

# INTRODUCTION

## Multispecies Justice

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**Abstract** This introduction to the special issue “Multispecies Justice” traces various histories and genealogies of multispecies justice, illuminating the critical contributions of Indigenous philosophies and lifeways and more recent justice movements and intellectual developments in the West. It emphasizes how these intellectual traditions are rooted in social and political movements spurred by the relentless violence against the more-than-human and the inadequacy of existing conceptualizations or institutions of justice. The introduction explains the issue’s engagement with the relationship between epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies on the one hand, and political institutions on the other, with a particular focus on different “species” of beings (human, nonhuman animal, plant, and so on). It also sets out the methodological and representational challenges involved in conceptualizing and achieving multispecies justice. The introduction introduces the articles to follow by thematizing them around four key topics: the relationship between agency and representation; situated knowledges and knowledge production; colonialism and capitalism; and the law and institutions understood as formal rule-systems *and* informal rules and norms. By engaging these themes, the special issue seeks to imagine how political institutions might be formed and transformed in ways that are responsive to cultural ontologies that disrupt existing grids of meaning and distributions of value.

**Keywords** multispecies justice, more-than-human, cultural ontology, posthumanism, political institutions, representation, epistemology

As the pressures of human exploitation of the planet intensify, the experiences of injustice among differently located humans, other-than-humans, and the environment deepen and become more glaring. It is also becoming

increasingly apparent that hegemonic existing frameworks for conceptualizing justice, the ways in which justice is imagined and represented, and the dominant political institutions for delivering justice are not up to the task of attending to the multiple dimensions and experiences of injustice in a multispecies world. Specifically, the individualist and humanist ontologies and ethical frameworks that underpin virtually all theories and practices of justice in Western legal cultures are proving inadequate to encompass the needs, relations, interests, concerns, communicative styles, and lifeways of more-than-human beings, and indeed many humans as members of diverse yet shared communities of life.

This special issue seeks to contribute to the larger exploration that is currently taking place across various disciplines of what it would mean to reconceptualize, reimagine, and reinstitute justice through a multispecies lens. While the term *justice* implies an emphasis on institutional protections, the very possibility of political or legal institutions commencing the task of doing justice in a multispecies world requires acknowledging the presence of beings endowed with perceptual lifeworlds, communicative capacities, biotic affordances, and ecological situatedness that may be radically different from those of humans. This, in turn, calls on an acknowledgment of the momentous (though not necessarily insurmountable) challenges entailed in entering into each other's perceptual lifeworlds—or *Umwelten* (Uexküll 1957)—and negotiating justice in ways that honor all and different points of view. In this regard, the “multi” of multispecies justice is an acknowledgment of not simply the many different types of beings who ought to be included as subjects of justice but also the multiplicity of ways of being. The transformative work of

cocreating multispecies justice thus calls for more than an expansion of the rules of inclusion that constitute politics. Rather, it requires new political imaginaries that take into account the ontological diversity, relational complexity, and incommensurable forms of communication and desire, within which just arrangements and outcomes can be cocrafted. The politics of multispecies justice is, in other words, bathed in questions of culture, politics, knowledge, and communication. Further, in response to the epistemic implications of the multiplicity of ways of being now included, the “multi” of multispecies justice also implies a multiplication of disciplinary lenses and knowledge systems.

Working across a number of fields, the contributions to this special issue explore how existing dominant political institutions and approaches to justice assume and encode particular ways of knowing and modalities of being that exclude more-than-human beings from the reach of justice. They demonstrate how dominant political institutions preclude admission except under conditions that do violence to different modalities of being and knowing. More positively, the issue engages with multispecies worlds to imagine possibilities for disrupting existing grids of meaning and distributions of value so that political, social, cultural, legal, and economic systems might be formed and transformed in ways that are responsive to, and afford the possibility of, justice for more-than-human beings. It does so through four linked lenses: agency and representation; situated knowledges and knowledge production; colonialism and capitalism; and laws and institutions.

Our foundational thesis is that comprehensively reconceptualizing, reimaging, and reinstituting justice through a multispecies lens requires something more and

other than simply expanding the rules of inclusion. A *transformation* in justice calls on scholars and practitioners to challenge the ontology and representation of the subject of justice and the telos of justice itself in ways that take into account the radical diversity of ways of being, the complexity of relationships, and the impossibility (even the dangers) of assuming or seeking full comprehension or transparent communication across species lines (Neimanis in this issue). Thus, as against the strong association between justice and transparency, and the assumption that justice requires translatability (if not equivalence, a *sine qua non* of justice refracted through economics), justice in a multispecies context must take shared and yet fundamentally different worlds as its ground.

Such an approach demands a critical engagement with themes and processes that have long been central to our understanding of cultural politics: from ethics and aesthetics, to ideologies and values, power and performance, and colonialism and capitalism. At the same time, theorizing and enacting justice in multispecies terms invites us to reimagine culture and politics themselves as always already shaped by, and shaping, the lives, relations, and socialities of *other-than-human* beings within uneven fields of power and privilege (Tsing 2014). More than this, it demands attention to the *plurality* of ways of being and knowing that animate situated more-than-human worlds, alongside the epistemic and ontological frictions, indexicalities, and incommensurabilities produced by interspecies encounters both real and imagined.

### ***Genealogies and Implications of Multispecies Justice***

The emerging field of multispecies justice has arisen in relation to longer histories and diverse genealogies of thought and practice. It draws on a range of different fields, each of which contributes to the multispecies justice conversation through a particular sets of insights, methods, and objectives. Written from a number of disciplinary perspectives and theoretical traditions, the articles in this issue engage with a number of these genealogies. We hope that they provide not only a snapshot of contemporary thinking on multispecies justice but also a view into the intellectual traditions from which this emerging field draws its ideas and orientations. At the same time, we make no claim (in this introduction or across the articles) to provide a comprehensive intellectual biography of the idea.<sup>1</sup> Our intention is not to synthesize diverse intellectual traditions but to render apparent the points of tension across them and indeed to show that these tensions are central in shaping multispecies justice's evolving trajectory.

At the same time, we wish to make clear that many of the intellectual traditions we trace here are rooted in social and political movements spurred by the relentless violence against the more-than-human and the inadequacy of existing conceptions or institutions of justice to bring succor or protection. Concern for the well-being of and justice toward more-than-human life-forms and the environment have given rise to a range of innovative ethical frameworks and advocacy approaches, including extending legal rights to the more-than-human, such as trees, rivers, and mountains (Stone 1972; de la Cadena 2010), or apes and elephants (Cavaliere 2001; Wise 1997), and imagining the expansion of citizenship rights to nonhuman animals

(Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Cochrane 2018). Such approaches radicalize the character of the subject of rights and thus may, especially through the emergence and embrace of earthrights (Cullinan 2011; Gordon 2018), eventually transform how we understand the ontological structure of legal subjecthood. Nevertheless, these efforts largely remain embedded within traditional Western ontologies. Otherwise put, much of the politics of justice remains committed to a culture in which a series of bound and exclusive associations are implicit, in particular individuality and subjecthood; individuality and the capacity to make justice claims; and, albeit often implicitly, justice and the human.

As Indigenous scholars have pointed out, these bounded associations and the nature-culture split on which they are premised are alien to Indigenous cultures. While Indigenous cultures are diverse, variously constituted through complex historical interactions, and grounded in the specificities of time, place, and community (Durie 2005; Turner 2006), their customary political, legal, and moral structures share a recognition of the coconstitutive relationships between the land and its diverse human and other-than-human dwellers (Bird-David 1990; Rose 2011; Stewart-Harawira 2012; TallBear 2015; Winter in this issue). Within this relationist ethos, other-than-humans are frequently conceived and sustained as kin (and not just kind) endowed with sentience, volition, and dignity. They participate as interagentive members within a shared community of life and are bound to other life-forms—including the human—through relations of reciprocal care and nurture (Kimmerer 2013). These relations are in turn inextricable from the places in which they are embedded (Todd 2014). They also operate intergenerationally in that they

recognize how just interspecies relations in the past may enable livable presents and futures, both within and across species lines (Winter 2020, 2021).

Sustained critiques of liberal humanism from Indigenous and anticolonial perspectives have more recently been joined by a number of bodies of theory and research practices in the Western academy. Posthumanist and new materialist approaches, for instance, work to reembed human beings, aims, and goals in mutually constitutive relations, or “intra-actions” with other species, elements, and technologies (Jane Bennett 2009; Braidotti 2017; Barad 2003; Haraway 2008). Cosmopolitical and ontological theorists problematize the question of who and what composes the common world, questioning the assumed singularity of reality and drawing attention to the exclusions, potentialities, and politics generated by difference and disagreement over what counts *as* and *in*, more-than-human worlds (de la Cadena 2010; Latour 2004; Stengers 2010). Actor network theorists, meanwhile, invite a flattening of ontological difference through an attention to the complex, contextual, and changing networks of people, organisms, things, and processes in ways that belie modernist classifications and their constructed but naturalized splitting of the cultural from the natural, the subject from the object, and the agentive from the structural (Latour 2005, 2017).

Critiques of liberal humanism are also central to the interdisciplinary currents of environmental humanities and multispecies studies, which aim to bridge conventional divides between the natural sciences, arts, and humanities in describing and theorizing naturecultures through the situated agencies of their human and other-than-human dwellers (Rose et al. 2012; van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster

2016; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). A similar project animates the work of scholars in critical animal studies (Wolfe 2003; Gruen 2015) and critical plant studies (Myers 2017; Ives 2019; Foster 2019), who analyze and often challenge the entrenched concatenations of structural, institutional, technoscientific, and discursive powers shaping how animal and vegetal life-forms are classified, hierarchized, and instrumentalized to serve (certain) human ends.

The currents outlined above, while certainly not exhaustive, offer capacious and comprehensive ways to critique humanist and individualist ontologies and reconceptualize the beings who might be legitimate subjects of concern or interest. They do so by resituating the human within a broad spectrum of life in which other-than-human organisms, once relegated to the status of bare life, or *zoe*, are repositioned as (co)makers of meaning endowed with fleshy cultural, historical, and political biographies and involved in sympoetic becomings. Still more radically, some of these theoretical approaches decenter the individual subject altogether and shift ontological primacy to material-semiotic relationships, ecologies, assemblages, processes, and so forth (Barad 2012; Haraway 2008; Kohn 2013).

Just as important to the enterprise of multispecies justice are the critiques and contestations that have arisen in response to these various approaches, all of which must inform how justice beyond the human is theorized across and beyond disciplinary imaginaries. These critiques include worries about a lack of attention to the uneven power dynamics shaping assemblages of beings and things within actor network theory; the dangerous slippage of posthumanism toward anti- or ahumanism; the elision of thought, language, and discourse as sources of meaning

and world-making within rigidly materialistic approaches; and the challenges for cosmopolitical and ontological approaches of achieving translation or interaction *between* worlds. Other critiques call out the exclusion or unacknowledged appropriation of Indigenous knowledges within Western theoretical currents; the frequent neglect of questions of race, gender, and (dis)ability in shaping human and other-than-human lifeworlds; and the erasure of colonialism and its afterlives in the constitution of what counts as knowledge, science, philosophy, and theory, and who gets to produce and use it.

Even as the move beyond the human and associated intellectual debates seem to promise a more capacious and nuanced understanding of justice, it remains critical to be vigilant against eliding the strategies of dehumanization that have organized systematic intrahuman injustice and violence and critiques of the multiple forms of violence generated by humanism. Such vigilance demands attending to the morally laden and racialized instrumentalization of "species" categories and hierarchies by dominant human groups in order to legitimate the exploitation of peoples as fungible bodies, extractible labor, dangerous vermin, and disposable property (Moore, Pandian, and Kosek 2003; Hage 2017; Joshua Bennett 2020; King 2019; Mavhunga 2011). Navigating the cultural politics of justice beyond the human, in other words, demands reflexive consideration of the ways in which colonial-capitalist-racist assemblages and their afterlives undermine the flourishing of multispecies communities of life *and* continue to relegate certain human populations to the status of subhuman, nonhuman, and killable before the law (Büscher 2022; Gilroy 2017; Jackson 2015; Kim 2015; Murphy 2017; Weheliye 2014). Fields such as

ecofeminism (Plumwood 1998; Mies and Shiva 1993), postcolonial studies (Ahuja 2009; Caluya 2014), critical race studies (Joshua Bennett 2020; Boisseron 2018; Jackson 2020; Wynter 2006), and critical disability studies (Chen 2012; Clare 2015; Puar 2017) insist that any “turn” to the nonhuman must be crucially informed by counterhegemonic understandings of justice that call into question the exclusions encoded into the assumed Western liberal subject of rights. The capacious justice we seek must, then, also be grounded in such perspectives.

Until recently, attention to justice in multispecies terms was relatively fragmented, confined to particular subfields, or embryonic (Alaimo 2019; Haraway 2018; Heise 2016; Kirksey 2017; Radomska 2017). A growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship is now seeking to more systematically reconceptualize justice beyond the human realm and draw out the implications of this reconceptualization for the ideological and structural transformation of existing political institutions. Without seeking to summarize a field that is growing as we write, a number of themes are emerging. A nonexhaustive list includes: the disruption of structural anthropocentrism and nature/culture divides and the invitation to embrace multispecies justice as a critical path to better shared future worlds (Celermajer et al. 2020; Thaler 2021); the emergence of interspecies responsibility through encounters with other-than-human beings in the face of climate change–induced and unevenly distributed vulnerabilities (Tschakert 2020; Tschakert et al. 2021); multispecies justice praxis grounded in acts of multispecies love— affective, practical, and political—enacted across diverse, interconnected communities of life (Fernando 2020); possibilities of justice approached

through the lens of contingency, situatedness, and partial connections (Chao 2021a; Chao, Bolender, and Kirksey 2022; Heise and Christensen 2020; Weaver 2021); the importance of artistic production and visual cultures in a world increasingly shaped by climate breakdown (Agarwal 2021; Broglio 2021; Celermajer et al. 2020; Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021a); and the centrality of capitalism and colonialism to multispecies injustice (Chao 2021b, 2022; Celermajer 2020; Celermajer et al. 2021; Emel and Nirmal 2021; Gillespie and Collard 2015).

This special issue seeks to take up some of the openings suggested in this emerging field, in ways that will expand and deepen possibilities for practices of living together that are hospitable to a broader range of subjects at a time of socioecological unraveling, threat, and instability. The articles reflect on what this transformation in justice might mean for human lifeworlds and their inextricable yet always historically and culturally situated relationship with the more-than-human. Rather than simply celebrating the fact of more-than-human mingling, we follow Donna Haraway in honestly asking what a more responsible “sharing of suffering” across species lines might look like in forging “barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures” (Haraway 2008: 72, 2003: 7).

Pushing against anthropocentric, hierarchist, and individualist understandings of justice, and correlatively of knowledge, representation, culture, politics, and sociality, we ask: What does justice mean when refracted through a multispecies lens? Who/what is justice for and who benefits from justice? How ought we conceive of the subject of justice? Does it even make sense to speak of subjects of justice in multispecies worlds? What is

the relationship between justice and other areas or dimensions of ethics such as care or hope? How do different practices of research, knowledge, representation and communication impede or enable the possibility of justice across radical difference?

Within this potentially vast intellectual space, the particular focus of this issue is on the relationship between epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies on the one hand and political institutions on the other, with a particular focus on different “species” of beings (human, nonhuman animal, plant, and so on). By *epistemological cultures*, we refer to the different ways in which people’s capacities to know, act toward, and form relationships (including relationships of justice) with different types of beings are shaped; how different types of beings come to matter for differently located humans, and specifically, the ethical stakes of these different ways of knowing and relating. The complementary term, *cultural ontologies*, refers to the quality or character of the being of different beings and their status within meaning-laden grids. Following Bruno Latour (2004), we pair epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies to underline that recognizing the radical differences across cultures requires acknowledging that there is not one cosmos that transcends different “local cultures” but differently composed cosmoses. Understanding what justice might entail cannot be achieved without interrogating these epistemological and ontological premises (Ruiz-Serna, in this issue). Indeed, taking ontological politics a step further and in a multispecies direction would demand wondering about the cultures and ethical orientations of beings other than humans. In this regard, and recognizing the inextricable entanglement of *bios* and *geos*, the special issue also engages with elements that might

normally be excluded even from a multispecies geography—for instance, oceans, soils, and territories (Povinelli 2016; Tall-Bear 2015; Todd 2017; Reid in this issue).

Thus understood, we are interested in how existing dominant political institutions encode epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies in ways that exclude beings other than humans from the category of subjects of justice and indeed condition and sanction systematic violence against them (Singer in this issue). At a more foundational level, these institutions preclude admission except under conditions that do violence to different epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies. Thus, while the articles in the issue are interested in recent developments in the recognition of nonhuman legal personhood as well as precedents in Indigenous and other non-Western ontologies, they caution against prioritizing (anthropogenic) juridical spaces and instruments in ways that render opaque the potentials afforded by nonjuridical, “social,” artistic, and more-than-human practices and phenomena that may prove more conducive to radical innovation. In this regard, we adopt a generous understanding of the means of and to justice.

The special issue aims to imagine how political institutions might be formed and transformed to become responsive to cultural ontologies that disrupt existing grids of meaning and distributions of value. It does this in two principal ways. First, it considers what happens to the idea and practice of multispecies justice if we take as a starting point epistemological cultures and cultural ontologies that radically challenge those that are assumed by and inform dominant justice institutions. Second, it considers what happens to the idea and practice of multispecies justice if one assumes as one’s starting point the being

of beings other than humans (Nassar and Barbour in this issue). In other words, we interrogate what beings other than humans might suggest to humans about justice and the politics of life, not only in a naturalistic sense (i.e., how they are in some idealized context) but also in contexts of past and ongoing colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism (Chatterjee in this issue).

This special issue also explicitly aims to explore the methodological and representational challenges involved in conceptualizing and achieving multispecies justice. If the pursuit or fantasy of full translation and transparent communication are features of an anthropocentric conception of justice (and even then, a narrow and excluding one), multispecies justice invites us to consciously and explicitly experiment with a different set of tools, processes, and objectives. We are interested, for example, in ideas like care (including complicit care), compromise, respectful distance, and imagination. Following Anna Tsing's (n.d.) invitation to experiment with disruptive grammars in the "big human mess" that is the current ecological epoch, we seek to develop a (re)new(ed) set of more-than-human vocabularies and representational practices that can better capture the contradictions, dilemmas, and hopeful openings at play in achieving justice across and within multispecies worlds.

Fulfilling, or even approaching the fulfilment of multispecies justice cannot be achieved within the boundaries of any single discipline, nor even within the boundaries of the traditional academy, nor within the institutional borders that cordon off scholars, artists, and activists (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021a). For this reason, this special issue includes contributions from scholars across a range of humanities and social science disciplines,

collaborative work between humanities scholars and natural scientists, and contributions from artists and activists. Articles within the issue engage with methods and concepts derived from fields including cultural theory, anthropology, political theory, philosophy, art, history of science, queer/feminist theory, Indigenous studies, law, conservation science, and plant science. Included in this issue also are works by Ravi Agarwal, Janet Laurence, and David Brook, whose artistic endeavors sit at the interface of scholarship and advocacy. Fostering diverse modes of engagement with theory, cultural production, and politics, these artistic contributions independently convey and perform themes concerning multispecies justice rather than illustrating the ideas suggested in the essays. They are critical to performing the methodological innovation we believe is required to explore if not enact multispecies justice.

One of our hopes in curating this special issue is that it will engage scholars who do not already identify as working on multispecies or indeed animal or environmental issues at all, but whose concerns are profoundly relevant to and intersect with ours on conceptual or political dimensions. We are interested in conversing with scholars who are exploring the intersections between ideas and practices concerning identity, culture, politics, law, power, representation, and modes of communication. Insofar as articles in this special issue take up these topic areas in the context of questions about justice for beings other than humans, and/or humans and more-than-human beings in relationship, they promise to offer fresh perspectives on the topics outlined above. We see our collection as offering something new to engagements with questions of identity-based power, inequality, and marginalization that have not yet comprehensively



or programmatically taken up the multi-species question.

In the final section of this introduction, we outline a number of recurring themes that animate our interdisciplinary foray into the realm of multispecies justice: agency and representation, situated knowledges and knowledge production, colonialism and capitalism, and laws and institutions. We hope our readers will see our engagements with these themes as an invitation to identify theoretical, conceptual, or empirical affinities with their scholarship in ways that will catalyze innovation in our mutual work and across disciplines.

### *Themes and Articles*

While diverse in their thematic and theoretical scope, the empirical and conceptual contributions of this issue revolve around a number of key interrelated issues. First is the relationship between agency and representation. Continental philosopher Dalia Nassar and plant physiologist Margaret Barbour take up the question of agency in relation to trees, a community of species that have, until relatively recently, been excluded from ethical, moral, and political purview in Western thought. Synthesizing their respective insights from philosophy and plant science, Nassar and Barbour offer the concept of “embodied history” to reframe trees as inherently relational beings that hold in their very materiality the biological, historical, geological, and ecological processes that together produce life and the environment. Approaching trees as embodied history invites us to reckon with vegetal beings as ethical subjects beyond the realm of representation. It also brings into question speciesist hierarchies that have been encoded in justice theories and that obscure forms of historical and ecological agency stemming from outside zoocentric and anthropocentric

notions of sentience and intelligence. In this regard, their article asks not what justice might do for trees but what trees might do for justice.

Agency and representation meet vulnerability, materiality, the law, and capitalist extraction in cultural theorist Susan Reid’s essay on ocean justice. Thinking-with oceans through the lens of mastery, discursivity, alterity, and imagination, Reid articulates vulnerability as an agentic force that, if acknowledged and accommodated by institutions, can reveal how exposures to harm extend in networks that vastly transcend individual human subjects to include interdependent organismic and elemental actors. A vulnerability-based approach thus opens generative pathways toward imagining legislative and economic institutions that could, contra the dominant regime of extractive capitalism and so-called ocean justice, offer the possibility of securing the materials humans need to live well while also ensuring the adequate recognition of other-than-human beings and the flourishing of ocean worlds.

Anthropologist Daniel Ruiz-Serna’s essay, meanwhile, foregrounds how Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples conceptualize and relate to “territory” not just as physical lands but rather as sets of emplaced and agentic relationships through which humans share life with much wider assemblages of human and other-than-human beings—venomous snakes, guardian spirits, monocrop oil palms, and sentient forests, among others. These conceptualizations challenge conventional paradigms of politics in general and transitional justice in particular as a human-only activity and of multiculturalism as a representational elision of ontological difference. Instead, they draw attention to the existential stakes of ecological destruction for the many worlds and world-making

practices that together produce the territory as a multiplicitous, agential meshwork of matter and meaning.

Agency and representation resurface in art historian and environmental humanities scholar Sria Chatterjee's essay on art, design, and plant sentience. Tracing the co-optation of vegetal sentience beyond scientific discourse into cultural and ideological fields through artistic representations, Chatterjee demonstrates how efforts to rehabilitate vegetal agency remain mediated at the core by a range of anthropocentric discourses and historically engrained relationships with colonial, nationalist, and capitalist world systems. Calling into question the assumption that more inclusion means more justice, her essay demonstrates how these systems and discourses profoundly shape whether the recognition of plant agency can lead to just ethical or political outcomes for plants themselves, or whether such recognition is simply circled back to serve particular human needs and hegemonic ideologies.

Multispecies violence—both real and representational—takes center stage in ecofeminist theorist and critical animal studies scholar Hayley Singer's essay, which meditates on the factory farm as a form of hell for animals whose horrific lives and deaths are normalized under institutionalized agro-industrial regimes. Singer's contribution grapples with the complexities of articulating and enacting multispecies literary justice through textually grounded modes of empathy, subjectivity, and point of view in relation to beings other than human. Her approach attends to the visceral granularity of industrial and flesh realisms in order to broaden representations of multispecies life and death and to foster solidarities across species differences, similarities, and complexities. Challenging the form of the essay itself, Singer offers a mode of noninnocent representative

thinking, committed to the difficult but necessary political and ethical labor of dissolving hegemonic and humancentric subject-writer-reader distinctions.

Imagining and enacting multispecies justice draws attention to the broader power relations that shape particular processes of knowledge and value production and their more-than-human consequences (Haraway 1988). Situated knowledges and knowledge production thus constitutes a second recurring motif in the contributions to this special issue. Returning to the Old Norse etymology of *hell* (*hel*, or "cover"), Singer examines the narrative strategies through which literary texts keep secret, hidden, or covered over, the unspeakable horrors of animal cruelty in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and factory farms, such that they cannot be adequately apprehended by the human mind. A practice of "poetic outrageousness," Singer argues, can offer more ethically rigorous representations of the acts of intolerable violence that govern animal life and death in industrial settings.

Chatterjee, meanwhile, traces the colonial and aesthetic mobilization of scientific knowledge about vegetal life-forms from late nineteenth-century Indian political spheres to contemporary Western neurobiological and bioengineering settings. In particular, she examines how the Western knowledge system of plant science was instrumentally activated to further human causes as diverse as Hindu nationalist ideology in India and biomimetic technological innovations in modern capitalist and military-industrial frameworks.

Reid takes up the question of knowledge production and its limits in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, whose primary focus on "ocean development" renders it incapable of adequately responding to the direct harms of extraction. Indeed, she points

to its complicity with them. Drafted in the 1970s under the pressures of nation-states and powerful industry lobbyists, the Convention conjures the ocean into territorial zones of exploitation that bear no resemblance to the actual ocean, thereby producing and compounding the ocean's material vulnerability to now naturalized modes of anthropogenic exploitation.

The violence of knowledge production as a form of extraction also constitutes a central thematic in culture and gender theorist Astrida Neimanis's contribution to this special issue. Neimanis examines how groundwater-dwelling stygofauna—a deep-time invertebrate species—unsettle the assumption that knowledge, care, and justice must necessarily be predicated on a symbolic and literal practice of “revelatory” knowing. Stygofauna's resistance to ocularcentric Western epistemologies, together with their growing vulnerability to industrial coal mining, troubles the ethical implications of knowing in the name of justice when it is tangled up with knowing as further violence. Bringing Indigenous water management practices into conversation with narrative fiction writing, Neimanis identifies other ways of knowing that take nonhuman strangeness and opacity as the basis for cultivating new kinds of ethical relations, forged through childhood memories, stories, embodied encounters, sounds, Indigenous law, conversation, and various kinds of science.

Extractive modes of knowing are further challenged in political theorist Christine Winter's essay, which examines how Mātauranga Māori—the epistemological foundations of Māori philosophy and science—is both generated by and generative of, layers of living, nonliving, ancestral, and spiritual beings bound in interdependent relationships (*whakapapa*). Recognizing and respecting the ongoing significance

and efficacy of Indigenous knowledge, science, philosophy, and culture in nurturing multispecies relationships and well-being, and engaging with Indigenous peoples as intellectual peers and producers of knowledge, Winter argues, is of fundamental importance if multispecies justice is to counter both the damaging domination of the nonhuman realm *and* the ongoing colonial domination of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in and beyond the academic sphere. Such an approach would ground itself in the principle of relationality, covering all planetary being within an expansive nonmechanical, nonlinear conception of time/space/matter that is animated by multiple, more-than-human epistemologies and ontologies.

Envisioning justice beyond the human demands attention to the perduring afterlives of colonial regimes, as these manifest in the ongoing epistemic and material violence wrought by agro-industrial, capitalist landscape transformations and attendant forms of ecological degradation. Colonialism and capitalism thus constitute a third recurrent theme in this issue. Analyzing the rise of biomimesis as a dominant techno-natural fix for the future, Chatterjee calls for the development of a framework of politics and ethics that departs from framing the natural world as dependent on human interference and innovation. This framing, she points out, problematically erases inequalities (between humans and other sentient beings) and colonial structures of power and domination even as they persist in current geopolitical and economic structures. Through a comparative analysis of Gaganendranath Tagore's 1921 satirical picture “Reform Screams” and contemporary artist Pedro Neves Marques's video “The Pudic Relation between Machine and Plant,” Chatterjee also reflects on the conflation of human

and plants as colonial subjects and as vehicles for political nationalism within entangled histories of imperial and economic domination.

Neimanis, meanwhile, describes how quests for interspecies intimacy within colonial scientific knowledge projects are often aligned with colonial extractivist projects. She invites decolonial, eco-crip, and poetic ways of knowing that depart from scientific positivism and find roots in the deeply embodied and situated nature of nature.

Reid's essay, on the other hand, performs a decolonial analytical move by thinking-with "multibeing justice" rather than "multispecies justice." Such a reframing, she posits, resists the violent logics of colonialism and biological determinism embedded within the Linnaean term *species*—one that elides the relational being and becomings of both organismic and elemental entities.

Writing as a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, where Indigenous peoples' sovereign claims remain insufficiently recognized by the contemporary settler colonial state, Winter cautions against the risk of academics perpetuating colonial knowledge practices through hegemonic and exclusionary modes of theory and practice. Eschewing the universalist impulse and instead embracing the powerful potential of multiple philosophical traditions, Winter invites a decolonial approach to multispecies justice, where justice is done not to individuals or species but rather to spatiotemporally expansive sets of relationships whose scale of mattering is open and accountable to all there is: human, animal, vegetable, mineral, and spiritual. Such an approach also challenges the neoliberal capitalist ethos of settler colonial regimes by reimagining wealth as that which comes from caring for and

carefully tending to the health and well-being of interdependent human, nonhuman, and spiritual realms.

As Winter's essay illustrates, emergent theorizations of multispecies justice within the Western academy rub up against strongly held notions about who counts ethically and politically before the law. The law and institutions thus represent the fourth and final central theme in this issue, with "institutions" defined in the broadest sense to encompass both formal rule systems (judicial systems and legislation, constitutions and political bodies, economic systems) and informal rules and norms (species, personhood, gender, race) that coordinate, discipline, and manage actions (Celermajer, Churcher, and Gatens 2020).

Ruiz-Serna explores the ontological and epistemological frictions between Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and state understandings of nature in the context of recent legislative measures that recognize traditional territories as victims of war in postconflict Colombia. This national legal precedent, Ruiz-Serna argues, foregrounds an important shift from notions of "territorial damage," or actions that limit the effective enjoyment of ownership rights, to notions of "damage to territory," or actions that jeopardize the relationships that communities cultivate with the myriad beings who constitute their territories. In the process, new possibilities arise for mending wrongs of war that go beyond considerations of human or environmental damage and that offer a unique opportunity to decolonize justice and decenter the human in our understandings of war and its aftermath.

Reid takes up jurisdictional institutions in her propositional analysis of responsible cohabitation with watery worlds. Legal and scientific paradigms, Reid demonstrates,

routinely position the ocean and its more-than-human dwellers as economic resources destined for human extraction and exploitation rather than as lively ecological actors and potential subjects of justice. Symptomatic of Western, anthropocentric ideologies of mastery and control, these institutions patrol the limits of who and what counts before the law and claim exclusive authority over ways of knowing the ocean. Achieving multispecies justice in an oceanic context, Reid argues, is not exclusively a matter of needing better law or more marine scientific knowledge but rather of learning how to perceive and relate to the ocean in intersubjective, and not exploitative, terms.

Indigenous protocols offer a vital avenue for reclaiming the law as an instrument for the fulfilment of multispecies justice. Neimanis, for instance, examines how Customary First Law in Aboriginal Australia has guided the responsible and respectful management and care of lands and waters since time immemorial, including in the absence of empirical and accessible forms of evidence for why this care matters. Winter, meanwhile, offers an important corrective to the framing of the academic field of multispecies justice as “new” by examining its long-standing existence as a field of philosophy, protocol, and practice among Indigenous peoples, for whom Western-derived nature-culture binaries are anathema to relational living and thinking. As such, the recognition of nonhuman entities as legal persons with interests, rights, powers, and duties, too, Winter argues, must recognize the shared identity and belonging of both nature and its human custodians, as these are produced through cascading spirals of time and relation.

As we hope is evident from this overview, our four principal themes—agency

and representation, situated knowledges and knowledge production, colonialism and capitalism, and laws and institutions—are entwined through the essays in this special issue in ways that demonstrate the weave of culture and politics that we set out at the beginning of this introduction. We trust that readers, coming to our collective reflections with their own perspectives, concerns, and experiences, and those of the multispecies worlds in which they are embedded, will draw their own threads beyond this offering.

### Note

1. For a more extended but also noncomprehensive genealogy of the contemporary work on multispecies justice, see Celermajer et al. 2021.

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