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Space Victimology

A phenomenological perspective

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Abstract

Victimology is expanding beyond Earth into what scholars are starting to call a space victimology. This nascent field draws on critical and green criminology to examine victimological experiences relating to extraterrestrial contexts. Some approaches, particularly those rooted in zemiology (the study of social harm), cast a wide net: they recognize non-human and ecological entities as potential victims and focus primarily on harm itself, rather than on the experience of wrongdoing. This paper pushes back against that framing. Victimization, it argues, is not just about harm – it involves intentional injustice, a sense of being wronged that pure harm-based accounts fail to capture. A phenomenological orientation – centering victims’ first-person experience – can serve to underscore the relevant moral dimensions. Space contexts require engaging with posthumanist thought. Entities beyond the human – animals, ecosystems, artificial agents – challenge the assumption that only humans can be victims. But extending victimhood in this way raises a problem: without some notion of subjectivity, it becomes difficult to make sense of wrongfulness at all. The paper also attends to the role of imagination in shaping injustice. Drawing on hauntology and the recent development towards a “ghost criminology,” it argues that visions of space futures – including those found in science fiction – can produce real and avoidable injustice in the present. This means space victimology cannot treat victimization as something that simply happens at a fixed point in time; the relationship between past, present, and (imagined) futures needs to be critically examined. The paper also calls for scrutiny of the legal fictions and philosophical

assumptions built into our standard responses to victimization — particularly ideals of restoration and “return to wholeness.” These frameworks may not translate well to outer space, where the conditions of injustice, identity, and repair can look very different. Space victimology, the paper concludes, should weave together phenomenology, posthumanist critique, and hauntological awareness to develop approaches to justice that are sensitive to relationality, temporal complexity, and the lived moral reality of being wronged.

Keywords: victimology, phenomenology, hauntology, ghost criminology, space criminology

1. Introduction

A voyage is set to begin. Research into (victimization by) crime has, until recently, been firmly focused on earth. Only very recently have a small smattering of academics attempted to revert their gaze upwards and outwards into space (Takemura, 2019; Lampkin & White, 2023; Rothe & Collins, 2023; Eski & Lampkin, 2024). To do so, criminologists have sought to connect work in critical and green criminology in particular, with the contexts and situations likely to be encountered in extraterrestrial environments.

As Jack Lampkin (2024, 96) – one of the pioneers of this field of inquiry – notes, “in these academic works, the focus has largely been on either the natural world (i.e., orbital debris and space mining), or how to conceptualize and prepare for crimes occurring in outer space in the near future. Largely omitted (thus far) from such debates is consideration of the victim of space crimes, broadly conceived.” His chapter in the edited volume by Eski & Lampkin (2024, 96), “set out to be the first discussion of victimological issues specifically about anthropogenic interactions with outer space along with the first definition of what constitutes a 'space victim' and a 'space crime'.” Lampkin situates his own work within radical and critical approaches that have extended traditional notions of victimhood involving human victimization, to encompass non-human victims like animals and natural environments (Williams, 1996, White, 2018).

The chapter is an interesting opening move, explicitly intended to inspire others to offer their own analyses of what space victimology might entail. That is the task undertaken in this paper. The approach situates space victimology at the intersection with another recent development. Pemberton & Mulder (2025) have highlighted the critical potential of an approach to victimology rooted in phenomenology. A phenomenological approach offers an inroad to explore experiences of victimization without requiring delineations related to legal norms or psychological impact. It counters 'the automatic conjoining of crime with victimization' (Spencer, 2011; 40) and allows for an inclusive examination of suffering wrongdoing. Such examinations may lead to different perspectives on the (im)moral dimensions of victimization, and on how wrongs should be addressed and redressed. Moreover, a phenomenological approach to victimization can reveal features and contingencies of the human condition more generally. Like other transformative experiences, victimization can be understood as a phenomenological method itself, in that it unsettles and thereby discloses previously taken-for-granted features of human and social life (Ratcliffe, 2008, Carel, 2017).

The topic of space travel seems to be particularly fertile ground for such an examination. The manner in which experiences *with* and fictional and imaginary descriptions of human existence in extraterrestrial environments contrast with life on earth harbors the potential to disclose features of the human condition. This means that space victimology can offer insights into victimology as such, potentially contribute to inquiries into the ontology of victimization, of what victimization *is*. Like other positive sciences, victimology starts with an assumption about what the subject of study, about the essence of its subject of inquiry (see also Thomson, 2003). That assumption is reflected in definitions, models, mechanisms. But that posit itself always remains beyond our reach. Phenomenological approaches to victimization seek to disclose this central posit, and space victimology has the potential to substantially contribute to this domain of inquiry.

First, it is clear from the extant research that the heritage of space criminology in critical and green criminology calls into question the degree to which victimization *by crime* is an appropriate posit (Rothe & Collins, 2023; Lampkin, 2024). Different authors define their topic of study as relating to experiences of harm, with the zemiological focus of current work also extending victimization to non-human and indeed non-living entities. However, in doing so it insufficiently recognizes that in the phenomenology of victimization, it is not merely being *harmed* that is central, but the experience of injustice in being *wronged* (Pemberton & Mulder, 2025). To what extent can

this experience be usefully extended to the entities of particular importance in a space victimology, like extraterrestrial life and celestial objects?

Second, and turning to the research program of space victimology, Lampkin (2024) argues that “space victimology should be concerned with both the prevention of space crime (and thus, victimization), as well as how to address crime and harm that has already occurred.” There is no doubt that these are subjects of great importance. However, it is also unnecessarily limited, given that victimology proper, will often concern the etiology of victimization, the responses to and framing of forms of victimization, and the sociology of relevant phenomena. Moreover, we need to consider that space travel in the present is still piecemeal. This contrasts with the large specter that future space endeavors and our imagination about space travel already cast. It therefore seems vital to consider victimological aspects of perceptions of future space travel. In similar vein to other technological developments – see for instance artificial intelligence (e.g., Vallor, 2024) – such future potentialities have all-too-real consequences in the present. A way of conceptualizing this lies in the *hauntology* of Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1994, Gordon, 2008) and the manner in which that has been taken up in the notion of a “ghost” criminology (Linneman, 2019; Fiddler et al, 2024).

A phenomenological approach to space victimology might also capitalize on the value of the fictional in victimology. This is so in two different ways. The first is the manner in which science fiction films, novels or television series can contribute to our understanding of victimological experience (see the parallel to criminology in McGregor, 2021). In particular I will suggest that this rests on the ability to cash out the interplay between the mimetic quality of experiencing fiction – the manner in which it can provide knowledge of experience by representing it in detail and immerse the viewer/reader within this experience – and its counterfactual features – offering hypothetical situations that provide insight into relevant alternative realities and/or cannot be reproduced in reality for legal or ethical reasons – to develop its phenomenological potential. By definition, science fiction offers a counterfactual to our current situation, which can be marshalled as an inroad to phenomenological inquiry (Sinnerbrink, 2022).

Second, it draws on the unavoidable necessity of appealing to useful untruths, or *legal fictions* (Vaihinger, 1924; Appiah, 2017; Pemberton & Bosma, 2024), in our justice response to victimization. Eski & Ugelvik (2025)'s recent elaboration of the crime of astrocide usefully ran the first use of fiction – an analysis of Ursula Le Guin's work – together with the second, a speculative account of material criminal legal categories, inspired by Raphael Lemkin's prospective criminalization of genocide. The idea that the legal response draws on more applied or more distant assumptions in its application to lived experience has a wider berth, and features of space travel can help tease out relevant aspects. For instance, much of the metaphysics of the justice reaction to (victimization by) crime relies on an implicit assumption of an existing order (Wolgast, 1987). To what extent was there a pre-existing order, and to what extent is it useful to view the aftermath as a return to order? Questioning this can be a harbinger of a more general approach to justice in space victimology, which would do well to take a critical stance to many of the accompanying legal and metaphysical assumptions.

2. Centering wrongfulness in a space victimology

2.1. Space victimology as *zemiology*?

The first moves in space criminology (Lampkin & White, 2023; Rothe & Collins, 2023; Eski & Lampkin, 2024) are rooted in critical and radical criminology, particularly as it relates to green criminology. This lineage takes a critical stance towards the concept of crime, and thereby towards criminology as such. Lampkin (2024, 106), for instance, affirmatively quotes Nils Christie's (1977,

1) famous quip “maybe we should not have any criminology,” adding that “[p]erhaps the same can be said of space criminology and astro-victimology.”

There is much to be gained from maintaining such a critical stance. Any current forays into space travel are the sole remit of states and large corporations, which necessarily invites scrutiny of the features of crimes of the powerful and state crime. Therefore, different authors highlight how the twin characteristics of a lack of criminalization or means of adjudication for the most damaging forms of harm committed in space, and the role of states and large corporations in perpetrating this harm, call into question the usefulness of crime as a concept (e.g. Eski & Lampkin, 2024).

This is only brought into sharper relief by the way that space crime will not only or primarily impact humans. Lampkin's notion of astro-victimology encompasses non-human victims such as animals (White, 2018) and natural environments (Williams, 1996). Like terrestrial green criminology, a division can be made between anthropocentric, biocentric, and ecological approaches to differentiate dissimilar types of anthropogenic environmental impact (Lampkin & White, 2023). The former considers human victims, future human generations, and human rights. The second extends the concern of criminology to the rights of animals and, subsequently, the impact of human activity on non-human species. The latter is the most broad – ranging, viewing the general health of the overall environment, including humans, non-humans, plants, and ecosystems. In space, this goes beyond “planet Earth” to involve other celestial bodies, including their landscapes, natural terrain, and atmospheres. Humans could irreparably damage extraterrestrial environments, threaten basic life forms on other celestial bodies, or even stop future extraterrestrial life from emerging. This risk can be seen as a form of ecocide – or “astrocide” – in which extraterrestrial environments are either destroyed or prevented from developing as a direct result of human activity.

These lines of thought lead Lampkin (2024, 97) to seek a means of defining the subject of space victimology in a way that does not refer to a criminal code, while being inclusive towards non-human and non-living entities. As a consequence, he proposes the following definition: “Someone or something harmed in some way by an activity or behaviour committed in outer space (i.e. the victim of a sexual assault aboard an inhabited space station), or on planet Earth (i.e. an employee within a space company who is treated unfairly or in contravention of domestic laws or regulations)” (id.).

As Lampkin emphasizes, adopting this definition means that the overall topic of study would be more accurately described as a space *zemiology* than as a space *criminology*. In this perspective, the focus would be on the harm that occurs in space rather than on crime. Like other zemiologists and critical criminologists, Lampkin (2024, 106) argues that “crime is a social construct with no ontological reality. It has developed as a way for society to describe, manage, and respond to unwanted behaviours of its citizens.”

2.2. *The wrongfulness of victimization*

A critical examination of the concept of crime and its administration is both necessary and pertinent for space criminology. Scholars must remain wary of close alignment with public and private actors who shape outer space policy, since those actors are also the most likely potential wrongdoers. Yet critique should not lead to discarding the idea of crime altogether. Core international offences – crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, and aggression – identify conduct that should be criminalized even when competent authorities are absent or unwilling (e.g. Greenawalt, 2020), conditions that could well obtain in outer space. Extending international criminal law to large-scale environmental wrongs (ecocide) and its extraterrestrial analogue (astrocide) likewise addresses the kinds of anthropogenic destruction that demand legal response beyond mere regulatory measures.

More to the point of this paper, in victimology, replacing “crime” with the broader category of “social harm” risks losing what is essential: victimization is not only *harmful* but *wrongful* (Pemberton, Mulder & Aarten, 2019). That wrongfulness typically involves an experience of intentional injustice or what philosopher Jean Hampton (1991) called a “moral injury,” which differs qualitatively from loss, damage, or harm. Hampton distinguished material, physical, or psychological harm from damage to what she called the victim’s “realization of value,” emphasizing that the injustice suffered has moral and experiential dimensions that go beyond measurable harms. Attending to this difference is vital: both for understanding victims’ experiences and for designing appropriate responses.

Hampton’s account matters for two reasons. First, it analytically separates public responses to wrongdoing from corrective responses to harm, offering an inroad for a victim-centered and forward-looking framework useful for understanding justice responses (see also Pemberton & Bosma, 2024). Second, it underscores the importance of viewing injustice from the victim’s first-person standpoint — an insight echoed by standpoint theory (Wylie, 2012) and marshalled in work on the phenomenology of victimization.

2.3. *A posthuman phenomenology of victimization?*

The current work on the phenomenology of victimization centers the human subject. It draws on Martin Heidegger (1927/1962)’s notion of *Dasein*— being-in-the-world — a “unique and self-interpreting activity or way of being that already dwells in a context of social — historical meanings” (Aho, 2019, 12). Victimization discloses the way of human being, precisely in what it endangers, damages or even destroys. It fundamentally entails a collapse of meaning, a breakdown in the victims’ ability to make sense of themselves and the world. Key features of the human condition, like embodiment, temporality, and selfhood, become sites of violent contradiction (Pemberton & Mulder, 2025). Because these harms are experienced as intentionally inflicted, they reveal the deeply relational character of human being. Countering these experiences of injustice, therefore requires attending to this social ontology.

Because such a phenomenological approach centers human experience, it may invite charges of anthropocentrism, particularly given green criminology critiques and calls for species — or ecocentric justice that treat humans as one species or, indeed, as one entity among many (White, 2018). I do not reject those critiques, but caution against flattening the ontology of victimization by simply replacing human-centered accounts of victimization with a generic “harm” framework.

That move risks leveling down the particular moral and experiential realities of human victims rather than exploring how to extend similar moral considerations upward to non-human or other-than-human beings. A more productive path, I believe, is to cautiously expand upon standpoint and phenomenological methods to include other-than-human perspectives, informed by work in critical posthumanism and trauma studies. An example of what I have in mind here is offered by Tony Vinci (2019)’s *Ghost, Android, Animal: Trauma and Literature Beyond the Human*. What to make of the victimization of animals as “embodied life lacking human language”, but also of androids as embodied consciousness, or of ghosts as disembodied voice? As Vinci writes, it can “create transsubjective, trans-corporeal fields that invite readers to cross subjective and cultural thresholds and interact with the “impossible pain of others through the imaginative acceptance of spectral voices, embodied realities, and alternative ontologies” (2019, 32). This work contributes to a broader effort to develop phenomenologies of non-human entities. Veit and Browning (2021) for instance, argue that growing insights into animal consciousness challenge the assumption that we cannot access first-person experiences of other species with sufficient confidence to build such phenomenologies.

Engagement with posthumanist theory can prompt essential questions about the subject of victimization, as well as the intent to which victims are exposed. In doing so, attempts to incorporate non-human actors should avoid erasing the notion of subjectivity. For example, Van der Wagen and Pieters (2020) use Latour's (2005) actor-network theory to propose a “hybrid victim” for high-tech cybervictimization. While an innovative attempt to counter anthropocentrism and to reconsider the “who” or “what” of victimology, this move risks the more general critique articulated by Braidotti (2019) that relinquishing the subject function undermines ethical or political projects. Posthumanism is not inhumanism. Without a clear account of the victimological subject, we lose the conceptual resources needed to explain what makes victimization *wrongful*. Perhaps ironically, this would mean the only way to stabilize any project of victimology is by reference to legal standards. Instead of distancing space victimology from (criminal) law, it would end up relying on it.

Instead, following Braidotti (2019), a central task for space victimology would be to translate the strengths of the anthropomorphic subject – its relationality, vulnerability, and distinctive capacity to perceive and resist injustice – into frameworks for understanding the posthuman victims likely to be afflicted by extraterrestrial wrongdoing. Braidotti captures this collective yet differentiated stance as “we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same,” stressing common entanglement without erasing difference. This is not the only route to thinking about other-than-human futures. Where visions of the future are inflected by neoliberal or neocolonial agendas (as in dominant strains of transhumanism; see Bostrom, 2014), those future projects themselves may amount to new forms of victimization and therefore require critical scrutiny (I return to this in Section 3).

In short, posthumanist inquiry both problematizes anthropocentrism and can serve to highlight new injustices that require investigation and response. Moreover, posthumanism reinforces that victims' experiences should be understood in terms of their being relationally embedded subjects, adding that this relationality also includes other-than-humans. Indeed, much value could be derived from explicitly centering relationships and otherness in our moral and ethical considerations. Space victimology could be inspired by the words of philosopher Kelly Oliver (2010, 269) concerning animal ethics, that what “we need is to move from an ethics of sameness, through an ethics of difference, toward an ethics of relationality and responsivity” (also Oliver, 2009). Victimization weaponizes relationships against the victimized subject, which means that responses must first acknowledge the fundamental importance of remaking relational ties. That those relational ties consist of posthuman assemblages only underscores the insight that such remaking is not adequately understood as repair in a previous condition, but as a more forward-looking rebirth into novel constellations (Dunk and Pemberton, 2025). As I will note in section 5, a space victimology should be alive to the implications this can have for the way I conceive of the reaction to the injustice of victimization in justice processes.

3. The specter of space travel and victimization

3.1. The temporality of victimology

In Lampkin's (2024, 97) initial exploration victimization is something that occurs at a particular moment. A space crime would be “Any unwanted action or behaviour that results in harm to people, property, non-human species or landscapes/ecologies.” In this view space victimology would have both reactive and preventive qualities: “space victimology should be concerned with both the prevention of space crime (and thus, victimization), as well as how to address crime and harm that has already occurred.”

These are undoubtedly subjects that a space victimology would do well to consider. However, victimology proper covers more than preventing and addressing criminal victimization, ranging from

etiology to societal framing to historical development (e.g., Pemberton & Mulder, 2026). Moreover, what I think is particularly relevant to the development of space victimology is the manner in which adopting such a definition would constrict victimization to a discrete act or behavior that can be prevented or addressed. Many forms of victimization defy such conceptualization. For instance, Henze-Pedersen (2025, 1) recently argued against an understanding of the experience of violence as fixed in time. She distinguished the experience of suffering violence into “legacies (past of violence), saturations (present of violence) and foreshadows (future of violence).” Many forms of victimization cannot be neatly mapped onto a discernible act or acts. A well-known example concerns chronic forms of partner violence, in which the eruptions of violence are but one element in an ongoing habitus of coercive control (Stark, 2007). Similarly, structural forms of epistemic injustice underpin the violent actions of states or corporate actors, in large part by restricting victims' hermeneutic resources for making sense of and resisting them (Medina, 2017). Such victimization proceeds to a large degree through hegemonic ideas and meaning-making. These cannot be tied to individual acts of injustice but nevertheless amount to severe collective wrongdoing.

The issue I consider most pressing in this regard is the idea of space travel itself. In many ways, space travel and its criminological and victimological consequences belong to a more or less distant future. This can range from the coming forays of Elon Musk's SpaceX (e.g. Young and Docherty, 2025) to the ways advocates of longtermism predict forms of human life spreading out across the universe over the coming billions of years (MacAskill, 2022). However, such futurology already affects the present, which merits examination in criminological and victimological terms. Put differently, this *specter of space travel*, and the intentions that underwrite it, are worthy of inclusion in space victimology.

3.2. *Hauntology and ghost criminology*

The notion of a specter casting its shadow over experience was the starting point for Jacques Derrida's (1994) *Specters of Marx*, which develops the concept of *hauntology*. This is a deliberate pun on “ontology”, including the manner in which being in the present is haunted by the past and the future. Derrida does so initially by drawing on the opening phrase from Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* “A specter is haunting Europe: the specter of communism.” In 1848, this specter was that of the project of a future to come, while at the time of Derrida's writing, it was the ghost of the recently failed experiment in Soviet-style communism. Derrida uses this phrase as a point of departure for considering how past experiments, failed futures, and deferred promises continue to exert force in the here and now. They do not simply belong to a history or a future but appear or reappear as virtual, motivating patterns that shape perception and action. As Wendy Brown (2001, 150) sees it, “We inherit not “what really happened” to the dead but what lives on from that happening, what is conjured from it, how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspirit our imaginations and visions for the future.”

This broken sense of temporality is central to *hauntology* (Hägglund, 2008). It can be divided into two modalities: (1) that which has actually passed yet persists as a virtual force (repeating traumas, entrenched structures), and (2) that which has not yet occurred but already shapes present behavior through anticipation or attraction. In both modes, the spectral points to a liminal state — neither fully absent nor fully present — in which time feels “out of joint”, as the Hamlet epigram of *Specters of Marx* suggests, and boundaries between past, present, and future are unsettled.

The recent “spectral turn” in scholarship extends these ideas across disciplines. Writers such as Gordon (2008), Fisher (2014, 2017) and Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren (2013) emphasize the

ghost as a conceptual tool for exploring experiences in which the familiar becomes uncanny, weird or eerie, the invisible becomes visible, and immaterial or deferred forces influence social life. Building on this work, *ghost criminology* (Fiddler et al. 2024) urges the discipline to attend to phenomena that hover between presence and absence – forces untethered from linear time that nevertheless shape harm, accountability, and social meaning. In short, hauntology equips us to analyze how histories and futures, as well as visible and invisible forces, continually reconfigure the moral and temporal contours of the present.

3.3. *Ghost victimology in space*

Much of the initial forays into ghost criminology focus on how the past haunts the present, as well as on how criminological phenomena can benefit from being understood as both present and absent, visible and invisible simultaneously (Evans et al., 2025, Walklate, 2025). This also appears relevant for the project of space victimology, but of particular note is the manner in which the future impacts the present. Rather than simply projecting current victimization onto extraterrestrial settings, space victimology should examine how (imagined) space futures already haunt the present. For example, talk of colonizing or terraforming Mars is often deployed rhetorically to minimize the urgency of climate action and justify activities that worsen human-made environmental harm (Young and Docherty, 2025). In another example, the projections of adherents to longtermism seek to privilege the experiences of a possible future humanity over the reality of suffering in the here and now (Ord, 2020; Macaskill, 2022).

A space victimology should examine how our imaginaries of the future feed into current injustice. Debates about artificial intelligence illustrate this: sensational scenarios of rogue AGI distract from more immediate risks, such as AI's large climate footprint and its contribution to degrading information ecosystems (Vallor, 2024). Inflated fears also misdirect resources and political attention, producing victimological consequences by obscuring the real, distributed harms that technological development can create.

A space victimology could also draw on cultural critic Marc Fisher's (2014) hauntological diagnosis of a “failure of the future”: a cultural impasse in which collective imagination for genuinely different social worlds has eroded. Rather than enabling radical change, many techno-futures merely extend existing neoliberal logics – presenting privatized, gamified visions of progress while politics is reduced to managing the status quo. The rhetoric of technological salvation that underwrites much space investment therefore risks reproducing existing inequalities and injustices rather than countering or overcoming them and projecting a future permanence of those at the receiving ends of the victimization inherent to these inequalities. In effect, space projects could cement the long-term advantage of those already benefiting from concentrated wealth and power while normalizing the harms suffered by those on the receiving end.

A space victimology should therefore resist treating these developments as inevitable or merely accidental. Echoing Judith Shklar's (1990) critique of Hayek's (1976) *The Mirage of Social Justice*, the distributional and political effects of high-tech expansion are the product of deliberate policy and commercial choices, not neutral forces of progress. Shklar took Hayek to task for calling any adverse effects of his libertarian ideals “misfortune”. This would serve to mask the intentional and institutional choices that disenfranchise large segments of our societies, through a veneer of natural progress. Instead, a victimological approach would need to investigate and expose how specific decisions and power relations create and sustain injustice.

Finally, seen through a hauntological lens, discourse around space travel often incorporates a sense of failed futures. Derrida (1994) already highlighted how grand modernist projects – whether Soviet modernity or capitalist progress – have repeatedly stalled, producing nostalgia and anxiety rather than unambiguous promise. It was not for nothing that Derrida wrote *Specters of Marx* in

part in response to Francis Fukuyama's essay (1989) on *the End of History*. The space project itself, once emblematic of a forward-looking teleology, now can also appear weakened and decaying; its continued invocation can therefore function as both solace and distraction, with real implications for who bears the costs and who benefits.

4. Space victimology and science fiction

4.1. *The importance of the fictional in criminology*

The idea that fiction is a valuable resource for criminological and victimological research is not new (e.g. Rafter and Brown, 2010). Much criminological and victimological inquiry has focused on the representation of crime in fiction, often highlighting the manner in which this fails to offer a realistic portrayal of crime and victimization, and, for instance, contributes to moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2010) or rape myths (Garland et al, 2016). Others have argued the value of fiction in criminological projects, like furthering desistance, and offender rehabilitation (Colvin, 2015).

More recently, this criminological focus has expanded to mine crime fiction accounts for what they reveal about criminological phenomena (Page and Goodman, 2018). In particular, the work of Rafe McGregor (2021, see also Frauley (2021)) argues the value of a criminology of narrative fiction, in which the mimetic, counterfactual and phenomenological features of literary or cinematic fiction are marshalled for investigation of criminological phenomena. To date, McGregor's work has yet to be given a victimological follow-up, but as I will note further below, the type of arguments applies with at least equal force to victimological inquiry.

The initial forays into space crime have steered clear of examining science-fictional depictions, perhaps also to avoid baiting the giggle factor in academic research in this area. Nevertheless, Eski and Ugelvik (2025) already marshalled science fiction's ability to go beyond a narrow notion of the real in their investigation of a future crime of astrocide. They submit that science fiction functions as a "crowbar against conventional reality", making the improbable seem possible and forcing us to consider alternatives to current social, technological, and moral assumptions. Put succinctly, it pushes us beyond a narrow notion of the "real." For Eski and Ugelvik (2025), "unlike many other literary genres, sci-fi also often indicates what might be, what has not yet happened, and what could happen if we do not intervene." This also makes science fiction ideally suited for full-blown, rich, thought experiments (Sinnerbrink, 2022) that can offer insight into the moral and philosophical questions with which victimologists need to grapple.

4.2. *Science fiction and victimhood*

Before discussing the value of science fiction as a means to explore the phenomenology of victimization, we also need to acknowledge the victimological relevance of the manner in which science fiction is "connected discursively and intertextually to the rest of the world" (Eski & Ugelvik, 2025). That connection runs in two ways. As noted above, crime and victimization stories within science fiction, can always be read as a means to explore significant issues of criminological and victimological representation in the present.

In addition, science fiction and its depictions of possible futures can exert a real impact on the present and immediate future, which may be scrutinized for their victimological implications. A whole host of technological innovations began their lives as science fiction, ranging from the atom bomb to the metaverse, and the influence possible futures exert on the present is often channeled through their victimological implications. For instance, any current discussions about runaway AGI inherit the idea of looming catastrophe and doom associated with *Skynet* or *the Matrix* (Barron, 2023). Here science fiction might make common cause with human inability to adequately understand or gauge the reality of dread risks.

Like other “dread” risks (for instance large-scale terrorism; Mueller, 2006), the main victimological impact of sci-fi tropes might lie in institutional overreaction and the distortion of public debate and decision-making. Chouliaraki's (2024) “weaponization of victimhood” captures this latter phenomenon: vague or prospective narratives of injustice – common in science fiction because they refer to possible futures or alternate realities rather than to present lived experience – can be repurposed as moral-political tools. In such uses, victimhood ceases to describe an actual harm and instead becomes a claim to recognition, authority, and urgency that circulates between claimants and audiences. As Dunk and Pemberton (2025) argue, attention to real victims' lived experiences can undermine this rhetorical deployment, which thrives on a vague and ambiguous sense of grievance rather than facing up to the complex reality of victimization experiences.

To be sure, though, the examination of the victimological implications of science fiction should not merely assume that it is a negative force. Labelling public concerns as “science-fiction fears” can itself be a rhetorical move used to dismiss them as irrational or exaggerated (Kitzinger, 2010). This is also a well-known feature of discourse around victimization. For instance, critics who attack the political use of victimhood sometimes overreach by lumping legitimate calls for attention to real victims together with opportunistic or speculative claims of victimhood. A striking example is Campbell and Manning's (2018) *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*, which critiques political uses of victimhood but offers a weak and misleading account of the lived experiences of sexual-violence survivors. Put differently, science fiction might also offer a positive contribution to our understanding of the future, whether or not that is an optimistic one.

4.3. *A full-blown counterfactual*

Indeed, I would suggest that science fiction could also contribute to our understanding of victimological experience in the present. Eski and Ugelvik's (2025) assertion of the way in which science fiction is tethered to our current reality can also be understood in the manner in which it might offer a means to explore the phenomenology of victimization. Doing so draws on the quality of science fiction to be, at once, continuous with our current situation, and at the same time relevantly different. As Roberts (2002, 19) writes, “it is not so much the ingenuity of the novum, or the strangeness of it, that is important, it is the symbolic purchase its point of difference provides on the world we live in.” In effect, science fiction can serve as a full-blown counterfactual thought experiment, in which relevant features of social reality can be varied as a means to gain insight into its phenomenological features (Sinnerbrink, 2022).

In line with the work of Rafe McGregor (2021), the degree to which this would be a valuable avenue for victimological inquiry depends on the manner in which the mimetic and counterfactual qualities of science fiction can contribute to insight into the phenomenology of victimization. In this way science fiction can serve as a valuable complement to direct inquiry of victimological experience, given that such inquiry faces several experiential and interpretive challenges. Researchers rarely have direct access to victims' first-person experiences and must rely on victims' accounts, creating complexities relating to a double hermeneutic move: scholars interpret victims' interpretations (Spencer & Kidd, 2023). That task is further complicated by the ineffability of certain qualitative aspects of suffering, which may resist easy verbalization. Rather than assuming victims can readily name or frame their experiences, researchers should treat articulation as a dynamic and often iterative process of phenomenological discovery (Van de Ven & Pemberton, 2022).

The contribution of a work of science fiction to victimological inquiry would then depend on its ability to cash out the interplay between its mimetic qualities – the manner in which it can provide knowledge of experience by representing it in detail and immerse the viewer within this experience – and its counterfactual features – offering hypothetical situations that provide insight into relevant alternative realities and/ or cannot be reproduced in reality for legal or ethical reasons (see Sinnerbrink, 2022). Counterfactuals can offer knowledge of a reality by exploring more or less extreme alternatives to that reality. It is precisely the manner in which science fiction can vary

taken-for-granted features of experience that makes it a valuable phenomenological device (see the parallels with Ratcliffe, 2008).

This paper will stop short of examining science fiction works that might be mined for their victimological value. Instead, I will just suggest that considering works such as Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* through a victimological lens could also be beneficial for inquiries considering the posthumanist project outlined in section 2, as well as drawing on the hauntological perspective from section 3. In doing so, such a project could offer a critical examination of the assumptions relating to justice, which could be of particular value to a space victimology.

5. Responding in space victimology: how to understand justice out there?

5.1. Countering the injustice of space victimization

A key issue in any victimological endeavor is the extent to which justice processes succeed or fail in addressing the wrongs visited on victims. Lampkin (2024) underscores the importance of doing so, and Lampkin & White (2023) highlight features that could be useful in devising court-based or ADR responses to space crime and victimization. As noted before, much of the current work in space criminology is underwritten by notions of environmental, species and ecological justice, and some of the complexities of involving non-human victims in justice responses are also noted.

In doing so, space criminology's zemiological heritage is plain. Zemiology's emphasis on harm centers corrective, reparative, or restorative goals in thinking about justice (Lampkin & White, 2023). These aims ultimately rest on the ideal of *restitutio in integrum* – of making the victim “whole again” (Weinrib, 2002). However, while restorative remedies may have important practical benefits, we need to be aware of their problematic features from a philosophical and victimological standpoint. The idea of “making whole” presumes a prior, intact subject to be restored, a premise that misreads human existence (*Dasein*) as stable rather than inherently open-ended (Dunk and Pemberton, 2025). That misreading seems even more misleading when applied to the other-than-human or posthuman assemblages invoked by the species – and ecological – justice claims inherent to space victimology.

Moreover, this restorative framing risks implying a false symmetry between injustice and justice remedies. It is not just a matter of quantity – victimization often exceeds our capacity to redress it – but of kind. Injustice should be treated as an independent phenomenon in its own right, not merely as the absence or inversion of justice (Shklar, 1990). Justice processes aim for order, universality, and rule-based responses; responding to victims' lived, concrete experience often requires attention to particularities that resist such generalization. Thus, “countering injustice” and “doing justice” are two overlapping but distinct projects (Walgrave, 2023).

Indeed, seen phenomenologically, the wrongfulness of acts such as rape, torture, or genocide cannot be reduced to their violation of abstract legal norms. Instead, legal norms should be informed by the moral reality disclosed in victims' experiences: absent theological reference, the rules of justice need to derive their force from the degree to which they are responsive to – and in that sense parasitic upon – the wrongfulness that victimization reveals (Bernstein, 2015; Pemberton & Mulder, 2025). This shift reverses the usual prioritization and highlights why victimology must attend first to the concrete, often irreducible, moral injury of victims. This is all the more important in areas where we can have grave doubts about the degree to which legal norms will sufficiently reflect victim experiences, like in the area of space victimology.

Space victimology has much to gain from maintaining a clear sight on the reality that the experience of injustice is not adequately captured by reference to justice transgressions, which also

involves considering more critically the interlinkage between justice processes and experiences of injustice. One issue I have in mind is the reliance of legal systems on “legal fictions,” instances of deliberately convenient falsehoods that help institutions function (Fuller, 1930). These fall within a broader class of “useful untruths” described by the philosopher Hans Vaihinger (1924). They are ubiquitous and unavoidable in social science models and in political, social, and legal institutions, with useful untruths denoting the necessity of pretending that “something we know to be false is nevertheless the truth because it serves some purpose to do so” (see also Appiah, 2017). This usefulness, however, depends on two conditions: awareness of their fictional character and periodic critical review of their continued utility. This is particularly necessary in the area of victimology (see Pemberton & Bosma, 2024), and the characteristics of an emerging space victimology can help us query our legal responses to victimization, posing questions such as: “which useful untruths are we using?,” “who benefits from them?,” and “under which circumstances are they useful?” Answering these questions helps ensure that instrumental assumptions do not obscure or invalidate the concrete moral realities of victims.

The project of a space victimology can serve to highlight and question the legal fictions used in our justice responses. As signaled above, a key issue is that justice responses involve a return to a previous situation, an evening of the score, a return to balance. That is questionable on its victimological merits on Earth, but even more so in outer space. A second and more expansive issue concerns the manner in which the conditions of space travel, including relevant aspects of posthumanism and hauntology, might impact the way that we need to conceive of justice reactions to victimization.

5.2. *Space victimology and a future-oriented response to victimization*

In responding to victimization many theorists invoke notions of restorative justice, and the same is true for Lampkin & White (2023). Restorative justice is often cast as an opposite of retributive efforts but instead inherits many of its main features. Unintentionally, restorative thinker Howard Zehr (2002, 58) makes this point explicit:

In my earlier writings, I often drew a sharp contrast between the retributive framework of the legal or criminal justice system and a more restorative approach to justice. More recently, however, I have come to believe that this polarization may be somewhat misleading....they have much in common. A primary goal of both retributive theory and restorative theory is to vindicate through reciprocity, by evening the score. Where they differ is in what each suggests will effectively right the balance.

The point is not to dispute Zehr's hope that restorative measures might help victims, but to argue that the language of “evening the score” or “righting the balance” requires closer scrutiny.

In contrast, Elizabeth Wolgast (1987) argued that punishment, but also other legal processes, may satisfy societal or formal aims but cannot restore victims to a pre-offence state – obviously, murdered people are not brought back to life, and survivors of sexual violence are not “un-raped.” Such “restoration” is better understood as a legal fiction reinstating an abstract order rather than an empirical claim about reversing lived injustice (see Shklar, 1964/1986). Phenomenologically, the idea that justice can return things to a prior balance is misleading: the pre-offence state is unlikely to be just itself, while justice procedures cannot be expected to re-establish a lost normalcy. Recently, Pemberton & Bosma (2024) drew attention to the manner in which notions of “a return” might indeed compound rather than assuage experiences of injustice. They drew on the work of Auschwitz survivor Jean Améry (1980) to argue that the desire to “restore” a pre-injury state is both impossible and self-defeating: it demands the undoing of irreversible events. It thus traps victims in a temporal distortion that blocks a future orientation. In a similar vein, victimology increasingly conceives of the challenge facing victims as “re-storying” – building a new, meaningful life narrative – rather than “re-storation” to a former self.

The context of space victimology can highlight the fictional character of restoration and simultaneously draw our attention to a more future-oriented response to victimization. The key issue is that in outer space references to an existing order seem spurious: what order can be intended here? Here, inspiration can be drawn from recent victimological work that pits notions of a return or restoration against a view that centers acknowledgement and recognition of the injustice of victimization as a point of departure for a more future-oriented endeavor (Pemberton, 2025). Following Hannah Arendt (1958) it replaces the re-action inherent to such thinking with her concept of action. This centrally involves the idea of natality, and of the distinctly human capacity for starting anew. This is a better fit for the challenge of re-storying the experiences of victims in any case but given the absence of existing order in outer space, it seems even more relevant there than on earth.

5.3. *Hauntological justice in space*

The difficulty of seeing justice in space victimology as a return to order could serve to highlight the broader necessity of rethinking, rather than merely transplanting concepts from terrestrial systems of justice. Acknowledging the value of hauntology and posthumanism to a space victimology only brings this into sharper relief. Wendy Brown (2001) already argued that Derrida's ambit was to argue for a justice that is beyond right, debt, calculation, and vengeance. As he contended, "Otherwise justice again risks being reduced once again to juridical – moral rules, norms, or representation within an inevitable totalizing horizon" (1994, 28).

Thoroughly examining or indeed understanding the way that Derrida (1994) considers justice processes in a state of "disjuncture" – i.e. an indeterminacy of the past and of the past relationship's to the present – is beyond the scope of this paper. However, space victimology would do well to keep an open mind to the possible consequences of time being "out of joint" in its approach to justice processes. The work of Takemura (2019, 2024) sketches the manner in which time literally might be warped in space travel, for instance, due to the consequences of conceiving of travel around light speed, and/or issues relating to quantum mechanics. But also, the more subjective warping of time inherent to hauntology already requires a rethinking of the temporalities of justice. A hauntological perspective speaks against the everyday temporality of the law, with justice being administered in response to events in the past, given that it dislodges the order of past, present and future. In addition, involving posthuman and other-than-human entities in space victimology also requires further critical examination of central concepts in justice responses. Again, the work of Kelly Oliver (2009, 2010) can be instructive here. Her perspective on ethics as relational and focused on otherness can, for instance, be invoked to question concepts of rights. Her argument about animal rights, "that considering the role of animals in its development would alter our entire conception of rights, based as it is on assumptions about autonomous human individuals" (Oliver, 2010, 270), can be expanded to other-than-human entities more generally. Such perspectives can be important conduits between the ambition of space victimology to be inclusive towards the myriad entities that this project is likely to encounter and key aspects of the phenomenology of victimization.

6. Conclusion: a future-oriented space victimology

The first steps into space criminology and victimology have rightly drawn on the lineage of critical and green criminology. This offers an immediate challenge to the idea that conventional crime categories will capture the injustice of state and corporate activity *in* and relating *to* outer space. That critique is valuable: space activities are and will be dominated by powerful actors, will involve injustice that may evade domestic jurisdiction, and will damage non-human entities and the environment.

However, this paper has also sought to clarify that the critical potential of space victimology should not be spent on grafting familiar discussions of state crime or crimes of the powerful, on extraterrestrial contexts. A space victimology needs to grapple with phenomenological questions, like the subjectivity of victims in outer space, the temporality of victimization processes, the value of the fictional and the metaphysical assumptions underlying justice in the aftermath of victimization. This is not only due to the potential realities that a space victimology is likely to encounter, but also as a means to magnify space victimology's contribution to victimological questions more generally. The latter is precisely due to the way features of a space or astro – victimology can serve to unsettle or contrast taken-for-granted features associated with victimization on earth.

The paper has offered a sketch of some of the sources of inspiration for a space victimology. First and foremost, though, it has sought to push back against a tendency – also visible in critical and green criminology – to lump a critique of the concept of crime together with an erasure of a central quality of the phenomenology of victimization. Viewed from the first-person vantage point of victims, an essential issue is that it is *wrongful*, not merely *harmful*. That this experience of wrongfulness turns on a collapse of meaning in which embodiment, temporality, and social identity are violently undermined, seemingly invokes a human subject. This casts doubt over its inclusiveness to other-than-human entities. In contrast, I have offered the ongoing work on posthumanist subjectivity as a means to bridge the phenomenology of victimization with the necessity of including other-than-human entities under a victimological lens. The manner in which posthuman subjects can be understood as assemblages not only has the potential to offer novel answers to the “who” or “what” involved in victimization but also reinforces the insight that countering injustice should not be understood as a restoration to a previous self, but as *re-storying*, remaking the subject anew.

Such a future orientation runs through the whole paper. Derrida's hauntology was invoked as a conceptual tool to center aspects of the future of space travel in space victimology's research program. Such a hauntological sensibility shows how futures – imagined or deferred – already shape present injustices. Sci-fi imaginaries, longtermist arguments, and techno-utopian rhetoric can distract from immediate harms, weaponize victimhood, or legitimize unequal distributions of risk and harm. The idea that these possible futures exert a victimological influence on the present thereby also suggests the temporality of space victimization as a sight for critical victimological inquiry. The fact that this is an imagined future, means that space victimology needs to investigate (science) fictional accounts of what that future might be. Indeed, the way Derrida's project involves seeking out phenomena that harbor contradictions – the in(visible), present/absent and the real/imaginary – might offer much inspiration for space victimology.

A final future orientation is visible in the conceptualization of countering injustice. Space victimology is an ideal site to interrogate the “useful untruths” and legal fictions underpinning justice claims, including those that tend to treat restoration as an all-too-easy remaking of the past. The imagined futures of science fiction can serve as a laboratory for considering what such an approach should entail. It would also need to consider what justice means in contexts where past, present, and future are entangled and where victims – human and otherwise – require responses that are responsive, imaginative, and ethically grounded. That is our hope for the future of space victimology: I, for one, am very curious about where this voyage into the unknown might lead.

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