Multispecies justice

Multispecies Justice:

Theories, Challenges, and a Research Agenda for Environmental Politics

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Abstract

This essay seeks to open a conversation about multispecies justice in environmental politics. It sets out some of the theoretical approaches, key areas of exploration, and obvious challenges that come with rethinking a core plank of liberal theory and politics. First, we discuss some of the diverse scholarly fields that have influenced the

emergence of multispecies justice. We then discuss core concerns at the centre of this reconfiguration of justice – including broadening conceptions of the subject of justice and the means and processes of recognition (and misrecognition). The importance of deconstructing and decolonising the hegemony of liberal political discourse is crucial, and is part of a larger project for multispecies justice to rework a politics of knowledge and practice of political communication. Finally, we begin to explore what a commitment to multispecies justice might demand of politics and policy.

Keywords: Multispecies justice, environmental justice, environmental political theory

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Introduction: Laying out the terrain of multispecies justice

We began this in the midst of a fossil-fueled climate disaster. Bushfires raged across Australia laying waste to ecosystems and billions of the nonhuman beings and relationships that make up this place. This reality is neither a natural disaster nor a tragedy, but injustice – albeit injustice that cannot be contained by standard notions of that concept. The impacts of these and other ecological disasters generated by industrialization and capitalism demand an approach to idea and practice of justice that can encompass and respond to the destruction of multispecies lifeways. Here, we lay out an introduction to multispecies justice (MSJ), suggest theoretical approaches that contribute to it, key areas of exploration, and the challenges of rethinking justice.

An account of MSJ is required to rectify false assumptions and longstanding misconceptions in justice theory. Principal amongst these is the fictitious idea of human beings as individual, isolated, unattached and unencumbered, and the correlative presumption that more-than-human nature is mere passive background. Beyond rejecting the belief that humans alone merit ethical or political consideration, multispecies justice rejects three related ideas central to human exceptionalism: a) that humans are physically *separate or separable* from other species and non-human nature, b) that humans are *unique* from all other species because they possess minds (or consciousness) and agency and c) that humans are therefore *more important* than other species.

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In conceiving 'multispecies', we contest the exclusive classificatory politics of anthropocentric justice theories that purport to expand beyond humans by recognising the value of certain other entities. Such speciest approaches tend to import a human/other, or assume hierarchies based on anthropocentric assumptions about the character and worth of 'other' subjects including other humans. By adopting more relational ontologies, MSJ can recognise the multiplicity of different types of being, in their own terms and their involvement in thick relational webs. Rethinking the subject of justice moves attention from the fiction of individuals to the actual ecological array of relationships that sustain life. As humans and other beings surround, infuse, and support each other, justice for any cannot be divorced from MSJ for all. Nevertheless, in light of their capacity to impact these relations, and their ability to have a conception of justice that might, through critical reflection, reshape human institutions and actions, humans are uniquely implicated in conceiving and practicing MSJ. MSJ thus seeks to understand the types of relationships humans ought to cultivate with more-than-human beings so as to produce just outcomes.

We begin with a discussion of some of the scholarly fields that have influenced MSJ's emergence. This tentative geneology is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather seeks to indicate some of the threads evident in our reading of the field; the goal is to open a broader conversation where others might illuminate sources we have under-emphasised or overlooked. These will likely include the thinking from the global south commonly neglected in mainstream western scholarship, and the theories and practices of activism that exceed what is codified in the academy.

Next, we discuss core concerns, including broadening and decolonising conceptions of the subject of justice, the means and processes of recognition, the politics of knowledge and practices of political communication. Because justice is not simply a normative framework, but also a guide for institutions, we then sketch what MSJ might demand of legal, representational, and deliberative processes, which have been overwhelmingly concerned with justice for humans alone. The final part of the paper canvasses some internal contestations of this field-in-development and suggests an agenda for environmental political theorists engaging MSJ.

Before proceeding, a word about terminology. Every part of the term we are working with, that is, the multi-, the species- and the justice, can be critiqued, particularly for their implication in forms of classification and ontologies of seperateness that we seek here to deconstruct (van Dooren, Kirksey et al. 2016; Celermajer et al 2020). Alternatives might include 'inter' not 'multi', 'being' ' not 'species' and a regulative ethical concept other than justice. Similarly, the naming of those to whom we argue justice ought to apply, as 'other than human', 'more than human' or 'non-human' problematically recentres and reifies the human as a singlar benchmark. Finally, the reach of inclusion, and the distinction between life and non-life need to be posited as questions. For the purposes of this project, we mark, but do not seek to resolve these dilemmas.

What are the intellectual and political origins of the field of MSJ?

We illustrate a few strands of environmental and political theories that have set the foundations for extending the conception of justice beyond human beings. While grassroots and networked activism – for animals, for environmental justice, for species and environments, for the climate and earth systems – has been central in

shifting the focus from individual humans to our complex relations, our limited focus here is on the (movement-informed) scholarship underlying MSJ.

Animal Rights

Advocacy for the recognition of the rights or personhood of non-human animals has long created ruptures with anthropocentric ideas about justice. In challenging the traditional assertion that, by virtue of their rationality and self-awareness, humans uniquely merit recognition as rights-holders, animal rights theorists and movements question the absolute ontological distinction between humans and non-human animals. A consistent commitment to the principle of justice also compels major reforms to legal and political institutions shaping outcomes for animals.

Under the broad animal rights umbrella, both those advocating strengthened protection of animals welfare on the basis of utilitarian principles (Singer 1975) and those who leverage deontological ethics (Regan 1983, Francione 1995) to call for the recognition of animals as persons before the law (Wise 2012) or as citizens (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2016), rest heavily on animals' sentience. This logic of extensionism has also justified an ethic of biocentrism (Taylor 1986), implying recognition of the claims of all living beings, like plants or trees (Stone 1975). Insofar as such approaches continue to identify individuals as the only moral subjects, they have been seen as insufficient to the ethical transformation required to support the flourishing of environments (Schlosberg 2007).

The individual/holism debate has transcended early dichotomies (Ouderkirk and Hill 2002) to articulate principles supporting a "common theoretical umbrella" (Callicott 1988, 169) and more subtle moves between holistic foci and individual

moral claims (Fox 2007). Nevertheless, there is an ongoing tension between animal rights positions' focus on the irreducible good of the individual, and environmental holists' focus on the functioning of systems. This is one of the challenges that motivates a consideration of multispecies justice.

Environmental justice and political ecology

Environmental justice (EJ) activism and scholarship have a long history of consideration of the non-human. In 1991, a broad cross-section of environmental and civil rights activists from communities of color came together to define a set of Principles of Environmental Justice. Alongside a focus on inequity in the distribution of environmental bads, they emphasise the crucial role of the natural world. The first Principle affirmed the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species. As one of the organisers of the event reflected, 'For people of color, the environment is woven into an overall framework and understanding of social, racial, and economic justice' (Alston 1991). Such principles, based on the crucial ties between the non-human environment, culture and identity, are intrinsic to many EJ issues, such as the battle over oil pipelines on the stolen land and waters of the Standing Rock Sioux (Whyte 2017). While there are many, and often competing, approaches to EJ in both theory and practice, this particular principle and concern remains highly influential.

While undoubtedly focused on racism at the heart of a range of social and environmental injustices, the focus on the sacredness of place, on the interdependence of species, and on the link between justice and a functioning and sustainable environment has also been central to environmental justice scholarship. Agyeman's (2013) conception of just sustainabilities, for example, directly addresses

the justice of relationships between social and environmental communities. In the wake of growing impacts of climate change, including Hurricane Katrina (Ross and Zepeda 2011), conceptions of EJ have come to address not only the classic issue of the social injustice of environmental impacts, but also the reality that no system of social justice is possible without a functioning and sustainable environment (Schlosberg 2013). Longstanding environmental justice scholars have embraced this broad focus, from Sze's *et al.* (2010) work on California's Central Valley, to Pellow's (2017) extention of 'critical' environmental justice to nonhuman animals.

Similarly, over the last decade, the field of political ecology has combined a focus on environmental justice with the reality of the co-constitution of humans and non-humans and their multiple entanglements in socio-natures (Bakker 2010). Building on understandings of the social and natural as co-constitutive (Castree, 2002), more-than-human geographies (e.g. Whatmore, 2002), and 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005), this work attends to the political processes that shape connections. Critical urban ecology, for example, examines 'nature-society hybrids' (Zimmerer 2000: 356) such as hybrid cities and their socio-ecological metabolic flows that entangle peoples, natures, and things, often unevenly. Scholarship on 'alternative urbanisms' (Houston et al., 2016: 265) and just urban transformations emphasize bodily encounters and political entanglements with multi-species worlds. Urban environmental and climate justice, then, requires experimenting with 'alternative ways of being', actively interacting with 'others' (Roelvink, 2018), and scrutinizing injustices in urban imaginaries predicated upon extinction of both human and more-than-human inhabitants (Houston 2019).

The posthuman turn

Posthumanist scholarship has become increasingly important in contesting anthropocentrism across a range of disciplines (Braidotti 2013, Wolfe 2010). The term is contested, but a core feature of posthumanist approaches is the recognition of human beings' inextricable embeddedness in biological and technological worlds. This ontology of 'entanglement' (Barad, 2007) rejects anthropocentric insistences that humans are separate or separable from nature, unique, and always more important than other species or elements.

Contra the notion that action originates with the transcendent intervention of an autonomous agent (normally assumed to be a human), through Actor-Network-Theory Latour (2005) and Law (1992) insist that the production of effects always emerges from networks comprised of a range of different types of beings - human, technological, material and more. This reconsideration of agency – what it is, how it works, and who 'has' it - is a key inheritance for multispecies justice.

Similarly, anthropologists have recast human nature as an 'interspecies relationship' (Tsing 2012, p. 144). Studying a wide range of entanglements between humans and other species, from mushrooms (Tsing 2015) to nonhuman animals (Marchesini 2017) to forests (Kohn 2013), scholars creatively combine research into the human world with an acute attention to its immersion in the more-than-human realm. Often their engagements have been with Indigenous peoples, whose ontologies around the human and more-than-human are indicative not only of different knowledge systems but different 'worlds' (de la Cadena 2015, Rose 1992). Attending to the intimate ways in which apparently distinct entities 'co-shape' (Haraway 2008, 2016) or 'intra-act' (Barad, 2007) with each other has become foundational to multispecies studies.

Drawing on a Spinozist heritage, and echoing the relational ontologies mentioned above, new materialism (Bennett et al. 2010; Coole and Frost 2010) also challenges the attribution of agency to humans alone or even to certain 'sentient' animals. Here, all matter has vitality (Bennett 2009), and agency is a feature of human and nonhuman networks, assemblages, and (inter)relationships.

Much new materialism is feminist, and in its longstanding efforts to deconstruct the normalised universalized idea of 'the human' as white, male, cis-gender, heterosexual, abled-bodied (Braidotti 2016), such feminist scholarship is foundational to multispecies justice. Building on ecofeminists like Plumwood (2002), feminist politics have illuminated how structures of oppression are rooted in a Western paradigm that organizes the world via linked hierarchical oppositions (e.g. man/woman, human/nature, white/not, mind/body, reason/passion), and elevates one side of each binary, and reclaimed the agentic quality of the very materiality traditionally deployed to degrade women and the environment (Alaimo 2000, Macgregor 2017). Those groups of humans and beings other than humans associated with the devalued side are then expelled from the unique benefits afforded to 'the human'. Feminists have long sought to disarm the theoretical basis of this 'logic of dualism' (Plumwood, 1993) by tracing how the human is constituted through, and thus dependent on, its relationships with other species and supposedly 'inanimate' nature (Neimanis, 2017). Posthuman feminist work also attends to the more-than-human relationships that contribute to human gender norms (Daggett, 2018). Building on this legacy, a multispecies justice ethic attends to intersecting dynamics of oppression across human categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality, across species, and across the living/non-living binary (Clare 2016) to acknowledge, resist,

prevent, and respond to violence enacted against all kinds of beings (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

Indigenous Philosophies and Decolonising Justice Theories

Although considered critical advances in various scholarly fields, none of the above is new. Indeed, while useful, these conceptualisations illustrate the obliteration of Indigenous genealogies of inter-species relationality and their implications for rethinking justice and governance (Stewart-Harawira 2012; Winter 2020). The frequent erasure of Indigenous peoples' articulations of the more-than-human has led some Indigenous scholars to denounce posthumanism as yet another universalist colonizing philosophy (e.g. Hoogeven 2016). For tens of thousands of years, Indigenous philosophies have, in myriad ways, posited the world, human and non-human alike, as animated, agential, knowing, feeling, and relational. While western posthumanists struggle for credibility within more mainstream scholarship, Indigenous peoples have well-developed 'posthumanist' philosophies unconstrained by Western dualisms and hierarchies. When asking 'what constitutes the good?', 'what should we do?' these approaches direct our attention to responsibilities and duties to human and nonhuman agency and interconnectivity.

Obvious linkages exist between a wide range of more-than-human theories and geographies of indigeneity, particularly the idea of responsible co-becoming in situated ways (Bawaka Country et al. 2013). Even then, as Schaeffer (2018) argues, Western efforts to recognise the agency and vitality of matter tend to neglect the spiritual or cosmological. The danger here is not only that ecocentric or multispecies approaches appropriate Indigenous philosophies, but that they expunge their spiritual and cultural connections and knowledges, and so reinforce a range of

problematic dualisms (Western/Indigenous, material/spiritual). Neglect of the spiritual and cultural can also result in inattention to the ways in which dominant western cultural and spiritual forms sustain narrow conceptions of justice, and to the importance of the transformation of these dimensions of western practice alongside the oft-emphasised reform of legal and political ideas.

Problematically, through the course of colonisation, these philosophies have been traduced by Western thinkers and decimated by the relentless extractivist drive of capitalism (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Stewart-Harawira 2005; Winter 2019). Yet beginning with the eruption of Indigenous environmental activism onto the global stage in the 1970s (Stewart-Harawira 2005), and with increased urgency in the 21st century (McGregor et.a. 2020), from Indigenous demands for the recognition of rights and the cessation of destructive forms of development on traditional lands and waters have emerged some of the most powerful voices against the devastating impacts of capitalism. Salient beacons of Indigenous multispecies justice, predicated on the deep inter-relationality between human and more-than-human-human species, have emerged in political initiatives across the globe.

In Māori philosophy and living, for instance, it is impossible to conceive of separating the spiritual from the material (Durie, 1998). Drawing from an ontoepistemology – *whakapapa* – that stresses (inter)connections (Roberts, 2010), the spiritual, the living and ancestors, plant, animal, waters and lands are understood through their shared genealogical origins and reciprocal relationships. Here the positioning of human beings as the junior in a relationship of reciprocity delineates the responsibilities of guardianship - to respect, protect and nurture the wellbeing and spirit of their environment (Kawharu, 2010, Winter, 2019). As the

nonhuman 'provides for' human wellbeing, so must humans respect that giving through sustainable patterns of use and protection of nonhuman realms. Although we cannot speak for all Indigenous approaches, these themes of reciprocity, respect, sustainability and spiritual-material interconnection echo throughout Indigenous philosophies across the globe.

As this discussion indicates, there are numerous intellectual traditions, ways of life, and grassroots movements that inform a focus on multispecies justice. Their combined insights equip us with tools to push environmental politics beyond the fiction of the unencumbered liberal individual as the sole focus of political theorising.

Central features, essential themes, and research agendas for the Multispecies Justice project

These streams of theory and activism may take us to the idea of MSJ, but when it comes to its operationalization in the context of western traditions of justice, we face serious challenges. That tradition has perhaps recognized the implications of our treatment of nonhuman beings for our own moral character (Kant), or that their treatment fell under the rubric of ethics (Rawls); but beings other than humans have been cast outside the sphere of justice. How do we engage justice beyond the human, to the ecological reality in which we are immersed? What areas of political environmental theorizing are challenged by this multispecies lens?

Radically rethinking the subject of justice

The first step for MSJ is redefining the subject of justice. In western philosophy since the Greeks, the status as a subject of justice with correlative rights to equality before the law and political institutions has been reserved for those classified as human.

Lacking the requisite attributes constituting 'the human', defined within the sets of binaries discussed above, many humans and all beings other than humans have been excluded from the community of justice. Nussbaum (2006) has contested this frame by arguing that justice theory can incorporate sentient individual nonhuman animals as dignity-bearing subjects; such beings have agency and life-projects which, when interrupted, bring about indignity, and so, injustice. These attributes warrant a list of nonhuman capabilities that parallel her human capabilities list. Ensuring animals access to these capabilities so that they can live their most fulfilled species-specific lives then becomes a matter of justice for human politics and institutions.

While pathbreaking within mainstream philosophy, Nussbaum's reconceptualisation of justice remains limited to individual, highly sentient animals. Others have pushed further. For instance, Baxter's (1999) conception of ecological justice argues that for life forms that have low degrees of individuality – and may not have 'dignity' – the unit of moral concern could be the species. Similarly, Schlosberg (2007, 2014) and Fulfer (2013) include ecosystems as the subjects of justice, based on the argument that such systems merit a capabilities-based conception of flourishing. For Fulfer, the dignity of ecosystems can be undermined, making it a collective subject of injustice. Schlosberg (2012) focuses on injury to bodily integrity as one of the most salient bases for violations of dignity; he argues that if human practices create the conditions that undermine the integrity of ecological systems, and harm their basic functioning, those practices should be considered unjust. The integrity of bodies, and the ecological flow and functioning of entities or relationships, becomes key to understanding multispecies justice.

This discussion suggest a larger point: any conception of justice beyond the human must take a critical stance vis-à-vis those characteristics that are to count as criteria for moral considerability as a subject of justice. Those traditionally proffered, like agency, subjectivity, and the capacity to critically reflect and think turn out to be – not coincidentally – those associated with the human individual. Multispecies justice insists on the need to account for other beings, with their own radically diverse life projects, capacities, phenomenologies, ways of being, functionings, forms of integrity, and relationalities.

Given the microbiome communities that live on and in (and perhaps as) us, and the impossibility of human life without the flow of non-humans through our bodies, we have never been individual (Gilbert et al 2012). Multispecies justice redesigns justice away from the fiction of individualist primacy, toward an ecological reality where humans actually exist: in a larger set of material relationships. Here, human and nonhuman animals, species, microbiomes, ecosystems, oceans, and rivers – and the relations among and across them – are all subjects of justice. Consequently, multispecies *in*justice comprises all the human interruptions of the functioning of this broad array of relations.

The grounds and role of recognition
One of the important post-Rawls developments in justice theory is the move beyond distribution alone, to the role of recognition as one of the 'whys' of maldistribution (Young 1990). When applied to non-human subjects of justice, recognition demands attention to the systematic and relational nature of deprivation and oppression, and to the broader deprived status of the non-human in human ontologies, cultural, and religious formations. Following Fraser (1998), a multispecies approach focuses on

misrecognition not as an individual affront, but as a larger status injury occurring through domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect (Schlosberg 2007).

All such status injuries are endemic to many institutional, managerial, corporate, and legal understandings of beings other than humans, and evident in the injustice wrought upon the more-than-human world. Dominated by and invisible to the economic decisions that support extractive industries, beings other than humans are, at best, degraded and disrespected, if present at all. Following the formative work of feminist and civil rights theory and activism, status injuries form part of the routine operation of corporate, extractive, and governmental logics and so overcoming them will take more than legal pronouncements but will demand numerous shifts in the patterns of legal and cultural recognition.

Knowing, Communicating, and Evoking Recognition
Informing multispecies studies has been the appreciation that knowledge is not 'objective' but always situated by the positionality of the knower and the dynamics of her relationships (Haraway 1988). What follows is the recognition that all beings have knowledge, consciousness, intelligence, creativity, emotions, personality, intentions, and desires (van Dooren, Kirksey et al. 2016) shaped by their ecological histories, relationships, and embodied capacities (Barad 2007). To be comprehensive, MSJ must take seriously how different beings experience the world, and to understand those varied interests; the challenge is that how others interpret reality and their interests may be opaque to humans.

Precisely because the attributes of knowledge and consciousness have been uniquely attributed to humans, we are faced here with the twin risks of anthropomorphism,

where we assume that others are like us and fail to acknowledge their difference (Plumwood 2002), or 'mechanomorphism', where we objectify the more-than-human world, treating it, or parts of it, as inert, unfeeling and unthinking matter (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). What is required are continuous efforts to engage with radically different ways of knowing and being, while recognising the limits of our capacity to understand (Palmer, Malone & Park, 2015; Celermajer et al. 2020). Tarrying with the discomfort of never fully knowing, but continuing to strive to do so better, is a core practice of multispecies justice (Haraway 2016).

Most beings do not speak human language, although some species are able to understand (e.g. dogs) and speak (e.g. parrots), some in complex ways. For multispecies justice advocates, attending to the communication of non-humans is a key task (Hamilton and Taylor 2017). Such efforts can include learning body language, or using more sophisticated technologies to investigate how non-humans communicate (Hayward 2010) – for example, exploring how plants use chemicals to communicate the presence of predatory insects (Wohlleben 2016). Of course, once we suspend assumptions about what counts as communication, it becomes glaringly obvious that the ecological realm offers very loud statements: extinctions, fires, droughts, fish die-offs, ocean heatwaves, and more.

A cultural context structured around the binaries described earlier impedes this work of communicating across species, as it elevates dispassionate modes of linguistic communication (Cole 2016) and forecloses the aesthetic, affective, and embodied ways some humans already 'know' the more-than-human (Todd 2016). MSJ can benefit from a diverse range of communication and engagement practices, including various arts, storytelling, embodied communication, and emotions (Lloro-Bidart and

Banschbach 2019). Enabling such alternative ways of knowing may increase peoples' ability to communicate with and about other species (van Dooren and Rose 2016).

Deconstructing and decolonizing liberal hegemony

As noted above, the disrespect shown to Indigenous philosophies' understanding of the more-than-human world has been an intrinsic part of the colonial enterprise. In this regard, the work of recasting justice to include the more-than-human needs to be understood as self-consciously decolonizing and deconstructive of liberal hegemony.

While remaining alert to the dangers of appropriation, Indigenous approaches afford critical intellectual resources for challenging dominant understandings of human/non-human relations and offering alternative schemas. For example, drawing from Māori philosophy, Watene (2016) and Winter (2019) suggest that the concepts of *mauri* (life force), *tapu* (potential to be) and *mana* (respectworthiness) underscore justice for human and non-human. Mauri is a force that is constantly seeking connection between beings – human, animal, vegetable, and mineral (Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Durie, 1998) – and justice requires respect for the intrinsic goodness and right-to-be of all things. Humans must respect the dignity of the mountain, then, because of the vast interconnecting sets of relationships between mountain, human, fish, fowl, plant, and waterways. With these interconnections come obligations to respect not just the individual but everything; disrespect to any part is disrespect to everything – living, ancestor, spirit, future beings, and material.

Challenges with Institutionalising Multispecies Justice

In this final section, we consider the challenges and prospects of operationalizing or realizing MSJ as a framework for political and legal institutions, and the risk that even as we move towards greater democratic inclusion, exclusionary dynamics and ethical tensions will persist.

The advantages and disadvantages of rights and personhood
While many liberal states have long had laws placing obligations on humans with respect to harming animals or the environment, more recent developments expressly recognise the personhood of beings other than humans. Such beings then enter the political landscape as rights holders, and not merely recipients of human largesse - a distinction definitional to the very idea of justice. Insofar as rights and personhood have constituted the principal forms for political and legal recognition, according them to other beings seems to provide a path towards just institutional inclusion. Nevertheless, both frameworks risk reinscribing anthropocentric assumptions that may replicate existing exclusions. Indeed, the risk with this approach is that the hierarchically organised binaries and speciest logics that have generated systematic injustice are retained, albeit softened so as to quell dissent and offset demands for the type of structural transformative that would, as discussed earlier, deconstruct and decolonise the unjust logics. Political forms sufficiently capacious to encompass the radical diversity amongst human and other than human beings, and the radical diversity of their ways of making and understanding relationships, will need to be imagined and attempted.

That said, being accorded the status of rights in current systems is important for two reasons. First, a right has a non-negotiable character: it cannot be traded off as one interest amongst others. Second, the rights holders are understood as the moral

source of the claim, as distinct from being considered an object, albeit a valued one, afforded protections when ethical others recognise their worth. This latter distinction is often represented through the close relationship between having rights and being an agent, such that having a right means being able to claim it for oneself, on one's own terms. This logic underpins the idea that the right to participate in decisions about the institutions that will regulate their lives and relations ought to extend to animals and the environment, albeit, in our contemporary imagination, through human representation (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2016, Eckersley 2011).

Another justification for such inclusion is the impact human activity has on the non-human realm. A basic democratic principle is that those affected by a policy or action should have a say in the decision-making process, but most human decisions undemocratically exclude a wide range of the affected. Many have suggested ways that human beings can enhance institutional decision-making through the use of proxy representation of the non-human. This can range from environmental impact reports to local and traditional knowledge to a standing 'environmental defenders' office to represent those affected without access to democratic institutions (Eckersley 2004: 135).

While such institutional recognition marks a move against the structural exclusion of other-than-human beings from the realm of claims to justice, it risks retaining anthropomorphism in the most literal way: the subject of justice always takes the form of the person. The danger here, and one that is particularly stark once we start to think about the inclusion of subjects like ecosystems or rivers, is that this disrespects others' distinct ways of being. As argued, the particular identity of those humans first considered subjects of rights and personhood (white, heterosexual,

propertied, abled cis-men) continues to be encoded in the supposedly universalised figure of the human. The risk in extending personhood is subtly but insidiously preserving the imaginary that equates subjects of justice with particular human individuals (Rodman 1977).

A further concern is that even when accorded personhood, the inclusion of these new classes of persons rests on a type of second-order exclusion, insofar as beings other than humans must always be represented by, and rely on, the accurate translation of humans. As Latour (2004) and Stengers (2005) have long argued, the category of subjects essentially remains the preserve of humans, whereas the non-human, even if represented, must stay within the realm of the object; even the choice of exclusion or inclusion is dependent on the reasoning processes of human subjects.

Imagining new forms of deliberation and representation
We might imagine a couple of planks to help us past this impasse. One involves exploring the communicative expansions discussed above. A second involves recasting the role of humans in this more multifarious political community such that we see ourselves not as representatives, but as 'diplomats' (Latour 2004). Understood thus, beings other than humans are recognised as capable of, and responsible for, defining themselves and their interests. The role of the diplomat is decidedly not to discover 'a common language, or an intersubjective understanding … between protagonists constrained by diverging attachments and obligations' (Stengers 2010, 29), but to propose ways forward that are acceptable to the different parties, perhaps for very different reasons.

This proposed direction responds to concerns long expressed by critical ecological thinkers, that recognising beings other than humans as subjects of moral considerability or justice has been marked by a failure to tolerate 'unassimilated otherness' (Plumwood 1993, 52). To challenge this entrenched ontology, Latour has staged what he called 'a parliament of things', a deliberative experiment where the silenced beings would be afforded political voice. We might think of this parliamentary model as but one conception within a broader democratic imagination of how the range of non-human communications can be incorporated into political decision-making; this is where multispecies justice meets ecological democracy (Pickering, et al 2020).

This line of thought helps us respond to concerns about the impossibility of resolution in the face of a radically expanded number and type of interests (Cripps 2010). What is being proposed does not promise peaceful resolution, but suggests more hesitating, provisional, situation-specific agreements (van Dooren 2019). The supposed certainty of fully accounting for all interests is lost, but even in the human realm this has been a myth constituted through violence and silencing. Ecological systems, from individual human bodies to climate-changed atmospheres, are ever transforming in relation to each other; institutions must be designed to incorporate the pluriverse in which we are immersed, and the constant change, feedback loops, and cascades that are key to its continuation.

Conflict and exclusion

As MSJ seeks to expand the scope of justice to include more beings than just humans, interests will conflict. Here we discuss two types of persistent risks and tensions. First, insofar as the *multispecies* element situates MSJ within ecologies, we

must recognize that killing, consumption, and harm are fundamental ecological processes and are the basis of life (Haraway, 2008). So far, we have argued that only humans have obigations vis-à-vis justice, but here, we face difficult dilemmas about whether this also entails obligations to intervene in the relationships between other beings. While justice cannot demand human intervention in all conflicts in the nonhuman realm (Hailwood 2012), conservation efforts have long faced dilemmas about whether it is ethical to kill some beings (often those designated as 'feral' or 'invasive') in order to enable others ('native', 'endangered') to survive (Ramp and Bekoff 2015).

Another instance of such tensions is in conflicts between animal rights activists and communities (often Indigenous peoples) for whom hunting or otherwise harming animals provides cultural and physiological sustenance (Kopnina 2017). We do not pretend to have easy answers in such difficult ethical territory. MSJ rather forces engagement, questions, and decisions about which species, which beings, which relationships and which interconnections are valued and which are not, and who makes such decisions. Kim's notion of mutual avowal provides a fertile direction to explore here; rather than situating the diverse moral commitments of differently placed beings (human and other) within a zero-sum game, a 'multioptical analysis' (2015, 250) opens the possibility of finding ways forward that take into account the diverse stakes and understandings, against the background of historical legacies of injustice and the possibilities available in the present. Articulating more complex moral and perspective maps, and discovering the institutional forms that will support this type of multispectival deliberation, are central elements of MSJ.

The second risk or tension concerns how MSJ engages longstanding and unresolved injustices amongst humans, many of which, as noted, involve dehumanisation. Are we projecting our privilege as citizens and academics of the Global North (Henrique et al. 2020), while silencing other voices that demand basic justice in so-called 'bread-and-butter issues' (e.g. affordable housing, education, health care)? Are we expanding a long-overdue debate on the non/more-than human whilst condoning the brutal corporeality of millions of people silently enduring or violently contesting their less-than-humanness? Would the youth in Hong Kong, South Africa, Chile, and Lebanon who protest oppressive politics and policies take to the streets for multispecies justice?

We see this as a legitimate concern, but argue that it is also based on a crude devaluation of the struggles, hopes, and relationships that many—human or not—enact in their everyday lives and, as Anguelovski and Pellow (2020) argue, use to redress oppression, exclusion, and other injustices rooted in notions of dispensability. One critical problem here is that examples in the academic literature on multispecies entanglements and justice from the Global South remain limited, outside evidence from Indigenous experiences. Some noteworthy exceptions are animal flood rescue efforts (Rao et al., 2018) and human-snake relations in species-inclusive cities (Narayanan and Bindumadhav, 2018) in India, as well as traces of 'biopower from below', such as in human-soil relations and life-and death-making processes within Columbia's recent history of violence and reconciliation (Lyons 2020) and smallholder agency and affective engagements that counter neoliberal human-forest environmentalities (Gebara and Agrawal 2017; Singh 2013). These examples serve as vital reminders that MSJ exists outside of western/northern elitism and aims to addresses entrenched dehumanization while acknowledging the

real, embodied hardship of social inequalities, multidimensional poverty, and pervasive injustices in all societies. Such a progressive lens entails illustrating evidence of those not recognized as fully human being able to claim justice, for themselves and others, from within situations of 'attritional lethality' (Nixon 2011) – the gradual and out-of-sight harm that erodes people's control over their own lives, their dignity and their humanity, and ultimately forecloses their capacity to become otherwise (Anderson et al. 2020).

Taking Multispecies Justice beyond the ideal

Finally, actually realising MSJ aspirations within existing institutions and normative frameworks forces an engagement with questions of strategy and power. Advocacy in relation to animals and environmental rights has historically faced significant resistance, especially when claims are made not merely in terms of care or protection, but under the more demanding principle of justice. As their protests become increasingly robust, climate emergency and animal rights movements have found themselves faced with legislative restraints if not state authorised violence.[1] Beyond the cultural challenge they represent to the entrenched hierarchy of beings, what most provokes opposition are their material demands to transform basic institutions whose political economy is premised on the exclusion and exploitation of the nonhuman. Moving beyond the articulation of ideals of justice to bringing about real institutional transformations will require a range of strategies that can redress the evident imbalances in power, given the strength and existing connections with governments of the industries whose interests are directly threatened.

Realizing MSJ will thus require building coalitions beyond scholarly multidisciplinarity, and beyond the movement groups already committed to animal

and environmental rights. This will not only broaden the constituencies advocating institutional reform, but also counter discourses that frame advocates (in and out of the academy) as extremists bent on the destruction of mainstream and national interests. It will be important to find ways of demonstrating that the concerns that come under the umbrella of multispecies justice -- for example the mass death of fish due to the mismanagement of rivers, or of ecosystems like the Great Barrier Reef -- are concerns for a broader range of people and for a range of reasons. This means engaging people who will not share some of the more radical commitments that have been at the heart of the multispecies turn – but who would benefit in their own ways from the protection of multispecies systems and relations. It also means recognising internal tensions which will inevitably arise from differences in class or race, and in the priorities of different constituencies within the coalition. MSJ must continue to learn from the increasing intersectional efforts of environmental and climate justice movements, in both theory and practice.

Conclusion

We began this essay in the midst of the worst bushfire events Australia has ever seen; they were followed shortly by Covid-19 and global movements for black lives – both of which illustrated the relationship between social, racial, and environmental injustices. Drawing these reflections back to the immediate reality of violence and injustice in the face of rapid and extreme climate, health, and social changes, the litmus test for the work scholars do in developing the conception of MSJ must be its capacity to help us more ethically navigate the real world we face – one of unprecedented but foreseeable disasters, mass deaths, species extinctions, and the full corpus of impacts of the realities of our current social, ecological, and climate emergencies. In the face of losses that cannot be reversed, inevitable future

devastations and changing ecosystems, we cannot afford to allow MSJ to remain an idealist notion, but need to press it and ourselves to provide guidance in the face of the ever-shifting and destructive realities we will continue to confront in the coming years.

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[1] For example, in Australia, NSW increased the penalty for 'aggravated unlawful entry on inclosed lands' and added a three-year prison term for people who 'hinder' a business while trespassing. In response to Extinction Rebellion protests, the Queensland government passed the legislation which criminalises the use of devices commonly used in peaceful protests.