Feminism and Philosophy

FROM THE EDITOR

Serena Parekh
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This issue of the newsletter features three book reviews and an invited symposium on Alexis Shotwell's book, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. The symposium is a result of the author-meets-critics session at the APA Central Division meeting in February 2018 and includes a response by Shotwell. Many of the themes of Shotwell's book, as well as the discussion of it by her critics, will be of interest to feminist scholars: for example, the ways that moral agents are implicated in forms of harm that make it impossible to be ethically pure, the role of non-ideal philosophy in moral discourse, and strategies for addressing structural injustice. I particularly appreciate Shotwell's insistence that though we are implicated in unjust systems, systems that we cannot easily repair or avoid, we can nonetheless maintain a positive attitude and avoid despair. Her work is a helpful antidote to what Hannah Arendt called the "reckless optimism and reckless despair" that she thought characterized the modern world. Readers of this newsletter will, I believe, find much of interest in the discussion of Shotwell's book published here.

After three years as editor, I will be stepping down from this position. This will be my last issue of the newsletter. I am grateful to everyone who submitted articles and who volunteered to review submissions and to the Committee on the Status of Women for their support. Lauren Freeman, University of Louisville, will take over. Please send all future submissions and questions to her at lauren.freeman@louisville.edu.

ABOUT THE *NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY*

The *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of newsletter articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The newsletter contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor or send four copies of essays via regular mail. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the newsletter, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the editor, Lauren Freeman (lauren.freeman@louisville.edu), a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Dr. Lauren Freeman, University of Louisville, lauren.freeman@louisville.edu.

4. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2018–2019

Adriel M. Trott (APA Blog Series Editor), Kathryn J. Norlock Associate Chair (2019), Charlotte Witt (Chair 2019), Margaret Atherton (Member 2019), Amy R. Baehr (Member 2019), Michael C. Rea (Member 2019), Rachel V. McKinnon (Member 2020), Julinna C. Oxley (Member 2020), Katie Stockdale (Member 2021), Nancy Bauer (Member 2021), Nicole J. Hassoun (Member 2021), Janet A. Kourany (Member 2021), Lauren Freeman (Newsletter Editor), Peggy DesAutels (Site Visit Program Director).

CHECK OUT THE NEW WOMEN IN PHILOSOPHY BLOG

From editor Adriel Trott:

The "Women in Philosophy" series at the APA Blog has been going well. The series has been able to offer a platform for voices and perspectives that are not often given space in the field, and future posts will be doing more of the same. Topics thus far have included feminist philosophy conferences, Southern Black feminism, the work of the Graduate Student Council of the APA, the importance of having people who have experienced oppression working in relevant areas of philosophy, and a call to decolonize the philosophical canon, among other topics. I have lined up several senior women in the field to respond to questions more junior scholars and graduate students might have, like whether to be on social media and whether and how one could contest an editor's decision on a manuscript. The series continues to solicit contributions on topics about women in the field, about women in the public sphere, or about the research women in the field are doing. The series is meant to provide a space for women and genderqueer folks to discuss these issues, but notes that the comment sections still tend to be populated by men, and often men who are telling the posters how to better think about diversity, so it's still a work in progress. Those who are interested in supporting the series might consider submitting a post to the series editor (Adriel M. Trott at trotta@wabash.edu) or commenting on posts.

CSW POSTERS

Two new posters are available for purchase on the CSW website (http://www. apaonlinecsw.org/).

ARTICLES

Introduction to Cluster on Alexis Shotwell's Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times

Ami Harbin
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

Alexis Shotwell's *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016) advances a view of the moral terrain where it is impossible for agents to hold pure, unimplicated, morally righteous positions, but also where such an impossibility is not cause for despair. Shotwell considers the ways agents are inevitably involved in webs of harm and suffering, considering in depth the presence and histories of, among other realities, colonialism, the social conditions of illness, eco-degradation, and food consumption. No matter how they may try, moral agents cannot remove themselves from their implication in ongoing legacies of suffering, degradation, destruction, and harm. What they can and should do, instead, is acknowledge and inhabit their implicated positions in ways which open new paths of collective action, creativity, and courage in working towards different future landscapes. Shotwell draws out the possibilities for such creativity embodied in such practices as disability and gender justice activism, and speculative fiction.

The following responses originated in an author-meets-critics session devoted to Shotwell's book at the American Philosophical Association Central Division meeting in Chicago, February 2018. The authors developed their essays further following that conversation and offer them now as a testament to the usefulness of *Against Purity* in multiple areas of philosophy. Michael Doan offers a reflection on Shotwell's "distributed" or "social" approach to ethics as an alternative to ethical individualism. Kathryn Norlock's response focuses on Shotwell's view as non-ideal theory and considers the analysis of gender voluntarism in Chapter 5. Mark Lance's response explores the notion of prefiguration in Shotwell's work, as a turning moment, from the reality of impurity to the possibilities of activism and organizing. The variation among the responses attests to the richness of the book and to its appeal to readers throughout and beyond academic philosophy.

Non-Ideal Theory and Gender Voluntarism in Against Purity

Kathryn J. Norlock
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Alexis Shotwell's *Against Purity* is an unusual and absorbing collection of ideas. It is a pleasure to delve into the related chapters, but hard to know where to start with a response. It was helpful, therefore, when panel organizer Ami Harbin

suggested that rather than be mere critics, we readers of *Against Purity* provide a focus on our ways of using and developing its themes in our own research. I come to this text as one interested in non-ideal theory, and specifically what I call *non-ideal ethical theory* (NET). (For readers who don't embrace the term, I'll briefly characterize it below.) Shotwell takes up a multiplicity of tasks with respect to what I think of as the non-ideal. In what follows, I trace the relationship of her work to that of non-ideal theorists whose work influences mine. Then, more critically, I probe her analysis of gender voluntarism in Chapter 5, "Practicing Freedom: Disability and Gender Transformation," partly to better understand what she takes it to be, and partly to advance a cautious defense of some of the moral functions of gender voluntarism that non-ideal theory leads me to value. Perhaps my interest in retaining a non-pejorative account of gender voluntarism is due to my tendency to take non-ideal theory as a recommendation for some pessimism, whereas Shotwell's similar commitments turn out to inform her more optimistic philosophy.

First, I should clarify why non-ideal commitments lend me to pessimism. In a recent article,[1] I offered a vision of non-ideal ethical theory (hereafter NET) construed from elements of non-ideal theories as articulated in political philosophy by writers including Laura Valentini and Charles Mills, and in moral theory by writers including Lisa Tessman and Claudia Card. I combine insights like Mills's that political philosophers should reject Rawlsian idealizations that "obfuscate realities,"[2] with the work of moral theorists like Tessman, who argues for avoiding idealizations in morality, saying, "theory must begin with an empirically informed, descriptive account of what the actual world is like,"[3] and we "should forego the idealizing assumption that moral redemption is possible, because it obscures the way that moral dilemmas affect the moral agent."[4] NET offers reminders to theorists of institutional and systemic change that material contexts involve ongoing oppressions, and that individuals are inconsistent and biased, bear emotional and moral remainders, and are often outmatched by the seriousness of the problems we face. Because NET prioritizes attention to the imperfect realities of human nature, I am pessimistic that (inevitably temporary) progress in institutional arrangements will lead to better-behaved persons. Institutions can be orderly, but their orderliness does not thereby yield compliant individuals, because to believe individuals will be compliant with orderly institutions *is* to idealize moral agents, as primarily rational, unencumbered by moral remainders, free from histories of violence or oppressive occupation, and so on. Therefore, ethics should not aim for absolution, and justice should not aim for wiping the record clean, because embodied individuals in the material world will continue on all-too-human paths in a way which forestalls possibilities for purity; instead, moral and political efforts should engage in a necessary struggle that will remain a perpetual struggle. I suggested that NET is methodologically committed to (1) attention to oppression, (2) de-idealized moral agents, (3) recognition of moral remainders, and (4) recognition that some wrongs are not reparable.

How does Shotwell's work in *Against Purity* measure up to these injunctions of mine? I find her work urgently

relevant to all four of the above commitments. In the first chapter, Shotwell refers to "currently extremely oppressive social relations" (25) including colonialism. Her book holds up for scrutiny oppressions including healthism, anthropocentrism, trans-exclusion, and hostility to LGBTQ+ people. So (1) attention to oppression is certainly satisfied! One might infer that Shotwell's concern for oppressed groups motivates the book itself.

Next, (2) de-idealized moral agents, as Tessman describes us, are moral agents who are subject to moral failure: "To see the moral agent as someone who will likely face complicated moral conflicts and emerge from them bearing moral remainders is an important way to de-idealize the moral agent," she says.[5] Tessman criticizes theory that has been unduly focused on *action-guiding*,[6] idealizing the moral agent as one with options that can be exercised toward a right choice, which does not promote "understanding moral life under oppression."[7] I add that a de-idealized moral agent, especially in American political contexts, is a *relational* agent rather than the self-sufficient and independent individual valued by oppressors who long to ignore our shared states. Again, Shotwell exemplies this attention to our compromised lives; her very subtitle (*Living Ethically in Compromised Times*) heralds her attention to the impurity of choices. Shotwell's attentive criticism even to fellow vegans is instructive here; she describes the attitudes some take toward veganism as mistaken when they fancy themselves as "opting out" of systems of agriculture, migrant labor, environmental degradation, illness and death—as if veganism were an action-guide in a world with right choices that lead to a pure self (117). Shotwell's attention to the relational nature of oppressions and systems of production enables her to clarify that rightly intended actions are still enacted in thick contexts from which no opting out is possible. "It is striking," Shotwell says, "that so many thinkers answer the question 'how should I eat' with an answer that centers on individual food choices" (118), as if one's body were "one's horizon of ethical practices of freedom" (120). Shotwell keeps front and center a relational account of what it means to be a body (interdependently) and what it means to be a less than ideal moral agent.

Shotwell's arguments against purity easily satisfy my (3) and (4) above, to an extent, as her account of pollution and what it means to be a part of a damaged ecosystem make us *feel* the importance of the tenet that (4) some wrongs are not slates that we can later wipe clean, and that (3) we carry the moral remainders of our compromised choices. Of course, in the case of pollution, we carry literal remainders that are not washed away by using Brita filters for our water. Claudia Card attended importantly, however, to one type of moral remainder in particular: emotions as moral remainders,[8] and as insoluble as results of what Card called "the challenges of extreme moral stress."[9] It is the consideration of the challenges of moral stress that moves me to probe Shotwell's account of gender voluntarism in Chapter 5.

I continue to read and learn the literature on gender voluntarism, and readers like me who may need more explication of the term will perhaps have some questions

after reading Shotwell's account of it. This is certainly a project that is complicated in part by the extant literature, in which there does not seem to be a clear consensus as to what gender voluntarism means. Understanding voluntarism is also complicated in part by an uncharacteristic change in Shotwell's writing voice in Chapter 5. Much of the book is written first-personally, and invitationally, including moments when Shotwell leans in and clearly indicates to us that she is offering her own view ("I am identifying this as naturalism" (99), she says of skills of attention to details of the natural world). However, in Chapter 5 she momentarily disappears, when she says, "I examine charges that certain trans theorists are relying on voluntarist conceptions of natural change. 'Voluntarist' here refers to political projects that assume individuals can change themselves and their political circumstances through their own force of will, without regard for current realities or history" (140). The source of the "charges" is unclear in the book; it became clear in discussion at our author-meets-critics panel that she refers to charges on the part of writers including trans-exclusionary feminists whom Shotwell was aiming to avoid citing, which is a worthy ideal.

Absent that explanatory context, the latter sentence, with the "here refers to" phrase, threw me; is this *Shotwell's* characterization of the voluntarist, I wondered? It's not flagged as such the way naturalism was, even though it seemed to me that this depiction of voluntarism is more distinctively her own than was the depiction of naturalism. Why would she provide an account that seems like no one would hold it—who assumes that individuals can change themselves "without regard for current realities or history"? The most individualistic voluntarist must have *some* regard for current realities or they wouldn't want their own forms of change. What is the history of this term, and what is its function in this chapter, and does Shotwell intend it to have a pejorative meaning? Is gender voluntarism bad by definition, or is it the effects of the associated attitude that are lamentable? One might think that learning some trans-exclusionary feminists are at least one source of the sense of "gender voluntarist" at work here would remove my questions, but as the chapter proceeds, it becomes clear that Shotwell is not merely tilting at people who use the term accusatorily and unethically. She is also working out arguments against gender voluntarism itself, in which case she must have a conception of the meaning of the term that exceeds the more cartoonish form ascribed to the sources of the "charges." She does not merely take up the term "gender voluntarism" as the construct of trans-exclusionary authors. She also takes it up as a site of her own normative concerns. So the full meaning of the term is worth working out.

At first, I took gender voluntarism to be almost equivalent in meaning to individualism, as she indicated an interest in "nonindividualistic, nonvoluntarist approaches" (140). However, I then reached her comment that the description of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SLRP), at first glance, "looks like a kind of voluntarism, or at least individualism" (note: she concludes it may look like voluntarism, but is not) (149). But if individualism is a thinner concept than voluntarism (and not as bad?), then voluntarism is a subset of individualistic attitudes. I double back, I check again:

"SRLP's response points to the dangers of individualist allegiance to voluntarist gender norms *as these norms are enacted by the state*," Shotwells says (140, emphasis mine). Ah-hah! Is it the state's enactment of the norms of voluntarism that are the problem, rather than gender voluntarism itself?

This was an attractive possibility to me, but I realized quickly that a criticism of the state's norming of voluntarism would not cover all of Shotwell's objections. For example, she also resists overattention to the individual's performance of gender. Shotwell says that "discussions about what's happening when someone changes their gender expression often presuppose that gender enactment (or performance) is something people *do*: we *will* to be perceived in one way or another, and dress or move accordingly. For many theorists, part of the making of gender, or its performance, is the uptake we receive or are refused from others" (141, emphasis hers); to my surprise, Shotwell cites Judith Butler here. Is this Butler's view, and is Butler now implicitly saddled with a lack of "regard for current realities or history"? I was sure I was on the wrong track. I could almost see the author shaking her head, that she did not mean that at all; she meant merely to shift everyone's attention to the performance of gender in a thick context which is, as Cressida Heyes says, relationally informed.[10]

But then voluntarism is not an attitude of *disregard* for realities, after all. Instead, perhaps it is an emphasis, an attitude with respect to what has priority for our attention: that which the individual wills, or the "role of individual transformations within collective change" as Shotwell says—collective change which "we instantiate precisely through our agential subjectivities" (141), and collective change which we ought to so instantiate.

Rhetorically, perhaps those of us in intellectual feminist communities or in popular press accounts have overattended to individualist aspects of gender formation when we should have attended more to collective change. Shotwell offers arguments for how we should think about "shifting the grounds of intelligibility and sociality," and focuses on "the question of whether transforming social norms is voluntarist in the sense offered here," where voluntarism refers to "a political position that places emphasis on individual choice and liberty, implicitly assuming *that individuals are the locus of change*" (145). Shotwell calls "the supposition that we make change as individuals" a "danger of voluntarism for engaging with oppressive norms" (146).

I pause, resistant, at the idea that voluntarism is always a danger to collective change. I recall again Shotwell's criticism of some attitudes that veganism opts one out of anything: one's body is not "one's horizon of ethical practices of freedom" (120). But a locus is not a horizon. There is more than one sense in which one can be a locus, more than one sort of change, more than one reason to act. The same act or performance can have multiple moral functions. I share Shotwell's commitment to appreciating the extent to which "the situation in which we live [is one] which we have not chosen and cannot completely control" (145), but I do not know if I equally share her commitment

to *collective change as a norm*. I agree with Shotwell that relational beings are constantly engaged in collective norm-shifting in deliberate and less deliberate ways, but a norm of engagement seems another way to idealize the moral agent, and in non-ideal contexts, gender voluntarism may be the better choice at times.

Gender voluntarism may be, as just one possibility, manifest at those times when one feels morally isolated, when the performance that one wills is to be a voice that shouts "no" despite the likelihood that one will not be heard, or will be heard only as unwell, or criminal, or displeasing. Gender voluntarism may also be manifest at times when one's expression or performance is idiosyncratic, even as, at the same time, one persists in hoping to change norms. But what if one abandons that hope, or feels they need to carry on in its absence? What if collective change, itself, is in danger of becoming a form of a disciplinary norm, on this analysis, *that for the sake of which we ought to act*? If we have not chosen, and cannot completely control, the situation in which we live, then collective change is not always normatively available. I said above that I am a pessimist, and my commitments to representing de-idealized realities include recognizing the imperfect possibilities for collective change. Oppressive contexts provide an abundance of opportunities for moral failure, that is, for situations permitting multiple responses from an agent, none of which resolve the moral demands presented.

Perhaps voluntarism is available to us at times when transforming social norms is not available. More, voluntarism sounds so successful, and I find myself thinking of times when gender-voluntaristic choices are not received as socially successful, when success is not the point. At times, instances of gender voluntarism may be forms of resistance, a foray in a fight that may have no end, perhaps even a moral remainder, the act of an agent presented, again and again, with a hostile, dangerous, and determinedly unreceptive world. The individual body may not always be the locus of collective norm transformation, but individual acts of resistance in the form of willed gender presentations may serve to shift the agent's world in ways that provide her self-respect, strength, or as Rachel McKinnon says, epistemic assets, shifts in one's view of oneself, as a locus of many changes, and as a source of future efforts.

NOTES

1. Kathryn J. Norlock, "The Challenges of Extreme Moral Stress: Claudia Card's Contributions to the Formation of Nonideal Ethicsl Theory."

2. Ibid., 177.

3. Lisa Tessman, "Idealizing Morality," 807.

4. Ibid., 811.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 803.

7. Ibid., 808.

8. Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, 169.

9. Ibid., 234.

10. Cressida Hayes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*, 39–40.

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Impure Prefiguration: Comments on Alexis Shotwell's Against Purity

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Alexis Shotwell has given us a fascinating and rich book. It connects so many themes under the heading of "purity" that I'll be thinking about, digesting, and trying to respond to it for years. In a stab at manageability, I'm going to focus on applying a few ideas centered on prefiguration to movement-organizing work.

I begin with Alexis's point that we are practically embedded in structurally violent systems, even when we are working to transform them and the need to embrace and recognize that impurity in our work. She lays out in admirable detail the ways that illusion of purity can harm transformative efforts and argues that the core concept for navigating that impurity is *prefiguration*. Prefiguration, we might put it, is the pivot from impurity to strategy. But prefigurative strategy is a complicated process. In what follows, I outline some of that complexity.

A movement for any sort of social transformation can be thought of as having an internal and an external dimension. By the external, I mean the target of the movement—typically some form of structural oppression or violence and the institutions and individuals that support it. By the internal, I mean the way that the movement is itself configured—who participates and in what ways, how decisions are made, how resources are mobilized, who faces what sort of threat, who speaks, whose understandings of the problem guide group action, what sorts of actions are within the range of options considered, etc.

Of course, these are not fully independent dimensions. The social forces against which we organize will push back in all manner of ways from attempts to marginalize to violent assault. And internal structures and practices will adapt

to that push-back. Obviously, the internal structures that are possible and tactically useful in, say, contemporary Canada are going to be very different from those in 1938 Germany. More fundamentally, though, we have all lived our lives in the capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist, imperialist, militarist, authoritarian world, and this has profound effects on the attitudes and capacities of each of us, no matter our political orientation, including our capacity to construct prefigurative movements. Familiar histories of anti-racist organizations falling into patterns of sexism, or gay liberation organizations embodying classist or trans exclusion, or the invisibility of disability in many radical praxes make this point straightforward. To recognize our impure political situation is not only to recognize that there are external forces we must struggle against, but that, in the words of the great marxist theorist Pogo, "we have met the enemy and he is us."

But to say that we all suffer from implicit biases and habitual participation in as yet unexamined oppressive social structures is not to say that we are mere automata of these systems of oppression. Alexis picks up a central theme of the anarchist tradition: its insistence that we not merely identify the enemy, form whatever structures are needed to defeat that enemy, and then suppose that we would build a utopia out of the ashes. Rather, if *we* are not transformed from the impure participants in systemic oppression into new "second natures" exhibiting solidarity, mutual aid, and an ability to see new dimensions of hierarchy, then our post-revolutionary constructions will simply shift who participates in patterns of oppression. Thus, the assumption that we must "build the new world in the shell of the old" [IWW], via "a coherence of means and ends" [early Spanish anarchists]; we must, in our practices of living and struggling with one another, *prefigure* the kinds of social systems that we hope to see post-revolution so as to remake ourselves into the kinds of people who are capable of building the new world.

And prefiguration is obviously possible because it has occurred. The examples of 1920s Catalonia, or current-day Chiapas, and Rojava (among others) provide cases in which whole societies develop radically alternative forms of life. And smaller experiments in living—collective businesses, communes, intentional communities, autonomous zones, and radical spaces of many sorts—are everywhere. We humans constantly imagine new worlds and try to build something closer to that imagination. As Alexis emphasizes, we design these constructions of the imagination in many genres—not only the political theories of Murray Bookchin that inspire the Kurds of Rojava, but also the science fiction of Ursula Le Guin, or the inventive mixed genres of history-poetry-theory-myth spun out under the name "subcomandante Marcos."

But there are important constraints on prefiguration to keep in mind. (Indeed, to imagine that we are capable of imagining a pure future and then proceeding to work in a linear way toward building it is precisely an instance of purity politics.) One reason is that among the consequences of our social embedding is epistemic limitation. To so much as have the concepts of gay pride, queerness, or trans* identity, sexual harassment, class solidarity, anti-imperialism, direct anti-

capitalist action, syndicalism, consensus process, stepping back, active listening, satyagraha, indigeneity, micro-aggressions, disability positivity, intersectionality, "the 1 percent," or epistemic injustice itself required elaborate intellectual, social, and political labor.

Imaginative work is crucial, but such labor is never purely intellectual for the simple reason that our epistemic impurity stems from the socially and environmentally embodied and embedded aspects of our lives. Alexis's earlier book—*Knowing Otherwise*—has a wonderful discussion of the way that the emergence of various trans identities was only possible as a sort of co-evolution with the growth of new spaces in which local social relations allowed others to give uptake to the living of those identities. There is an enormous amount to say here, but I'll leave it at this: prefiguration is not a one-off process of imagining a better future and then working to build it. Rather, it is a dialectical cycle in which imaginative and caring, but damaged and impure, people vaguely imagine a future, and build alternative ways of being together that allow that future partially to come into being. This, then, allows them to grow, or often to raise another generation a bit freer than their parent, and so to imagine further worlds within which yet further-seeing people can be born. We need fetishize no particular revolutionary blueprint, but rather, in the words of Calvino:

> The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.

The interplay of external and internal processes adds another complication to prefiguration. First, a sort of organizing 101 point: there is typically a tension between efficiency and capacity building. Suppose that we—a community housing activist organization—are confronting a slumlord who is allowing a low income property to fall into disrepair. Typically, the most efficient way to get rid of the rats and asbestos is to find a good movement lawyer who can sue the landlord. Externally, that gets tangible benefits for the residents, reliably and efficiently. But on the internal side it does, at best, nothing. A well meaning savior comes into a context they are not a part of and fixes things. And since the underlying problem is a massive power disparity between rich and poor, educated and not, renters and owners, this tactic might even reinforce the central disempowering feature of the tenants' existence—namely, their acceptance of their inability to determine the structure of their own life.

By contrast, imagine convening tenants' meetings with the goal of forming a collective organization that can launch a rent strike. This is probably a higher risk strategy, and certainly slower, but if the tenants succeed, they learn new skills, build capacity, and form a collective consciousness

of empowerment. The result is not just fewer rats, but a social collective capable of joining the next struggle.

Both efficiency and capacity-building are important. If one simply works on building the perfectly woke communist housing co-op, the residents are going to leave to pick up their kids and buy more rat traps. How we should balance the internal and external dimensions depends on the urgency of harm we are confronting, the existing social ties that can be mobilized to build internal solidarity, and the external forces arrayed to protect the harms. One crucial dimension of skill at organizing is a good sense of how to carry out that balance, when to move forward within the impure systems at hand, and when to pause to work on building counter-institutions. It is foolish to denounce "bandaid" solutions if the patient dies from loss of blood while awaiting radical surgery. And yet, at the same time, what is needed in this world is tools sufficient for radical surgery.

More issues arise when we complicate the simple internal-external dichotomy. One current project of BLM-DC is defending the Barry Farm Public housing project from a process initiated by developers and DC City Council. BLM-DC itself is a black-led, queer affirming, consensus-based, non-hierarchical organization of radicals committed to police/prison abolition, socialism, direct action, militancy, and much more. It is certainly not the case that all residents of Barry Farms have signed onto, or even know about, all that. BLM-DC works in solidarity with residents without expecting those residents to endorse their entire agenda or movement practices. There is, we might say, a looser social connection between the actual BLM members and residents than between different BLM members or, hopefully, different residents. So the "internal" here is something like an alliance of two semi-autonomous groups gradually building genuine trust, solidarity, mutual aid, and a lived commitment to one another.

And in more systemic movements, there are far more complex relations. The core organization in the fight for black lives in St. Louis—Ferguson Frontline—has strong but complex relations with the St. Louis Muslim and Arab community, with native organizations, with Latino groups, with a number of national solidarity projects, with progressive anti-zionist Jewish organizations, and with various international comrades. None of these relations of solidarity erases the differences into a single organization, or even a single overarching formal alliance, but all are crucial to the accomplishments of that community. And the same temporal dialectic of individuals "getting more woke" and prefigurative social construction applies to these more complex relationships. The interpersonal understanding and lived social relations of a black-led movement against White Supremacy changes in the process of working out which Jewish allies are genuinely comrades to be relied upon in situations of life and death, just as this same interaction has profound effects on the structure of the local Jewish left.

Finally, we should complicate the internal-external distinction itself. Our goal is not simply to destroy everything involved in an external system of oppression. In fact, the central insight of lived impurity is that this is literally incoherent, since we, and much beyond us, are all inter-engaged. But even if a conceptual cut could be made between, say, the capitalists and all their tools, and the proletariate and all theirs, one might well want to take up a slightly more conciliatory approach than "hanging the last capitalist with the entrails of the last priest" (in the words of early twentieth-century Spanish terrorist factions) if for no other reason than that among the tools of the capitalists are nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. They have a lot more capacity to eliminate us than we do them. So the internal goal is always eventually to reconcile and integrate internal and external. But this brings along its own dialectical process.

To address one of the most positive and pro-active cases, the necessity for restorative/transformative/reparative justice post-revolution was a constant theme in the African National Congress. For decades they were explicit that the goal was not merely the end of apartheid, but "a new South Africa." Work to bring down the system was constrained always by the need to build a functional society post-apartheid. Balancing resistance and potential integration with external systems is never simple. I'm not advocating a fetishized nonviolence that says one can never punch a Nazi or shoot a Klan member as he attempts to burn your town. I am saying that a future non-racist society will include people who currently oppose us, and part of the political calculus is thinking about tactics that will make living with them possible.

The complexity of that dialectical process is well illustrated by the South African example. Even with detailed planning and attention, with the systematic implementation of a truth and reconciliation process, with admirable principles of governance and democracy, and with a lot of luck, the evolution of an internal-external conflict to a new world proved hard to predict. In the movement context, the ANC developed procedures that were prefigurative of a democratic anti-hierarchical coalition of diverse groups. The ANC included core representatives of white communists, black communists, black liberals, black radicals of several varieties, and representatives of socially, linguistically, and geographically diverse communities, all working together. The structures that evolved over the decades of revolutionary struggle were enormously functional and in many ways internally transformative, but this functionality evolved in the context of a movement organization where, for example, no group was forced to participate, and so a kind of consensus was a practical necessity, with grassroots funding and solidarity networks, and with a common enemy. When those social systems, habits, and revolutionary individuals took over the power of an industrialized and militarized capitalist state, much changed. Now coalition partners were forced to accept majority votes. Now massive funding was available, not only from the grassroots, but from national and international corporations, leading to new temptations toward corruption and new economic hierarchies. Now decisions were enforced not merely through rational persuasion and revolutionary commitment, but through the police and military.

None of this is to say that we need choose between a simple dichotomy of "revolution realized" and "revolution betrayed." My whole point is that every revolution will be

both—and in many ways South Africa has navigated the transition better than other post-revolutionary states. But it is to say that the current student and union movements for economic justice and internal decolonization, as well as movements for greater democratization, anti-corruption, queer liberation, and de-militarization, are both heirs to the prefiguration of the ANC struggle and at the same time movements confronting the ANC as an oppressive external force.

I will stop here on the trite conclusion that prefiguration is hard. It is multi-dimensional, dialectical, and always an impure confrontation with impurity. But it is also the most beautiful thing we people do. Our attempts to build the social, psychological, and environmental capacity to be better, richer, more flourishing people, to build "a world in which many worlds can flourish," is a constantly evolving project carried out by damaged people inside damaged social relations across complex and contested dimensions of solidarity and opposition. We live our prefiguration on multiple fronts simultaneously, whether these be teach-ins at a campus shantytown or facing down the military in the streets of Soweto, whether fighting cops at Stonewall or figuring out how to make a queer-friendly collective space in our apartment, whether marching for black lives in Ferguson or even engaging with the brilliant work of Alexis Shotwell in an author-meets-critic session of the APA.

For an Impure, Antiauthoritarian Ethics

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My commentary deals with the fourth chapter of *Against Purity*, entitled "Consuming Suffering," where Shotwell invites us to imagine what an alternative to ethical individualism might look like in practice. I am particularly interested in the analogy she develops to help pull us into the frame of what she calls a "distributed" or "social" approach to ethics. I will argue that grappling with this analogy can help illuminate three challenges confronting those of us seeking a genuine alternative to ethical individualism: first, that of recognizing that and how certain organizational forms work to entrench an individualistic orientation to the world; second, that of acknowledging the inadequacy of alternatives to individualism that are merely formal in character; and third, that of avoiding the creation of organizational forms that foster purism at the collective level.

THE ARGUMENT OF "CONSUMING SUFFERING"
In "Consuming Suffering," Alexis Shotwell takes aim at a long tradition of thought and practice rooted in *ethical individualism*, an approach to ethics that "takes as its unit of analysis the thinking, willing, and acting individual person" (109). Focusing on the complexity of our present circumstances as concerns energy use, eating, and climate change, and emphasizing our constitutive entanglement with countless others and, hence, our inescapable implication in cycles of suffering and death, Shotwell argues that "an ethical approach aiming for personal purity

is inadequate," not to mention "impossible *and* politically dangerous for shared projects of living on earth" (107). Not only is ethical individualism ill-suited to the *scale* of especially complex ecological and social problems, but it also nourishes the tempting yet ultimately illusory promise that we can exempt ourselves from relations of suffering by, say, going vegan and taking our houses off grid. Clearly, then, to be against such purity projects and the ethical and political purism underwriting them is to commit ourselves to *uprooting individualism*—a commitment that Shotwell puts to work in each chapter of her book.

I find the negative, anti-individualist argument of the chapter quite convincing. Having developed related arguments in a series of papers focused on collective inaction in response to climate change,[1] I also appreciate Shotwell's approach as an invaluable contribution to and resource for ongoing conversation in this area. Her critique of ethical individualism has helped me to appreciate more fully the challenges we face in proposing philosophically radical responses to complacency (in my own work) and purity politics (in hers). On a more practical level, I couldn't agree more with Shotwell's point that "we need some ways to imagine how we can keep working on things even when we realize that we can't solve problems alone, and that we're not innocent."[2]

As Shotwell recognizes, it is not enough to keep tugging at the individualistic roots of purism until the earth begins to give way. Unless more fertile seeds are planted in its place, individualism will continue crowding out surrounding sprouts, greedily soaking up all the sun and nourishing its purist fruits. As an alternative, Shotwell proposes what she calls a "distributed" or "social" approach to ethics. Rather than taking the individual person as its unit of analysis, a distributed approach would attend to *multiple* agents and agencies, organized into more or less elaborate networks of relationships. Such agents and agencies are capable of performing actions and carrying out procedures the elements of which are distributed across time and space. For those who adopt Shotwell's proposed alternative, the most basic moral imperative becomes "to understand that we are placed in a particular context with particular limited capacities that are embedded in a big social operation with multiple players" (130).

To illustrate what a distributed ethics might look like in practice, Shotwell draws our attention to Edwin Huchins's celebrated book, *Cognition in the Wild*, in which he introduces the notion of "distributed cognition" by way of a compelling example.[3] Consider how the crew of a large Navy ship manages to grasp the ship's location relative to port while docking. No lone sailor is capable of carrying out this cognitive task on their own. To solve the routine problem of docking—not to mention the many, relatively predictable crises of maneuverability regularly foisted upon crews at sea—an elaborate ensemble of social and technical operations need to be carried out all at once, so cognitive processes end up manifesting themselves in a widely distributed manner. Indeed, the ship's position is only ever "known" by an entire team of sailors geared onto multiple instruments simultaneously, in some cases for weeks and months on end.

Shotwell invites us to wonder: "Might we understand the ethics of complex of global systems in this way?" (129).

The answer, of course, is "Yes!"

. . . followed by a slightly hesitant, "But do you really mean, 'in *this* way'?"

"WHAT'S *MY* WORK ON THE SHIP?"

A great deal seems to hang on how seriously Shotwell wants us to take her analogy. Recall that the analogy Shotwell draws is between the shared predicament of a Navy ship's crew, on the one hand, and our shared predicament aboard an imperial war machine of far greater magnitude, on the other. Arguing from the strengths of this analogy, she eventually concludes that "Our obligation, should we choose to accept it, is *to do our work as individuals* understanding that the meaning of our ethical actions is also political, and thus something that can only be understood in partial and incomplete ways" (130).

I have to admit that I stumbled a bit over this conclusion. Yet when Shotwell invokes the language of "doing our work as individuals," I take it that she is mostly just drawing out the implications of the analogy she is working with, and may or may not, upon reflection, want to focus on the question of what our obligations are *as individuals*—a question at the very heart of ethical individualism. I take it that Shotwell wants nothing to do with the questions animating such an approach to ethics. Here, then, are my questions for her: Does an alternative to ethical individualism still need to address the question of individual obligation? Or does a consistent and uncompromisingly social approach to ethics need to find ways to redirect, sidestep, or otherwise avoid this line of questioning? In other words, *is there a way to avoid being compromised by ethical individualism and the epistemic priorities it presses upon us*? Is such compromise merely contingent, or could it be constitutive of our very being as ethically reflective creatures, or of our practices of ethical reflection?

Shotwell does acknowledge the limitations of her analogy, pointing out how it "fails at the point at which we ask where the ship (of nuclear energy use, or of eating) is going, and why" (130). Perhaps, then, she doesn't mean for us to take it all that seriously. Notice, first, that the ship's crew, as a collective agent, has a clearly delineated objective and, significantly, *one that has been dictated from on high*. Given the Navy's chain of command, there is really no question as to where the ship is going, and why. Yet as Shotwell rightly points out, "Our ethical world is not a military—not a hierarchical structure; there's no captain steering the way" (130). Unlike the question of where the Navy ship is going, the questions of where *we* are and ought to be going when it comes to the extraction and usage of energy sources are pressing, hotly contested, and not easily resolved to the satisfaction of all involved.

Notice, second, that the ship's crew has at its disposal certain well-rehearsed modes of collective action which, when mapped onto the officers' objectives, generate what we might think of as a *collective obligation* to bring the ship to port. In the context of an established chain of command where decisions flow from the top down, it becomes possible for each sailor to think of their own responsibilities, *qua* individuals, in terms derived from the responsibilities of the crew, *qua* collective agent. Incidentally, this is precisely the sort of analysis of collective responsibility that Tracy Isaacs elaborates in her 2011 book, *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*. According to Isaacs, "when collective action solutions come into focus and potential collective agents with relatively clear identities emerge as the subjects of those actions, then we may understand individual obligations . . . as flowing from collective obligations that those potential agents would have."[4] "*Clarity at the collective level is a prerequisite for collective obligation in these cases,*" she explains further, "*and that clarity serves as a lens through which the obligations of individuals come into focus.*"[5]

What I want to suggest, then, is that precisely in virtue of its limitations, Shotwell's analogy helps to illuminate a significant challenge: namely, the challenge of recognizing that and how certain organizational forms work to entrench, rather than overcome, an individualistic orientation to the world. What Shotwell's analogy (and Isaacs's analysis of collective responsibility) shows, I think, is that hierarchically structured organizations help to instill in us an illusory sense of clarity concerning our obligations as individuals—definitively *settling* the question of what we are responsible for doing and for whom in a way that relieves us of the need to think through such matters for and amongst ourselves. Hierarchical, authoritarian structures are particularly adept at fostering such deceptive clarity, for in and through our participation in them we are continually taught to expect straightforward answers to the question of individual obligation, and such expectations are continually met by our superiors. Shotwell's analogy helps us see that expecting straightforward answers goes hand in hand with living in authoritarian contexts and that ethical individualism will continue to thrive in such contexts, significantly complicating the task of uprooting it.

"WHERE'S THE SHIP HEADING, ANYWAY?"

Recall that Shotwell ends up putting the Navy ship analogy into question because, as she puts it, "Our ethical world is not a military—not a hierarchical structure" (130). While I agree that, in our world, "there is no captain steering the way," I also wonder whether it might be worth staying with the trouble of this analogy a bit longer to see if it might help shed light on our current predicament in other ways. In the most recent book-length publication of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN), there is a delightful series of stories borrowed "From the Notebook of the Cat-Dog"—stories which, we are warned, are "very *other*."[6] In one such story, called "The Ship," we are invited to imagine the following scenario:

> A ship. A big one, as if it were a nation, a continent, an entire planet. With all of its crew and its hierarchies, that is, its above and its below. There are disputes over who commands, who is more important, who has the most—the standard debates that occur everywhere there is an above and a below. But this proud ship was having difficulty, moving without clear direction and with water pouring in from both

sides. As tends to happen in these cases, the cadre of officers insisted that the captain be relieved of his duty. As complicated as things tend to be when determined by those above, it was decided that in effect, the captain's moment has passed and it is necessary to name a new one. The officers debated among themselves, disputing who has more merit, who is better, who is the best.[7]

Who, we might add, is the most *pur et dur*? As the story continues, we learn that the majority of the ship's crew live and work unseen, below the water line. "In no uncertain terms, the ship moves thanks to their work"; and yet, "none of this matters to the owner of the ship who, regardless of who is named captain, is only interested in assuring that the ship produce, transport, and collect commodities across the oceans."[8]

The Zapatista's use of this analogy interests me because of the way it forces us to face certain structural features of our constitutive present. In a sense, there *really is* a captain steering the ship of energy use, or of eating—or better, it doesn't matter who is at the helm, so long as the ship owner's bidding is done. The ship *really is* heading in one way rather than another, so the crew have their "work as individuals" cut out for them. And as the narrator explains, "despite the fact that it is those below who are making it possible for the ship to sail, that it is they who are producing not only the things necessary for the ship to function, but also the commodities that give the ship its purpose and destiny, *those people below have nothing other than their capacity and knowledge to do this work*." Unlike the officers up above, those living and working below "don't have the possibility of deciding anything about the organization of this work so that it may fulfill their objectives."[9] Especially for those who are set apart for being very *other*—*Loas Otroas*, who are "dirty, ugly, bad, poorly spoken, and worst of all . . . didn't comb their hair"[10]—everyday practices of responsibility are organized much as they are in the military. Finally, and crucially, the crew's practices of responsibility *really, already are* widely distributed across space and time.

If we take Shotwell's analogy seriously, then, we are confronted with a second challenge: namely, that of acknowledging the inadequacy of alternatives to individualism that are merely formal in character. Reflecting on Shotwell's proposed alternative to individualism, I now want to ask, is it enough to adopt a distributed approach to ethics? Are we not *already* working collaboratively, often as participants in projects the aims and outcomes of which are needlessly, horrifyingly destructive? And have our roles in such projects not *already* been distributed—our labors already thoroughly divided and specialized—such that each of us finds ourselves narrowly focused on making our own little contributions in our own little corners? What does it mean to call for a distributed approach to ethics *from here*, if we are already *there*?

"WHAT DID *UNA OTROA* SEE?"

Thus far Shotwell's analogy has helped us come to grips with two significant difficulties. First of all, it turns out that organizing ourselves with a view to acting collectively is not necessarily a good thing, nor is it necessarily an anti-individualist thing. Seeing as how certain organizational forms help to foster and reinforce an individualistic orientation to the world, it seems misleading to treat collectivist and individualist approaches to ethics as simple opposites. Second, it turns out that adopting a distributed approach is not necessarily a good thing either. Seeing as how our current practices of responsibility *already* manifest themselves in a distributed manner, without those of us living below having the possibility of deciding much of anything about the organization of work, proposing merely formal alternatives to individualism might very well encourage more of the same, while at best drawing our attention to the current division of labor.

Taken together, these difficulties point to the need to propose an alternative to ethical individualism that is not merely formal, but also *politically contentful*. Such an alternative would go beyond offering up new destinations for the ship of extraction, production, consumption, and waste—after all, that's the sort of thing a new captain could do. Instead, it would aid us in building new organizational forms in which the entire crew are able to participate in deciding the organization of our work. A genuine alternative would also aid us in resisting the temptation to project authoritarian forms, with all the illusory clarity in responsibilities they tend to instill. Simply put, what we anti-individualists ought to be for is not just a distributed approach to ethics, or an ethics of impurity, but *an impure, anti-authoritarian ethics*. Besides, I can see no better way to meet the third challenge confronting us: that of avoiding organizational forms that foster purism at the collective level.

With this third challenge in mind, I want to conclude by considering what might be involved in "creating a place from which to see," as opposed to "creating a political party or an organization" (8).

As the Zapatista's telling of the ship continues, our attention is drawn to the predicament of the story's protagonist, *una otroa*. *Loas Otroas* were always cursing the officers and "getting into mischief," organizing rebellion after rebellion and calling upon the others down below to join them. Unfortunately, "the great majority of those below did not respond to this call."[11] Many would even applaud when the officers singled out individual rebels, took them on deck, and forced them to walk the plank as part of an elaborate ritual of power. Then one time, when yet another was singled out, something out of the ordinary happened:

> The dispute among the officers over who would be captain had created so much noise and chaos that no one had bothered to serve up the usual words of praise for order, progress, and fine dining. The executioner, accustomed to acting according to habit, didn't know what to do; something was missing. So he went to look for some officer who would comply with what tradition dictated. In order to do so without the accused/judged/condemned escaping, he sent them to hell, that is, to the "lookout," also known as "the Crow's Nest."[12]

High atop the tallest mast, the Crow's Nest furnished *una otroa* with a unique vantage point from which to examine afresh all the activities on deck. For example, in a game periodically staged by the officers, the sailors would be asked to choose from two stages full of little, differently colored flags, and the color chosen by the majority would be used to paint the body of the ship. Of course, at some level the entire crew knew that the outcome of the game would not really change anything about life on the ship, for the ship's owner, and its destination, would remain the same regardless. But from the angle and distance of the Crow's Nest, it finally dawned on *Loa Otroa* that "all the stages have the same design and the same color" too.[13]

The lookout also provided its occupant with an unrivaled view of the horizon, where "enemies were sighted, unknown vessels were caught creeping up, monsters and catastrophes were seen coming, and prosperous ports where commodities (that is, people) were exchanged came into view."[14] Depending on what threats and opportunities were reported, the captain and his officers would either make a toast, or celebrate modernity, or postmodernity (depending on the fashion), or distribute pamphlets with little tidbits of advice, like, "Change begins with oneself," which, we are told "almost no one read."[15] Simply put, the totality of life aboard the ship was fundamentally irrational and absurd.

Upon being banished to the subsidiary of hell that is the Crow's Nest, we are told that *Loa Otroa* "did not wallow in self-pity." Instead, "they took advantage of this privileged position to take a look," and it "was no small thing what their gaze took in."[16] Looking first toward the deck, then pausing for a moment to notice the bronze engraving on the front of the boat ('*Bellum Semper. Universum Bellum. Universum Exitium*'), *Loa Otroa* looked out over the horizon, and "shuddered and sharpened their gaze to confirm what they had seen."[17]

After hurriedly returning to the bottom of the ship, *Loa Otroa* scrawled some "incomprehensible signs" in a notebook and showed them to the others, who looked at each other, back at the notebook, and to each other again, "speaking a very ancient language."[18]

Finally, "after a little while like that, exchanging gazes and words, they began to work feverishly. The End."[19]

"THE *END*?"

Frustrating, right?! "What do you mean 'the end'? What did they see from the lookout? What did they draw in the notebook? What did they talk about? Then what happened?" The Cat-Dog just meowed barking, "*We don't know yet.*"[20]

I wonder: What lessons could such frustration hold for we aspiring anti-individualists and anti-purists? Which of our expectations and needs does the story's narrator avoid meeting, or neglect to meet? Where are we met with a provocation in the place of hoped-for consolation?

What might our own experiences of frustration have to teach us about what we have come to expect of ethical theory, and how we understand the relationship between theory and the "feverish work" of organizing? What stories are we telling ourselves and others about our own cognitive needs—about their origins, energies, and sources of satisfaction? From, with, and to whom do we find ourselves looking, and for what? Who all has a hand in creating *this* "place from which to see" (8)? "*Who is it that is doing the seeing?*" (5, original emphasis).

One final thought from the EZLN, this time from a chapter called "More Seedbeds":

> We say that it doesn't matter that we are tired, at least we have been focused on the storm that is coming. We may be tired of searching and of working, and we may very well be woken up by the blows that are coming, but at least in that case we will know what to do. *But only those who are organized will know what to do.*[21]

NOTES

1. Michael D. Doan, "Climate Change and Complacency"; Michael D. Doan, "Responsibility for Collective Inaction and the Knowledge Condition"; Michael D. Doan and Susan Sherwin, "Relational Solidarity and Climate Change."

2. Chandra Prescod-Weinstein, "Purity in a Trumped-Up World: A Conversation with Alexis Shotwell."

3. Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*.

4. Tracy Isaacs, *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*, 140.

5. Ibid., 152.

6. Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), 190.

7. Ibid., 190–91.

8. Ibid., 191.

9. Ibid., 194; emphasis in original.

10. Ibid., 191.

11. Ibid., 192.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 195.

14. Ibid., 193.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 195.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 196.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 310.

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Response to Critics

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Participating in an author-meets-critics (AMC) panel is peculiar—there is an artifact, a book, which can't be changed. And then there is rich and generative conversation, which illuminates the vitality and ongoing changefulness of why one thinks about things and writes books about them. Still, perhaps still images of moving objects are all we ever have, in trying to understand the world. In the AMC at the Central APA, where these folks first shared their responses to *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, this texture felt especially heightened, in part because of the quality of the responses and in part because the conversation in the room from participants beyond the panel was enormously rich and interesting. Several of us commented afterwards on how nourishing it felt to have a wide-ranging, feminist, politically complex conversation that refused to confine itself to disciplinary habits within philosophy. I am grateful to the hard work that went into putting on the Central APA, to the North American Society for Social Philosophy for hosting this book panel, to Ami for organizing it, and to Mike, Kate, and Mark for their generous and provoking responses. I am still thinking through their engagements, and the reflection below is only a beginning.

I am struck by a shared curiosity among all three responses about the relationship between individuals and social relations, between people and our world, especially around the question of how we transform this unjust world that has shaped us. I share this curiosity—in *Against Purity* I am especially interested in what we gain from beginning from the orientation that we are implicated in the world in all its mess, rather than attempting to stand apart from it. I've been thinking through what it means to take up an attitude that might intertwine epistemic humility with a will to keep trying to transform the world even after we have made tremendous mistakes or if we are beneficiaries of oppressions we oppose. Epistemic humility asks of us (among other things) that we not imagine we can be completely correct about things, and a will to keep trying demands that we find ways to be of use without being perfect. Underlying this attitude is a belief in the possibility of transforming the extant world while refusing to sacrifice anyone in service of the envisioned world-to-come—as Mark discusses, this is an anarchist understanding of prefigurative politics. I am compelled by his account of prefiguration as a useable pivot point from recognizing impurity towards shaping strategy. And, indeed, thinking clearly about prefiguration invites us to consider the question of how capacity building in our social relations might be in tension with efficiency. I've learned so much from social movement theorist-practitioners who take up an essentially pedagogical approach to working on and with the world. Many of the movements Mark mentions have helped me think, too, about one of the key points in his response—the question of dialectics of struggle. Many of us feel a pull in thinking about prefiguration to idealize or stabilize a vision of the world we want—and I believe in having explicit and explicated normative commitments in engaging political work. If we want to change anything, we should be able to say what we want, and why, and we should have some ways to evaluate whether we're winning the fights we take on—this is part of my own commitment to prefigurative political practice. I am still working through what it means theoretically to understand something that activists understand in practice: The victories we win become the conditions of our future struggles. In this sense, social transformation is never accomplished. In the session, I shared an example of this from an oral history project on the history of AIDS activism that I have been doing over the last five years. In 1990, there was a widespread move in Canada towards legislation that would allow Public Health to quarantine people living with HIV and AIDS; in some provinces this was defeated (in BC such legislation passed but was not enacted). At the time, activists argued that if people were transmitting HIV to others on purpose, it would be appropriate for this to be a matter for the legal system rather than a matter of health policy. At the time, this was a strategic move that allowed people to effectively mobilize against forced quarantine; now, Canada is, shamefully, one of the world leaders in imprisoning people simply for being HIV positive. The victories of the past become the conditions of struggle in the present, and if we regard that as only a problem we might become immobilized. Instead, a prefigurative approach encourages us to take a grounded, emergent attitude toward our work. How can we create ways forward even when what we win is incomplete or reveals problems we had not considered?

Prefiguration involves, complexly, the concerns about voluntarism that Kate raises. As Kate notes, in *Against Purity* I discuss fellow feminists' work on questions of gender transformation and voluntarism, rather than turning to trans-hating thinkers. This is in part because as a matter of method I prefer to attend to people who I think are doing good and interesting work in the world, rather than people who are both intellectually vacuous and politically vile (and I have spent some fair amount of time considering the views of trans-hating writers in trying to suss out what their opposition to gender transformation tells us about their understanding of gender[1]). But it is the case that the main source of charges of gender voluntarism come from anti-trans writers who consider themselves to be in opposition to it. So as a conceptual term, it is strange to define "gender voluntarism," since it's something that is almost entirely used in a derogatory sense. Thus, in trying to evaluate whether transforming gender is voluntarist in the relevant sense, I certainly gloss, and perhaps oversimplify, a view that holds, as I put it in the book, "individuals can change themselves and their political circumstances through their own force of will."[2]

I think that Sheila Jeffreys holds the view that trans people are expressing gender voluntarism in this sense. Consider this quote from her book *Gender Hurts*.

> Women do not decide at some time in adulthood that they would like other people to understand them to be women, because being a woman is not an 'identity'. Women's experience does not resemble that of men who adopt the 'gender identity' of being female or being women in any respect. The idea of 'gender identity' disappears biology and all the experiences that those with female biology have of being reared in a caste system based on sex.[3]

Now, Jeffreys does not literally say, "people who talk about gender identity are practicing a form of gender voluntarism, which is." Rather, she frames people who transition as making a decision, about identity, which ignores both biology and experience. This is an example of a charge of voluntarism in the relevant sense—although in the book I discuss feminists who affirm trans existence who seriously consider the question of whether voluntarism is at play in gender transformation. Now, I take it that Kate's worry is not (or not only) whether there actually exist people who charge trans people with gender voluntarism. She is concerned with whether my shift to arguing for open normativities as collective projects of world-making moves too far away from understanding the important transformative effects individuals can and do have on social worlds. That is, I take it that she has concerns that perhaps the only way forward I see is collective in nature—and that an account that worries as hard as mine does about individualism risks eliding or negating the important work that a solitary voice or expressive enactment can accomplish. I need to think about this more. Part of my own form of non-ideal theory is trying always to think through what it means to understand us as always relationally constituted. I'm not sure that I believe individuals really exist! In my current project, I'm working with Ursula K. Le Guin's political thinking (through her fiction) on the question of how individuals shape the society that has shaped them, and especially her argument that the only form of revolution we can pursue is an ongoing one, and a corollary view that the only root of social change is individuals, our minds, wills, creativities. So I'll report back on that, and in the meantime have only the unsatisfactory response that, on my view, we act as individuals but always—only—in collective contexts—and that has normative implications for any political theory we might want to craft.

Mike's engagement with the "very other" stories "From the Notebook of the Cat-Dog" is tremendously challenging and generative here. Indeed, a distributed ethics does not flow automatically from simple distribution—we need norms, as well as a place from which to see. I agree with Mike's turn toward "an impure, antiauthoritarian ethics." What such an ethics looks like in practice is, of course, emergent, necessarily unfixed. In the (wonderful!) EZLN story, the tremendously genre-mixing Cat Dog bark meows that perhaps more social scientists ought to learn the words, "We don't know yet." And so it is appropriate that Mike ends with questions that open more questions for me—

especially the question of what it means to become one of those who are organized [who] will know what to do. In thinking about the provocation that Mike offers, I am reflecting on some of his own work on epistemic justice and collective action and inaction. Because while learning the words "we don't know yet" is definitely vital for knowledge practices that can contribute to justice, it is also clear that the distribution of power matters enormously and that some of us need to listen better according to how we are placed in social relations of benefit and harm. This brings me back to Mark's engagement with prefiguration alongside Kate's meditation on what we as individuals might be able to do: If we pursue a prefigurative approach to the theory and practice of becoming organized, we experience that world that we are trying to create—this is how we find perspective from which to perceive where we are, collectively and personally, and what dangers loom on the horizon. As Kate affirms, a locus is not a horizon, but the crow's nest from which we look out changes the frame of the horizon we might perceive—and this, perhaps, is a way that we individuals help determine how to steer our craft. I look forward to more conversations about where we go from here, and how we get there.

NOTES

1. Alexis Shotwell and Trevor Sangrey, "Resisting Definition: Gendering through Interaction and Relational Selfhood," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 56–76.

2. Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 140.

3. Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts* (Routledge, 2014), 5–6.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ethics of Pregnancy, Abortion, and Childbirth: Exploring Moral Choices in Childbearing

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The *Ethics of Pregnancy, Abortion, and Childbirth* is a slim volume that primarily examines the moral obligations that a pregnant woman has to a zygote, embryo, or fetus (which this review will henceforth refer to as a fetus, for the sake of simplicity). This is an area in need of nuanced critical reflection on how pregnancy disrupts the familiar paradigm of the self-possessed subject, and what effect those disruptions have on an individual woman's right to bodily self-determination. Helen Watt's work begins to sketch some of the phenomenological uniqueness of pregnant embodiment, but her focus is very much on the moral questions raised around pregnancy.

Watt argues from the beginning of the book against two mistakes: the first is that we tend to "treat the bodily location of the fetus in the woman as morally conclusive for

the woman's right to act as she wishes in choices that will or may affect the fetus or child long-term," and the second is that we may frame the pregnant woman as merely a neighbor to a second moral subject, with no deeper obligation than one might have to a stranger in need (4). That is, Watt claims that fetuses should not be understood simply as tissues contained within a woman's body. Rather, their presence within and connection to a woman's body creates a moral obligation that is stronger than we might have to anonymous others. Neither of these mistakes seems to do justice to what Watt calls the "familial aspect of pregnancy or the physical closeness of the bond" (3).

On the third page of the book, Watt begins to use language that signals her position on the issue at the heart of debates around abortion and other issues in reproductive ethics: Should we affirm that the pregnant woman is already a mother, and that the fetus is already *a* child, and indeed *her* child? Watt's stance is that pregnant women have a "familial" relation with an "unborn child," and then unpacks the moral implications of that relation (16). But that familial relation is precisely what is at issue. The limitation of the book is that this conceptual framework and set of normative assumptions will be convincing to those who already agree with its conclusions, and deeply unconvincing to those who do not.

In the first chapter, Watt makes an argument for the moral personhood of the fetus that emphasizes the significance of the body in identity, and the claim that living, experiencing bodies have objective interests: conditions that promote their well-being. In making this argument, Watt objects to the idea that fetuses gradually acquire moral status, or that their moral status is conferred socially, by being recognized and affirmed by others. She appeals to a basic principle of equality in making this claim: "One advantage to connecting moral status with interests—and interests with the kind of being we are—is that it identifies one sense, at least, in which human beings are morally *equal*: a view to which many of us would wish to subscribe" (15). This sentence assumes that a commitment to equality necessarily extends to fetuses, and it therefore insinuates that anyone who rejects this view cannot be normatively committed to equality. Rhetorical moves of this kind appear frequently: for instance, toward the end of the book, Watt discusses an example of a woman who becomes pregnant with twins that resulted from a donated egg fertilized *in vitro*, after six years of fertility treatments. The pregnancy is reduced—one of the fetuses is terminated—and that leads Watt to decry the "betrayals" normalized in "an alarmingly, and, it seems, increasingly atomized, consumerist, and egocentric culture" (106). After this discussion, however, Watt asks a rhetorical question: "Is there not something unhealthy about a society where women—even women of forty-five, even where they have other children, even where they need to use another woman's body—feel drawn to such lengths to have a baby?" (111). There are many such rhetorical questions in the book, and they allow Watt to invoke readers' intuitions about matters in which traditional philosophical concepts, admittedly, tend to be of limited help, given their assumption of an adult, sovereign individual. But such appeals are not arguments.

In the second chapter, Watt offers a sustained critique of the view that frames a pregnant woman as a kind of good Samaritan or neighbor to the fetus. Rather than framing the fetus as too closely identified with the woman, in this model it is too loosely associated with her, such that her moral obligations seem attenuated. This chapter includes Watt's only substantive consideration of arguments that disagree with her position—principally, Judith Jarvis Thomson's violinist analogy. Watt emphasizes the difference between unplugging a violinist from renal support and invading the bodily boundaries of the fetus in order to terminate a pregnancy. This insistence on the bodily sovereignty of the fetus seems in tension with Watt's description of the female body as relational, and pregnant bodies in particular as experiencing "a sense of 'blurred boundaries' between self and other" (4).

In the third chapter, Watt explores the implications of this view of pregnancy for a range of issues: What are our moral obligations when a pregnant woman is comatose? What impact does conception due to rape have on moral obligations during pregnancy? Who else beyond the pregnant woman has obligations to the fetus or child? Should pregnant women choose to have prenatal tests done? What should happen when pregnancy would threaten the health or life of the woman? In these various cases, Watt reasons that the fetus is a full moral person, but one that is uniquely vulnerable, and she concludes that there are almost no situations in which the deliberate termination of a pregnancy is morally justifiable, given the capacities of modern obstetrics.

In the fourth chapter, Watt considers reproductive technologies such as *in vitro* fertilization, egg and sperm donation, and surrogacy. Her arguments here stretch into conclusions based on the claim that children thrive when they are raised by their biological married parents, and that it is psychologically important for children to "know who they are" by being raised by "visibly linked, publicly committed" life partners (114–115). Reproductive technologies of various kinds interfere with that ideal, according to Watt.

There is a fundamental appeal to nature throughout Watt's argument: that women naturally feel maternal instincts when they become pregnant or when they see their children, and that the uterus is "functionally oriented towards the pregnancy it (or, rather, the pregnant woman) carries, just as the woman's fallopian tube is oriented towards transporting first the sperm to the ovum after intercourse and then the embryo to the womb. Pregnancy is . . . a goal-directed *activity*" (4). This appeal to the functional orientation of the reproductive system rests on the presupposition that nature has purposes that are morally binding on us, as if Watt has never encountered or taken seriously Beauvoir's rejection of biological "facts" as defining a woman's purpose (in a way that nature has never been taken to define a man's purpose) or the work of feminist epistemologists on the contingency and political investment that permeates interpretations of nature. There is thus little attention paid to the cultural context of pregnancy, although most philosophers who argue for a relational dimension to the self emphasize the person's

immersion in a social world that shapes her sense of her identity, aspirations, and norms.

In sum, Watt's book demonstrates the disadvantages or risks of care ethics interpreted through its most socially conservative implications: women have moral obligations to accept and welcome pregnancy—her "psychophysical 'openness'. . . to becoming a mother" (113)—whether or not they have planned to become mothers, because their biology primes them for familial relations and thus familial duties to their children (where fertilization defines the beginning of a child's life). The moral significance of the physical possibility of becoming pregnant or being pregnant is premised on the personhood of the fetus, but this account sets aside too quickly the value of self-possession or self-determination that is at the core of an ethics of justice. And it pushes such a value aside asymmetrically, based on sex.

Watt also writes as if the only possible family configurations are married heterocentric couples committed to having children or single women with children. There is no consideration of LGBTQ families, families headed by single men, or any other possibility. This omission follows from Watt's defense of the following ideal of parenthood: children conceived without recourse to reproductive technology, borne by and born to women who welcome them as moral persons (even if those pregnancies have not been intended or desired) and who are married to the child's biological father, who will then, as a couple, raise the child. It is rather surreal to read this argument in 2018, without any consideration of the sustained critique of heteronormativity that has taken place in philosophy and in the wider culture for the past couple of generations.

Watt's justification for these positions is inadequate. Watt regularly draws upon highly one-sided first-person experiences of women who have been pregnant (with a variety of outcomes). There is no testimony, for instance, to women who are relieved to have had an abortion, or who have no intention of becoming mothers. These first-person descriptions tend to substitute for more rigorous arguments and so risk functioning merely as anecdotal evidence that is then generalized to all women. She also makes claims that cry out for empirical support, such as when she argues that a woman should resist testing during pregnancy that might give her information that would lead her to consider an abortion, because the test itself may be dangerous to the fetus: "This [framing such tests as prenatal care] is particularly objectionable in the case of tests which carry a real risk of causing a miscarriage: one in 100 or 200 are figures still sometimes cited for chorionic villus sampling and amniocentesis" (71). Although these figures *are* regularly cited in anti-abortion literature, medical scholarship does not confirm those claims.[1] Also without citation, Watt endorses the claim that women who choose to terminate their pregnancies are likely to suffer psychological and physical harm, a statement that has been thoroughly disproven (70).[2]

Watt's book draws out the complexity of pregnancy as a situation in which the traditional tools of moral reasoning are limited: it is not clear at what point it is appropriate to discuss the rights of one individual over and against another, and it is not clear how to integrate our sense of ourselves as relational beings (when those relations are not always chosen) with our sense of ourselves as self-determining individuals. Approaches to these issues that attended to the embodied experience of pregnancy and other forms of parenthood and caring for children would be most welcome. This book, however, too quickly subordinates the personhood and agency of women to their possibility of becoming mothers. Watt does not challenge the assumptions that currently define debates in reproductive ethics and therefore does not help to move those debates forward; instead, she tries to settle such moral debates through a teleological reading of women's bodies.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, C. B. Wulff et al., "Risk of Fetal Loss Associated with Invasive Testing Following Combined First-Trimester Screening for Down Syndrome: A National Cohort of 147,987 Singleton Pregnancies," *Ultrasound Obstetrics and Gynecology* 47 (2016): 38–44; and C. M. Ogilvie and R. Akolekar, "Pregnancy Loss Following Amniocentesis or CVS Sampling—Time for a Reassessment of Risk," *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 3, no. 3 (Sept. 2014): 741–46.

2. See, for instance, E. G. Raymond and D. A. Grimes, "The Comparative Safety of Legal Induced Abortion and Childbirth in the United States," *Obstetrics and Gynecology* 119, no. 2 (2012): 215–19; and B. Major et al., "Psychological Responses of Women After First-Trimester Abortion," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 57, no. 8 (2000): 777–84.

Foucault's Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason

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Reproduction as a critical concept has re-emerged in feminist theory—with some arguing that all politics have become reproductive politics—coinciding with a period of its intensification as a political field.[1] With the global ascendancy of extreme right, nationalist, eugenicist, neocolonial, and neo-nazi ideologies, we have also seen renewed feminist activism for reproductive rights and reproductive justice, including for access to legal, safe abortion; for instance, in Poland, where it has been recriminalized; in Ireland, where it has been decriminalized following a referendum; and in Argentina, where despite mass feminist mobilizations, legislators voted against abortion's decriminalization. At the same time, the socio-legal category of reproductive citizenship is expanding in certain contexts to include sexual and gender minorities.[2] Trans activists have pressured nation-states "to decouple the recognition of citizenship and rights for gender-variant and gender-nonconforming people from the medicalisation or pathologisation of their bodies and minds"[3] struggling against prerequisites and consequences of legal gender recognition, including forced sterilization, compulsory divorce, and loss of parental rights.[4] What struggles for

reproductive justice and against reproductive exploitation reveal is that violence runs through reproduction; hegemonic politics of reproduction (pronatalist, eugenicist, neocolonial, genocidal) suffuse gendered and racialized regimes of biopolitical and thanatopolitical power, including that deployed in war leading to dispossession, displacement, and forced migration of millions of people. Yet, procreation continues to be conflated with life, not only (obviously) by "pro-life" but also by "pro-choice" politics.

Penelope Deutscher's *Foucault's Futures* engages with the recent interest in reproduction, futurity, failure, and negativity in queer theory,[5] but also the historical and ongoing investments in the concept of reproduction in feminist theory as well as (US) social movements. *Foucault's Futures* troubles the forms of subjectivation presupposed by "reproductive rights" (177) from a feminist perspective, exploring the "contiguity" between reproductive reason and biopolitics—specifically the proximity of reproduction to death, risk, fatality, and threat (63): its thanatopolitical underbelly.

Philosophers are notorious for having little to say about their method, but Deutscher's writing about her methodology is one of the most interesting contributions of the book. Returning to points of departure Foucault and his readers never took, Deutscher retrieves "suspended resources" in Foucault and in the "queer and transformative engagements" with his thought by his post-Foucauldian interlocutors, including Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Lauren Berlant, Achille Mbembe, Jasbir Puar, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Lee Edelman (38-39). In this regard, Deutscher lays out two methodological choices for reading Foucault (or, I suppose, other theorists): the first is to "mark omissions as foreclosures," while the second is to "read them as suspensions" (101). Pursuing the latter possibility, she contends that "Foucault's texts . . . can be . . . engaged maximally from the perspective of the questions they occlude" (215n26). Each of the above-mentioned theorists "has articulated missing links in Foucault, oversights, blind spots, and unasked questions" (185). Yet, Deutscher is also interested in the suspensions that can be traced in each theorist's engagement with Foucault, like words unsaid hanging in the air in their intertextual dialogue, or even the elephant in the room which neither Foucault nor the post-Foucauldian seems to want to confront. Thus, she asks, what are the "limit points" of engagements with Foucault by post-Foucauldian scholars? The figure of wom(b)an and that of the fetus are two such elephants. One interesting consequence of Deutscher's hermeneutic approach—which focuses on the unsaid or the barely uttered rather than the said—is that it seems to guard against dogmatism: instead of insisting from the outset on one correct reading of Foucault, Deutscher weaves through oft-quoted and lesser known moments, exploiting the contradictions immanent in his account, and pausing on the gaps, silences, and absences, asking, in essence, a classic question of feminist philosophical interpretation, to what extent have women been erased from Foucault (101)?

Still, Deutscher's method of reading closely at the interstices of what is written does not restrict hers to a merely textual analysis, as she allows the world to intrude upon and, indeed, motivate her exegetical passion. What I particularly liked about the book was its almost intransigent tarrying with the question of reproduction, pushing us to reconsider how biopower normalizes reproduction as a "fact of life," and prompting our reflexivity with respect to how we reproduce its facticity even when we contest as feminists the injustices and violences which mark it as a political field. One way in which Deutscher attempts this is by analyzing the "pseudo-sovereign power" ascribed to women, that is, the attribution to them of "a seeming power of decision over life" (104). In other words, she deconstructs "modern figurations of women as the agents of reproductive decisions but also as the potential impediments of individual and collective futures," demonstrating in how both constructions women's bodies as reproductive are invested with "a principle of death" (101). If this seems counter-intuitive, it should, since Deutscher tells us, ultimately, "we do not know what procreation is" (72).

This "suspended" argument Deutscher reconstructs as the procreative/reproductive hypothesis, which reveals as biopower's aim "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (76, citing Foucault). Despite its marginal location in Foucault, who makes scant reference to what he terms, at one juncture, the "procreative effects of sexuality" (73, citing Foucault) as an object or a field for biopower, she convinces the reader (at least this feminist reader) that procreation is actually the "hinge" between sexuality and biopolitics (72). Procreatively oriented sex and biopolitically oriented reproduction hinge together to form the population (77).

As Rey Chow has argued, sexuality is indistinguishable from "the entire problematic of the reproduction of human life," which is "always and racially inflected" (67, citing Chow). Yet, the argument gains interest when Deutscher attempts to show that "biopoliticized reproduction [functions] as a 'power of death'" (185). A number of important studies of "reproduction in the contexts of slavery," colonialism, "and its aftermath" constitutes have demonstrated that what Deutscher calls "procreation's thanatopolitical hypothesis" (4): the fact that "reproduction is not always associated with life" (4), and, in fact, through its "very association of reproduction with life and futurity (for nations, populations, peoples)" it becomes "thanatopoliticised" that is, "its association with risk, threat, decline, and the terminal" (4). This helps us understand, contemporaneously, the ostensible paradox of convergences of pro- *and* anti-feminist politics with eugenicist ideologies (223n92). Citing the example of "Life Always" and other US anti-abortion campaigns, which deploy eugenics in the service of ostensibly "antiracist" ends (likening abortion to genocide in claims that "the most dangerous place for black people is the womb" and enjoining black women to bring pregnancies to term), Deutscher analyzes how "[u]teruses are represented as spaces of potential danger both to individual and population life" (4). Thus, "[f]reedom from imposed abortion, from differential promotion of abortion, and the freedom not to be coercively sterilised have been among the major reproductive rights claims of many groups of women" (172). These endangered "freedoms"

do not fall neatly on either sides of dichotomies such as privilege/oppression or biopolitics/thanatopolitics. But they do generate conditions of precarity and processes of subjectivation and abjection, which reveal, in all instances, the interwoveness of logics of life and death.

Perhaps most useful to Deutscher's project is what is hanging in the air in the dialogue between Butler and Foucault: the figure of the fetus, "little discussed by Butler and still less by Foucault" (151), but which helps to make her argument about the thanatopolitical saturation of reproduction as a political field. That is, although embryonic/fetal life does not inhere in an independent entity, once it becomes understood as "precarious life," women become "a redoubled form of precarious life" (153). This is because despite being invested with a "pseudo-sovereign" power over life, "[w]omen do not choose the conditions under which they must choose" (168), and they become "relays" as opposed to merely "targets" or passive "recipients" of "the norms of choice," normalizing certain kinds of subjectivity (170). They are interpellated as pseudo-sovereigns over their reproductive "capacities" or "drives" (or lack thereof), pressed into becoming "deeply reflective" about the "serious choice" with which reproduction confronts them (169). Yet, pronatalist politics do not perform a simple defense of the fetus, or of the child—any child—because, as Deutscher states, drawing on Ann Stoler's work, especially in discourses of "illegal immigration and child trafficking . . . a child might be figured as 'at risk' in the context of trafficking or when accompanying adults on dangerous immigration journeys" (think of the Highway Sign that once used to line the US-Mexico borderspace, now the symbol of the transnational "refugees welcome" movement, which shows a man holding a woman by the hand, who holds a presumably female child with pigtails, dragging her off her feet, frantically running). "But the figure of the child can also redouble into that which *poses* the risk," as in the "anchor baby" discourse.[6] In "zones" of suspended rights" that women occupy, whether as "illegal [sic] immigrants, as stateless, as objects of incarceration, enslavement, or genocide," women are rendered "vulnerable in a way specifically inflected by the association with actual or potential reproduction" (129). Women are made into "all the more a resource" under slavery, as Angela Y. Davis has argued;[7] or women are imagined to be a "biopolitical threat" by nation-states criminalizing "illegal immigrant mothers" (129). Here, Deutscher animates the racialized "differentials of biopolitical citizenship" drawing on Ruth Miller's analysis in *The Limits of Bodily Integrity*, whose work lends a succinct epigraph to a chapter devoted to the "thanatopolitics of reproduction": "[t]he womb, rather than Agamben's camp, is the most effective example of Foucault's biopolitical space" (105, citing Miller). Deutscher reminds us of the expansiveness of reproduction as a category that totalizes survival, futurity, precarity, grievability, legitimacy, belonging. Deutcher's argument points to the centrality of reproduction to the "crisis" forged by the thanatopolitics of the asylum-migration nexus, as illustrated by Didier Fassin's concept of "biolegitimacy," that is, when health-based claims can trump politically based rights to asylum (215n33, citing Fassin).

Deutscher does not situate her argument explicitly with respect to intersectionality except at one instance, when discussing Puar's critique of "intersectionality" in *Terrorist Assemblages*.[8] Still, it seems that one way to understand the argument in the book is that it insists on the inherently "intersectional" impulse of Foucault's thought that has been, nevertheless, occluded by the separation of sex from biopolitics in the critical literature (68).[9] Given her reading method of retrieving suspensions, particularly interesting is Deutscher's discussion of the relationship between modes of power (sovereign power, biopower) in Foucault's account (88), and her argument in favor of a distinction between thanatopolitics and necropolitics, two terms that are often used interchangeably (103). Here she discusses the (in my opinion, essentially Marxian) concern in Foucault studies about the historical relationship between "modes of power," variously argued to be supplanting, replacing, absorbing, or surviving each other (88). Taking us beyond the equivalent to the "mode of production" narrative in Marxism, Deutscher argues for sovereign power's "survival" in biopolitical times, wherein it has *both* "dehisced" (burst open) and become absorbed by biopower. Deutscher's eight-point definition of thanatopolitics shows how it infuses the biopolitical with powers of death, constituting the "underside" (7) and condition of possibility of biopolitics, the "administrative optimisation of a population's life" (102). It should not be confused with sovereign power or with necropolitics, a term introduced by Achille Mbembe to refer to the "management in populations of death and dying, of stimulated and proliferating disorder, chaos, insecurity."[10] This distinction seems crucial to her argument that reproduction is thanatopoliticized the moment it becomes biopoliticized, aimed at managing "women's agency as threatening and as capable of impacting peoples in an excess to projects of governmentality" (185). For Deutscher, how we construct feminist subjectivities and stake political claims in the field of reproduction ultimately are questions of exposing the "interrelation" of rights claims with (biopolitical, thanatopolitical, necropolitical) modes of power, a genealogical but also a critical ethical project.

If I have a criticism of Deutscher's book, it concerns her conflation, throughout, of reproduction and procreation. Disentangling the two terms, insisting, perhaps, on the "procreative effects" of reproduction, in an analogous gesture to revealing the biopolitical stakes in regulating the "procreative effects" of sexuality, would enable us to pursue an opening Foucault makes but Deutscher does not traverse. Less a missed opportunity than it is a limit point or a suspended possibility for synthesizing an anti-authoritarian queer politics of sexuality with a critique of reproduction as the pre-eminent (if disavowed, by classical political theory) site of the accumulation of capital—an urgent question as what is being reproduced today by reproductive heteronormativity are particularly violent, austere, and authoritarian forms of capitalism.

NOTES

1. Laura Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump*; see also Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*; and Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*.

2. Sasha Roseneil, Isabel Crowhurst, Ana Cristina Santos, and Mariya Stoilova, "Reproduction and Citizenship/Reproducing Citizens: Editorial Introduction."

3. Susan Stryker, "Preface," 16.

4. Amnesty International, *The State Decides Who I Am*, 7.

5. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*; Robert L. Caserio et al., "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory"; Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

6. See Eithne Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival: Making the Illegal Immigrant*; and *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*.

7. A. Y. Davis, "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood." See also A. A. Davis, "Slavery and the Roots of Sexual Harassment."

8. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 67–70. See also Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory."

9. See also Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*.

10. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 102–103.

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Connected by Commitment: Oppression and Our Responsibility to Undermine It

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In *Connected by Commitment: Oppression and Our Responsibility to Undermine It*, Mara Marin seeks to provide an antidote to the hopelessness we feel in the face of intractable oppression.

Marin follows Marilyn Frye in understanding oppression as characterized by double-binds—"situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation."[1] Further, according to Marin, oppression is constituted by systems that adapt to local attempts at amelioration. Oppression, she writes, "is a macroscopic phenomenon. When change affects only one part of this macroscopic phenomenon, the overall outcome can remain (almost) the same if the other parts rearrange themselves to reconstitute the original systematic relation" (6). When we seek to intervene in cases of oppression, we sometimes succeed in bringing about local change only to find the system reconstituting itself to cause similar oppression elsewhere. For instance, a woman with a career outside the home might seek to liberate herself from the so-called "second shift" of unpaid domestic labor by hiring another woman to do this labor, and in this way unintentionally impose low-status gender-coded work on the second woman. One oppression replaces another. The realization that oppression adapts to our interventions in this way can lead us into a "circle of helplessness and denial" (7). Marin argues that we can break the cycle by thinking oppression in terms of social relations and by framing social relations as commitments.

Marin bases her conceptualization of social relations as commitments on the model of personal relationships. (An example early in the book involves a particularly challenging situation faced by a married couple.) We develop personal relationships through a back-and-forth of actions and responses that starts out unpredictably, but becomes habituated—firmed up into commitment—over time. These commitments vary from relationship to relationship and vary over time within a relationship, but all relationships are alike in being constituted by such commitments. "At the personal level," Marin tells us, "obligations of commitment are violated when the reciprocity of the relationship is violated, that is, if its actions are not responded to with equal concern. Similarly, at the structural level open-ended obligations are violated when actions continue to support norms that constitute unjust structures" (63).

As social beings, we are all entwined in relationships of interdependence. We are all vulnerable, argues Marin, not only in infancy, illness, and old age, but throughout our lives. Human beings are not free agents but constitutively interdependent. We are fundamentally social, and our social relations both grow out of and produce open-ended

actions and responses that, once accumulated, constitute commitments.

In her employment of this conception of commitment, Marin aligns herself with political philosophers such as Elizabeth Anderson, Rainer Forst, Ciaran Cronin, and Jenny Nedelsky who understand justice as relational (172 n.8). For Marin, we undertake commitments in the context of various social relations. On this model, commitments are not contractual arrangements that can be calculated in the abstract and then undertaken. Rather, they are open-ended and cumulative. Through our countless small actions and inactions, we incrementally build up the systems of social relations we occupy. And our resulting location within those social relations brings with it certain obligations. While we are in this sense responsible for our commitments, they are not necessarily the products of our intentions. Many, if not most, of these cumulative actions are not the result of deliberation. To borrow and extend an example from Frye, a man may be long habituated to holding the door for women such that he now holds the door without deciding to do so. It's just automatic. Indeed, he may never have decided to hold the door for women, having simply been taught to do so by his father. Intentional or not, this repeated action serves to structure social relations in a way for which the man is answerable.

Further, Marin's account helps to make clear that holding the door is not in itself oppressive, but that it can be oppressive within a larger system of norms:

> On the model of oppression I work with here, the oppressiveness of the structure is a feature not intrinsic to any particular norms but of the relationship between different norms. It follows then that what is important for undoing the injustice of oppression is not modifying any particular norms but modifying the oppressive effect they have *jointly*. Thus what is essential for an individual is not to stop supporting any particular norm but to disrupt the connections between norms, the ways they jointly create structural positions of low social value. The oppressiveness of a set of norms can be disrupted in many different ways, which makes discretion as to what is the most appropriate action required. On the commitment model, the individual is only required to have an appropriate response, not to take any particular action. (64-65)

One of the salutary features of Marin's account is the response it provides to debates between ideal and non-ideal theorists. As is well known, Rawls applied ideal theory to states created for the mutual benefit of members, and non-ideal theory to pathological states created for the benefit of only some members. Marin need not weigh in on whether her account is intended for ideal or non-ideal conditions because she rejects the conception of social structures (like states) as organized primarily around intentions and projects. Social structures evolve, as relationships do, in our cumulative interactions with one another, not as means to the end of particular projects. For Marin, oppressive social structures emerge in the same ways that non-oppressive social structures do, and can

be changed just as they were formed, through cumulative actions.

According to Marin, the commitment model of social practices has three advantages: "First, we make familiar the abstract notion of social structure. Second, we move from a static to a dynamic view of social structures, one that makes change intelligible. Third, we add a normative point of view to the descriptive one" (50).

While Marin's primary goal is arguably the third of these aims, I think that the first two are ultimately more successful. With respect to the first aim, by grounding her descriptive account in familiar dynamics from personal relationships, Marin offers a rich naturalistic account of social structures as immanent that is both more plausible and more accessible than the abstractions that are sometimes employed.

Further, and in line with her second aim, Marin's analysis of oppression as a macroscopic system that we are always in the process of constituting through our collective, cumulative actions makes possible a nuanced account of justice that takes seriously the role of social location. For Marin, norms are not *tout court* just or unjust. Rather, they are in some circumstances just or unjust depending on surrounding circumstances. Thus, to return to our earlier example of the domestic worker, it is the surrounding norms about how different kinds of work are valued and rewarded and about how work is gendered that makes the domestic work potentially unjust, not the intrinsic character of domestic work. Thus, Marin's account is a helpful rejoinder to discussions of reverse-racism or reverse-sexism. Social location matters in our assessment of justice and injustice.

This leads to the normative (third) aim. Since norms are just or unjust in virtue of the larger social structure in which they occur, and in virtue of respective social locations of the agents who contribute to or are subject to the norms, our judgments of the justice or injustice of norms must be context-sensitive. Thus, Marin's normative project proceeds not by way of universal rules, but via contingent and shifting local assessments of the commitments that obtain in different contexts. In three dedicated chapters, she illustrates this by applying her framework across the distinct domains of legal relations, intimate relations of care, and labor relations. In each of these domains, Marin shows that once we understand social structures as relational and as constituted by the commitments we build up through our open-ended actions and responses to each other, assessments of justice and remedies for injustice must always be context-sensitive.

A good portion of Marin's discussion in these chapters plays out in terms of critiques of other theorists. For instance, she takes aim at Elizabeth Brake's proposal of minimal marriage, which contractualizes marriage and allows people to distribute their various marital rights—cohabitation, property rights, health and pension benefits, etc.—as they wish among those with whom they have caring relationships. Marin argues that by disaggregating the forms of care that occur within marriage, Brake's account neglects a key feature of intimate care—flexibility. Within marriage, our needs and the corresponding demands we

make on our spouses change unpredictably from day to day. Without flexibility, argues Marin, there is no good care (109). Marin plausibly argues that Brake's account has the unintended effect of denying the labor involved in caring flexibly, and thus fails to accomplish its aim of supporting justice for caregivers.

The strength of Marin's normative project is that it seems really manageable. We change social structures the very same way we create them, through an accumulation of small actions, through the commitments we take on. What's needed isn't moral heroism or new systems of rules but rather small changes that create ripple effects in the various interwoven relations and interdependencies that make up our social structures. We render the world more just not by overhauling the system but by, bit by bit, changing the relations in which we stand.

While this seems like a plausible account of how we ought to conduct ourselves, it's not clear that Marin's account is sufficient to help overcome the hopelessness we feel in the face of intractable oppression. Given the extent of the oppression in the world, it is hard to envisage the small ripples of change Marin describes as enough to rock the boat.

NOTES

1. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1983), 2.

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