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Review of Grusin, R. (2022) Insecurity

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Book Reviews

Uchenna Okeja, *Deliberative Agency: A Study in Modern African Political Philosophy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022, 214 pp.

Okeja's new book is necessarily disruptive. This is besides being ambitious, awakening, enlightening, and exciting for those who realise the need for such new perspectives in African studies. Okeja inquired into the reasons why public deliberation reflects Africa's political culture and how it can help in resolving current political challenges. In the book, he constructs a contemporary African political philosophy (p.2). The book is divided into three sections; Section One comprises Chapters 1-3 and is reconstructive, while Sections Two – Chapters 4-6 – and Three – Chapters 7-8 – are constructive. My review will focus on the way this timely book leads on us on a path of reflection about Africa.

The first achievement of the text is that it brilliantly captures the experiences of Africans, past and present, in its central concept of political failure. Political failure describes the situation in which individuals experience powerlessness, inertia, demobilisation, and cognitive disorientation. Okeja points out that there are a generation of Africans who will never in their lifetimes experience what it means for a society to be governed properly. As individual Africans are perennially struggling to survive, they leave 'issues about politics and social reforms to elites, thugs, foreign powers, and . . . shades of experts offering commentaries on Africa' (p.9). Unlike most works that have relied on the 'problem-solution' approach in the attempt to understand the current challenge in Africa, Okeja proposes that 'an analysis of the political failure that constitutes the core of the contemporary African crisis must do more than propose solutions to particular problems' (p.29). This is the first reconstructive feature of Okeja's book.



So, what better approach does he offer? Okeja discusses the viability of previous political theories, concepts, theories about democracy, consensus, decolonisation, and neologisms that have occupied postcolonial African philosophers. He is masterly, systematic, and sympathetic in reconstructing several views on what it means to experience politics as a permanent condition of failure. He considers previous attempts to understand the challenge of governance in Africa to be normatively deficient, because the most they could offer 'is a perspective on who and what to blame for the African political condition' (p.59). They looked back into Africa's past in search of solutions to the problems they identified, but, as Okeja remarks, they relied too much on a weak method of conceptual retrieval (p.78). He points out that retaining this method 'may . . . mean that Africans in the present century are incapable of independent, critical reflection on realities that shape their lives and aspirations' (p.79). As an alternative, he suggests a robust and sustainable approach he terms 'conceptual creativity'. Two of the most appealing aspects of this approach are that it awakens the agency of Africans and enables them to understand the scope of their responsibility towards a possible African future.

Okeja assesses the concept of 'palaver' and its relationship with 'consensus democracy, the pursuit of consensus, or democracy by consensus' (p.92) which has engaged several persons in response to Kwasi Wiredu's seminal work. In his view, the concept is problematic, inadequate, and fails 'to provide accurate description of experiences' (p.129). This assessment of the concept differs from the predominant trend, and is the third appealing feature of Okeja's book.

Then come his deeper analyses of the method he proposes, namely, 'conceptual creativity'. He begins with the idea that 'when a people's conceptual resources become . . . inadequate . . . for interpreting the perception of reality, the result is that perception of reality becomes a meaningless succession of disparate events . . . (and) comprehension itself becomes impossible' (p.105). Okeja's view here derives from 'devastation of African conceptual resources' (p.112) that led to 'conceptual loss'. As a solution, Okeja holds that 'conceptual creativity is a viable response to the challenge of method in African political philosophy'. His reason is that the method corrects 'the deficits of conceptual retrieval' (p.135). It

bridges traditional and modern Africa by refashioning, rethinking, and merging the conceptual resources and apparatuses of both eras (p.141, pp.143–148).

So how do all these connect with the question of deliberative agency? Agency, Okeja argues, is the core of a framework that can disrupt the current mode of politics in Africa because it implies the ‘idea of collective ownership of politics’ (p.179). This is the fourth crucial feature of this book. And certainly, this is the aspect that will retain its relevance the most. His description of deliberation as the site for contestation and negotiation with the state is (re)humanising and empowering. According to him, agency is ‘an assertion that politics is a sphere of human action where individuals primarily exist in the mode that entails cocreating meaning and purpose’ (p.184). It ‘offers a replacement for consensus, which previously constituted the ideal of deliberation’ (p.182). Okeja describes the political philosophy that derives from this idea of agency as ‘deliberative agency’. He explores three meanings of deliberative agency (pp.185–186). In the third, he proposes deliberative agency as primarily an imagining of what politics ‘ought to be, especially in a context with a specific debilitating experience’ (p.186).

The fifth compelling feature of Okeja’s text is his striking proposal that ‘[H]owever way colonisation and the other factors responsible for entrenchment of cognitive orientation operated, they did not succeed in killing imagination’. The idea of imagination as a tool for creative agency is crucial, because faith in imagination ‘is the best way to approach reality while going through’ the experience of disorientation (p.192). Creative agency is anchored on the principle of orientation to reality as contradiction. This principle expects one to ‘act in a way that is aligned with the true nature of their reality which is shaped by contradiction’. But how exactly is the idea of contradiction necessary in explaining conceptual creativity and creative agency in politics? This question deserves deeper exploration, which Okeja does not seem to provide. A further appreciation is needed in this regard, but this does not render the work any less impressive.

One of the things I find essential in the book is the argument that individuals need ‘to always be alert to the sense in which we are all potential contributors to giving meaning to experience . . . because we are cocreators of meaning’ (p.205). This is what agents do when

they engage in deliberative practices where their imagination is in full use. This is how politics in Africa can be infused with meaning to improve human wellbeing in Africa. I consider this a brilliant and compelling invitation to individual Africans to not abandon politics to those who have destroyed it the most.

A brief review of the kind I have done is inadequate to highlight the excellence and success of this book. The author may brace up for questions and refutations, because his views will turn the tables for several scholars. Two such questions immediately come to mind: First, how does his idea of ‘conceptual residues’ which can be ‘recovered and recast to function as building blocks’ for the articulation of a new conceptual imagination (p.183) substantially differ from ‘conceptual retrieval’, which he criticised in several sections of his book (see pp.11, 63, 77–80, 134–136)? Second, how is ‘conceptual residues’ not part of hybridity, which he assessed as inadequate (p.154)? His definition of hybridity as lacking a sense of becoming is also contestable. There seems to be a need for further clarification in this regard, even though this lack in no way diminishes the excellence of the book.

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Gideon van Riet, *Hegemony, Security Infrastructures and the Politics of Crime: Everyday Experiences in South Africa*. London: Routledge, 2021, 224 pp.

Studies of crime and policing in urban South Africa have tended to focus on the country’s larger cities. Gideon van Riet’s latest book focuses instead on Potchefstroom, a city in the North West province of the country, which is home to approximately 50,000 residents.

The author focuses on the area of the city served by Potchefstroom’s central police station. Potchefstroom, he explains, bears the living legacies of apartheid spatial governance. The area served by this police station continues to be heavily shaped by ‘white, Afrikaans, middle-class interests’ (p.10). The book’s scope arises from van Riet’s initial focus on private security in the city, which

has since expanded to include ‘the sociality of crime and responses thereto’ (p.1).

Positioning his work between security studies and policing studies, Van Riet’s first three chapters explore his conceptual perspective. He notes that contemporary South Africa continues to be characterised by rampant inequalities, which have their roots in colonialism and apartheid. Rather than comprehensively tackle this inequality, he argues, elites have attempted to secure their position through political and economic policies that amount to the ‘biopolitical abandonment’ of most citizens. This is bolstered by a ‘spatial practice of frontier governance’ (p.18) which utilises ‘physical, virtual and ontological structures’ to create borders and enclaves that van Riet explores through the lens of the ‘laager’ (p.47). These practices are justified and reinforced by stigmatising discourses that create the ‘constitutive outside’ against which the ‘non-continuous physical and metaphysical laager’ is positioned (p.42).

Parts two and three in the book centre on van Riet’s empirical material, drawing together a mixture of ethnographic observations, interviews, newspaper articles, and social media posts. There is an interesting mixture of qualitative sources in these discussions, although I would have valued more details on the sampling of his interviews. Chapters four, five, and six explore the discourses and practices of the local community policing forum, Potchefstroom’s newspapers, and its private security companies’ social media engagements. Chapters seven, eight, and nine move on to explore the security practices of private security operatives, Oweresig’s Residents’ Association, and Potchefstroom’s City Improvement District.

Throughout the text, van Riet is critical of accounts that engage in what he terms ‘infantile constructivism’ (p.196) by implying that crime is not something to be feared in South Africa. That said, he agrees with other scholars who argue that the fear of crime has been bound up with other forms of fear, prejudice, and a misplaced sense of persecution amongst those he studies. This, he argues, can and should be productively challenged. Crime, he states, is fundamentally fed by the country’s inequalities and the multi-dimensional poverty that these inequalities produce. A solution to crime will be found, he concludes, through inclusion rather than abandonment.

For the author, Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony and discourse provides a productive analytical lens and normative path forward. Taking inspiration from the text, he adopts the premise that social change will require a plurality of actors across different social categories who build a shared understanding of the issues at stake. A key analytical concern in his text is to demonstrate the heterogeneity of opinions within social groups and occupations. This demonstrates the potential, he argues, for alliance-building action that could dissolve 'frontier governance' and, with it, a quest for security that serves only to compound the racism and classicism bound up with the politics of abandonment.

This is a hopeful vision, but I would have welcomed more on the pathways of change. Van Riet acknowledges that crime is driven by inequalities and injustices in society but suggests that inclusive forms of policing are possible within contemporary South Africa. Moreover, at several points, he treats faith in the state police as an inherently positive step towards a more progressive vision of security. These arguments seem to be based on assumptions about the functioning of power, oppression, and policing that would benefit from being more clearly acknowledged and defended. Moreover, while the recognition of heterogeneity within social categories is vitally important, the degree to which it meaningfully represents the potential for alliance building around shared understandings of antagonism feels overstated at times. Readers who hold a different understanding of the status quo in South Africa and possibilities or pathways for its transformation may not find their questions addressed in the text.

Overall, this book provides valuable insights into elements of policing and security within Potchefstroom and, in doing so, provides a sense of what can be gained by looking beyond South Africa's larger cities. In Potchefstroom, for example, it is local private security companies who dominate the town. Larger national and multinational companies lack the ubiquitous presence they have in cities like Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. This, we learn, shapes their discourse and practices of security. We also hear of community policing forums struggling to compete with the appeal (to a few residents) of patrols organised by Afriforum. This, too, impacts upon everyday policing, sovereignty, and (in)justice. Such empirical insights are fascinating. At times, however, they are

mentioned relatively briefly and I was eager for a more sustained engagement with the specifics of dynamics within Potchefstroom, a clearer sense of the evidence base from which the author is drawing, and a deeper comparative engagement with the rich literature on private security and community policing across South Africa. This book covers a wide range of important topics. Concepts and discourses are not always unpacked with equal insight and rigour (p.70), but many valuable discussions are explored.

The empirical base and scope of the study is also worth noting. There are two police stations in Potchefstroom, van Riet tells us. His book focuses on the larger, central police station. The author is currently undertaking research in the precinct of the second police station in Ikageng. This latter station serves Ikageng, Promosa and Mohadin, which were established as townships under apartheid. Narrowing the focus of a project is inevitable, and the author does try to draw on research currently being undertaken in Ikageng to enrich his discussions. He also understands the perversities of people and spaces being spoken of as a 'spectre' and not 'on their own terms' (p.193). The voices of residents in higher density housing and workers who are stigmatised within the precinct of study, however, could have been given more space in this book. I would also have been interested to hear more about the university as a space and a security actor.

As a resident in the city himself, van Riet supplements the empirical material in the book with his own positionality and experience as a first language Afrikaans, white South African man (i). This is often done to good effect. The author clearly feels an ethical obligation to demonstrate to would-be readers who are also residents that he understands their perspectives, even where he disagrees with them. This, too, is fruitful practice. Perhaps as a consequence of this, however, the book does at times seem to have an inconsistent sense of who its audience is – academics, interviewees, or the general public – which leads to some inconsistency in tone, what is being explained, and how it is being explained.

Theoretically, van Riet offers contributions to a range of conceptual developments and approaches. This makes for an engaging read, but sometimes I felt that contributions being asserted could have been more fully explained and interrogated. For example, extending the notion of infrastructure to include physical infrastructures,

digital platforms, ‘routine actions’ and ‘cognitive frames’ is an interesting proposition (p.4). I did wonder, however, about the conceptual losses of stretching a concept in this way. Furthermore, the author argues that an infrastructural lens allows us to appreciate ‘flows’ in a way that nodal and network analyses of policing do not. However, I did not feel that his precis of the existing literature does justice to the literature’s potential, nor does it give credit to the productive ways in which nodal and network analyses have been conceptually combined.

Overall, this is an engaging and informative book that offers a useful exploration of policing and security in Potchefstroom. It will be of interest to scholars of policing, security, and urban studies.

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Richard Grusin (ed), *Insecurity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022, 272 pp.

Whereas unfreedom, inequality, illegitimacy, and injustice can all be thought of as negative counterparts to more or less undisputedly positive ideas, insecurity, it appears from this volume, is different. Far from referring to the opposite of some great ideal, insecurity surfaces as the grim reality that all too often results from (putative) attempts to create security – be it by the state or by capital, by armies or banks, or through campus protocols or household practices. Indeed, in the words of editor Richard Grusin, ‘that security does not respond to but rather generates insecurity’ (p. vii) was the central thesis of the conference, organised by the Center for 21st Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in May 2019, of which this book is the product.

Interestingly, the volume’s opening contribution by renowned (anti-)security scholar Mark Neocleous can be read as an argument for the reverse thesis as well: that ‘insecurity’ actually invites ‘security’. Contrary to common assumptions, Neocleous tries to show, for a long time ‘insecurity’ did not exist as an idea in art, literature, and political thought. In fact, he argues, it was invented as an ideological category under bourgeois modernity with the purpose of reinforcing interventions undertaken in the name of ‘security’. It is

for this reason that Neocleous questions the potential of ‘insecurity’ as a critical concept, a status that notions such as ‘securitisation’ and ‘precarity’ have come to occupy in contemporary political theory.

Whether or not insecurity has potential as a critical concept, it undeniably emerges as a pervading characteristic of our present world. Today, people around the globe seem to be experiencing insecurity with regard to various aspects of their lives – from their work to their health, from their environment to their bodily integrity. The wide range of domains across which insecurity currently appears to manifest itself is also reflected in the book. The contributions by Annie McClanahan and Maureen Ryan, for instance, shed a light on the insecurities characterising work and the struggle to sustain a living under an economic system leaning on highly flexibilised labour and intense competition between individuals. The chapters by A. Naomi Paik and Lisa Bhungalia, on the other hand, focus on the insecurity-generating practices that comprise part of the modern-day strategies for military and national security in the US. The contributions by Neel Ahuja and Andrea Miller, finally, expose racialised security thinking in the context of migration and urban planning.

The works in this collection do not only show great diversity in terms of the substantive issues that they address through the lens of insecurity; there are also differences in form. The chapters mentioned above follow a similar idea, whereby authors zoom in on a very concrete event or phenomenon – from the killing of twelve Nepali recruits on a US military mission to artworks made through Amazon’s ‘Mechanical Turk’, from depictions of Bangladeshi environmental migrants to the Netflix show *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* – in order to problematise insecurities that are in fact created more structurally. The penultimate chapter, by contrast, takes the form of a conversation between two scholars, Saskia Sassen and Aneesh Aneesh, exchanging thoughts about the insecurities produced by high finance. The book ends with a highly personal essay by Jennifer Doyle, who bravely chose to narrate her personal experience of being stalked by a student, giving readers a chilling intimation of what it can feel like to be utterly insecure.

Each of the nine chapters in this volume makes a relevant and thoughtful contribution to our understanding of the reality of insecurity in the present-day world. Taken as a whole, the book manages to give readers an impression of the pervasiveness of insecurity

in people's lives today, the variety of domains in which insecurity manifests itself, and the complexity of the political, cultural, and economic context from which insecurity arises. The thesis posited in the introduction – that security does not resolve insecurity, but rather tends to breed it – seems to find adequate support throughout the volume, albeit more clearly so in some chapters than in others. Contributions that stand out for revealing the insecurity-promoting dynamics of security are Paik's account of the US's exploitation of third country national military recruits, and Bhungalia's analysis of American aid securitisation in Palestine.

The book, then, does not only sketch in what ways the contemporary world is marked by insecurity, but also reminds us of the adverse effects produced by discourses and practices of security – with insecurity indeed emerging as a condition that often results from (supposed) efforts to create security. All of this adds up to a work that is not particularly hopeful. As a reader, you are left wondering: if insecurity accounts for so much misery today, but striving for security tends to make things even worse, then what are we to do?

This question becomes particularly acute in the face of the severe crises that have presented themselves in the time after the conference that brought together the scholars contributing to this volume, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. If insecurity already pervaded the world in the spring of 2019, then this condition has only been amplified in the three years that followed. And both during the pandemic and in the context of Putin's war, we can again observe how political acts performed in the name of security all too frequently end up making people's lives more insecure instead. In that sense, recent events underline the importance of the message that *Insecurity* tries to convey – while at the same time making us painfully aware of how hard it is for the world to learn.

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Tao Jiang, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, xiii–xvi+556 pp.

Major English-language surveys, featuring varying degrees of analytical depth, of the development of Chinese philosophy during

the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE) have appeared over the last thirty-five years. Tao Jiang's recent release, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, a tome which took the author fifteen years of research, teaching, and reflection to complete, goes far beyond the confines of mere survey. Jiang lays out an interpretation which sees a fundamental normative debate shaping these two and a half centuries of 'master texts'. The normative debate, he argues, that runs from the Confucian *Analects* to the Legalist masterpiece *Hanfeizi* revolves around whether, in broadly construed terms, *ren* as intimate benevolence or *yi* as impartial justice should be the guiding principle of governance.

In the opening chapter, Jiang develops a promising methodological approach. The main dilemma for him is unravelling historical vs. textual authorship. By arguing that historians and philosophers treat the same texts of this period as different 'scholarly objects', he aims to give philosophers a needed liberty to pursue normative reflection by following the assumption that a 'textual author' is the traditionally attributed author of a thematically unified text. This does not excuse the philosopher from paying close attention to new historical discoveries and findings about the development of thought during this complex period. But it does allow philosophers to address themselves largely to the 'received texts' as we have them today.

In the first content chapter on the Confucian *Analects*, buttressed by the section on the excavated fourth-century Guodian manuscripts, such as the *Wuxing*, Jiang maintains that Confucius sees the cardinal virtue of *ren* as both the virtue of interpersonal relations and the ground of impersonal justice, without reconciling tensions between these ideas. This reading is partly but importantly based on what Jiang sees as a continuity between devotion (*zhong*), which answers the demands of familial humaneness, and reciprocity (*shu*), which fulfils the exigencies of universal justice.

The following chapter on the Mohists puts them squarely on the side of the primary moral status of justice in social ethics and rulership. The facts that justice is heaven's aim, that we need fixed standards to justify moral claims, and that 'impartial care' is fundamental to social ethics do support this assessment. With its firm commitment to impartiality in governing, the *Mozi* represents a crucial moment in the great Warring States philosophical debate. The influence it had on many other movements of Chinese thought,

despite the short-lived historical pedigree of the Mohists themselves, cannot be overestimated. It possibly solves one mystery about why the Mohist corpus was preserved in the later Daoist canon.

Jiang's next chapter on the *Mengzi* is highly innovative. Though Mencius overtly criticises the Mohists for contradicting themselves by following 'two roots' of morality rather than impartial justice only, Jiang sees Mencius as embracing a 'two-roots' theory. They do this through an analysis of much-debated Emperor Shun narratives. Shun is a moral hero, for Jiang's Mencius, because, when forced to choose, Shun will simply never sacrifice even his criminal family members to the state, but at the same time, he will not interfere in the state's goals of impartially pursuing righteous punishment for crimes.

Jiang's *Laozi* chapter argues that a decisive step is taken by this work in seeing justice as supplanting humaneness, though in the radically different framework of the naturalistic, non-anthropomorphic *dao* rather than the earlier notion of the anthropomorphic heaven (*tian*) of earlier thinkers. In the course of the chapter, Jiang endorses Moss Roberts' argument that the *Laozi* separates the familial from the political, and in this respect sides with the Mohists regarding the need for impartial justice in the political realm.

The extensive chapter on the *Zhuangzi* makes a compelling case for the text's emphasis on two kinds of 'personal freedom'. The first is gained by living at the margins or outside of the Confucian ritual and political order, and the second by guarding internal peace by learning to cope with the difficulties of the social order by adjusting to its conflicting perspectives and interpersonal tensions. At the end of the chapter, Jiang laments the misfortune that the work does not question the validity of the 'cage' of the Confucian social order, but only counsils the reader on how to deal with that order, and thereby concedes the space of the socio-political to the Confucian without argument. This finding contributes to Jiang's own philosophical perspective at the end of the book, with some help from the twentieth century theory of 'negative freedoms' postulated by Isaiah Berlin. At the end of the book, Jiang holds that a 'road not taken' in early Chinese philosophy was a vision of a political order that ensures the protection of Zhuangist personal freedoms by impartial state institutions.

The next chapter on Xunzi represents him as taking a bold step in the Confucian context of de-personalising heaven by making human effort or *wei* the basis of civilisation and morality. Xunzi,

on this reading, balances the ‘*renyi* synthesis’ he works out strongly in favour of justice through his essays on how ritual creates proper socio-political distinctions. Jiang even suggest at the end of the chapter that Xunzi’s emphasis on *yi* is so strong that his position is redolent of Mohist preferences.

One of the most importantly unique features of *Origins of Moral and Political Thought in Early China* is that it devotes two chapters to the growing tradition of Legalist thought, one in the middle of the book on the fourth-century proto-Legalists Shang Yang, Shen Buhai, and Shen Dao and toward the end a fine exposition of the *Han Feizi*. This last content chapter makes a cogent and straightforward case that Han Feizi came down squarely on the side of justice in the great Warring States debate by making the state the sole arbiter of justice and insisting, at least overtly, that Confucian-style morality has no place in politics. At the end of the chapter, Jiang concedes that, while the Legalist arguments do seem to reveal that Confucians overestimated the promise of virtue in politics, Han Feizi underestimated the need for at least some moral principles among political leaders, given the fact that attempts to put the *fajia* system into practice always resulted in totalitarianism. In these chapters on *fajia* thought, there is an intriguing and oft-repeated expression describing Legalist views of political conduct as ‘clear-eyed’ compared to corresponding views of Confucians. This consistent description of Legalists as ‘clear-eyed’ strongly implies that Confucians were ‘murky-eyed’ about politics. It insinuates that, even if both impartial justice and self-cultivation should play roles in political society, the Confucian vision needs more correction in the direction of impartial state structures than the Legalist requires correction in the direction of the need for some moral cultivation among politicians.

Every single chapter of Tao Jiang’s *Origins of Moral-Political Thought in Early China* is steeped in exhaustive research and analysis and presents provocative and insightful challenges to common perspectives. It will, in my view, become a standard in the field, and its influence and pedigree will outpace the decade and a half that went into writing it. It is a must-read for serious students of early Chinese philosophy.

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Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind*. London: Verso, 2020, 209 pp.

Violence is a central problem of current global affairs. This has become increasingly apparent both in the build-up to the publication of Judith Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence* and in the short time since. The continued use of self-preserving violence by the modern state, as well as systemic violence that permeates through all of its social structures, make the modern world a violent world. This violence can be both obvious and subtle. No more obvious examples of state-sanctioned violence can be found than Russia's violent invasion of Ukraine and police killings that continue in America, which Butler refers to often. However, violence does not have to be a punch in the proverbial face; it can also exist in far more subtle forms, such as the systemic violence of racism and classism. This combination creates what Butler describes as a 'forcefield of violence' (p.7). What role, if any, does nonviolence have to play in a world saturated with violence? Judith Butler suggests it has a pivotal role to play and argues that one need not fight fire with fire, violence with violence, but instead one can escape the 'forcefield of violence' through forceful, aggressive nonviolence.

Through the work of Walter Benjamin, Butler argues that society is stuck in a continuously strengthening 'forcefield of violence' (p.7). Benjamin's identification of the instrumental ends/means continuum around which violence circulates is extremely important to Butler as it illuminates the violent foundations of the state as well as displays the way in which this violence is continually perpetuated. The perpetuation of violence occurs through the mythic violence that both instates the law and preserves it. It is this violence that nation-states continue to use against their own populations through the justification of law. Butler, like Benjamin, seeks a means of emancipating society from this 'forcefield of violence'.

However, unlike other left-leaning political scholars, Butler does not use the presence of violence to justify violence against the system. A notable example of this is Slavoj Žižek, who, through reading Benjamin, concludes that any violence perpetrated against the oppressive structure of the state is justified due to the violence that the state has already used. This is a form of argument stemming from self-defence. Butler eloquently dismantles this argument for

self-defence by insisting that, due to the epistemic problems of who ought to be identified as the ‘self’ or where this ‘self’ ends, the argument that justifies violence in the case of self-defence continues to perpetuate problems of inequality, as there will always be those who are not deemed defensible. It is from here that Butler calls for a means to escape the ‘forcefield of violence’ that does not rely on violence. Butler finds this through the notion of non-violence. However, Butler’s notion of nonviolence is set apart from others, as they argue that ‘the ethical stand of nonviolence has to be linked to a commitment to radical equality’ and that nonviolence ought to be aggressively pursued (p.62).

To set the foundations for the argument that nonviolence is necessary and that it ought to be committed to radical egalitarianism, Butler turns to the notion of dependency. In the Hobbesian conception of the state of nature, humans are seen as individuals who are independent. Butler convincingly argues that this is completely incorrect and that a major characteristic of being human is being dependent on others. This dependency begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. Thus, Butler gives a critique of liberal individualism to make their move toward radical egalitarianism. This link of dependency is then fastened to the question of violence through Kant’s categorical imperative. The suggestion is that since we are ever dependent on others, humans ought to act in a manner that they can warrant all other human beings acting. Thus, turning to violence becomes both unreasonable (since by using violence, you open up the potential for others to use violence against you) and immoral. This means that nonviolent intervention can be the only reasonable and moral position to take in order to escape the ‘forcefield of violence’ that engulfs the modern world. Butler gives a psychoanalytic justification for this position through the work of Melanie Klein by suggesting that, although we have aggressive and destructive drives, guilt is a mechanism that is used not only to check these destructive drives but also to preserve the life of the Other. Thus, Butler gives both a Kantian and a psychoanalytic justification for the moral position to preserve a life. To reinforce the notion of radical egalitarianism that Butler welds to nonviolence, they suggest that certain people are more grievable than others and that this level of grievability is often linked to race, gender, class, and sexuality. Thus, one needs to ensure that everyone is equally

grievable and valued as a life in order for nonviolence as an ethical notion to be successful.

The most unique and powerful aspect of Butler's version of nonviolence is that it seeks to embody what Albert Einstein called 'militant pacifism' (p.181). Butler suggests that 'nonviolent forms of resistance can and must be aggressively pursued' (p. 21). Nonviolence has been linked to passivity and Butler seeks to break these shackles. In doing so, Butler aims to argue that nonviolence is no longer in the realm of the imaginary; rather, it aggressively bursts into reality. Thus, Butler argues that nonviolence can be used to create real and radical systemic change and ought to be turned to in order to shatter the 'forcefield of violence' protecting the power of the state.

Although Judith Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence* is well researched and eloquently reasoned, there remain some areas that deserve more scrutiny. Butler identifies the problem with defining what is and is not violence. This problem is illuminated as Butler suggests that 'violence from the start is defined within certain frameworks and comes to us already always interpreted' (p.136). However, the epistemic problem of violence, while identified in the book, is not corrected. Thus, all of the examples of acts of nonviolence that Butler uses can still be interpreted as violent. Butler fails to unambiguously overcome this issue of the definition of what is or is not violence. A second major *aporia* in the book is found in Butler's excessive leaning on the work of Walter Benjamin. Butler leans heavily on Benjamin's *Critique of Violence*, and although they acknowledge Jacques Derrida's objections to this piece, they do not respond to them adequately. These issues raise the following questions: can nonviolence be of practical use without a strict definition of violence? Does the commitment to radical equality go far enough to ensure that Butler's theory of aggressive nonviolence is not used to justify acts of violence?

Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence* is not without its flaws; however, it is a major step in the direction of a nonviolent means of creating radical systemic change. It is this work that may be a steppingstone to a better understanding of nonviolent alternatives to conflict resolution, which is a topic that deserves our full attention.

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