

Extending justice considerations to insects, crustaceans, cephalopods and other invertebrates

Joe Gray

Joe is a field naturalist who lives in Great Britain. He has edited or co-edited several books, the most recent being *Cohabiting Earth: Seeking a Bright Future for All Life* (SUNY Press, 2024).

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A review of: Russil Durrant (2024) *Invertebrate Justice* (Palgrave Studies in Green Criminology). Springer Nature, Cham, Switzerland.

Russil Durrant's *Invertebrate Justice* belongs to a series of scholarly titles on green criminology, the overall focus for which is “the development of and enforcement of environmental laws, environmental criminality, policy relating to environmental harms and harms committed against non-human animals” (see <https://link.springer.com/series/14622>). Given this juridical scope, in which the non-human concerns examined might easily have been restricted to harms against species with existing legislative protection (e.g. major targets for wildlife trafficking) and more broadly ecocidal activities (e.g. dumping of toxic materials into lakes), it may come as a pleasant surprise to find a title in the series that suggests a foregrounding of invertebrate-wide interests. This, after all, is a group of organisms on which humans bestow comparatively few legal safeguards.

It soon becomes clear, however, that Durrant's focus is principally on those invertebrates who exhibit sentience – a subset of organisms that, based on current understanding, includes: “octopuses and other coleoid cephalopods, decapod crustaceans [e.g. crabs], and many insect species” (p. 119). Indeed, the author's position in the monograph is that “although sentient species (including humans), non-sentient species, and ‘ecological collectives’ (e.g., ecosystems) all have intrinsic value and hence some moral status, we only have strong direct justice obligations towards sentient species” (pp. 7–8). This sentientist challenge to anthropocentrism falls substantially short of an ecocentric philosophy, in which the possession of agency and interests qualifies a living being for justice considerations independently of any established capacity for subjectively experiencing the world (Curry, 2017; Washington *et al.*, 2018). In practical terms,

such a distinction is especially significant for groups of organisms, such as invertebrates, in which the extent and nature of sentience is poorly understood.

Nevertheless, Durrant's treatise should serve, even to the most devoted ecocentrist, as a welcome argument for extending the bounds of criminology. Green criminology, the author explains, has drawn on an area of social study known as *zemiology* to recognize the importance of both illegal and non-illegal harms and then expanded its horizon further with the assertion that "victims of harm can include humans, non-human animals, and the wider environment" (p. 149). The invertebrate justice model that Durrant advances within this purview is built on the eco-justice framework of White (2013). In this structure, justice concerns are organized into those that encompass present and future humans (*environmental justice*), those concerning non-human species (*species justice*), and those relating to ecological collectives (*ecological justice*).

Durrant notes that in cases such as the reduction of pesticide use, the direct benefits from a *species justice* perspective in reducing harms to invertebrates will translate into indirect benefits for other species, as well as positives from both an *environmental* and an *ecological justice* perspective. Conversely, there are examples, including where invertebrates are vectors of human diseases, in which antagonism will arise between the different domains. Nonetheless, through a better comprehension and appreciation of our ecological relationship with invertebrates, we might begin to see, at a societal level, how synergies far outweigh any conflicts.

Durrant's invertebrate justice model is well presented and is supported by strong argumentation. Furthermore, the author is a passionate advocate for the importance of his subject – observing, for instance, the following (p. 4):

Given that humans inflict significant harm on a very, very large number of invertebrate species, the topic of invertebrate justice may not simply be of peripheral concern for scholars and policymakers but, in fact, may be the most pressing moral issue of our time!

The more holistic lens of ecocentrism – in which sentience is one pillar among several for non-human justice – only magnifies the importance of Durrant's speculation. Furthermore, the author might have noted here, as he does elsewhere in the book, that it is not just the number of species that is huge but the quantity of directly affected individuals (a figure that quite possibly extends, on an annual basis, into the quadrillions [p. 16]). The significance of this is apparent, to give an example, in the urgent need for empirically informed ethical analysis of the rapidly growing industry of insect farming – a point that has been made by Helen Lambert, who is a former sentience advisor at World Animal Protection (discussed in Gray [2022]). Of course, there is little point in such scrutiny if minimal or no transformation results from the identification of problems. And so it is to the topic of change, at the level of the individual and the system, that Durrant turns in his final chapter.

While acknowledging that "the road to invertebrate justice is long and difficult" (p. 361), the author argues that there is a potential for human societies,

through continued incremental modifications, to “reduce an enormous amount of unnecessary harm, suffering, and death” (p. 362). Whether one’s view of the world is guided by sentientism or ecocentrism, there is a deeply significant truth in that statement.

References

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Clockwise from top: a giant horntail, a red net-winged beetle and numerous parent bug nymphs, all in Scotland
(Joe Gray)