

P/A Forum

# Interview

## Multispecies Living and Justice

*An interview with Danielle Celermajer*  
Eva Meijer

**Introduction:** Danielle Celermajer is well-known for her work on human rights and multispecies justice. She also lives in an intentional multispecies community. In this interview we discuss the relationship between living differently and thinking differently, the connection between different forms of oppression, and how to work towards justice for all Earth beings.

*The Interviews / Symposia format acts as a platform for conversations, where participants discuss the original work of an author, practitioner, policy maker, or activist. As such, these entries do not offer an outlet for original research, but instead reflect the personal views of the participants*

---

P/A **I am very pleased that you agreed to have this conversation with me. To give the readers a better understanding of how you live, could you describe how you and the rest of your community start your day?**

DC Eva, it is always such a joy to be in conversation with you, to learn with you to be in the world in a way that nurtures curiosity about. and care for the other animals with whom we share this Earth.

I love this question. In truth, I start my day with a visceral sense that it is an infinite blessing to share a place and a life with so many others. When I pull the curtains in our room, most of the time, my eyes fall on a kookaburra on the fence just outside the window, perhaps some parrots on the grass eating seeds, and then in the further background, the donkeys who tend to mooch around close to the house to let us know they are ready for breakfast anytime; or in other words *right now thank you*.

The first critical incident of our day is what we call the “Aphra sighting”. Aphrodite is an exquisite, very regal white Muscovy duck, and she and her consort Vrodsky live outside, usually spending the night on the pontoon my partner Leonard built so that they might be relatively safe. They have made it clear that they want to spend their nights outside and not in an enclosure, where the four other ducks live, but that also means that they are vulnerable to people for whom they occur as food – foxes and quolls in particular. Quolls are one of the only two carnivorous animals native to this continent and humans thought they were extinct on the mainland, but a few years ago, humans discovered that they still live in this valley. Quolls have eaten a few of our duck friends in the past, which I always feel deeply ambivalent about. It’s painful to think of the ducks being killed and losing their friends, but the quolls are also just living their lives. So, after the Aphra sighting, we two humans who live here breathe a sigh of relief.



Aphra and Vrodsky  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

---

---

The mornings are a fulsome time. Everyone is ready for breakfast, and in winter, some of them are ready to have their rugs taken off so they can roll on the grass or the dirt or feel the sun on their skin. The people who live here are very familiar with their routines, which also means there are lots of expectations. Most mornings, it is a cacophony of calls: Kaya and Kuzu, the pigs screaming loudly, because they are always overflowing with enthusiasm for life, having started theirs in a lab; the sheep and goats, who by contrast are very modest, gently calling out to remind us they are also waiting; Gabriel, the donkey who spends his nights with the horses, braying to me from a distance; the chickens chortling from inside their house as I feed the ducks first so they don't get hassled; and of course the donkeys who are predictably indignant if they have to wait. As well as everyone having breakfast, we humans go around in our little electric All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and collect their manure from the night, adding it to the compost pile which becomes the soil, which in turn nurtures everyone.

After breakfast is then a uniquely peaceful time. People like to lie in the run, or if it is wet, they might go into their houses for a rest. And when they are resting, the humans come inside to start their other work.

P/A **This is not your only life, you are also Professor of Sociology and Social Policy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, and Deputy Director at the Sydney Environment Institute. At the SEI, you lead the Multispecies Justice Project. Before we get to what 'Multispecies Justice' entails, could you tell us a bit about how you ended up at the SEI, in particular how and why you made the transition from human to multispecies justice?**

DC Without wanting to go too far back, I really need to start my answer to that question to a time before I was born. I am the child of two people who were children during the Shoah. Their - and in turn my, entire families were murdered, save a very few survivors, by a regime that attributed to itself the right to decide whose lives mattered. So both epigenetically and atmospherically, I was constituted as someone for whom injustice and violence were not abstract concepts. There was never any question for me that I would work on issues of justice, violence and arbitrary exclusions from ethical treatment, and in the world I was born into, the most universal language for justice I had access to was the language of human rights. So, from when I was knee high, I said I wanted to be a human rights lawyer. And I did spend the first part of my activist and professional life working in human rights, as an activist, in policy and then as a scholar and teacher.

As I said, what made human rights an appealing framework for me was its apparent universality: anyone – so I thought – could, at least hypothetically - make a claim for inclusion. Now of course as black, Indigenous and disability and gender activists and scholars have long argued, not all humans get to count as human for the purposes of human rights, so the 'hypothetical' is itself a weak, but Earth others – that is, other animals, trees, rivers and so on, are by definition excluded.

And this increasingly became intolerable for me, for a few reasons. First, and to be honest most compelling, was my direct experience, which told me that the naturalized hierarchy which places humans above everyone else - other animals, but also forests and other living beings - was yet another violent and arbitrary imposition which justifies, normalizes and enables violence. Contra this framework, I experienced everyone as living their lives, as seeking forms of life and relationships that are nurturing and that allow them to flourish, as the types of being they are. And yet, we live in a world where if you are not human (and often if you are in some cases, but I

---

---

leave that aside), you are automatically classified as the property of humans, as resource to be exploited, and it is completely legitimate for humans to cause you harm. This state of affairs occurs to me as profoundly unethical and unjust.

Second, the idea of the human, or of human individuals which has undergirded most western justice theories is one that is not only fictional, but dangerously so. These theories (and the institutions they undergird), abstract humans from the relationships that are in fact the necessary conditions for all aspects of our lives. Without a flourishing and healthy ecology, which includes forests and rivers and soils and other animals, there is no possibility of any human life, let alone a good one. Of course, that humans are embedded in larger ecological relationships lies at the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems as I understand them, but in the last thirty or so years, pretty much every discipline within western knowledge has come to the same conclusion. Whether it be entanglement in physics, symbiosis in biology, or the various forms of posthumanism and new materialism that have come into social and political theory and philosophy, there is a dawning (albeit overdue) recognition that humans cannot be abstracted from their relationships. So even within its own terms, which is to ensure the possibility of a dignified life for humans, justice theories which do not also attend to Earth others are an absurdity.

Third, and this links back to my first point, but is a more situated one, I have felt the crises forced by the excesses and anthropocentric and extractive forms of life pressing against my body like a tidal wave. Whether we are talking about the horrors of industrial animal agriculture, the extinction driven by rabid development, the decimation of forests, the poisoning of rivers, the heating and destruction of oceans, or the unraveling of complex and exquisite ecological systems, the truth that the ways of being human that have characterized western modernity and for that matter informed 'ethics' and 'justice' in the modern west are toxic and intolerable and just cannot be ignored for one moment longer. I could not ignore them one moment longer.



Gandhi  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

---

---

So all of this pushed me, quite literally from a focus on justice and ethics for humans, to justice and ethics from everyone. If the horrors of the second world war catalysed a turn to justice for all humans (and not humans by nation or state), then the horrors of this time must force a turn to justice for all Earth beings.

P/A **So, what exactly is Multispecies Justice?**

DC I'd like to answer that question two ways, one in terms of what we might call the 'content' of MSJ, and the other in terms of its 'standing', starting with the latter. What I mean by its standing is the type of theory MSJ is, and I want to say a few words about this because I think this is critically important. To my mind, MSJ is not a thick or, to use J. K. Gibson-Graham's term, a strong theory. In other words, and I quote Gibson Graham here, it is not one of those "powerful discourses that organize events into understandable and seemingly predictable trajectories." It is rather a theory that suggests a number of principles and orientations, and seeks to open up a conversation about what justice would mean and looks like if all earth others were included. In general, I would advocate that all theories ought to adopt this type of humility, but there are particular reasons why that needs to be the case here, and I will mention three of them.

The first, is that most (although by no means all) of us who are doing this theorising or speculating, have been constituted as humans in a world of taken for granted human exceptionalism, anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, which means that our imaginations, including how we imagine justice, are stunted when it comes to the more than human, or to be a little more positive, we need room to grow and change and be reshaped through real collaborations with Earth others if we are to work out what a justice theory that really includes Earth others is.

The second is that right now, while humans are always already part of more-than-human communities and no doubt influenced by Earth others, again for the most part, the only ones actively doing this work are humans. There are exceptions of course, like your own multispecies collective, but until earth others are active participants in shaping multispecies justice, it needs to be understood as formative. The path will of course be iterative: we need to take a step onto the stone in the river that is reachable, and from there something else becomes accessible and visible, especially as we learn to collaborate with Earth others.

The third is that there are multiple worldviews around what multispecies justice is, and these cannot and I would say should not be reduceable to a singular set of tenets. Another way of putting this is that I'd like MSJ to remain pluriversal. One implication of this is that there may be significant disagreements about what counts as MSJ, particularly for example around killing other animals. Those of us who have strong commitments that it is unjust for humans to kill other animals for food for example will have strong objections to forms of MSJ that do not see all killing as unjust. Nevertheless, I'd say that it is critical to retain the pluriversality of MSJ even if this means there will be strong internal disagreements.

Turning to the content, for me there are three principles that are constitutive of multispecies justice. The first is that all Earth beings are subjects of justice. And because I adopt a capabilities approach to justice, that means that justice requires that the conditions required for all beings to function and flourish are matters of justice. This does not mean that justice requires that they all be fulfilled, because there will be conflicts and choices will need to be made; but it means that all need to be counted as fundamental claims in deciding what is the most just outcome. And

---

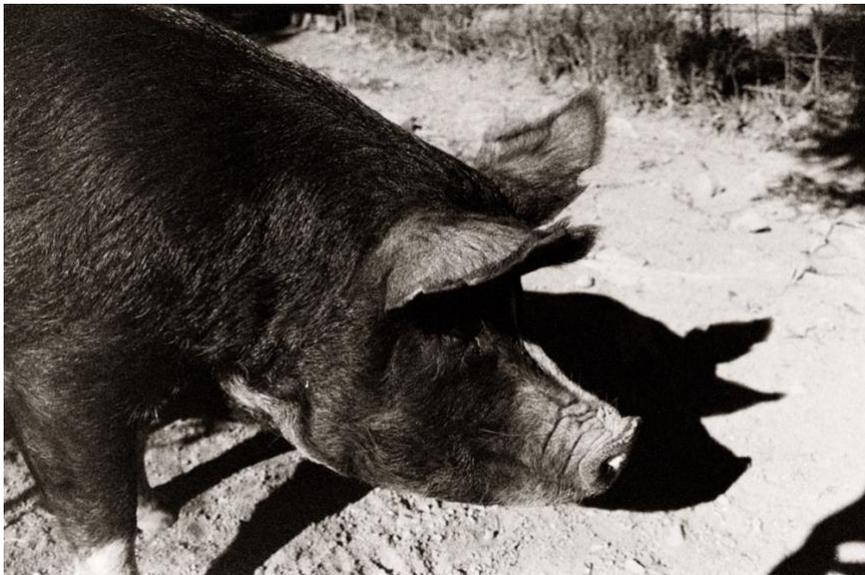
---

because procedural justice is part of justice for me, it also means that justice requires processes whereby their perspective and interests (noting that I find that word overly narrow) need to be included in decision making.

Second, MSJ adopts a relational ontology, which means that we understand individuals as always embedded and entangled in relationships. So we cannot just count individual interests, or consider individuals abstracted from their relationships, but need to attend to the conditions that enable good relationships. I just want to signal here that MSJ theorists have different views when it comes to how we think about individuals and relationships. There are some who do not think we need to take individuals into account, but really prioritise relationships, in a way that is consistent with the type of thinking we see in mainstream ecology and conservation biology. I think that individuals also count, and am concerned with the functioning and flourishing of individual animals in particular. And this of course raises a whole lot of difficulties when it comes to conflicts between what might seem to be good for the system and what might be good for individuals. As I said, MSJ is not a formula for working those conflicts out, but a refusal to pre-emptively settle them in favour of some parties (say some humans) or one level (the individual or the collective or system).

Third, MSJ is not an extensionist or assimilationist theory. MSJ does not assume a certain model of the subject of justice – which of course would tend to be a human imagined in a particular way - and then allow entry to others insofar as they approximate that model. MSJ takes beings on their own terms and is interested in what functioning and flourishing means and looks like for them. It is in this sense consistent with philosophies of difference.

P/A **What is the position of other-than-human animals in MSJ? Could you say something about the tensions with regard to including the other animals in this framework, given the recognition of the importance of different cosmologies?**



Kaya  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

DC I appreciate this question, and as I noted above, there is a tension that is very much alive amongst people who adopt an MSJ framework. Precisely because it is so critical to ensure that MSJ is hospitable to different cosmologies, even though I have my own

---

---

position, I am committed to keeping the framework open, even to apparently very different – perhaps even incompatible - positions.

I certainly recognize that there are peoples who have recognized Earth others as subjects of justice (albeit not using that language) in ways that put western liberal approaches to shame, and that their lives also involved and still involve killing and eating other animals. I will not and cannot pass judgement on this – for a whole host of reasons, including acknowledgement of the complexities of forms of life I know far too little about, respect for the ways they have lived and continue to live protecting good relationships and Earth others, at huge cost to them, and of course my own position as a white woman in the global north and the history of colonialist thought in which I am inevitably caught up.

Living as I do, however, in systems where other animals are caught up in massive systems of violence – associated with the production of food for humans, extractive industries, deforestation and other forms of development, my position is that respect for and protection of the lives of other animals has to be an absolute priority. For me this includes a strong commitment to veganism, not only in terms of what I eat and wear, but more broadly as a form of life. When non-indigenous people confront me with arguments about Indigenous and other peoples' forms of life that involve killing and eating other animals, for the most part, I find this to be a disingenuous ruse. We live in a world where close to 100% of animals who are killed for food, or used to produce other products for human use, live lives that constitute nothing short of torture. And it is that truth to which I respond.

To be honest, I think there are plenty of people who work in this area, including under the label of MSJ, who don't want to face the truth of this regime of violence. And we humans are very good at finding justifications to continue doing what suits us. I should say, I am sure I do that to, and I hope others will help me see that.

**P/A In your work you stress the importance of thinking in and with the world. You practice this in your community and daily life (including your academic life). I am interested in what the other animals taught you. Could you share some of their lessons with us?**

**DC** This is a book of a question. I will give just three examples. Closest to my mind at the moment is what Wookie, who was a horse we lived with for almost ten years taught me. He was 24 when we came to live here and he already lived here, and during the decade together, he became completely blind. In the last five years, he was extremely ancient for a horse and to live his life, he needed more and more support from others – from the humans and the other horses: to guide him past trees that might have fallen, to ensure he had food he could chew and so on. Yet he never experienced the physical changes he experienced as loos, nor the needs he had as an undignified loss of independence. It was all just how life unfolded. I looked to him as my teacher in aging.

---



Wookie  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

And then there was Jimmy of course, who was a pig and he taught me about friendship, about openness to the world, and about grief, but I will say a little about his teachings about death. When he became gravely ill, we decided to take him to the hospital, as we thought that was the only way of possibly saving him. But when we got him into the float, he looked at me and told me very clearly, that I misunderstood him. He told me that I could not take him out of his world – this amazing rich world of the forest that was his home – and ‘save him’. He told me that his life and his death were of his world. So we opened the float and let him back into his world, where he, in and of his world moved from life to death.

Third are the donkeys – who are not at all hierarchical, but each have their role in favour of all of them. There is Zachy, a donkey who experienced terrible loss when he was very young and takes huge responsibility for his family. He is vigilant and extremely protective. If the vet comes, Zachy has to hold the lead rope in his mouth and observe the vet. Zorro’s job is to stand at any spot that is an entrance to a new area, say a gateway to a new pasture and wait till he decides that the others are safe on the other side, and then he will move. Humans sometimes say donkeys are stubborn, but in fact, they are judicious and make decisions based on careful judgments about the situation. And then there is Jasper-Dapple, who is beloved to everyone and basically does what he wants.

**P/A You are committed to translating this embodied knowledge back into the world, academically, institutionally, and culturally. An example of the latter is your book *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*. What led you to write this book, and why did you choose this genre?**

**DC** I started writing the pieces that grew into *Summertime* during the black summer fires at the end of 2019, beginning of 2020. I wrote those first pieces for two reasons: first, because I needed to write to help me make sense of an apocalypse that was

---

---

overwhelming all of my capacities; and second, because it felt critical to convey to others, who were not witnessing what I was, that this catastrophe was not only one humans were experiencing, but one that all of the Earth others were also experiencing – in their feelings, in their relationships, in their need to make sense of their world, however they do that. After three of those pieces were published in the popular media, an editor from Penguin asked me to write a book. Initially I did not think I could, because I'd not written like that before, but then I tried, and it poured out of me.

The genre was not really one I initially chose. I wrote what was unfolding around me. Theoretical writing would not only have been inappropriate; it would have been a type of insult. There were stories that I was witnessing and I felt needed to be recounted. Of course though, I remain a philosopher, and so I experienced those stories or events through the lens of some of the large philosophical questions that animate me – about responsibility, about love and care, about justice and so on.



Gabriel  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

**P/A In Summertime, you introduce the concept 'omnicide'. Could you elaborate a bit on what this means? Why is it important to connect different forms of killing, destruction and violence (also in MSJ)?**

**DC** On January 5<sup>th</sup>, we were driving home after we had evacuated. I was listening to the radio and people kept talking about this being a natural disaster or a tragedy. I felt hugely frustrated by the use of these words. There was nothing natural about the fires or the mass killing and this was not a tragedy. Tragedy is a word historically used precisely to signal that humans are helpless victims. The evacuation of responsibility enraged me. And literally, the word omnicide came to me on that drive – omni, meaning everything and cide meaning killing, as in genocide or homicide. Only later did I find out that others had coined the term to describe the effects of nuclear bombs.

The 'cide' part really mattered because I wanted to convey that the deaths were not random or unavoidable. They were and are the outcome of how (some) humans have

---

---

come to live on the planet. The responsibility is a complex one, lying not only with those directly responsible, like fossil fuel companies and the governments that authorize and even subsidize them, but also with a range of others, who enable and normalize extractive forms of life.

And as you signal, the omni also matters – not just because literally all sorts of beings are being killed – humans, other animals, trees, forests and so on. Their killing is connected through the structures and logics of extractivism, and more specifically neoliberalism, capitalism and ongoing coloniality. I do not want to throw these words around as if they are self explanatory, but use them to mark that ways in which institutions are organized to render some beings nothing more than tools, or commodities, or resources, or things that can be used for the benefit of those who are deemed to have ethical value.

This latter point is terribly important from the point of view of advocacy. Sometimes people ask me how I can care about other animals or forests when so many humans are subjected to so much violence and injustice – when there are so many humans who do not have enough food, or clean water, or decent shelter, and so on. Now if someone who was experiencing this type of violence or injustice brought that complaint to me, I'd never be so arrogant as to give them a lecture about the structures of injustice and violence – the only ethical response from me would be to listen to them. But if the argument is being made in the abstract, my response is that pitting humans who experience violence and injustice against Earth others who experience violence and injustice is to fall into the precisely the trap that the beneficiaries of extractive, colonial and capitalist systems would like us to. We are not the cause of each other's injustice. On the contrary, we are all subjected to similar institutional logics and systems. And our best change for justice is to be in solidarity.

P/A **How can we respond to this large-scale violence? What does it mean to live rightly knowing that we (probably) cannot counter it?**

DC I have to admit to being floored by such a large question. I cannot answer for a universal we. I can offer a few principles and practices.

To take what responsibility each of us can, and this will be very different depending on our circumstances. One of the impacts of neoliberalism has been to leave people atomized and with a sense of their incapacity to have any effect on macro-structures. Combine this with the rise of social-media generated virtual reality, and I think a lot of us have an experience of unreality in our own lives. But the climate catastrophe and the grave forms of violence being wrought on the Earth, on other animals, on forests and on so many humans are real. No one is coming to save us or them. But what we do in our lives – including how we practice our jobs, how we mobilise politically, and for people who may be reading this – what and how we teach, what and how we research and write – all of this makes a difference.

Act in our immediate contexts and at the same time network with others in other contexts. The phrase 'scale out not scale up', seems very apt for this time. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to 'transform the structure' holus bolus, but in concert with those with whom we have relationships, or can build relationships, local change is definitely possible. And this becomes macro through the formation and growth of networks.

Feel and think, and build our collective muscle for honestly encountering the world. It makes sense that so many of us want to turn away from what will give rise to painful

---

---

feelings – fear, loss, uncertainty, anxiety. But these feelings are an accurate index of reality and when we turn from them, we turn from our own lives and our capacity to act to make a difference. I don't think this is work we can or should do alone – but we can support and enable ourselves collectively.

Accept uncertainty as a feature not a bug. The challenges we are facing are not ones that we can resolve or fix. Learning to be at home with uncertainty would I think go a long way in fortifying us. Solutionism is part of the problem – which does not mean that we are not looking to make the world more just, less violent and so on.

Be kind – at every level. Similarly, have integrity at every level. Being a public warrior but a private asshole is not going to cut it.

And finally – be present to how wonderous this planet is and to your love. Anger and outrage are fine motivators, but ultimately, it is love that is going to sustain responsibility and commitment.

P/A **What is the role of other Earth Beings in learning to live justly (and specifically the members of your own community)?**

DC I'm going to answer that question a little differently, because I think that they are all already fulfilling their roles; it is our role to pay attention to them.

Some years ago, I started to have a distinct sense that I could hear Earth others, doing something more than communicating their experiences or violence and injustice, which they are doing all the time of course. I felt that they were distinctly calling on humans, who have access to levers of institutional and cultural transformation, to act in solidarity with them. I don't think that humans are better or smarter or that humans are the only ones who can effect change or work out how to do that. But I do think that these are systems humans have built and humans have unique capacities and forms of access which enable us to transform them. And Earth others are turning to humans do exercise our capacities and responsibilities in particular ways.

I've had this conversation with many humans of late, who also experience themselves as called upon. Of course, it is critical that we take up that call with humility and accountability, and that we don't again, assume the privilege of knowing what is best for everyone. Narcissism is such a trap for humans it seems, and one that those who think that are doing good are certainly not immunized against.

---



Dany Wookie  
*Brogers Creek, Australia, 2025*  
Eva Meijer

---

## About Danielle Celermajer

**Danielle (Dany) Celermajer** is Deputy Director of the Sydney Environment Institute and lead of the [Multispecies Justice project](#) at the University of Sydney. Over the last decade, she has turned her attention from uniquely intra-human injustice and human rights to injustices and violence against the more than human world and their intersection with injustice against particular groups of humans. Through the experience of living through the black summer bushfires as part of a multispecies community, she began writing about a new crime of our age, [Omnicide](#). Her creative non-fiction book, *[Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future](#)* (Penguin Random House, 2021) was written in recognition of the critical urgency of conveying the complex conceptual recognition of the multispecies harms of the climate catastrophe. Her latest book, co-authored with other members of the Multispecies Justice Collective is *[Institutionalizing Multispecies Justice](#)*, Cambridge University Press, 2025. She is co-author, with Rosemary Lyster and Phillipa McCormack of a new book on *Multispecies Climate Justice, Disasters and Responsibility*, which will be published by Edward Elgar in 2026.

---