from all this?*

Yet, despite this minor shortcoming, Almassi’s insightful book on *Reparative Environmental Justice in a World of Wounds* delivers a most illuminating and thoughtful contribution to the field of morality, ethics and environmental justice. He does this without, for some reason, locating his book

in the Utilitarian field or the Kantian field of ethics. Yet, if Almassi takes his motto, well, it is actually Plato's motto—*an unexamined life is not worth living*—at heart, Almassi has truly achieved what he had set out to achieve. He has thoroughly examined the issue of ethical issue of *reparative environmental justice*

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