Healthy Conflict in Contemporary American Society

From Enemy to Adversary

Jason A. Springs

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US citizens perceive their society to be one of the most diverse and religiously tolerant in the world today. Yet seemingly intractable religious intolerance and moral conflict abound throughout contemporary US public life – from abortion law battles, same-sex marriage, post-9/11 Islamophobia, public school curriculum controversies, to moral and religious dimensions of the Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street movements, and Tea Party populism. *Healthy Conflict in Contemporary American Society* develops an approach to democratic discourse and coalition-building across deep moral and religious divisions. Drawing on conflict transformation in peace studies, recent American pragmatist thought, and models of agonistic democracy, Jason Springs argues that, in circumstances riven with conflict between strong religious identities and deep moral and political commitments, productive engagement depends on thinking creatively about how to constructively utilize conflict and intolerance. The result is an approach oriented by the recognition of conflict as a constituent and life-giving feature of social and political relationships.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

To Atalia, Yonatan, and Pnei'el Alois

I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believ'd in, (for all this hectic glow, and these melo-dramatic screamings,) nor is humanity itself believ'd in. What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask?

The spectacle is appaling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the *litterateurs* is to find something to make fun of. A lot of churches, sects, &c., the most dismal phantasms I know, usurp the name of religion. Conversation is a mass of [banter] …

The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business, (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field …

I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results. In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome … It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul.

Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*

Of course, the old undying elements remain. The task is, to successfully adjust them to new combinations, our own days.

Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*

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Acknowledgments

This book project emerged in bits and pieces over the course of nearly a decade. Such a lengthy unfolding makes it challenging to thank adequately all the people whose input was indispensable to the final outcome. In the form of conversations, comments on drafts, invigorating paper panel discussions, or critical response to some piece of the project published along the way, many people lent their support. Each of them contributed vitally to the end result. The idea for this book first occurred during my conversation with Martin Kavka at the 2010 San Jose, CA, Ethics Societies meetings. I am grateful to Martin for countless further discussions throughout the process that ensued. John Kelsay and Aline Kalbian provided advice as well as opportunities to present portions of my research to the Florida State ethics colloquium. I benefited from engaging several excellent cohorts of Florida State University doctoral students, many of whom are now credentialed scholars themselves – Shannon Dunn, Rosemary Kellison, Ross Moret, Sam Houston, Carson Bay, among others. I am similarly grateful for intellectual friendship and countless discussions (as well as detailed feedback) with dear friends Cecelia Lynch and Slavica Jakelich that influenced these pages. Colleagues, friends, and interlocutors who read all or portions of chapter drafts, gave critical feedback on early papers I presented, or just took time for a helpful conversation and support along the way include Scott Appleby, David Cortright, David Decosimo, Beth Eddy, Eddie Glaude, Emmanuel Katongole, Asher Kaufman, Mark Lance, Bryan Langlands, John Paul Lederach, David Little, Ann Mische, Ebrahim Moosa, Atalia Omer, Robert Orsi, Dan Philpott, Christian Smith, Jeffrey Stout, Ernesto Verdeja, and Cornel West. Tom Tweed and Martin Kavka were kind enough to read the entire draft in the

final stages of the project. I was aided, as well, by dialogue with a stellar cast of students – now emerging scholars – Garrett FitzGerald, Chris Haw, Kyle Lambelet, Angela Lederach, Kelly McGee, Michael Yankoski – and by remarkably incisive feedback and editorial support from Ben Dillon. As always, I am grateful for the loving support from my parents and grandparents that made my work possible.

I am grateful for permission from each of the following publishers to adapt some earlier materials for this book, all revised and updated. Some passages from Chapters 1 and 2 come from "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons Reimagined: Moral Imagination as a Tool for Transforming Conflict" in Jacob Goodson and Brad Stone (eds.), *Rorty and the Religious: Christian Engagements with a Secular Philosopher* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), used by permission of Wipf and Stock publishers (www.wipfandstock.com). The first two chapters also adapt some paragraphs from "'To Let Suffering Speak': Can Peacebuilding Overcome the Un-representability of Suffering? Elaine Scarry and the Case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Peace and Change* 40, No. 4 (October 2015): 539–560. Chapter 3 draws material from an earlier essay published as "The Priority of Democracy to Social Theory," *Contemporary Pragmatism*, special issue on Cornel West, ed. Eddie Glaude, Vol. 4, No. 1 (June 2007): pp. 47–71, and Chapter 5 takes three passages from "Prophetic Dialectic," my contribution to a Contending Modernities book symposium on Cathleen Kaveny's *Prophecy without Contempt.* Chapters 6–8 were originally drafted together and then split (somewhat artificially) into independent publication projects. These chapters draw upon "'Dismantling the Master's House': Freedom as Ethical Practice in Robert Brandom and Michel Foucault," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, No. 3 (September 2009): 419–448; "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-secular Society," *Journal of Religion* 92, No. 1 (January 2012): 1–30; "'*Next time, try looking it up in your gut!*': Tolerance, Civility, and Healthy Conflict in a Tea Party Era," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 94, No. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 325–358. A version of Chapter 9 appeared as "A Tale of Two Islamophobias: Comparative Religious Ethics and the Paradoxes of Civic Nationalism in Contemporary Europe and the United States," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (2015): pp. 289–321.

Introduction

United States (US) citizens perceive their society to be one of the most diverse and religiously tolerant in the world today. Yet seemingly intractable religious intolerance, and moral and political conflict abound throughout contemporary US public life. Even in the years before the election of President Donald J. Trump, studies showed divisions among US citizens by political affiliation as more oppositional than they had been in decades. The 2016 election cycle and first year of the Trump presidency only exacerbated these divisions. Antagonistic political hostilities no longer gravitate to the poles of the political spectrum. Political conflict and oppositional divisiveness affects even those who identify themselves in the middle of that spectrum, or self-identified "moderates." Moreover, both sides identify their opponents as not merely fellow citizens of differing political persuasions, but rather, as harboring political and religious commitments that threaten the very well-being of the country.[1] Through 2017, partisans expressed not just frustration with their opponents, but anger and fear of them.[2]

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[1] Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization in the American Public," June 12, 2014, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/ (accessed August 28, 2017).

[2] Pew Research Center, "Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016: Highly Negative Views of the Opposing Party – and Its Members," June 22, 2016, www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/ (accessed August 28, 2017). Pew Research Center, "The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider," October 5, 2017, esp. 65–71, www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/ (accessed November 22, 2017).

This book develops an account of "healthy conflict" to intervene in allegedly intractable instances of political, religious, and moral intolerance in the contemporary United States. It combines the insights of recent pragmatist accounts of democratic social transformation, agonistic models of democratic engagement, and insights from the field of peace studies known as conflict transformation. In placing these resources in a mutually enriching conversation, this book offers a coherent approach to transforming religion-related conflict that sidesteps the self-subverting difficulties posed by standard accounts of "religious tolerance" and "conflict resolution." It provides a set of tools by which ethicists and religious thinkers, political philosophers, activists, and practice-minded peacebuilders might confront even the most severe, enduring forms of religiously or morally grounded conflict and intolerance.

Many approaches to conflict seek to resolve them by containing the differences in identities, passions, and commitments that fuel persistent conflict. The approach to "healthy conflict" developed here seeks instead to reframe and innovatively deploy the elements that give life to those conflicts. Instead of trying to solve the elements of persistent conflict, it reconceives them as resources that can be channeled to reduce violence and promote justice.

Chapter 1 appeals to "moral imagination" as a means of reframing apparently intractable conflicts born out of rigid identity oppositions. I first draw from the pragmatist philosopher and social critic Richard Rorty, who characterized moral imagination as the cultivation of empathetic sentimentality in order to promote mutual tolerance and overcome conflict. However, Rorty's position has provoked recent debates over both the strengths and dangers of appeals to moral imagination. It draws a powerful contrast with the work of literary critic Elaine Scarry. In tracing these debates, I consider the forms of persuasion and engagement that such sentimentality can inspire. I argue that such a focus on moral imagination can indeed reconceptualize conflict by mitigating the abstractness of human rights foundationalism on the one hand, while limiting the deconstructionist excesses of cultural theory and critique on the other. I ultimately suggest, however, that Rorty's position suffers from a crucial flaw: it tends to dismiss precisely those types of religiously motivated conflict and identity oppositions that Rorty says he aims to assuage with his appeals to mutual tolerance. This is because Rorty's approach fails to take the depth of identity-associated oppositions seriously enough, or to address their structural manifestations in the intersections of race, class, gender, and religious identities (among others).

In Chapter 2, I emphasize that moral imagination always develops within a web of relationships, even in the midst of persisting conflict. So conceived, interventions through literary moral imagination can reframe ways of seeing that help alter how rival groups habitually perceive one another. As a result, people who view each other in stark opposition might come to imagine themselves in mutual and empathetic relationships. Understood in this way, moral imagination enables a different mode of seeing and feeling in light of an empathetic understanding of those against which a group distinguishes itself.

Of course, practices of moral imagination do not simply eliminate the oppositions that engender conflict. Such oppositions typically run far too deep to be simply resolved. Nonetheless, moral imagination remains a powerful tool by which someone perceived to be an enemy to be destroyed could be reconceived as an opponent to be grappled with, and even learned from. On the account I develop, an adversary is an opponent one comes to recognize as deserving basic respect, care, and even empathy. Such an adversarial relationship should be characterized by reciprocal accountability and protection against arbitrary treatment, even if one's adversary nonetheless remains an opponent to be contested and resisted. On this account, empathy, imagination, and creativity are key to avoiding what is perhaps the greatest poison of all to healthy, productive conflict: the temptation to demonize and scapegoat one's opponent, positioning him or her as intrinsically evil and beyond the possibility of constructive engagement or future reconciliation – as no more than an enemy to be vanquished.

Here I build an account of moral imagination as an ethical practice aimed at the formation – or perhaps the reformation – of good habits and skills of imagination. What would be required in order to take the rigors of moral imagination with sufficient gravity? I take up in detail the case on which Rorty and Scarry initially agree – the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After its initial society-altering impact at the time it was written, social and literary critics (most powerfully, James Baldwin) criticized Stowe's text as a failure of moral imagination regarding race in America. In the last half-century, however, feminist scholars and activists have retrieved the text and critically challenged that assessment. The encounter between these readings creates an instructive and generative tension. I offer a reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in light of this debate in order to demonstrate how Stowe's text displays both the limitations and the power of moral imagination to illuminate structural and cultural forms of violence, and to inspire transformational responses.

Chapter 3, building upon my revised account of moral imagination, tests this account against criticisms that such pragmatist approaches result in gradualist and ultimately superficial social change. Here I address the alleged incapacity of such an account of moral imagination to deal adequately with social evil and structural violence by examining the debate between Rorty and his former student Cornel West.

In contrast to Rorty, West's "prophetic pragmatism" challenges his fellow pragmatists to interrogate pervasive injustices and systemic evils, the structural conditions that permit some citizens to wield power over others in arbitrary and unaccountable ways. Perhaps the most pronounced feature of prophetic pragmatism is its hope-driven struggle for democratic transformation of injustice and conflict in the midst of persistent domination and tragic conditions. Prophetic pragmatists refer to this struggle as "hope against hope" or "tragic hope." A second central feature is its use of critical social theory for identifying the sometimes catastrophic proportions that such domination can take. A third feature I examine is prophetic pragmatism's reliance upon a "fugitive" model of democratic action as the means of resisting systemic injustice and suppression. I argue that grasping prophetic pragmatism helps explain West's increasingly activist work as a public philosopher and, in particular, his sustained interventions in such movements as Occupy Wall Street (2011– 2013), Black Lives Matter (2013–), and the Movement for Black Lives (2016–) more broadly. More importantly, I also argue that a nuanced grasp of prophetic pragmatism is the only means by which we can adequately understand and account for West's fiercely prophetic criticisms of, and controversial resistance to, many of President Barack Obama's policies.

In Chapter 4, I examine in detail West's controversial opposition to several policies of the Obama administration. This contest exemplifies the ultimate import of the differences between Rorty's moral imagination and West's prophetic pragmatist mode of socio-theoretical critique, a difference further highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement. I argue that West's interventions are more important than his critics allow. And yet, occasionally West risks tilting too far in the direction of relentless critique and righteous anger, thus sometimes failing fully to enact the virtues of moral imagination. As a result, at times his indispensable efforts suffered from some excesses of prophetic rage. West's prophetic pragmatism exemplifies the challenging opposition between moral imagination and critique. Though he recognizes the indispensability of the former, he is sometimes inclined to overemphasize the latter. Yet it is necessary to

mediate this opposition in order to address constructively conflict and antagonisms embedded in structural and cultural forms of violence, and which constitute the tragic dimensions of American society (the inevitable limitations of human agency, forced choices between irreconcilable goods, confronting recurrent forms of evil). Thus, in Chapter 5, I conduct an exposition of "the prophetic" at the heart of prophetic pragmatism. In a contemporary political context rife with the rhetoric of categorical indictment and denunciation between parties in conflict, conceptualizing prophetic rhetoric is as urgent a task as it is indispensable for developing a model of healthy conflict. My claim in this chapter is that, contrary to popular perception, from the vantage point afforded by prophetic pragmatism, contemporary public life does not suffer from a glut of prophetic criticism but, rather, a deficiency of it.

Having analyzed two of the most influential contemporary pragmatist visions of democratic social transformation in the first five chapters, I turn next to show their implications for conflict transformation. I demonstrate how they help illumine structural forms of domination, possibilities for critical resistance, and practical action for change. In Chapter 6, I propose a model of practical agency and concrete engagement for effecting democratic transformation in deadlocked political conditions and "culture war" religious intolerance. Here I add to this unfolding conversation pragmatist philosopher Robert Brandom's account of expressive freedom to examine the apparent opposition between theoretical critique and democratic activism. On the account of agency that I develop, the integration of moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique allows for more than simply illuminating and resisting the dynamics of domination. Those dynamics – and the conflict they produce – can be altered and transformed. This strategy thus moves beyond Rorty's tendencies toward romantic quietism as well as West's temptation to theoretical excess.

I employ Brandom's model of inferential pragmatism to show its potential for prompting democratic social transformation. At the same time, I place his inferential pragmatism in critical dialogue with Michel Foucault, an unlikely candidate to mediate the theory–practice opposition. Foucault, after all, is widely considered to exemplify the paralysis of critique and the excesses of theory. Yet the mutually corrective conversation between Brandom and Foucault displays the pragmatist concern to transform injustice at its most refined. This critical exchange lays the groundwork for the constructive accounts of "agonistic respect," "healthy conflict," and "strenuous pluralism" in contexts of protracted intolerance and incivility that I set forth in Chapters 7–9.

To this point – the end of Part I – I have explored a number of recent ethical and philosophical attempts to constructively engage intractable conflicts in contemporary public life (e.g., recent pragmatist accounts of moral imagination and critique, accounts of prophetic criticism, and agonistic proposals of democratic practice). In Part II, I integrate these resources in a positive account of "healthy conflict" and "strenuous pluralism" in contexts of intransigent religious conflict. Here I bring conflict transformation insights from peace studies into conversation with the resources for democratic social transformation I have cobbled together so far.

With the tools of moral imagination, prophetic critique, and expressive freedom in place, Chapter 7 explores the possibility that morally and religiously grounded intolerance and conflict might become resources for positive political and social change. I begin by intervening in recent debates among political philosophers and religious ethicists about how to accommodate intolerant religious voices and actors in political discourse. These debates demonstrate the necessity of accommodating wide degrees of religion-specific reasoning, practice, and speech in liberal-democratic political discourse. But even such accommodation runs up against limits. Ultimately, I argue, accommodationist principles tend to exclude the most disruptive and intolerant forms of religion in public life. But these often involve precisely those actors who understand their religious and moral claims to be nonnegotiable, and even demanding resistance to, or substantial transformation, of the public sphere. Accommodation of such voices in public life – in effect, allowing them "permission" to participate – tends to elicit antipathy at being domesticated or discursively policed in exchange for approval to participate in the first place. I explore several cases where this has occurred.

Rather than advocating straightforward accommodation or appealing to mutual understanding, I explore the potential goods of forthright conflict that come into view when we recognize the full depth – and perhaps irremediability – of intolerance. I critically reevaluate the broadly shared presupposition that tolerance is key to addressing conflict generally, and religiously motivated conflict in particular. I argue that "tolerance" – understood as a means of resolving or containing conflict through the principled allowance of a range of incompatible religious, moral, and political views (or as dispositions to "put up with" or to "live and let live") – can risk perpetuating, even aggravating, the very forms of conflict and opposition that it is supposed to contain or resolve.

I do not argue that intolerance is good or that tumultuous political encounters are better than tranquil ones. I appreciate tranquility as much as everyone else. I argue, however, that tranquility is not a feasible path to a just and transformative approach to intractable conflicts. Instead, I examine the potential of agonistic pluralism as an effective response to intransigent conflict. This approach, I argue, finally suffers from certain of the same shortcomings as the accommodationist and recognition-based approaches. Still, the model of agonistic pluralism helps us to conceptually reframe religious intolerance and conflict. In particular, it adds the notion of "agonistic respect," the practice of reconceiving a potential enemy to be destroyed as an adversary to be contested – though also respected and cared for. This approach, I suggest, generates a workable strategy for constructively deploying the elements of conflicts that are liable to be intransigent.

Although the case for inclusion of religion-specific practices within liberal democracy has been successful at the level of scholarly debates, questions persist as to whether the expanded conception of democratic inclusion proves viable amid the religious intolerance of contemporary US public life. On-the-ground realities continue to tempt analysts to frame current conditions either as irreparably fragmented or tragically ineffective, suggesting that existing democratic practices cannot mediate deep and persistent conflict. In Chapter 8, I argue that the hope for democratic discourse and coalition-building across deep – potentially irreconcilable – moral and religious divisions in US public life depends less on continuing calls for "more tolerance" than on finding ways to constructively utilize conflict and intolerance. Is it possible to distinguish between constructive and destructive forms of intolerance? If so, can we reorient theorizing about democratic practices and processes so that what seems to be simple intolerance (and thus a candidate for marginalization or exclusion from political processes) might instead be used to constructively transform those practices and processes? Further, what would an analytical framework that cultivated "healthy conflict" look like? How would such an approach facilitate concrete efforts to transform religiously motivated conflict?

I situate such questions within the religious and cultural battles that have erupted around abortion laws and the allegedly nonrational modes of intervention deployed by many anti-abortion activists. I offer an observational account of a particularly acute episode of religiously motivated conflict: the anti-abortion battles triggered by President Obama's 2009

commencement address at the University of Notre Dame. In that case and others, I argue, fostering strenuous pluralism and healthy conflict requires a capacious vision of public discourse. Such a vision must generously but critically include visceral and "irrational" forms of public participation often dismissed as intolerant and unreasonable. Interventions of this kind, I argue, should not be written off. In fact, healthy conflict demands a willingness to charitably understand and creatively respond to forms of public engagement and protest that one may be inclined to dismiss.

A strategically effective conception of healthy conflict would redirect the inclination to describe the oppositions in terms of fragmentation and the conflict as hopeless. In other words, it must recognize and resist temptations to draw terminally polarizing contrasts between sides and to apply constructed labels that exacerbate conflict. At the same time, a conflict transformation approach must avoid downplaying the severity of the disagreements in an effort to make them go away. As I suggest, this calls for three related tasks: (1) to reframe an understanding of intolerance, (2) to harness the constructive potential of conflict, and (3) to develop strategies for confronting seemingly intransigent forms of conflict and intolerance.

The constructive dimension of Chapter 8 thus presses beyond the limitations of the standard tolerance–intolerance dichotomy and reorients the fact–feeling and reason–"gut" dichotomies that demarcate contemporary public discourse in the US. These forms of charitable recognition, capacious inclusion, sensitive translation, and generous understanding hold the potential to reshape the poor communication and misunderstanding characteristic of degenerative conflict. At the same time, "reframing enactments" that engage the intuitions and emotions through humor, satire, irony, and other modes of "nonrational" or "metarational" appeal, provide indispensable means of wading through the oppositional and allegedly nonrational or irrational character of expressive politics.

Chapter 9 uses this account of healthy conflict to provide a new angle of vision on one of the most pressing and persistent sources of religious intolerance and conflict in US public life today: Islamophobia. The relationality that orients healthy conflict includes – but is always more than – immediate, or face-to-face, relationship. A proper understanding of such relationality requires recognizing the myriad forms of interdependence and connection in which our encounters with others occur. It requires thinking about the spaces wherein personal and group identities are

constituted. It requires thinking about how particular people and groups carry the relational spaces and histories within them – spaces within which they may not encounter each other face to face, but nonetheless relate through symbol systems and ritual practices, shared language, histories, and stories of origin.

As my account emphasizes, differences in power inflect relational spaces and the patterns and histories of those spaces. The practices and (sometimes tacitly) shared understandings that constitute those spaces, histories, and patterns are always normatively charged. To preserve the relational nature of healthy conflict requires attending to the normative implications of what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities." This means that promoting healthy conflict requires vigilance about the ways that symbolically articulated identities (e.g., ethnic, national, and religious identities) and cultural patterns may, however, inadvertently fuel and perpetuate degenerative forms of conflict. This is precisely the case in the forms of Islamophobia that have erupted across the US since – but also, I argue, long before – September 11, 2001. I argue that conceiving of the US as naturally inclined to be religiously tolerant frequently functions as a central feature of American exceptionalism. Bringing this dynamic to the surface is thus vital in resisting the modes of exclusion that the unreflective glorification of US civic nationalism may promote. Here I focus on contemporary forms of civic nationalism in the US and France. In both contexts, pursuing "healthy conflict" impels ethicists, social theorists, and peacebuilders to attend to how Islamophobia relates to US and French national identities in particular. Thinking about specific episodes of religious intolerance in this context challenges the tendencies of both ethno-religious and civic nationalisms to lead to degenerative forms of conflict. Conversely, the lens of healthy conflict illumines how identities rooted in practices of religious traditions (in this case, Muslim religious identities) can promote the expressive freedom, moral imagination, and socio-theoretical critique I have suggested we most need today.

Of course, I write as a white, cisgender, heterosexual male in the midst of conflicts that are increasingly recognized as rooted in, and inscribed with, disparities of power and forms of domination that cut along lines of race, class, gender, as well as national, religious and sexual identities (among other points of intersection). I write, moreover, as someone who is committed to the prospect that democratic social transformation is the best hope for transforming the conditions that suppress people and groups who are most vulnerable in contemporary US society. To propose

a model of healthy conflict requires that I grapple with these challenges in full recognition of myself as one who is implicated in them – as one who is, by default, a beneficiary of them. But I am also one who believes that these causes and conditions of destructive conflict can be challenged and altered, and that those who have most benefitted must be awakened and converted to participate in the processes of dismantling and transformation of the patriarchal, classist, white supremacist powers, and through that participation, be changed ourselves. To those ends I devote the following chapters.

PART I

PRAGMATIST REPERTOIRES

The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons, Reimagined

Moral Imagination as a Tool for Transforming Conflict

> To the Serbs, the Muslims are no longer human … Muslim prisoners, lying on the ground in rows, awaiting interrogation, were driven over by a Serb guard in a small delivery van … A Muslim man in Bosansi Petrovac … [was] forced to bite off the penis of a fellow-Muslim … If you say that a man is not human, but the man looks like you and the only way to identify this devil is to make him drop his trousers – Muslim men are circumcised and Serb men are not – then it is probably only a short step, psychologically, to cutting off his prick … There has never been a campaign of ethnic cleansing from which sexual sadism has gone missing.[1]

Many observers think the preceding report from the ethno-nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia illustrates the limits of conceptions of "personhood" or "humanity" as abstract moral categories. It illustrates, they point out, the potentially debilitating relativity inherent in such terms. In the case above, Serb soldiers deemed Bosnian Muslims to be lacking the salient features of humanity. Here, in fact, impressions of similarity inspired even greater cruelty. The Serb soldier, who might act honorably in other circumstances – who might be quite humanitarian to those he recognizes as fellow members of "humanity" – instead acts savagely. In this context, to confront the Serb soldier for his in*humanity* – accusing him of violating the basic human rights of his victims – is to introduce a non sequitur. It was not "fellow humans" upon whom he perpetrated violence – these were Muslim Bosniaks.

[1] David Rieff, "Letter from Bosnia," *New Yorker*, November 23, 1992, 82–95, as quoted by Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, eds., *On Human Rights: Oxford Amnesty Lectures, 1993* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 112.

The refusal to recognize others as persons is a recurring feature of nationalist, ethnic, and religious conflicts. Repeatedly, such conflicts are born out of decisions about who is and is not a candidate for recognition as "someone like myself," and thus who is or is not imaginable as fully human. "For most white people, until very recently, most black people did not so count," wrote Richard Rorty. "For most Christians, until the seventeenth century or so, most heathen did not so count. For the Nazis, Jews did not count." The examples quickly multiply. "For most males in countries in which the average annual income is less than two thousand pounds, most females still do not so count. Whenever tribal and national rivalries become important, members of rival tribes and nations will not so count."[2] In all such instances, the group in question defines itself largely by who (or what) they are not. A nonnegotiable element of the Nazi's identity was that down to the last drop of blood he was not a Jew, the white that he was not black, the Christian that he was not heathen, the Hutu that he was not Tutsi, the straight that he is not gay.

Rorty devoted much of his social criticism to inveighing against conceptions of humanity that were too narrowly circumscribed. At the same time, however, he argued against shortcuts to universal inclusion – appeals to self-evident principles or moral categories that purported to apply themselves. In this he stood at odds with much of modern Western moral philosophy, an intellectual tradition that sought to cure refusals to recognize others as "of one's own kind" by appealing to self-evident bases for including all in the universal category of "humanity."

Rorty agreed that the best hope for expanding the category of "people like us" was to render the basis for those divisions and exclusions increasingly irrelevant. But he was convinced that this change would have to be cultivated first on the ground and in practice, rather than dictated in principle from above. A principle, after all, will always have to be applied in particular times and places. Application will unavoidably involve the applier's understanding of an adequate implementation of the rule. Hence, applications of principles reflect the particular understandings and commitments that characterize the social and cultural context in question. Thus understood, applying a moral principle relies on a historically situated social practice that is itself embedded in wider webs of social practices and understandings that define its context and extend over time. Here, much depends on the ethical life of the group in question. This includes the conceptions the groups share (explicitly or implicitly) of

[2] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," 177.

what it takes to count as a person in the first place – whether, for instance, one can or must be a man, white, a property owner, a citizen, or could be, for example, a corporation. For these reasons, Rorty recognized imagination as central to any ethical and political enterprise.

As Rorty had it, imagining others empathetically and expansively is indispensable for developing the capacity to recognize as like oneself those otherwise understood to be radically different. Imagining becomes a moral task, one pivotal for defusing the kinds of identity oppositions that give rise to ethnic, religious, nationalist, and racist forms of conflict. The central challenge of moral imagination, and one crucial to defusing these oppositions, is to cultivate the capacity and desire to make oneself vulnerable to the experiences and condition of someone that one may be inclined to find repugnant, or perhaps worse, for whom one is utterly unconcerned. These challenges often require imagining the position of those who are despised and oppressed. On this view, the work of moral imagination must begin at home, in the imaginer's proximate vicinity, rather than first presuming an abstract and universally inclusive conception of humanity. Thus, in attending to concrete realities, appeals to moral imagination countervail the predominant currents of modern moral philosophy.

The capacity to imagine others charitably and empathetically has become an increasingly contentious subject in recent years, especially among those who work to transform conflict. On one hand, many theorists and practitioners have come to identify empathetic imagining as indispensable to a more concrete, community-based, and ameliorative conception of justice. Such a conception contrasts with the "blind," impartial, and retributive model of justice that has prevailed throughout most western legal codes.[3] Furthermore, this strand of thinking sees moral imagination and empathy as central to the tasks of transforming conflict. It acknowledges that how parties involved in conflict frame it, and how they understand and imagine one another, powerfully influence which options for conflict transformation are available and viable. From this perspective, empathetic moral imagining is essential for building the conditions for a durable peace that cannot be conceived apart from a simultaneous pursuit of justice.

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[3] Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, "What Are the Implications of Restorative Justice for Society and Our Lives?" in H. Zehr and B. Towes, eds., *Critical Issues in Restorative Justice* (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press, 2004), 391–404; cf. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

At the same time, appeals to cultivating empathy and moral imagination have met with searching criticisms from thinkers who are certain that robust moral foundations and universal principles are necessary for claims about justice to have sufficient gravity to be effective. In Rorty's case, a penchant for rhetorical excess, though motivated by the effort to prod readers out of entrenched ways of thinking, has fueled the confusions surrounding these debates. In fact, Rorty's rhetorical strategies have often provoked his critics to characterize their disagreements with his position as fundamental and irreconcilable.[4]

My aim in this chapter is to examine as charitably as possible debates over the place of moral imagination in reframing and transforming conflict. I do so in light of a broader concern for effective democratic social transformation. The account of moral imagination that I develop here will remain pivotal to the concept of "healthy conflict" that emerges over the course of this book. In this chapter, I sift through recent debates among philosophers, social critics, and literary theorists about the effectiveness of appealing to sentimental and literary forms of moral imagination. I weave together insights from these exchanges to arrive at a concretely engaged account of moral imagination. In particular, Rorty's appeal to moral imagination brings to light a range of pragmatist resources on which I draw, in concert with recent work in conflict transformation, to propose an understanding of "moral imagination" as a practice – a set of skills requiring cultivation, discipline, practical wisdom, and critical self-reflection.

One reason the appeal to moral imagination is essential for democratic social transformation is that it sidesteps the metaphysical appeals and foundationalist dogmas to which many prominent strands of human rights discourse are prone.[5] At the same time, it avoids the terminal

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[4] For example, Michael J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 2.

[5] While Rorty's thinking about human rights developed considerably over the last two decades of his life, nowhere did he discuss rights as justification for coercive intervention in situations of mass atrocity in international contexts. If he had written explicitly of it at the end of his life, in my judgment, his position would have looked something like a mix between Michael Walzer's account of rights in *Thick and Thin* (which Rorty endorsed explicitly in his late writings) and Michael Ignatieff's characterization of rights as a cultural and political discourse. See Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

suspicion and even rejection of human rights discourse that typify some excessive forms of cultural theory and power analysis.[6] Hence, Rorty's account proves an instructive point from which to intervene in debates about moral imagination and conflict transformation. Even its deficiencies are instructive. As we shall see, Rorty's deep skepticism about cultural theory and critique, coupled with his enchantment with utopian enlightenment visions, leads to an account of moral imagination that is too therapeutic, at moments even glibly optimistic, satisfied to achieve what amounts to cosmetic forms of tolerance. Thus, as potentially transformative as Rorty's focus upon moral imagination is, it ultimately suffers from two related shortcomings. It fails to cut to the structural roots and cultural hold of injustice, on one hand, and fails to conceptualize the depth and persistence – indeed the inevitability – of conflict and opposition, on the other.

Yet might appeals to moral imagination avoid degenerating into glib optimism, or therapeutic or voyeuristic sentimentality? Might they take with sufficient seriousness the ways that injustices and differentials of power become inscribed in social and political structures and cultural practices and understandings? I argue in the chapters that follow that the cultivation of moral sentiments and moral imagination are just as crucial to healthy conflict as are theoretical critique and organized democratic action. In this chapter I demonstrate, however, that empathetic imagining – when deployed apart from sustained critique of structural and cultural forms of violence, and without being interwoven with critically self-reflexive practical engagement – risks degenerating into therapeutic voyeurism. That is, it quickly devolves into emotionally self-gratifying interloping in the sufferings of others.

The History and Character of Moral Progress

Modern philosophy's quest for universal inclusion is littered with narrow applications of theoretically broad principles. Thus Thomas Jefferson declared the self-evidence of the claim that "all men are created equal," even though he owned slaves. Many of the shared understandings, institutions, and practices that suffused Jefferson's historical context posited slaves as only approximating the full human personhood to which the

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[6] For a representative example, see Slavoj Zizek, "Human Rights and Its Discontents" (lecture, Bard College, November 15, 1999), www.lacan.com/zizek-human.htm.

principles of equality and liberty applied.[7] Likewise, Immanuel Kant predicated his account of universal law upon the distinctively human rational application of the categorical imperative. Of course, in his view, that rational capacity was not available to women, children, and non-European races. Examples such as these quickly multiply.

With the advantage of hindsight, we twenty-first-century cosmopolitans now know those views of Jefferson and Kant to be false. Some argue that to hold our blinkered intellectual forebears like Kant and Jefferson accountable to the standard of "universal inclusion" as we know it today would be anachronistic. But this requires accounting for the parochialism that skewed Kant's application of the categorical imperative and the tragically far-too-narrow scope of Jefferson's phrase "all men" in the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence – and asking our successors to understand our own blind spots.

The forms of parochialism that we congratulate ourselves as having overcome teach an important cautionary lesson. Self-congratulation for reaching a universal codification and application of such principles risks blinding ourselves to the complexity of applying these principles in the particularities of culture and history. For instance, it is imperative to understand how "human rights culture" – recognized as a contingent and fragile achievement, and a still-unfolding bundle of debates, revisable documents, and contested conventions – progressed to expand the scope and fill in the content of formally universal principles such as Jefferson set forth. It is just as important to grasp how these evolving understandings gradually came to inform the moral intuitions and dispositions of persons that human rights-oriented cultures produce.

To speak of human rights culture as *fragile* is to say that the idea of human rights was not an inevitable discovery waiting to happen. Rather, it is an achievement that emerged and evolved through a range of contingent, and at times precarious, historical developments. Without sufficient vigilance, human rights may become subject to misdirection, co-opted, or perhaps altogether compromised. Their fragility makes it even more pressing to remain vigilant against contemporary exclusions analogous

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[7] Jefferson himself explained that slaves' existence reflected much more "sensation than reflection," as their bodies were inclined toward sleep when not occupied with labor or some other diversion. Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905), 1: 194.

to those of Kant and Jefferson, and to guard against blind spots to which human rights frameworks may be predisposed.

Rorty endorsed the moral aim and encompassing scope of Jefferson's principle of equality. He argued that the limitations of Jefferson's account were offset by it being embedded in a self-correcting and expandable social and political enterprise, namely, liberal democracy. A liberal-democratic enterprise is characterized by discursive exchange based upon mutual recognition and reciprocal accountability among the participants.[8] Rorty considered these features to be conditions of the very possibility of democracy's experimental success. Mutual recognition and reciprocal accountability provide the grounds for hope in the progressive realization of principles of equality and justice over time. This positions democracy as a set of social practices and associational forms in relation to which democratic state theories and institutions, while indispensable, are secondary. The latter depend upon the former. In this scheme, Rorty followed John Dewey's account in his 1888 essay "The Ethics of Democracy." For Dewey, democracy can be a form of government only because it is more basically a mode of spiritual and moral association among particular persons and groups.[9] Democracy is first a tradition of mutual accountability, nondomination, and shared deliberation through discursive exchange.[10]

Rorty never shied away from asserting the possibility of moral progress. Indeed, he claimed that modern, liberal-democratic societies had achieved remarkable moral progress over earlier epochs, and are thus superior to their contemporary competitors. Nor did he hesitate to admit that his account of the direction that moral progress has taken, and ought to take, was marked by his own ethnocentrism. Rorty advocated

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[8] Rorty's vision of liberal democracy was thoroughly historicist, contingent, and open-ended, as articulated perhaps most succinctly in his essay "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," in *Objectivity, Solidarity, Truth: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 197–202.

[9] Louis Menand, ed., *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 196. For enlightening exposition of the centrality of this essay to Dewey's broader political thought – and its role as an early precursor to Dewey's crowning work *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) – see Melvin L. Rogers, "Dewey and His Vision of Democracy," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7, no. 1 (June 2010): 69–91.

[10] Rorty describes himself as building upon the legacies of Dewey and Walt Whitman in conceptualizing democracy in this way. See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), chap. 1.

for "justice as a larger loyalty" – the persistent "expansion of the circle of beings who count as 'us.'"[11] He asked his critics to adduce an example of some proposed remedy for the problems of exclusion, inequality, cruelty, and injustice that is not, itself, similarly ethnocentric (including appeals to abstract, putatively self-evident, universal principles). Evident here is Rorty's particular brand of democratic faith and social hope. He unapologetically identified his range of democratic preferences as contingent. But this did not stop him from asserting their experimental superiority.[12] As experimental enterprises, liberal-democratic societies had encountered greater successes than their antecedents and chief competitors. Indeed, Rorty asked to be shown some mode of political association that has been more effective than liberal democracy in diminishing human suffering, in facilitating the expansion of private forms of self-invention and innovation, and in instilling dispositions to tolerate the choices and fantasies of other people. The success of liberal-democratic societies is evident in their having opened up greater opportunities for private self-cultivation than their competitors.[13]

And yet, the dual task of enriching the content and expanding the parameters of principles of justice and equality such that they encompass long-excluded people is intrinsically challenging. Any celebration of moral progress must be tempered by contemplation of the often grave, sometimes tragic realities its accomplishment required. In the case of the US, the sometimes excruciatingly slow expansion of democratic practices and principles of inclusion has required, among many other challenges, a civil war; political and religious movements for the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage and basic equality; a series of labor rights movements; and civil rights movements for African Americans and – more recently – gays, lesbians, and transgender people. Climbing up the moral promontory from which contemporary people identify the deficiencies of the abstract universals set forth by the likes of Jefferson and Kant has been painful and, at times, treacherous. And those of us who benefit from the moral progress achieved in previous epochs are not

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[11] Richard Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 4* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 45n3.

[12] Richard Rorty, "Afterword: Pragmatism, Pluralism and Postmodernism," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 273.

[13] Richard Rorty, "Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 74, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 915–927.

exempt from falling prey to equally vicious forms of shortsightedness in the present.

The moral and epistemic foundationalism invoked by many moral philosophers and human rights theorists aims to justify human rights and protect those rights from the contingencies of history and context. Yet they risk forgetting the often tragic difficulties by which progress has been achieved, and the challenges in light of which further progress must be pursued. Moral foundationalism has been unable or unwilling to recognize itself as a socially embodied, historically extended, and contingent range of arguments. Promoting this self-recognition is the best hope for overcoming the tradition's limitations. Then one might invite human rights foundationalists into a shared project of democratic self-creation within which the emergence of human rights discourse, historically situated, is a vital component.[14]

Once we take the contingencies of history seriously, we realize that recognizing others as "like myself" – as deserving protection from harm and arbitrary treatment – is not something that comes naturally if only we will take the time to look at other people carefully enough. Appeals to the moral law within, history- and culture-transcending reason or intuition, or the image of God in each person cannot be presumed to suffice as de facto guarantors (because self-evident and self-applying) for the mutual recognition of shared humanity. *Looking*, rather, must be accompanied by *seeing*.

Seeing some other as one who has a moral claim upon me is a capacity that takes practice. It might become immediate – intuitive, second-nature, so habitually ingrained as to determine everyday perception. It might even attain "universal reach."[15] Nonetheless, it is a skill that must be acquired. As such, it is subject to adjustment and enrichment over time. It can be implemented in better and worse ways. Thus, hope that the moral

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[14] Rorty attributes the concept of "tradition" that he has in mind to Alasdair MacIntyre. He endorsed MacIntyre's pivotal claim in *After Virtue* that all reasoning is "tradition-bound." See Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth," in Robert Brandom, ed., *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1–30 (here 20); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 207. There MacIntyre defined a "living tradition" as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods that constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations."

[15] Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, 50.

imagination will help overcome divisions that motivate conflict depends on the capacity to see others as like oneself. It requires the cultivation of empathetic perception and normative attitudes and intuitions that make such perception habitual.[16]

Expanding the capacities for moral imagination calls on the parties involved in some conflict to maximize their sense of others as being "like us." This positions the other party to the conflict as a person who feels and cares much as I do. On this understanding, "moral progress" is the movement toward a broader account of who ought to qualify as candidates for respect, care, and protection from arbitrary treatment – as creatures to whom some things ought never be done. Indeed, the possibility of moral progress is driven, in part, by the hope that it is possible to generate and sustain sentimental *antipathy* for – even intuitive revulsion at – certain actions, attitudes, and dispositions. Just as interning Jews for extermination, branding and whipping one's slave, and relegating black people to "colored only" lunch counters and toilets have become repugnant to the moral sensibilities of most contemporary North Atlantic societies, so might other actions in the future. A central challenge of moral imagination then becomes *how* to cultivate the conditions, capacities, and sensibilities that would make, for instance, misogyny, gay-bashing, mass incarceration of people of color, and exploitation of the poor obviously shameful and intolerable.

On this account of moral imagination, broadening the compass of the word "humanity" falls on educators, artists, social visionaries, and activists more than on philosophers or social theorists. In fact, educating the moral imagination and widening habits of empathy require sidestepping as much as possible the philosopher's scholastic rehearsal of abstract questions: "Do moral absolutes exist?" "If so, how can we access them?" "Why should I be moral?"

Rorty's skepticism about the inadequacies of abstract philosophical argument is matched by his skepticism about the usefulness of critical social and cultural theory for democratic social transformation. For instance, the work of unmasking the pervasive dynamics of sadism

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[16] This was a pivotal insight that Rorty spent much of his career developing. For an especially early articulation of it, see Rorty's entry on "Intuition," in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), 204–212; for an account of the moral and social-critical implications of perceptual acquisition and cultivation of democratic normative attitudes, see Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), chap. 9.

that Freudian psychoanalysis illuminates often permits more banal and socially sanctioned – though no less insidious – forms of inhumanity to flourish. Theoretical obsessions with unmasking narcissism, sadism, and latent phobias alleged to pervade a certain milieu frequently overlook more straightforward cases of selfishness. In late twentieth-century laissez-faire capitalist societies, the phrase "greed is good" seems to many to be a mantra of common sense. Within such a framework, forms of selfishness that diminish persons and tear at the fabric of society are characterized benignly as "enlightened self-interest," or as essential to the (putatively) deregulated market forces by which "a rising tide will lift all boats."[17] Regarding seemingly mundane socioeconomic injustices, Rorty claimed that cultural and social theorists of Marxist, Freudian, and other persuasions had largely missed the boat:

> You would not guess from listening to the cultural politicians of the academic left that the power of the rich over the poor remains the most obvious, and potentially explosive, example of injustice in contemporary America. For these academics offer ten brilliant unmaskings of unconscious sadism for every unmasking of the selfishness intrinsic to American political and economic institutions. Enormous ingenuity and learning are deployed in demonstrating the complicity of this or that institution, or of some rival cultural politician, with patriarchy or heterosexism or racism. But little gets said about how we might persuade Americans who make more than $50,000 a year to take more notice of the desperate situation of their fellow citizens who make less than $20,000.[18]

The excesses of cultural theory to which Rorty points run parallel to the failure of human rights talk to remedy the most conventional and thus the subtlest injustices. For instance, in societies enchanted with laissez-faire capitalism, "'the right to a job' (or 'to a decent wage') had none of the resonance of 'the right to sit in the front of the bus' or 'the right to vote' or even 'the right to equal pay for equal work.' Rights in the liberal tradition were, after all, powers and privileges to be wrested from the state, not from the economy."[19] How else to account for the exclusion of millions of people from regular access to basic medical care and a living wage in a society as fabulously wealthy and saturated by rights talk as

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[17] For an explanation and defense of the laissez-faire capitalist account of these idioms, see Scott Rae and Austin Hill, *The Virtues of Capitalism: A Moral Case for Free Markets* (Chicago: IL: Northfield Publishing, 2010), esp. chap. 4.

[18] Richard Rorty, "What's Wrong with 'Rights,'" *Harper's Magazine* (June 1996): 17–18.

[19] Richard Rorty, "Fraternity Reigns," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1996.

the early twenty-first-century United States?[20] Similarly, and in the same context, gays and lesbians who invoke the notion of "marriage equality," and African Americans who call for reparations in the form of affirmative action and voting protection policies after centuries of slavery and Jim Crow, have been pilloried for seeking "special rights" and "preferential treatment." Allegedly, they promote a species of the very inequalities they claim to deplore.[21]

Many who carry the mantle of "enlightened self-interest" in economics most passionately do so under the banner of human rights. They invoke Jefferson's right to liberty and John Locke's right to property as often and as fervently as they invoke Adam Smith's account of the providence-like character of the free market's "invisible hand." For them, "rights" to a job and living wage interfere with the natural operations of market forces, and interference with markets amounts to redistribution of wealth, which violates more fundamental rights of private property ownership, self-possession, and self-determination. Such redistribution, some allege, is equivalent to forced labor.[22] In short, a context oriented by possessive individualism has assimilated

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[20] This problem persists – and in some contexts is even more severe – in the decade following the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (HR 3590) championed by the Obama administration and passed into law in 2009. As of 2013, twenty-six states (all controlled by Republican legislatures and/or governors) declined to implement the Medicaid expansion permitted under the law. These states contain "about half of the country's population, but about 68 percent of poor, uninsured blacks and single mothers. About 60 percent of the country's uninsured working poor are in those states. Among those excluded are about 435,000 cashiers, 341,000 cooks and 253,000 nurses' aides." Declining the Medicaid expansion sanctioned by the Affordable Care Act denies medical insurance coverage to this population. For background on and explication of these statistics, see Sabrina Tavernise and Robert Gebloff, "Millions of Poor Are Left Uncovered by Health Law," *New York Times*, October 12, 2013.

[21] For a powerful treatment of reparations for racial injustice in the US, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014. On the matter of "marriage equality," see Paul Brewer, *Value War: Public Opinion and the Politics of Gay Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), esp. chap 5.

[22] See, for instance, Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), chaps. 1 and 12; Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 1990), Introduction and chap. 5; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 164–173.

claims on behalf of inviolable rights to the point of conceiving of corporations as persons bearing inalienable rights to free expression and speech.[23]

With the limitations of sociocultural theoretical analysis and appeals to rights in view, Rorty claimed that hope for transforming unjust social conditions lay in the kind of moral progress that enlarges the individual and collective imagination. Such transformation fosters capacities for mutual recognition and empathetic understanding in specific situations. Rorty explained:

[Pragmatists] hope to minimize one difference at a time – the difference between Christians and Muslims in a particular village in Bosnia, the difference between blacks and whites in a particular town in Alabama, the difference between gays and straights in a particular Catholic congregation in Quebec. The hope is to sew such groups together with a thousand little stitches – to invoke a thousand little commonalities between their members, rather than specify one great big one, their common humanity.[24]

With proximate aims like these in view, the task of the moral educator is to deal with concrete social and historical contexts and stories. To a question like "why should I care about the stranger, a foreigner, someone I find disgusting?"[25] moral formation of this kind offers answers best expressed as stories:

The sort of long, sad, sentimental story that begins, "Because this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home among strangers," or "Because she might become your daughter-in-law," or "Because her mother would grieve for her." Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced … the rich, safe, powerful people to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people – people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation.[26]

The motivating insight here is that how one feels about and treats another is powerfully influenced by how one imagines him or her: whether or not one recognizes them at all, and whether they inspire one to respond. Seeing and being moved by "the human face of the other" are necessary

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[23] For helpful discussion, see Stanley Fish, "What Is the First Amendment for?" *New York Times*, February 1, 2010; and Fish, "How the First Amendment Works," *New York Times*, February 8, 2010.

[24] Richard Rorty, "Ethics without Principles," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 72–91.

[25] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, Sentimentality," 184–185.

[26] Ibid.

conditions (though not, I will argue below, sufficient ones) for motivating action, assistance, and protection, and more importantly, for gradually cultivating an intuitive revulsion at certain actions and attitudes.

The broader objective of moral and literary imagination is to gradually shift individual and culturally articulated intuitions and understandings so that recognition of others, empathy for others' suffering, responsive action, and thus change, can occur. Such shifts depend on people's capacities to see and feel differently – to enter imaginatively into relation with the experiences and conditions of someone previously perceived to be radically different, repellent, or simply negligible. Literary imagining thus aims over time to alter "the habit structure of everyday perception."[27] It is important to keep in mind that this is not to propose a fusion of the experiences of different persons, nor to strive to imagine oneself *as* another. Rather, the aim is making oneself vulnerable to, and thus becoming awakened to and affected by, accounts of others' stories and experiences.[28]

Rorty redescribed this point in a late response to Judge Richard Posner's claim that "moral progress" – the evolution of collective moral sentiments over time that expands the perception of "people like us" and deepens the recognition and reprehensibility of the suffering of others – is a fancy of the imagination. He wrote:

Posner has remarked that even Justice Scalia would now adjudge the lash and the stocks to be cruel and unusual punishments, even though they were not so regarded by those who drafted the Eighth Amendment. Most of us, and probably Scalia as well, would agree that this change constitutes moral progress. One can agree with Posner that moral philosophy is of no help in providing the courts with reasons for enjoining the use of the lash. But that is no reason to deny that our judges have, like the rest of us, become better able to tell cruelty when they see it. They do not need to be able to define it … If we adopt [this] account of moral progress we shall think of Martin Luther King, Betty Friedan, and the leaders of the gay rights movement as helping to create, rather than as detecting, a changed environment. They changed it by telling us, single-mindedly and passionately, how human lives were being needlessly damaged by cruel institutions. They incited social hope by proposing programs of action, and by prophesying a better future. These so-called non-rational methods worked.[29]

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[27] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.
[28] For a powerful exploration of such cultivated vulnerability through moral imagination – in dialogue with the work of Elaine Scarry – see Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20–31.
[29] Rorty, "Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress," 924.

This passage reflects "evolving standards of human decency," and forms of cruelty those standards preclude. One finds these further reflected in the gradually dawning recognition of the mercilessness and dehumanizing effects of capital punishment (and, more recently, increased recognition of the dehumanizing and racialized effects of the US criminal justice system and prison-industrial complex generally).[30] Arguably, gradual changes in our shared standards of decency have been prodded in particularly profound ways by the combination of activism and personal and observational testimonies exemplified, for instance, in Sister Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking.* Clearly, Prejean's personal narrative account has had far greater impact than, for instance, her formal debate with Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia over his so-called originalist interpretive approach to both Christian scriptural and constitutional justifications of the death penalty.[31]

Still, appeals to sentimentality, empathetic understanding, and moral imagination have come under intense scrutiny in recent years. Many claim that such appeals are hopelessly facile – a symptom of moral nihilism. Earlier in his career Rorty specified the anti-metaphysical implications of his account of pragmatism: "When the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is nothing to be said to them of the form, 'There is something within you which you are betraying. Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society which will endure forever, there is something beyond those practices which condemns you.' "[32]

[30] See, for example, Baxter Oliphant, "Support for Death Penalty Lowest in More than Four Decades," Pew Research Center, September 29, 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/29/support-for-death-penalty-lowest-in-more-than-four-decades (accessed December 5, 2016). "Only about half of Americans (49%) now favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder, while 42% oppose it. Support has dropped 7 percentage points since March 2015, from 56%. Public support for capital punishment peaked in the mid-1990s, when eight-in-ten Americans (80% in 1994) favored the death penalty and fewer than two-in-ten were opposed (16%). Opposition to the death penalty is now the highest it has been since 1972."

[31] See Antonin Scalia, "God's Justice and Ours," *First Things* (May 2002): 17–21; and Sister Helen Prejean, *The Death of Innocents* (New York: Vintage, 2006), chap. 3; for a first-person account of the events recounted in *Dead Man Walking*, see Debbie Morris, *Forgiving the Dead Man Walking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

[32] Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy," in *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xlii.

With his movement toward moral imagination, was Rorty suggesting that when the secret police come knocking, and torturers violate the innocent, one should regale them with sad, sentimental stories?

Moral imagination is not a tool for a moment's argument or a particular justification of one's position. It works more gradually, as a means for assembling the kind of audience to whom one would have a real chance of justifying one's view, and even a chance of persuading them to understand, and perhaps find solidarity with, one's perspective. It seeks paths around or through the cognitive defenses and visceral prejudices that often render philosophical arguments intractable. Imaginative discursive exchange might cause others to see things similarly. To do so, it must first open the possibility for a kind of conversion through which one comes to recognize some other person and empathize with their perspective and their story. It is conceivable that such conversion could occur in a moment of sudden awakening, like the tragic protagonist's moment of recognition that Aristotle described in his *Poetics*. Here one might think of the final lines of Sophocles' *Antigone* in which the blind seer Tiresias provokes King Creon to recognize the catastrophe that his *hubris* had wrought upon Thebes.[33]

Clearly, there are structural differences between the *tragic* and the *pathetic* – between poetry designed to inspire recognition and empathy in the audience (the tragic), and sad stories that aim to stir sentimental responses to the sufferings of others (the pathetic). And yet, their formative functions for expanding moral imagination (i.e., their potential *paideic* effects) are comparable, depending on how they are deployed.

In the case of Greek tragedy as Aristotle described it, moments of recognition served to educate the audience through a *paideia* of the tragic. Tragedy did this by evoking acute experiences of pity and fear in audience members. It inspired pity by displaying the protagonist's unanticipated misfortune and the suffering that followed. The misfortune resulted from a blind spot of a character who, though of noble birth, was of "relatively average virtue" – neither especially good or just, nor especially wicked. Tragedy's depiction of such misfortune inspired fear in the audience because the blind spot that precipitated the misfortune could well have

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[33] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, parts 9 and 11; Sophocles, *Antigone*. A comparable moment of recognition is the parable told by the biblical prophet Nathan to open King David's eyes to the malevolence of his infidelity with Bathsheba and of subsequently ordering her husband to certain death. 2 Sam 11–12 (esp. 12: 1–7).

been – could well be – one's own. The arousal of pity and fear thus set the stage for catharsis to clarify and shape those emotions to take virtuous proportions. The result was an education of both emotion and intellect. Repeated practice at responding proportionately would (ostensibly), over time, nurture the capacity to experience those emotions virtuously, and further, to reflect intellectually upon meaning and moral significance of such experiences. "The suggestion here is not that tragedy has the power to move its audience immediately and decisively to a better course of action, but that it can make its audience more inclined to act well, or at least not to act badly," Stephen Salkever argues.[34] On Aristotle's account, the protagonist's moment of recognition, the reversal of fortune from prosperity to affliction, and audience members' experiences of fear and pity, which catharsis would refine to virtuous proportions, are "the greatest things by which tragedy influences the soul."[35]

Recent work in social psychology appears to support Rorty's claim that practices of literary imagining can engender more discerning and expansive empathy for others. Indeed, literary fiction may have features that enable it to do so particularly well. In a range of studies conducted by social psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, practiced readers of literary fiction tended to demonstrate greater emotional intelligence, empathy, understanding, and keener perceptiveness of social

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[34] For a helpful account of this process, see Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 2 (esp. 26–34). Salkever characterizes the formative function in Aristotle's account of tragic poetry quite consistently with my account of Rorty's case of sentimentality in moral imagination: "Tragedy for [Aristotle] involves the arousal of pity and fear and the subsequent direction of those emotions toward a certain class of objects – a focusing of concern rather than direct teaching or admonition. The transformation the audience undergoes resembles the effect of Socratic *elenchos*, which encourages inquiry and gentleness indirectly by removing the ignorance that arises from *pleonexia* [insatiable desire for something that is not rightly one's own] and turning one's anger toward oneself." Stephen Salkever, "Tragedy and the Education of the *Demos:* Aristotle's Response to Plato," in J. Peter Euben, ed., *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 274–304 (here 300–301).

[35] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50a33. For a meticulous treatment of a comparable reading of Aristotle, see Martha Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 261–290 (esp. 273–283).

situations, at least when compared to readers of popular fiction and serious nonfiction.[36] Kidd and Castano suggest that a few important features make the difference. Most basically, they argue, "literary fiction often leaves more to the imagination, encouraging readers to make inferences about characters and be sensitive to emotional nuance and complexity."[37] Experiences and perspectives unfamiliar to readers are liable to be less threatening in imaginative encounters than they would be as immediate, real-world encounters.[38] At the same time, literary fiction has a particular power to "defamiliarize its readers," that is, to "unsettle readers' expectations and challenge their thinking" by evoking feelings in intimate and personal ways. These can afford opportunities for self-reflection and understanding in the face of foreign situations, persons, and experiences, yet without presenting an experience of immediate, real-life confrontation or threat.[39]

Kidd and Castano expand on this account of the power of literary fiction in terms of Roland Barthes's distinction between readerly and writerly texts.[40] Readerly texts promote passive engagement, usually serving the purpose of pure entertainment. Writerly texts, by contrast, require creative participation on the part of the reader as "a writer."[41] Invoking Mikhail Bakhtin, Kidd and Castano point to examples, such as Anton

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[36] David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," *Science*, October 3, 2013.

[37] Pam Belluck, "For Better Social Skills, Scientists Recommend a Little Chekhov," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2013.

[38] Kidd and Castano expand the point: "Just as in real life, the worlds of literary fiction are replete with complicated individuals whose inner lives are rarely easily discerned but warrant exploration. The worlds of fiction, though, pose fewer risks than the real world, and they present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of that engagement. More critically, whereas many of our mundane social experiences may be scripted by convention and informed by stereotypes, those presented in literary fiction often disrupt our expectations. Readers of literary fiction must draw on more flexible interpretive resources to infer the feelings and thoughts of characters." Kidd and Castano, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind."

[39] David Miall and Don Kuiken, "Foregrounding, Defamiliarization, and Affect: Response to Literary Stories," *Poetics* 22 (1994): 389–407.

[40] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

[41] In the "writerly" value and approach, the goal of literary work is to move the reader from being a consumer to a producer of the text. Barthes contrasts the "writerly" with the realist approach of the classical novel. See Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

Chekhov's "The Chameleon" and Wendell Berry's "Nothing Living Lives Alone," of literary fiction that exemplifies "polyphonic" and "writerly" dimensions (one finds other powerful "writerly" examples in such works as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*).[42] They are "writerly" in Barthes's sense in that readers "must contribute their own to a cacophony of voices. The absence of a single authorial perspective prompts readers to enter a vibrant discourse with the author and her characters."[43] Polyphony invites readers to cultivate the skills of simultaneously considering multiple perspectives.[44] On this account, sentimental narratives in literary-fictional mode can evoke – and, over time, build capacity for – forms of empathy and compassion in ways similar to those intended by tragic poetry.

Aristotle's account of tragedy and cathartic *paideia* simply assumes the plausibility of empathizing with the tragic protagonist. But what of cases in which a sense of radical *dissimilarity* frames the encounter between a reader, character, and circumstance? Here, the cultivation of moral imagination most likely must occur as a gradual progression, an education of sentiments through persuasion and incremental adjustments, until sympathy reaches the critical mass that is necessary to effect change at both an individual and cultural level.[45] At this point, Rorty's case for moral

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[42] For helpful exposition, see Madhu Benoit, "Circular Time: A Study of Narrative Techniques in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," *World Literature Written in English* 38, no. 1 (2008): 98–106.

[43] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Kidd and Castano, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," 1. Kidd and Castano adduced pieces from Chekhov, Berry, Don DeLillo, and Lydia Davis in their studies as instances of texts that are "writerly" and "polyphonic" (contrasted with nonfiction texts such as "How the Potato Changed the World," and "Bamboo Steps Up," and readerly popular fiction such as *The Sins of the Mother* by Danielle Steel and *Cross Roads* by W. Paul Young).

[44] See Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). For full details of the various readings used in the study, and detailed account of its implementation, see David Comer Kidd and Emmanuel Castano, "Supplementary Materials for Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," *Science Express*, October 3, 2013.

[45] Lynn Hunt has argued at length, for example, that exercises of the literary imagination (e.g., reading accounts of torture and epistolary novels) inspired new individual empathetic experiences throughout the eighteenth-century United States. These novels prompted readers to identify with, for instance, vulnerable women characters who had to fight to retain their agency and uncompromised integrity in response to various types of domestic oppression that they

imagination as engine of moral progress runs up against one of its most formidable objections.

The Difficulties of Imagining Other Persons

Literary theorist Elaine Scarry argues that the primary deficiencies of appeals to moral sentiment and imagination do not lie in their refusal of metaphysical foundations or self-evident common human essence. Their deficiencies are far more mundane. Even in the most practiced and empathetic imaginings, the stranger remains a stranger. He or she remains the stranger *as imagined by me*. And I, the imaginer, understand the needs, desires, and identities of this imagined other inevitably in reference to my own. Scarry calls the result a "perceptual disability."[46] Imagining other people easily becomes gratuitous. Even when our sincere intention is to act altruistically, we risk making the "imagined other" a reflection of our own image, desires, wants, needs, and hopes. "The human capacity to injure other people has always been much greater than its ability to imagine other people." Scarry continues:

Or perhaps we should say, the human capacity to injure other people is very great precisely because our capacity to imagine other people is very small … Our injuring of others results from our failure to know them; and conversely, our

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faced. Once these imaginative experiences were encountered broadly enough in literary form, they facilitated the development and emergence of new political concepts – namely, human rights. See Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: Norton and Company, 2007), 32–34. One finds another example of the widespread social impact of empathy-inspiring literary imagining (though nonfictional) in the ways that school teachers throughout Germany widely assigned *The Diary of Anne Frank* to their students in the decades following World War II. They also required pupils to attend the book's even more broadly influential stage adaptations. On the popular reception, educational uses, and widespread impact of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in post–World War II Germany, see Edna Nahshon's essay "Anne Frank from Page to Stage," in Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler, eds., *Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), esp. 82–85. Rorty himself points to first-person narratives such as Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Paul Monette's *Becoming a Man* as exemplary therapeutic interventions for students who enter their education with racist and homophobic dispositions intact, however tacit or un-reflected upon those dispositions may be. Rorty, "Universality and Truth," 19–23.

46 Elaine Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," in Eugene Weiner, ed., *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 40–62 (here 43).

injuring of persons, even persons within arm's reach, itself demonstrates their unknowability. For if they stood visible to us, the infliction of that injury would be impossible.[47]

If the feebleness of one's imaginings inhibits "truly knowing" even those in one's immediate environment, then the difficulties of imagining those far removed are compounded several times over. Here we have in mind vast numbers of a distant population or group. The sheer size of the numbers stifles the imagination. Consider the 12 million undocumented immigrants estimated to reside in the United States today; as many as 117,000 Iraqi civilian deaths from violence in the years between the US-led invasion in 2003 and official US withdrawal at the end of 2011;[48] or the estimated 70 million people who would suffer and die should the US launch one of its nuclear missiles.[49] Numbers so vast quickly lose any sense of meaning. With that vanishes "the density of personhood."[50] The result is an invitation to become, in effect, "empty of ethical worry."[51]

Despite Scarry's strong case against moral imagination, are there not examples where literary inspiration from novel reading and theatregoing has broadly altered people's ability to recognize others? Scarry, herself, points to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the second-best-selling book of the nineteenth-century US (after the Bible). This novel

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[47] Ibid., 45, 43–44.
[48] www.iraqbodycount.org.
[49] Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," 45.
[50] Ibid., 47.
[51] Ibid., 44. Recent psychological research bears out Scarry's contention. Paul Slovic illustrates the point as follows: "American writer Annie Dillard cleverly demonstrates the limitation of our affective system as she seeks to help us understand the humanity of the Chinese nation: 'There are 1,198,500,000 people alive now in China. To get a *feel* for what this *means*, simply take yourself – in all your singularity, importance, complexity, and love – and multiply by 1,198,500,000. See? Nothing to it.' We quickly recognize that Dillard is joking when she asserts 'nothing to it.' We know, as she does, that we are incapable of *feeling* the humanity behind the number 1,198,500,000. The circuitry in our brain is not up to this task. This same incapacity is echoed by Nobel Prize winning biochemist Albert Szent Gyorgi as he struggles to comprehend the possible consequences of nuclear war: 'I am deeply moved if I see one man suffering and would risk my life for him. Then I talk impersonally about the possible pulverization of our big cities, with a hundred million dead. I am unable to multiply one man's suffering by a hundred million.'" Paul Slovic, "'If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act': Psychic Numbing and Genocide," *Judgment and Decision Making* 2, no. 2 (April 2007): 79–95 (here 86), quoting Annie Dillard, *For the Time Being* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 47, italics added.

profoundly altered the nation's popular imagination, and slowly changed their widely shared normative attitudes. It "made blacks – the weight, solidity, injurability of their personhood – imaginable to the white population in the pre-Civil War United States."[52] And in fact, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an example on which Scarry and Rorty find important, if fleeting, agreement. It will thus be instructive to explore how far their agreement extends, and for what reasons their arguments finally diverge.

Uncle Tom's Cabin presents an instance of literary imagination that provoked moral outrage and spurred imaginative expansion among people already committed to the abolition of slavery. Perhaps more astonishingly, it also confronted many well-intentioned but noncommittal white people across the antebellum US, stretching the capacity of their moral imagination. It inspired the development of capacities to perceive black slaves in ways that enabled reconceptualizing their suffering as relatable and even overpowering. The novel did this despite many readers' entrenched predispositions to find the people it portrayed repellent and their experiences negligible. The sentimental impact of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gradually instilled "new habits of moral perception" with respect to the "human representability" of black people in America at that time.[53]

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[52] Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," 49.

[53] See Philip Fisher's treatment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in "Making a Thing Into a Man: The Sentimental Novel and Slavery," *Hard Facts*, chap. 2. Literary theorist Jane Tompkins identifies Stowe's novel as an exemplary instance of what she calls the "sentimental novel." In the nineteenth-century US, certain novels of this genre aimed to execute a "political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory," that "both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time." The first American novel to sell more than a million copies in the US (having sold a million copies in Britain, and two million worldwide, within a year of appearing in monograph form), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is "the *Summa Theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity, a brilliant redaction of the culture's favorite story about itself – the story of salvation through motherly love. Out of the ideological materials at their disposal, the sentimental novelists elaborated a myth that gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture; and of these efforts *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the most dazzling exemplar." Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 126. The most comprehensive (if, at points, overstated) case for the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on awakening and expanding the social, political, and moral sensibilities of mid-nineteenth-century Americans – and aiding in motivating many to action – is David Reynolds's, *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle*

Scarry insists that the reframing of oppositional relations that moral imagination allows – the way it helps us imaginatively reconceive "others" – will not be binding in any meaningful way unless grounded in legal and constitutional stipulations. "If the U.S. Constitution lacked the Reconstruction Amendments (prohibiting servitude; ensuring due process across race and religion; prohibiting racial restrictions on voting) no daily rereading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by the United States population … could in [itself] have the smallest healing power."[54] In other words, for appeals to the cultivation of sentiment and imagination to be effective, one must back them up by enforceable legal provisions. Moreover, she insists, to ground the derivation of laws in moral sentiment and imagination is surely to inscribe them in the very forms of partiality and prejudice that the expansion of moral imagination aims to overcome.

Scarry proposes the practice of *dis-imagining* as an alternative. Unlike imagining others, *dis-imagining oneself* can facilitate "statistical compassion" – compassion for the masses of distant, nameless, faceless others. This is a task for which literary imagination and sentimental education are inadequate. Dis-imagining oneself can be accomplished only by placing oneself behind a veil. The point is not to make one's knowledge of others as weighty and robust as one's knowledge of oneself, but to "make one ignorant about oneself, and therefore as weightless as all the others." Here Scarry aims to overcome the limitations of moral sentiments and imagination by applying John Rawls's "veil of ignorance" articulated in *A Theory of Justice.*[55]

Rawls famously argued that by taking up "the original position" – temporarily imagining oneself ignorant of one's "physical, genetic, psychological, and even moral attributes"[56] – one can make impartial decisions about matters of basic justice, without consideration for the particular role, status, history, relationships, or conception of the good that one has in the projected social framework.[57] Building on this thought

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for *America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011). In the chapter that follows, I take up Jane Smiley's more succinct account of Stowe's novel, "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's 'Masterpiece,'" *Harper's Magazine* (January 1996): 61–67.

[54] Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," 50.

[55] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 136–141.

[56] Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," 51.

[57] In the original position, "no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural

experiment, Scarry argues that making oneself "featureless" is the surest way to promote conditions of equality. This becomes possible, she writes,

> not by giving the millions of other people an imaginative weight equal to one's own – a staggering mental labor – but by the much more efficient opposite strategy, the strategy of simply erasing for a moment one's own dense array of attributes. By becoming featureless, by having a weightlessness, a two-dimensionality, a dryness every bit as "impoverished" as the imagined other, the condition of equality is achieved. One subtraction therefore has the same effect as a hundred thousand additions. Through it we create what Rawls describes as "the symmetry of everyone's relations to each other" … The only trait encouraged is psychological and moral "tolerance" of high levels of difference.[58]

The veil of ignorance has faced significant scrutiny from friendly and critical readers alike since Rawls published his monumental *A Theory of Justice*. As critics point out, any effort to dis-imagine oneself and one's situation – in which the parties are rational and mutually disinterested – actually presupposes a fairly specific conception of the self. This kind of self is able to stand back at a distance from its prejudices, biases, and deepest commitments and memories in order to impartially bracket them. In effect, the most essential constitutive feature of this self – the one that any such self would still display after dissolving all its particular contingent features behind the veil of ignorance – is rational choice. Though allegedly generic, such a self is, in fact, historically quite specific, though it purports to assume a view from nowhere.

The "self behind the veil" is *unencumbered*. Its core beliefs, commitments, relationships, memories, and history are ultimately optional. They constitute the self no more than the clothes that its possessor might put on and take off as need or desire dictates.[59] Such a position, of course, denies the intrinsic moral relevance of desire, passion, sympathy, compassion, and caring. Categorized as nonrational, they must be set aside by the "rational

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assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture it has been able to achieve. The persons in the original position have no information as to which generation they belong." Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 137.

[58] Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," 52.

[59] See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 149.

chooser" deliberating behind the veil. It brackets from the start the possibility – indeed, the necessity – of distinguishing good desires, passions, and needs from bad, and of acquiring the skills needed to make such distinctions.[60] It jettisons the question of what particular persons actually care most deeply about as the basis – the source of reasons – for how he or she ought to live, and what he or she ought to do.[61]

Recent psychological research appears to vindicate Scarry's claim about how large, anonymous numbers undermine individuals' capacity to imagine others as like themselves. Paul Slovic draws together a vast psychological literature indicating "diminished sensitivity to a wide range of perceptual and cognitive entities … as their underlying magnitudes increase," a phenomenon also known as "psychological numbing."[62] Yet sorting through this literature leads him to a conclusion opposite to Scarry's. The literature suggests that feelings are still indispensable for inspiring rational reflection, action, and even the formation and application of legal provisions. Clearly, these work together in complex ways. But it is the power of *affect* that fires the rational reflection that might then move particular people to act. Slovic defines *affect* as "the positive and negative feelings that combine with reasoned analysis to guide our judgments, decisions, and actions."[63] For purposes of eliciting compassion, "the identified individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer."[64]

For example, countless thousands of incidents throughout the 1950s in which white bus drivers and riders deprived African Americans of their bus seats did little to capture the popular imagination and challenge the Jim Crow laws that justified such oppression. But one strategically organized and executed, widely publicized incident involving a particular African American woman – Rosa Parks – helped to spark the Montgomery bus boycott, capture Americans' imagination for generations, and inspire enduring legal and cultural change. Numerous studies

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[60] Iris Marion Young, *The Ideal of Impartiality and the Civic Public* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 62–63.

[61] See, for example, Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 16–24.

[62] Slovic, "If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act," 79–95; on "psychological numbing," see David Fetherstonhaugh, et al., "Insensitivity to the Value of Human Life: A Study of Psychophysical Numbing," *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* 14 (1997): 283–300.

[63] Slovic, "If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act," 80.

[64] Ibid., 86.

have come to refer to this power of "the identified individual victim, with a face and a name" as the "identifiable victim effect."[65]

Slovic's case ties together the insights that Rorty and Scarry put forward. But Rorty's is the more basic. The *affect* spurred by imaginative encounters is both indispensable and fundamental to motivating compassion. Slovic argues, "Underlying the role of affect in the experiential system is the importance of images, to which positive or negative feelings become attached. Images in this system include not only visual images, important as these may be, but words, sounds, smells, memories, and products of our imagination."[66] In other words, sad, sentimental stories about particular persons and situations prove far more compelling than statistical reports on genocides and mass violence.

Of course, even if an appeal to moral imagination does not founder due to the weaknesses Scarry points out, it may prove deficient for more banal reasons. As we saw, Rorty's objective in appealing to moral imagination is to articulate a conception of justice that is oriented by "the expansion of the circle of beings who count as 'us.'"[67] His primary means of accomplishing this is to cultivate students who are "nice," "tolerant," and "nonexclusionary" regarding what other people do in their private lives, and thus to build on what is best about modern, liberal-democratic culture. He explains:

> If, like many of us, you teach students who have been brought up in the shadow of the Holocaust, brought up believing that prejudice against racial or religious groups is a terrible thing, it is not very hard to convert them to standard liberal views about abortion, gay rights, and the like. You may even get them to stop eating animals. All you have to do is to convince them that all the arguments on the other side appeal to 'morally irrelevant' considerations. You do this by manipulating their sentiments in such a way that they imagine themselves in the shoes of the despised and oppressed. Such students are already so nice that they are eager to define their identity in nonexclusionary terms. The only people such students find any trouble being nice to are the ones they consider irrational – the religious fundamentalists, the smirking rapist, or the swaggering skinhead. Producing generations of nice, tolerant, well-off, secure, other-respecting students of this sort in all parts of the world is just what is needed – indeed all that is needed – to achieve the Enlightenment utopia. The more youngsters like these we can raise, the stronger and more global our human rights culture will become.[68]

Being nice, as Rorty describes it in this passage, is not a virtue. And, in fact, the etiquette associated with "being nice" can mask substantial

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[65] Ibid., 88.
[66] Ibid., 82–83.
[67] Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, 45n3.
[68] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," 179.

viciousness toward others. It can even encourage indifference to the challenges of relating to people one perceives to be threateningly different. When it comes to cultivating the dispositions and relationships that might enable opponents to redirect their conflict constructively, I doubt that the kind of tolerance that Rorty recommends in the above passage can provide the curative elixir that he claims it can. His vision of an "Enlightenment utopia" – a society in which "tolerance for other people's fantasies and choices is instinctive and habitual" – as the objective of pursuing peace and justice has proven woefully deficient.[69] The ideal inhabitant of such a society is inoffensive for the sake of being tolerant and tolerable in public, civil, or political matters. In cases where conflict analysis and imaginative reframing – both indispensable to conflict transformation – prove difficult, Rorty's self-ascribed postmodernist bourgeois liberalism and its campaigns for "letting a thousand flowers bloom" may themselves prove lacking in imagination.

Left unqualified, Rorty's proposal lacks the gravity to succeed in situations where the intractability of conflict makes appeals to mutual tolerance and coexistence unlikely or ineffective. His approach overlooks how deep and persistent are the commitments, and how ingrained the dispositions, that fuel violent conflict. Rorty does not address how agonistic even democratic political conflict can be. Nor does he broach the possibility that the very commitments that motivate conflict, if reframed or reimagined, might become resources for redirecting that conflict constructively. In turn, he does not acknowledge that just as the virtues of moral imagination, if properly cultivated, open a world of possibilities for transforming conflict, so do ill-formed imaginative habits perpetuate vices, reinforcing tendencies to dehumanize and demonize "others." Donald Shriver captures the depth of the challenge:

Our century is littered with the outrages of dehumanization. Those whom we would kill, we first make subhuman. It is a war strategy of vast destructive power. From Auschwitz to Coventry to Dresden to Hiroshima to Phnom Penh to Sarajevo to Soweto to Kigali to Pristina, we have accumulated precedents of mass murder, usually preceded by some synonym for "subhuman" pasted over the image of enemies. We can call this phenomenon "beastly," but that is an unjustified insult to the beasts. To be sure, it takes training to peer through a dark lens long enough to begin to see one's neighbors as essentially inferior to oneself. Harder for most of us, perhaps, is training in the habit of seeing the worst of neighbors as still human like ourselves. To adopt the latter habit is to acquire

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[69] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 25–26.

empathy for the "repulsive," a habit quite different from either sympathy or excuse … To empathize is to discover the common humanity that links victims to their perpetrators.[70]

This passage identifies the heart of the difficulty. The tendency to dehumanize others becomes deeply inscribed in cultural understandings, even in the personalities and practices through which we engage the world around us. Is there a way of conceiving moral imagination as an ethical practice aimed at the formation – or perhaps the reformation – of good habits and skills of imagination, what we might call virtues of the moral imagination? What would be required in order to take the rigors of moral imagination with sufficient gravity? In the chapter that follows, I develop this possibility. I take up in detail the case on which Rorty and Scarry initially agree – the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After its initial impact, social and literary critics (James Baldwin, perhaps most influentially) came to decry Stowe's classic text as a failure of moral imagination, especially as it pertains to race in America. In the last half-century, however, feminist scholars and activists have retrieved the text and critically challenged that assessment. The encounter between these readings creates an instructive and generative tension. In the chapter that follows I offer a reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in light of this debate. I demonstrate how Stowe's text displays both the limitations and the power of moral imagination to illuminate structural and cultural forms of violence, and to inspire transformational responses. What ensues is an object lesson in what cultivating moral imagination as a virtue must look like.

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[70] Donald Shriver, "Is Justice Served by Forgiveness?" in Nigel Biggar, ed., *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 25–44 (here 38).

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Turning the Searchlight Inward

Cultivating the Virtues of Moral Imagination

"Transcending violence is forged by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination," writes Mennonite peacebuilder John Paul Lederach in his book, *The Moral Imagination*:

Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.[1]

Granted, it is no easy task to recognize the inescapability of the "web of relationships" in which we are caught up, to reframe what appear to be unavoidably oppositional structures, and to learn how to use these networks of relationships to conscript the elements of conflict for the purposes of constructive change. In many cases, simply recognizing the existence of a relationship presupposes the arduous challenge of learning to recognize as fellow humans some group of people that one may be inclined to despise. In the pages that follow, I offer an account of moral imagination reconceived as a virtue.

Acknowledging the power of prejudices illuminates two pressing challenges. On one hand is the challenge of identifying the entrenched behaviors and tacit understandings that may evade even intentional introspection. These can fuel conflict or impede efforts to recognize others as one's fellows. On the other hand is the challenge of recognizing the urgency of forming relationships with those with whom we are caught

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[1] Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 5.

up in "patterns of violence that are still present."[2] This involves learning to see others in their full weight and solidity, even when the ways that these people appear or live – their features, habits, manners, and mores – stir visceral revulsion owing to one's own parochial, culturally inscribed prejudices. Learning the skills of recognition through the cultivation of moral imagination entails the critical task of reflexive *self*-recognition, for it is through such encounters that one's own prejudices and limitations come to light. Here one is confronted with questions like, "Why is it that I respond this way when I encounter these people and practices?" and "How is it that people of this sort appear to me as exotic, or threatening, or negligible, and what insight do these perceptions offer into who I am?"

Reframed as a virtue, the moral practice of imagining others pursues a mean between vices that lie on either side. On one side is the temptation to the kind of affective engagement that lapses into voyeurism.[3] To

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[2] Ibid., 61–62.

[3] This is what the Jewish philosopher Gillian Rose has called "the sentimentality of the ultimate predator." Rose, for instance, addresses grave risks of moral imagination and sentimentality in her philosophical examination of Steven Spielberg's epochal film *Schindler's List* as a particularly influential representation of Holocaust atrocities. It is characteristic of a latter twentieth-century cultural industry that both capitalizes upon and perpetuates what she calls "holocaust piety" – a disposition to posit this atrocity as so extreme as to be, ultimately, unrepresentable, and thus something impossible to engage in a discursive way. "To argue for … non-representability is to mystify something we dare not understand, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human." To recognize that anyone might be implicated is to recognize that one's own humanity is continuous with the humanity of persons who commit atrocious acts. It is to refuse to protect oneself by partitioning some perpetrators off as "monsters," and thus as wholly other from what one might be capable of doing. This imaginative capacity is not only pivotal for recognizing that, under very different circumstances, one might be responsible for the kinds of acts perpetrated by, for instance, war criminals. It is also, as I will argue in the final section of the book, crucial for recognizing oneself as likely implicated in, and perhaps a beneficiary of, forms of violence that are inscribed in social structures and systems, and cultural support of those structures and systems. For her engagement with *Schindler*, see Gillian Rose's *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43–47. For more recent work in religious ethics that explores in greater depth each of these forms of affective and imaginative viciousness and what is required by a virtuous dispositional understanding of self-critical affectivity, see Diana Fritz Cates, "Experiential Narratives of Rape and Torture," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38, vol. 1 (March 2010), 43–66.

succumb to this temptation results in insulating oneself from the conflict and atrocity one encounters. A voyeuristic encounter permits the viewer's or reader's *self-absolution* from potentially identifying with, or recognizing oneself as complicit in, some variation of the evils or suffering portrayed. Thus it can enlist one's sentiments for any possible cause or condition. Consider, for instance, the affective responses inspired by Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a reform-spurring observational account and photo essay of squalid life in the Bowery tenements and sweatshops of New York City's Lower East Side at the turn of the twentieth century. One might also think of the impact of John Steinbeck's saga of tenant farmers' struggle to survive in the Depression-era Dust Bowl in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), or perhaps Harper Lee's gentle exposition of racial inequality and gender roles in the mid-twentieth-century American South in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Compare these with the libertarian activism-inspiring portrait of the Nietzschean individual overcoming the shackles of altruism in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). The voyeuristic imagination treats the difference between these as purely a matter of personal preference.[4]

At the other side stands the temptation to introspection and self-reflexivity – "turning the searchlight inward" – to play into the hands of a culture in which the self-cultivation associated with the virtues has been absorbed by a therapeutic culture of self-help. A society saturated with shallow and distracted emotionalism risks heralding as empathetic understanding for others what is, in fact, titillating self-absorption. Here the potential power of moral imagination is co-opted by industries of mass culture.

Along these lines, Elaine Scarry gestures toward William James's criticisms of what he called "the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer" – someone "who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a … concrete deed." Scarry points specifically to James's claim that "the habit of excessive novel-reading and theatre-going will produce true monsters." As James explains: "[The audience member at the theatre weeping] over the fictitious personages in the play, while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside, is the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale." James continues, "But

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[4] This is a shopping mall approach to value preference evocatively diagnosed by James C. Edwards as "normal nihilism" in his book *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1997), 46–54.

every one of us in his measure, whenever, after glowing for an abstractly formulated Good, he practically ignores some actual case, among the squalid 'other particulars' of which that same Good lurks disguised, treads straight on [this path]."[5] Taken on its own, this characterization appears to substantiate Scarry's claim about the deficiencies of moral imagination: that it leads to "perceptual disability" that ultimately empties the imaginer of ethical worry. Yet the full context of the passage from James actually provides resources by which we might incorporate the key insights of Shriver and Lederach in a way that enriches the pragmatist sensibilities of moral imagining I have described above.

Specifically, James is concerned with what he calls "the relaxing effect" of titillating sentimentalism upon the formation of moral character. This "relaxing effect" takes root when one mistakes an affective experience as an end in itself, rather than as a moment bound up in a process in which intentional, responsive action follows upon the heels of experience. It means failing to take action, even after one's sentiment or imagination has been evoked. According to James, it is perpetuated by sedentary, spectatorial, unresponsive habits that form, over time, when promptings of empathetic perceptions are followed by inaction. "One becomes filled with emotions which habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up," James writes. The remedy he proposes is action: "The remedy would be, never to suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert [at the theatre, or in engagement with some literary imagining], without expressing [that emotion] afterwards in some active way."[6] In other words, James's cure for an empty and degenerative sentimentalism is not an appeal to abstract principle. It lies, rather, in responding to sentiment with concrete, particular action, and over time, the cultivation of responsive habit. In fact, he goes so far as to say "Let the expression [action] be the least thing in the world – speaking genially to one's grandmother, or giving up one's seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers – but let it not fail to take place."[7]

It is crucial for James that action be the instinctive response to sentiment. He understands the complex interaction of sentiment and action to be central to shaping character and moral personhood. To respond actively to some sentimental appeal is to participate actively in the

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[5] William James, *Psychology: A Briefer Course*, in *William James: Writings 1878–1899* (New York: The Library of America, 1992), 148–149.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

processes that shape one's character, personality, and identity. Doing so keeps one's character flexible and capable of appropriate response in situations that call forth such responses. This dynamic, James argues, must determine the education of moral sentiments and formation of moral character. The cultivation of sentiments for the purposes of moral education must be followed by concrete action that is reinforced through practice. This habit makes it possible to subvert the gratuitous emotivism to which appeals to imagining other persons empathetically are prone. For James, habitually acting in response to affective experience is an imperative step in disciplining those experiences. It compels concrete engagement with those others with whom one is caught up in webs of relationships, as one realizes through practices of moral imagination.

At this point, however, a second concern arises for cultivating the moral imagination: Will any old action do, so long as it follows concretely upon the moral imagining? James may sound like he suggests as much in certain passages. But it is crucial to note that, for him, the aim is not to cultivate the bourgeois tendency to tolerantly refrain from judgment and to be nonexclusionary. Rather, James is concerned with cultivating habits that encompass the intellect *and* the moral sensibilities. These habits are essential precisely because it is possible to manipulate moral sentiments and imaginations in any number of directions. As Stowe's narrator cautions readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as they witness Lucy discover that her ten-month-old child was taken from her and sold while she was asleep: "[The slave trader's] heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought … You can get used to such things, too, my friend."[8]

Likewise, the approach to character formation that James advocates requires that agents develop the skills of critical self-reflection and

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[8] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Tale of Life among the Lowly* (Ingram, Cooke, & Co., 1852). "'Lucy,' said the trader, 'your child's gone; you may as well know it first as last. You see, I kno'd you couldn't take him down south; and I got a chance to sell him to a first-rate family, that'll raise him better than you can.' The trader had arrived at that stage of Christian and political perfection which has been recommended by some preachers and politicians of the north, lately, in which he had completely overcome every humane weakness and prejudice. His heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought, with proper effort and cultivation. The wild look of anguish and utter despair that the woman cast on him might have disturbed one less practiced; but he was used to it. He had seen that same look hundreds of times. You can get used to such things, too, my friend; and it is the great object of recent efforts to make our whole northern community used to them, for the glory of the Union" (101).

judgment, followed by action, that are necessary to increasing their ability to imagine and experientially empathize with others. The imaginative encounter is self-involving in the sense that the imaginer is implicated as a participant in the engagement (and its outcome) just as much as the other persons imaginatively present. The question "How should I respond?" is the presenting face of a much deeper and abiding moral question. For each time one asks, "What should I do?" one simultaneously asks, "Who and what am I becoming?" Each encounter bears upon the character, disposition, and identity of the imaginer.[9] There is no moral imagining or response that can be unaccompanied by the question, "Where do I stand in relation to the people and situations I imagine, encounter, and respond to?" The practice of moral imagination is inescapably relational, participatory, and because of this, self-involving. Practiced virtuously, the imaginer recognizes himself or herself as caught up in a relational web together with even those one may instinctively incline to feel revulsion for, those for whom it seems unthinkable to feel empathy.

Moral imagination – and the practices of reading and reflective response which characterize its literary modes – thus become practices of "soulcraft."[10] They become practices by which it is possible to reconceptualize and reframe human relationships that appear to be inevitably oppositional and riven by conflict. Deciding which course of action to pursue calls for further reflection on the affective and visceral responses that inspired one's reaction to an imaginative encounter, as well as the implications of the course of action itself. In other words, critical reflexivity about one's affective responses becomes key for cultivating moral imagining and for transforming the elements of conflict. The inescapability of relationality ethically orients the imaginative enterprise. There is no "doing unto others," or refusing to do unto others, that does not simultaneously implicate one in doing unto oneself.

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[9] The point was central for James, and he formulated it starkly: "The physiological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state … Every smallest stroke of virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar." William James, *Habit* (New York: Henry Holt, 1914), 150.

[10] I borrow this term and its relation to slow and inspired reading from recent work by Cornel West.

Even so, Scarry offers a formidable basis for pessimism about the possibility of adequately grasping the suffering of others through literary imagining. While she does not portray imagination and constitutionalism as mutually exclusive, her allowance of the impact of imagination as cultural work that is both powerful and necessary remains as minimal as her appeal to the power of constitution-making from behind Rawls's veil is vast. Her quick turn to "dis-imagining" oneself behind the "veil of ignorance" is itself an "imaginative act" that purports to therapeutically incorporate all perspectives in an instant. As such, it neglects the painstaking cultural work of challenging and altering people's habits of perception and understanding, cultivating capacities for empathy, adjusting normative attitudes by which one might recognize relational connections and spur action.[11] Might literary, moral imagining be reconceptualized to overcome the weaknesses to which Scarry points?

First, Scarry makes a crucial point. To be sure, the kind of formal legal provisions that she advocates are indispensable. Legal and political institutions are indispensable counterparts to democratic practices of mutual recognition and reciprocal accountability, and solidarity through engaged and empathetic imagining. At the same time, the hardness of legal facts (institutions, statutes, and series of legal precedents), once they have been established, frequently promote collective forgetting about the difficulty and extensiveness of the cultural work upon which those legal changes were predicated. Laws neither articulate nor apply themselves, and the addition of a few new laws to a society's law books is no guarantee of social and political change. In the present case, legal changes aim, in effect, to alter the boundary that purports to stand between a "person" and a "thing" (as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did imaginatively and through moral suasion). They aim to bring about this realignment in everyday life and interpersonal experience. Any such efforts cannot depend on legal and military efforts alone. Just as much, they will require extensive cultural work, as did the abolition of US chattel slavery. Only in hindsight does the transformation by which a piece of property comes to be recognized as a person to whom his or her former "owner" is now morally and legally accountable as his or her equal appear to be as easy as changing a

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[11] Here, again, my description of the extensive cultural work necessary to realize substantive changes in law and constitutional provisions (e.g., the emergence of human rights) echoes the accounts set forth by Hunt, Rorty, and Fisher.

few legal statutes. Here Philip Fisher countervails the gravitational pull of Scarry's argument:

The moral and perceptual change that alone could make effective a formal change had to be done by means of moral and perceptual practice, which includes repetition and even memorization. Where culture installs new habits and moral perceptions, such as the recognition that a child is a person, a black is a person, it accomplishes, as a last step, the forgetting of its own strenuous work so that what are newly learned habits are only remembered as facts.[12]

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a particularly instructive case in this regard. This is not only because of the role it played in consolidating the abolitionist movement. More importantly, it is because it massively expanded that movement by eliciting support from readers previously unaligned with, or indifferent to, abolitionism. It accomplished this feat through its imaginative and sentimental construction of the suffering and pain of black slaves as acute and relatable human pain and suffering, and further, by illuminating the complicity of average, well-intentioned white people in slave institutions and slavery-normalizing practices. Stowe's text came to be co-opted for purposes of minstrelsy. It was dismissed by critics and activists as sentimental propaganda for nearly a century. However, in the 1970s and 1980s feminist theorists and scholars of African American studies retrieved and reconceived *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an exemplar of how literary encounters could spur empathetic imagining in readers – in effect, to spark the kind of soulcraft I described above – to transformative political effect. Interestingly, on these later readings, the novel worked precisely because its sentimentalism and effort to convince its readers accompanied elements of social analysis.

"Halfway Between Sermon and Social Theory"

"*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a great book, not because it is a great novel, but because it is a great revival sermon, aimed directly at the conversion of its hearers," Ann Douglas argued influentially.[13] Stowe crafted her book from abolitionist tracts and newspapers, from firsthand narratives by blacks who had been slaves (e.g., The Life of Josiah Henson), and her encounters and interviews in Cinncinati and Brunswick, Maine with fugitive slaves who were escaping along the underground railroad (e.g., John

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[12] Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 4.
[13] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), 245.

Andrew Jackson), some of whom she harbored. She set out to fire the imaginations and stir empathy among noncommittal Northern whites who previously found it either unthinkable or trifling to imagine the lives and sufferings of black slaves. The novel sparked the moral imagination of fellow writers, social critics, and activists, becoming especially inspirational for Frederick Douglass, whose abolitionist newspaper reviewed and discussed it on numerous occasions. It also influenced literary and intellectual luminaries such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Henry James, and George Eliot. Perhaps more importantly, it helped consolidate a reform movement by evoking and educating the shared imagination of everyday readers.[14] Arguably, its success in arousing the popular moral imagination of that time through sentimental narrative worked in inverse relation to the "confrontational and abstract" rhetoric of abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison exemplified so-called immediate abolitionism. The searing prophetic criticisms of his approach called for instantaneous renunciation of and repentance for the sins of slavery, and did so largely through relentless moral and theological argument. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by contrast, exerted its influence more subtly and through more accessible means of dissemination. Ronald Walters captures the point quite well when he says:

Over a seven-year span in which passions about slavery dominated American politics and produced atrocious acts of violence, [Stowe] grafted an unpopular message onto a popular literary form and gained a sympathetic hearing from a large audience previously hostile or indifferent to abolitionism. She helped move the controversy over slavery from polemics, legislative debates, and mobs to parlors and to the popular stage … She – in common with authors of ex-slaves' narratives like Frederick Douglass – took abolitionists' abstractions and embodied them in striking characters, dramatic dialogue, and emotionally compelling predicaments.[15]

Stowe's novel asserted its influence through the more gradual suasions of sentimental literary imagining. And yet, to characterize Stowe's novel as exemplifying a reframing enactment *only* because of its sermonic power – its portraiture aimed to pierce the conscience, inspire empathy,

[14] Ronald G. Walters, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and the American Reform Tradition," in Cindy Weinstein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 184–185; see also Andrew Delbanco, "The Impact of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'" *The New York Times*, June 11, 2011.

[15] Walters, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," 188.

and elicit active responses in its audience – is to grasp but a small portion of its force at that time.

   Readers and critics debated the artistic merits and the practical impact of Stowe's novel from the moment it appeared. Contemporary critics and historians continue to wrestle with these dimensions of the work. James Baldwin derided it as "sentimentalist propaganda" that exemplified the trite romanticism of much of nineteenth-century literary culture. He characterized Stowe as "an impassioned pamphleteer."[16] More importantly, Baldwin held up *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example of a form of "protest novel" that purported to dissolve master–slave domination without making any substantial challenge to the underlying culture and social system, or the basic categories of personhood they upheld. It left the established racial stereotypes and categories unquestioned and firmly entrenched. The result, Baldwin declared, was a puerile, cosmetic invocation of a "new society" that actually left the underlying cultural preconceptions and structures of domination – and thus, the sources of black people's sufferings – fully in place.[17] Stowe's novel promoted sentimental do-gooder-ism that sought to persuade white people toward the horrors of slavery at the same time it inspired gratifying pangs of virtue in its white readers for having been willing to titillate themselves with the subject matter in the first place.

   Baldwin's severe admonitions against reform-minded "protest" literature are pertinent even today. And yet, his now canonical review risks too hastily dismissing the full critical scope of Stowe's novel. It overlooks its instructive critical potential. Upon closer inspection, it is possible to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as aiming to illuminate and inspire response to others' suffering through sermonic imaginative expression (a feature that Baldwin despised), *while also* attending to and indicting specific structural and cultural causes of the suffering it portrays. It is the paradoxical restraint – and, in some ways, even suggestiveness – of Stowe's uses of melodrama, interwoven with her highly unconventional uses of domestic settings and devices to place suffering and injustice on display, that have tempted some critics and readers to its overly hasty dismissal.[18]

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[16] James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955).

[17] Ibid., 18.

[18] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., makes this argument at length in a detailed unpacking and interrogation of Baldwin's now canonical criticism. See Henry Louis Gates, "Introduction to *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in Harriet Beecher Stowe, ed., *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2007), xi–xxx.

The sentimental novel is not so much a great revival sermon as a distinctive "political enterprise," as Jane Tompkins argued – an enterprise that stands "halfway between sermon and social theory." As social theory, it analyses the values of its time by placing those values on display. At the same time, like a sermon, it attempts to intervene in, perhaps to alter, those values.[19] It is an imaginative enterprise that seeks to involve its readers in – and inspire active response to – the world it shows them, rather than present the kind of "closed system" that Elaine Scarry takes typical literary representation to be. To grasp the complex intervention that the novel's description poses is to demonstrate how moral imagination might overcome the limitations of Rorty's intentionally bourgeois, and potentially frivolous, account of moral imagination. To avoid the temptations of glibness and inspire real change, literary imagination needs to be supplemented by both self-reflexive socio-theoretical analysis and relationally oriented action.

The necessity of the kind of action William James prescribes points us toward the difference between the imaginative moral power of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and another novel on slavery and race in the United States, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). In a dissent against the prevailing consensus that *Huckleberry Finn* was the literary masterpiece that helped to humanize black people in the imaginations of white Americans, novelist and essayist Jane Smiley highlights several dangers endemic to the attempt at cultivating empathy by enlarging moral imagination. Specifically, she rejects the widely held perception that the relationship that emerges between *Huckleberry Finn's* white, young male protagonist, Huck Finn, and Jim, his runaway slave travel companion, exemplifies the power of the moral imagination to humanize, and come to feel for, those perceived to be intrinsically "other."[20] Smiley counters:

Twain thinks that Huck's affection is a good enough reward for Jim. The sort of meretricious critical reasoning that has raised Huck's paltry good intentions to a "strategy of subversion" (David L. Smith) and a "convincing indictment of slavery" ([T. S.] Eliot) precisely mirrors the same sort of meretricious reasoning that white people use to convince themselves that they are not "racist." If Huck *feels* positive toward Jim, and *loves* him, and thinks of him as a man, then that's enough. He doesn't actually have to act in accordance with his feelings. White Americans always think racism is a feeling, and they reject it or they embrace it.

[19] Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 126.
[20] Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), chap. 4.

To most Americans, it seems more honorable and nicer to reject it, so they do, but they almost invariably fail to understand that how they *feel* means very little to black Americans, who understand racism as a way of structuring American culture, American politics, and the American economy … [*Huck Finn*] sets the terms of the discussion of racism and American history … very low: all you have to do to be a hero is acknowledge that your poor sidekick is human; you don't actually have to act in the interests of his humanity.[21]

Smiley here pinpoints a major potential pitfall of moral imagining. Namely, if moral imagination humanizes by inspiring fellow feeling, even affection, but is not followed by action in the interest of those for whom one feels empathy, then the relationality it engenders remains shallow – little more than "being nice" in refusing racist feelings. This, I argued, is a major limitation of Rorty's account of moral imagination that might be overcome by following James's requirement of practical action and thus repositioning imaginative engagement as a virtue.

And yet, even the recognition of the mutually shared webs of relationship, manifested practically by "acting in the interests of [another's] humanity" is not, in itself, a sufficient response, though the above passage from Smiley might suggest as much at first blush. Certainly, as Smiley intimates, fellow feeling all too easily goes hand in hand with inaction and self-satisfied passivity. Even while acting in what one may genuinely take to be the interest of one's fellows, one can remain oblivious to the ways that the violence one thinks one is opposing, and perhaps has even overcome, may layer itself deeply and inconspicuously into social, political, economic structures, and even into one's own soul. That violence may imbue cultural understandings in which the actor himself or herself is implicated. To act in the interests of "reimagined" others in ways that leave them passive or disempowered – without voice and agency in the decisions and actions that affect them – is merely paternalism masked by self-satisfied benevolence. This is not to invite an easy appeal to abstract dis-imagining and legal enforcement that we witnessed above in Scarry. It is to recognize, rather, that treating only the symptoms of a complex problem leaves its cultural, economic, political, and even spiritual roots in place.

For instance, African Americans confront daily forms of racism that pervasively structure contemporary US society, culture, economy, and politics. To address these manifestations of racism, moral and empathetic imaginings and the actions they motivate must be gauged according to how they cohere with or cut against forms of violence that suffuse social, political, and

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[21] Smiley, "Say It Ain't So, Huck," 61–67 (here 63, 67).

economic structures (i.e., structural violence).[22] Likewise, moral and empathetic imaginings and the actions they inspire must be measured against how they cohere with or cut against religious, ideological, aesthetic, and even scientific conceptual frames that underpin structural violence, making it appear normal, necessary, or altogether invisible (i.e., cultural violence).[23] The cultural diffusion and structural pervasiveness of such violence are precisely what makes the alteration of feelings and perceptions through the cultivation of moral imagination *appear* to be a sufficient antidote for racism. In fact, that remedy remains a merely cosmetic adjustment. Conversely, the self-reflexivity entailed in virtuous moral imaginings – where the imaginer is compelled to reflect critically on the nature, basis, and possible adjustment of his or her visceral and passionate reactions – becomes key to identifying and struggling against one's own complicity in cultural violence.

Smiley contrasts the moral power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with what she identifies as *Huckleberry Finn*'s complicity with racism in its attempt at enacting moral imagination. The power of Stowe's work, she suggests, arises from its sentimental narrative and social analysis of interpersonal relations *in conjunction with* its close attention to the structural and cultural conditions that embed those relations. The domination intrinsic to the master–slave relationship comes in many forms and sometimes subtle, putatively self-justifying varieties. Some of these seek to persuade that they are something other than – something less than – outright domination. In some cases, the domination may be mollified, or vindicated, or shown to be necessary – or perhaps as not domination at all. Whatever the variation, the relational logic of each case is inexorably the same: A relationship of domination presents itself as somehow voluntary or mutually beneficial. Stowe's sentimental narrative, by contrast, places front and center the inescapably tragic – the intrinsically distortive and false – character of "I–it relationships." These are

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[22] I unpack and use the critical peace studies lenses of structural and cultural violence at length in Chapters 7 and 8. For a succinct overview of the concept of structural violence, see Kathleen Maas-Weigert, in Lester Kurtz, ed., "Structural Violence," *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1999), 2004–2011. I provide a genealogy and critical discussion of the emergence of the forms of violence in twentieth-century peace studies in my article "Structural and Cultural Violence in Religion and Peacebuilding," in Atalia Omer, Scott Appleby, David Little, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[23] Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305.

exemplified in relations of whatever variety between anyone who dominates and the one dominated – a relation exemplified above all between slave and slave master. Such a dynamic is especially evident in the plantation owner Simon Legree's sadistic torture of Tom. But it is also present in the well-intentioned sympathies for Tom's plight professed by his previous master, Augustine St. Clare. It further emerges in the character of St. Clare's abolitionist cousin, Miss Ophelia, whose high-minded, principled abolitionist commitments thinly veil her visceral aversion to actual black people.

As Stowe portrays it, a slaveowner "being nice" or showing sympathetic "benevolence" to his or her slave fully participates in, indeed, is rooted in, the radical evil from which such benevolence purports to distinguish itself, and which it intends to combat. "Stowe never forgets the logical end of any relationship in which one person is the subject and the other is the object," Smiley writes. "No matter how the two people feel, or what their intentions are, the logic of the relationship is inherently tragic and traps both parties until the false subject/object relationship is ended. Stowe's most oft-repeated and potent representation of this inexorable logic is the forcible separation of family members, especially of mothers from children."[24] Smiley continues:

Eliza, faced with the sale of her child, Harry, escapes across the breaking ice of the Ohio river. Lucy, whose ten-month-old is sold behind her back, kills herself. Prue, who has been used for breeding, must listen to her last child cry itself to death because her mistress won't let her save it; she falls into alcoholism and thievery and is finally whipped to death. Cassy, prefiguring a choice made by one of the characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, kills her last child so that it won't grow up in slavery. All of these women have been promised something by their owner – love, education, the privilege and joy of raising their children – but, owing to slavery, all of these promises have been broken.[25]

Stowe's novel illuminates how these interpersonal relationships are embedded in the slavery-normalizing culture and political economy of the time. She does so not only through the personas of slaveowners and traders, but also those of Northern politicians who benefit from slavery, and white Christian preachers whose sermons assuage the conscience of those complicit (however distantly) in this horrific, person-destroying institution. In doing so, the narrative sketches a cross-section of the topography of violence, revealing not just the explicit forms this violence takes, but also its implicit structural and cultural forms.

[24] Smiley, "Say It Ain't So, Huck," 65.
[25] Ibid.

Structurally, this cross-section lays bare the economic and political forces that underlie social and political precincts that appear on their face to be untouched by the evils of slavery. Culturally, it exposes the subterranean strategies of normalizing violence – in many cases disguised as benevolence, fellow feeling, good intentions, and religious conceptions and practices – that explicitly justify slavery, soothe the Christian conscience, or camouflage slavery's status as radical moral evil. It was when the novel's action-inspiring imaginative impact was conjoined with its exposition and indictment of sociopolitical and economic structures, and religious cultures of that time, that it initiated critical reflection and opened possibilities for altering those structures and cultures. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided a centerpiece in Stowe's anti-slavery novels that consolidated and refined the central articles of abolitionism since the 1830s, namely,

that slavery is contrary to the principles of the American Revolution and Christianity, that slavery is a sin to be renounced immediately, that all righteous people must come out of corrupt churches and other institutions that uphold slavery, that northerners bear moral responsibility for slavery, that the self-interest of masters provides no protection for slaves, that the essence of slavery is arbitrary power, and that the institution is evil even when the treatment of slaves is humane.[26]

This is no mere humanizing and inspiring feeling for stereotyped black slaves. In effect, this is an exposition of structures, cultures, and spiritual conditions. These complex dimensions make *Uncle Tom's Cabin* an example of how to cultivate the moral imagination while avoiding the perils of cultural critique, abstract principles, and glib sentimentalism.

At the same time, the lesson Stowe's book offered was not merely that the sins of slavery and white supremacy had placed the souls of white folk at risk of peril. Rather, the situation was that they already were so

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[26] Walters, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," 184–185. Carol Lasser characterizes Stowe's novel as a pivotal move beyond what she terms "voyeuristic abolitionism," a rhetorical current of American anti-slavery of the 1830s that paired highly charged and frequently sexually graphic characterizations of Southern slavery with the urgency of immediate abolitionism that was concurrently emerging. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by contrast, captured the moral outrage of "voyeuristic abolitionism," yet managed to do so with a modesty and equilibrium that enabled it to widely infiltrate the parlors of mainstream, white Northern society. See Carol Lasser, "Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 1 (Spring, 2008), 83–114 (esp. 109–110).

imperiled. Indeed, anything short of active resistance to slavery – captured in the story by Quakers working along the Underground Railroad – would amount to some variation of complicity. And nothing less than the very conditions – and, indeed, the salvation – of the souls of white folk was at stake. For Stowe, this meant conversion to true Christianity, that is, a Christianity bent on the abolition of slavery. The broader implication for Stowe's readers (indeed, an implication for today) was that any empathy-inspired and compassion-driven actions to aid in altering the conditions under which black people suffered would have to be accompanied by the inner transformation of white folk as well. Without this, structures, cultures, and spiritual dimensions of white supremacy would remain unchallenged and intact, even if preserved under a new guise. As we will see below, these were the lessons in response to which generations of white Americans contorted her gentle indictment into black face farce.

Conclusion: "The first time as tragedy"

Uncle Tom's Cabin is not without its faults – even grave faults. Stowe essentialized the differences between whites and blacks as innate and racially grounded (whites are unfeeling and religiously dissonant; blacks are naturally affective and religiously musical; intelligence in African American characters tends to be indexed to mixed parentage; Stowe romanticized slavery at some moments in her novel).[27] She wrote little to imagine, or inspire others to imagine, the challenges and opportunities that would be unique to a post-slavery United States – "What happens when freedom comes?"[28] In fact, the novel concludes with the central surviving black characters departing for Liberia, which reflected Stowe's own commitment to black separatism (an unpopular option among abolitionists). In other words, Stowe's intervention by way of moral imagination – powerful as it was – made no attempt to imagine what would be necessary to combat the white supremacist culture still deeply entrenched (and even resurgent) after slavery's abolition. She did not try to envision

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[27] Patricia Turner, "The Troping of Uncle Tom," in *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1994), 69–88; Toni Morrison pinpoints the happiness with which Tom and Chloe's slave children eat their dinner under the table in her powerful Norton Lectures, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[28] Walters, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," 187.

more just futures between newly freed black Americans and former slaveowners that might develop in the aftermath of the horrors to which she exposed her readers. In her mind, the options were either tragic demise (leaving a remnant of blacks in a US freed from slavery but without racial equality), or altogether transcending the milieu (resettling freed slaves in Liberia).[29]

Just as instructive for my purposes, it was through the dramatic sentimentality with which Stowe punctured stagnant sympathies and edified passions that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gradually became captive to a culture of titillation and sentimental self-gratification of the kind William James warns will produce "true monsters." Throughout the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there emerged an industry of "Tom Show" stage plays, musicals, and eventually films and cartoons (typically, loosely adapted). These purveyed consumable sensationalism, vulgar sentimentalism, and stereotypes exemplified in passive and pacifying minstrelsy. Indeed, by the late 1850s, emerging stage productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* characteristically cut out a climax of the story. It is a point at which Tom – certain to be beaten to death for it – refuses nonetheless to divulge the whereabouts of two slave women in hiding, Cassy and Emmeline. His refusal protects them from further sexual abuse by their master and aids their escape from slavery. Refusing to lie, but refusing to betray his fellows, Tom is beaten to death as Stowe's true exemplar of dignity, integrity, and Christ-like love – even to the point of forgiving his tormentors. Tom's forgiveness elicits their conversion as, for Stowe, even sneering overseers are not beyond possibilities of repentance and redemption. Infamously, it was the sanitation of the story by the cultural industry of the day that produced the eventual epithet of "Uncle Tom." This is but a caricature of Stowe's central slave character as a submissive sycophant to whites and a "race betrayer."[30]

[29] This line is argued powerfully by Elizabeth Ammons, "Freeing the Slaves and Banishing the Blacks: Racism, Empire, and Africa in Uncle Tom's Cabin," in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227–244 (esp. 237–244).

[30] Turner, "Tom Was No Uncle Tom," *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*, 72. As historian Wilson J. Moses writes, "It is ironic that the humble heroism of old Uncle Tom has been transmuted into racial treason by the subtle alchemy of social amnesia." See Moses's *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), xii–xiii.

Though Stowe's novel interwove moral imagination with social analysis, its analytical self-reflexivity remained insufficient. The features that made it such a powerful tool for expanding the moral imagination ultimately contributed to its analytical deficiency in interrogating the array of uses to which it could be – and was – put. The novel, and its numerous theatrical, film, and popular adaptations, ultimately became assimilated into the industry of mass entertainment.[31]

In a 1981 retrospective piece, the essayist, novelist, and social critic Ralph Ellison recalled happening upon an advertisement for a Tom Show stage play posted in a little Vermont village in the days before he began composing *Invisible Man* (1952). Ellison's book would become, in its own right, an intervention of moral imagination that laid bare the vulnerability and negligibility of life as a black man amid the white supremacist ethos of the mid-twentieth-century US.[32] Ellison was acutely aware of the minstrelsy to which previously ubiquitous "Tom Shows" had largely reduced Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He was surprised to discover this phenomenon alive and well in post–World War II New England. In it, he found himself confronted by "the tenacity which a nation's moral evasions can take on when given the trappings of racial stereotypes."[33] The Tom Show embodied the cultural assimilation and effective neutralization through stereotype of both the imaginative power and critical moral edges of Stowe's masterpiece. She intended her novel to be – and at the time of its writing, it had been – a gentle yet compelling indictment of a wide range of people's complicities in the evils of slavery, and a call to conversion from those evils. Ellison described his encounter with the stage-play advertisement as a sobering epiphany. It forced him to recognize the ever-present possibility of counter-conversion – "the ease with which [the nation's] deepest experience of tragedy could be converted into black face farce."[34]

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[31] In the 1850s George Aiken and George Howard adapted Stowe's story as a stage play that placed its focus on the white child that Tom saved, Little Eva. They appended the subtitle to their version, "The Death of Eva." By 1879 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was in production by at least forty-nine traveling theater companies across the United States. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*, 76–78.

[32] Ralph Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," in John F. Callahan, ed., *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 471–485 (here 479).

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

The fate of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the exploitation of an (in some ways) exemplary instance of moral imagination – does not merely problematize that work. It also demonstrates how moral imagination can become co-opted for the ends of cultural violence (cultural factors that make structural forms of violence – high inequality, exclusion, humiliation – and even direct, explicit forms of violence "look and feel right, or at least not wrong").[35] To render farcical and parodic a history of moral evil renders its depravity inconspicuous, if not invisible, in the present. It occludes any serious recognition of the myriad ways that present conditions and actors are complicit in that history, as beneficiaries and even perpetuators of its legacy. Ellison's discovery illuminated for him how the past can animate the living present. "Furtive, implacable and tricky, it inspirits both the observer and the scene observed, artifacts, manners and atmosphere, and it speaks even when no one wills to listen."[36] And yet, by Ellison's own admission, his disturbing recognition of a repressed and tragic past invisible in the present was an indispensable step to realizing the potential power of literary work for sparking recognition of the past in the present, and stirring change. Indeed, this recognition led him to believe, in the inspired days of his drafting *Invisible Man*, that a novel "could be fashioned as a raft of hope, perception, and entertainment that might help keep us afloat as we tried to negotiate the snags and whirlpools that mark our nation's vacillating course toward and away from the democratic ideal."[37]

These lines from Ellison capture the power of moral imagination in its literary modes. On his account, a novel might provoke a mode of perception that is not available otherwise. It might activate the capacity to recognize and even come to feel for others whom one is disinclined to perceive as like oneself. Such a novel would awaken hope. This is hope that imaginative and inspired perception might move people in the direction of the democratic ideals of mutual recognition, respect, and reciprocal accountability. Just as importantly, in Ellison's vision, such a novel does not abdicate the task of captivating its readers. In other words, the vessel of the literary imagination is not simply reduced to its moral and political purposes. This point was clear in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and William James's reflections on the formation of moral habit and personality. The

[35] Galtung, "Cultural Violence."
[36] Ellison, "Introduction to Thirthieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," 479.
[37] Ibid., 483.

artist's ability to disarm and engage by way of evocatively captivating readers is not only a means of inspiring the moral imagination. The artist's ability to captivate may also challenge, gradually alter sensibilities, and motivate active, self-reflexive responses of those who engage with it.

Of course, Ellison also recognized that any progress toward the democratic ideal will be vacillating – at moments clearly toward it, at others away from it, a process beset by snags and whirlpools all along. Such a stark reminder raises needed questions about the prospects of moral imagination as an analytical and practical tool for transforming conflict. Are such limitations symptomatic of analyses and accounts that, because insufficiently systemic, end glibly or lack prescriptive depth? Is such a deficiency a problem intrinsic to moral and literary imaginings when they are applied to purposes of conflict transformation and cultivating justice in the face of persistent forms of evil and tragedy? I take up these questions in the following chapter. There I investigate both the indispensability and the limits of socio-analytical critique for democratic social transformation.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that Richard Rorty heralded vocabularies of increasingly wide moral and empathetic imagination as preferable to an emphasis on either rights theory or cultural critique. As we saw, he argued that democratic social transformation is best served by working to ameliorate seemingly intractable conflicts one piece at a time. And he took the cultivation of moral imagination to be central to this work. These processes should occur through the gradual and self-correcting expansion of people recognized as "like us," and the development of capacities to imagine the stories and experiences of those who seem most foreign, "other," or negligible.

William James, we saw, provides further resources for this vision. James wrote of the necessity to combine the sentimental encounter of moral imagination with the rigors of self-reflexive, habit-cultivating action. Cultivating the sort of imagination that leads to James's self-reflexive action takes hard work. Even when it has overcome the "postmodernist bourgeois liberal" inclinations of Rorty's account, such self-reflexive action requires systemic, sustained criticism and reflection that turns the critical gaze back upon one's own assumptions and presuppositions. I argued that cultivation of imagination for moral and therapeutic purposes tends to become complicit in structural and cultural injustices, however inadvertently.

The relational webs illuminated through moral imagination are not neutral. Because they always relate persons and groups in their unique

identities and social positions, webs of relations are simultaneously constellations of power; they are shot through inequalities of privilege, influence, voice, resources, and so forth. And so the moral and empathetic imagination – the practical skills of coming to see others in their full solidity in relation to oneself, and learning to empathize with others virtuously – requires both self- and system-reflexivity. Only then can the moral imagination be sufficiently attuned to, critical of, and responsive to inevitable power dynamics. This insight points to a persistent and controversial question in pragmatist approaches to democratic social transformation: whether the power dynamics of relational webs and the practices of moral imaginations can be effectively supplemented by tools of critique.

Pragmatists of recent years disagree deeply about the possibility of achieving equilibrium between the use of democratic practices and literary modes of social criticism, on one hand, and the use of tools of socio-analytical critique for illuminating, tracking, and resisting systemic injustices, on the other. This contest between moral imagination and socio-theoretical analysis plays out nowhere more acutely than in the dispute it provoked between Rorty and his former student and fellow pragmatist, the social critic and activist Cornel West. In the chapter that follows, I examine this rift among late twentieth-century pragmatist approaches to democratic social transformation. I do so by attending to the possibility that, absent sustained socio-theoretical analysis, moral imagination remains triflingly reformist and glibly optimistic, merely wishful literary thinking that cannot account for tragic social conditions, those forms of injustice and violence that permeate social structures and confound efforts to reform present conditions through moral imagination.

3

To Let Suffering Speak

Love, Justice, and Hope against Hope

In the previous chapters, I argued that – despite its potential drawbacks – moral imagination offers resources by which apparently intractable conflicts born of rigid identity oppositions might be challenged, reframed, and altered. I began with Richard Rorty's account, which serves as a focus for recent debates over the strengths and weaknesses of appeals to moral imagination. Moral imagination, I argued, opens onto a promising vista for conceptualizing conflict, especially in so far as it mediates the abstractness of human rights foundationalism on one hand and the excesses of cultural-theoretical analysis on the other. Rorty's approach foregrounds contextually sensitive accounts of moral progress, claiming that the best hope for extending Enlightenment ideals (of tolerance, equality, justice, and so on) is to disconnect them from their inherited philosophical foundations, and instead embed them in practices of moral imagination. However, I then suggested that, while Rorty's proposal conveys the indispensability of moral imagination, it ultimately fails to recognize the depth and persistence of the conflicts that it aims to conciliate. Without some revision, it contributes little to formulating an approach to healthy conflict amid persistent intolerance driven by religious identities, as well as differentials in power marked by race, class, gender, and sexual identities. In short, Rorty puts too much faith in the adequacy of demystified Enlightenment conceptions of tolerance and conflict. Such faith fails to take the basis, persistence, and intensity of identity-associated oppositions seriously enough. It does not recognize how easily sentimentality can be (and has been) conscripted for purposes of destructive conflict. And it too easily degenerates into a glib appeal to gradual education of sentiments

as the pivotal ingredient of moral imagination and the key to moral progress.

In light of these dangers, I made the case for reconceiving moral imagination as a capacity embedded in a range of complex practices. By means of moral imagination, people deemed irremediably other, or not recognized at all, might come to be repositioned within a shared web of relationality, even in the midst of continuing conflict. But moral imagination must be reconceived as a practice subject to metrics of virtuous and vicious implementation. Further, it requires critical self-reflexivity upon the processes by which moral sentiment and empathetic imaginings become possible, and the results at which they aim.

The reframing enabled by interventions of moral imagination can persuade people and groups who see each other in stark opposition to cultivate the ability to imagine themselves in relation to each other. They may come to see and feel differently once they have empathetically imagined the experiences of those against whom they set themselves. This may not (and I will argue that it does not) simply eliminate the oppositions out of which conflict emerges and may persist. Nonetheless, such moral imagination remains a powerful tool by which someone considered "an enemy to be destroyed" can be reframed as an adversary with whom one must struggle – reconceived, that is, as an adversary deserving respect, someone to be cared for and empathized with, even while contested. This kind of adversarial respect sees the adversary as someone with whom I am caught up in a relationship of reciprocal accountability. Like those I count as "of my own kind," this adversary deserves respect, and thus, though still an adversary, ought to be protected from arbitrary forms of treatment and domination. Most importantly on this account, empathy and imagination are key to avoiding what is perhaps the greatest poison of all to relationality: the temptation to demonize and scapegoat one's opponents, positioning them as intrinsically evil and beyond the possibility of constructive engagement (i.e., as no more than an enemy to be destroyed or dominated). When the moral imagination is enacted virtuously, it first makes evident the web of relationships in which one is caught up together with others. It then provokes recognition of the necessity – and perhaps the eventual willingness – to actively engage with those others.

At the same time, acts of empathetic imagination remain susceptible to well-intentioned complicity in the very evils they intend to fight. Without sustained attention to forms of violence embedded in social and political structures, and cultural understandings and perceptions, even the best

attempt at acting on behalf of a newly empathized-with "other" may subvert itself, or simply be co-opted by cultural trends that inconspicuously manifest forms of violence it aims to combat.

Can moral imagination – sentimentality and the forms of engagement it might inspire – ever suffice for transforming intransigent conflicts? To answer this question requires probing the limits of American pragmatist accounts of democratic social transformation. These limits became evident when pragmatist thinkers and activists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries complained that American pragmatism had tended to aim at reform-oriented social criticism and action, and remained incapable of dealing adequately with severe social and political evils and systemic injustices. This criticism led to a rift that takes multiple forms. It has unfolded most acutely, and instructively, in the intellectual grappling between thinkers who fall roughly on opposite sides of the debate. The first side espouses the kinds of reform-minded social hope and gradualist moral progress we encountered in Richard Rorty's account of moral imagination in the previous chapter. On the other side stands a pragmatist approach to democratic social transformation that is much more relentless in its attunement to, and interrogation of, injustices and systemic evils that pervade social systems. The latter approach trains its attention upon the structural conditions that permit some citizens to wield power over others in arbitrary and unaccountable ways. This pragmatist approach has been most visibly articulated by social critic and public intellectual Cornel West.

This chapter begins by scrutinizing this debate. How this disagreement unfolds – and whether or not its oppositions can be mediated – sheds light on whether pragmatism can sufficiently address conflict and oppositions of identity that are embedded in structural and cultural forms of violence. I begin by outlining the key points of contention between Rorty and West in order to then elucidate the most distinctive features of West's prophetic pragmatism. Prophetic pragmatism's most pronounced feature is its hope-driven approach to democratic transformation of injustice and conflict despite persistent and pervasive forms of domination. West characterizes this stance as "hope against hope," or "tragic hope." Second, it distinctively prescribes critical social theory as a necessary tool for diagnosing the catastrophic proportions that some forms of such domination take on. Third, it adopts a "fugitive" approach to democratic practice and resistance as the means of resisting such systemic injustice. After elucidating these features, I then examine the strengths and weaknesses of West's account of democratic social transformation. Specifically,

I probe the potential dangers of conceptualizing democratic action as "fugitive" and democratic revolutionary motion as moments of "utopian interruption." In the final segment of this chapter, and in the chapter that follows, I argue that this prophetic pragmatist approach accounts for the incisiveness of West's increasingly activist interventions in such movements as Occupy Wall Street (2011–2013) and Black Lives Matter (2013–). Attention to the characteristic style of prophetic pragmatism is also necessary for accurately grasping West's fiery and controversial criticisms of the policies of President Barack Obama. In this latter contest we see perhaps most acutely what lies at stake in the differences between moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique in a prophetic pragmatist mode.

Prophetic Pragmatism

Cornel West endorses Richard Rorty's evasion of modern philosophy (i.e., his refusal to search for self-evident foundations for knowledge and moral value). Yet West differs in his vision of what is necessary to attune democratic practices sufficiently to justice and thus about the prospects for transforming the root systems of conflict. Rorty thinks that once he has "demythologized" democratic practices – once he has cut them free from their alleged philosophical foundations – his work is largely done. Participants in democratic conversation will thereby be freed to envision new social possibilities and pursue unbounded self-creation. Promoting the ends of social hope mainly requires jolting one's fellow citizens out of certain inherited conceptions and intellectual habits and imagining new and more expansive ones – "replacing shared knowledge of what is already real with social hope for what might become real."[1]

For West, by contrast, a democratic enterprise demands far more socio-theoretical critique than the kind of hope that Rorty heralds can afford, though some version of hope remains an integral democratic virtue for West. A democratic enterprise, he insists, requires monitoring and challenging systemically inscribed, institutionalized, and culturally pervasive manifestations of refused recognition, domination, and repression. Injustice must be illuminated and resisted through the application of socio-theoretical tools of critique and praxis. Doing so demands more than merely historicizing inherited concepts. For West, the work of tracking systemic injustice takes precedence over nurturing shared hope for

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[1] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 18.

an ever-broader conception of "who we are" or "who counts as one of us." Such an emphasis marks one key way in which West's approach differs from Rorty's, though, as we will see, moral imagination and empathy remain vital for West's prophetic pragmatism. For West, an adequate approach to democratic social transformation must give priority to relentless self-interrogation in contrast to "unbounded self-creation." Even so, the creative potentialities of democratic practices inform West's conception of "tragic hope" as much as they constitute Rorty's account of "social hope."

For West, authentic democracy must be *radical*. It must entail the genuine participation of everyday members of the demos in that body's self-determination, maintenance, and self-creation. Such democracy is "operative only when those who must suffer the consequences have effective control of institutions that yield the consequences, i.e., access to decision-making processes."[2] Protecting the goods that democratic practices make possible requires confronting whatever cultural forces and social and political structures that would prevent any member of the demos from having a meaningful say in the political and social processes to which he or she is subject to. Most frequently, this means fighting forms of marginalization that are predicated upon lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth.

West fruitlessly searches Rorty's vision of social hope, moral imagination, and moral progress for some tool that might help track the operations of power and combat the conditions of exploitation and misery to which everyday people are subject.[3] From West's account of these limitations, and his effort to move beyond them, emerges a distinctive approach to democratic social transformation termed "prophetic pragmatism."[4] Democracy – as prophetic pragmatism understands it – requires grappling with the forms of systemic power that perpetuate the misery of one's fellows. Such forces remain inscribed in the prevailing social practices and institutions of US societies, however democratic they may appear. Because of this shortcoming, socio-theoretical critique plays

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[2] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 213.

[3] "Rorty's neo-pragmatism only kicks the philosophical props out from under liberal bourgeois capitalist societies; it requires no change in our cultural and political practices." West concludes, "What then are the ethical and political consequences of his neopragmatism? On the macrosocietal level, there simply are none." Ibid., 206.

[4] Ibid., 211–235, 269–271.

a central role in any genuine democratic project. Thus, like Rorty, prophetic pragmatism maintains faith in the potential of existing democratic practices to bring about more just political and social arrangements and transform destructive conflict. On the other hand, it claims that a properly situated radical democratic posture must ground its hope for remedying injustice in critical-intellectual capacities to relentlessly and self-reflexively grapple with the injustices and inequalities that inevitably erode those practices. This first requires a deep recognition of the catastrophic conditions under which many of one's fellows live. Prophetic pragmatism thus militates against tendencies to downplay those conditions or even overlook them altogether. What prophetic pragmatism calls for is not merely recognizing the severity of social misery, in contrast to feeling condescension toward, benevolence toward, or stated solidarity with the oppressed. Instead, West calls for "actually having a genuine love and willingness to celebrate with and work alongside those catching hell – with the wretched of the earth."[5] This call contrasts starkly with the conception of "social hope" for ameliorative social change we encountered in the previous chapters, for it demonstrates profound sensitivity to the structural and cultural forms of violence that present powerful obstacles to moral imagination.

Recall my suggestion in Chapter 1 that empathetic moral imagination for the least well-off could be the primary means to combating the greed and selfishness of laissez-faire capitalist society. I made the case that such a strategy, while promising, is ultimately inadequate in terms of its diagnosis and corrective prescriptions. West is inclined to agree: "The catastrophic conditions and circumstances right now, in light of corporate elites and financial oligarchs, with greed running amok, looting billions and billions of dollars, when 21 percent of America's children live in poverty – that's a crime against humanity," he claims. "And people will say so 150 years from now. They'll look back and say 'what were they doing?' in the same way we look back at Thomas Jefferson and say, 'Oh, freedom *and* slavery.' Very human, very hypocritical."[6] For West, tracking

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[5] Cornel West, "Prophetic Religion and the Future of Capitalist Civilization," in Butler, Habermas, Taylor, and West, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 97.

[6] Ibid., 97–98. West cites statistics here from 2010. The statistics on child poverty changed with the gradual recovery from the 2008 economic recession. A more recent Pew Research Center study found that "overall, 20% of children in the U.S., or 14.7 million, lived in poverty in 2013 – down from 22%, or

forms of structural violence such as child poverty is not merely a matter of social analysis. The moral and human dimensions infuse this prophetic endeavor with urgency. West expands the point:

When you have that kind of orientation, you're always full of righteous indignation and holy anger at injustice. There's a sense of urgency, a state of emergency that has been normalized, hidden, and concealed. So you get a little suspicious sometimes of the discourses that easily deodorize the funk that's there, that don't really want to engage the catastrophic, the way in which the U.S. constitution didn't want to talk about the near-genocidal impact on our red brothers and sisters or the slavery of black people and act as if they don't exist.[7]

Note the attentiveness of these lines to the historically immanent and fragile character of moral progress that, as the previous chapter showed, was central to Rorty's account of the emergence of human rights culture, and the important role that moral imagination must play in such emergence. The hypocrisy and injustice of previous eras that appear so self-evident in hindsight – now that they have been corrected by legal provisions and recognition of human and civil rights – almost assuredly find analogies in forms of injustice and hypocrisy about which we and our contemporaries remain oblivious to comfortably.

Thus, a central challenge that prophetic pragmatism takes up is the relentless diagnosis and tracking of the catastrophic realities facing the most vulnerable – realities often invisible to, ignored, denied, or explained away by those in power. In the face of persistently catastrophic conditions, how is it possible to sustain shared hope for moral progress and the pursuit of justice? Responding to this challenge, and

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16.3 million, in 2010. (Poverty in 2013 was defined as living in a household with an annual income below $23,624 for a family of four with two related children.) During this period, the poverty rate declined for Hispanic, white and Asian children. Among black children, however, the rate held steady at about 38%. Black children were almost four times as likely as white or Asian children to be living in poverty in 2013, and significantly more likely than Hispanic children." Eileen Patten and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Black Child Poverty Rate Holds Steady, Even as Other Groups See Declines," Pew Research Center, July 14, 2015, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/14/black-child-poverty-rate-holds-steady-even-as-other-groups-see-declines (accessed July 5, 2016). The Center for Disease Control reports that the nationwide infant mortality rate is 2.4 times higher for African America infants than for white infants. www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/infantmortality.htm (accessed July 28, 2017).

[7] Ibid. This self-characterization is pivotal for understanding West's own intervention in contemporary politics discussed in the final segment of this chapter.

in contrast to what I described above as the glibness of "social hope," prophetic pragmatism invokes the necessity of "tragic hope," or "hope against hope." Tragic hope is "against-the-evidence hope" that democratic practices can countervail social conditions that seem irreversible, odds that appear to be insurmountable, and forms of power that present themselves as inescapable. Such a critical and democratic vision is *radical* in that it takes aims at the roots – the systemic origins of injustice and inequality that are manifest in political and economic structures.

Prophetic pragmatism aims to address head-on the dilemma that emerged from my exposition, in the concluding sections of the previous chapter, of the limitations of literary and moral imaginings for addressing structural racism in the US. It deploys critique of social, political, and cultural practices and institutions with an eye toward revolutionary ideals. This means that it seeks to detect, root out, and overturn forms of domination that infect the status quo. At the same time, it is averse to *normalized* utopian thinking or romanticized understandings of revolution. In other words, prophetic pragmatism fully recognizes that new forms of injustice and domination will manifest once some particular injustice has been fought and perhaps overcome. Prophetic pragmatism's stringent combination of revolutionary impulses and aversion to utopian thinking in its radically democratic stance leads West to take what he calls a "Pascalian wager" on the capacities of ordinary people to participate in the decision-making processes and institutions that guide and regulate their lives. This is a "leap of faith" in that the capacity of "everyday people" to do so is "under-determined by the evidence." It is a leap of "democratic faith" in that it invests itself in the moral and mental abilities to take responsibility for – to have a hand in shaping and determining – the conditions in which they live. In light of catastrophic conditions, and the inevitable failures and fleeting successes of democratic action, transformative action constitutes "utopian interruptions" to the status quo.[8]

At first glance, socio-theoretical critique, which prophetic pragmatism insists on, appears to be merely a necessary supplement to a more basic moral or religious vision. In West's case, it would seem to offer a supplement to the standard versions of the democratic faith proper to pragmatism. On closer inspection, however, prophetic pragmatism's

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[8] Ibid., 99. See also Cornel West, "The Limits of Neo-pragmatism," in *Keeping Faith* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 126–127.

strident emphasis on social theory for democratic social transformation of injustice risks crowding out other critical forms and discursive practices. In particular, it appears to compete with the approach to moral imagination discussed in the previous chapter. This points to a tension within prophetic pragmatism, which aims above all at mustering and upholding democratic faith and the "hope against hope" that grounds radical democratic action and resistance. But is prophetic pragmatism so fixed on the catastrophic that it risks depleting the hope and faith necessary to sustain efforts to transform structural injustices and root systems of conflict? In its insistence on the deficiencies of liberal reformism, does prophetic pragmatism teeter along the brink of terminal pessimism? Does its focus upon oppositional action and utopian social motion override the possibility of incremental institutional reform?

In what follows, I critically examine prophetic pragmatism's conception of democratic practice as "fugitive" – as captured in efforts at "utopian interruption" of the status quo. West's vision of "hope against hope" tends to conceive democratic practice as a *fugitive* within history. For, if one recognizes the ubiquity of vicious inequalities that emerge from ever-shifting, ever-present forms of domination, it is tempting to maintain faith in the efficacy of democratic practice by envisioning *authentic* democratic action as an assortment of radical moments that erupt in political circumstances of domination only to dissipate. Here the currents of democratic transformation of conflict, on one hand, and revolutionary impulses in light of which prophetic pragmatism prescribes systemic critical analysis, on the other, converge in ways that are thorny, perhaps to the point of becoming an impassible thicket.

I demonstrate below that in portraying democracy as "fugitive," prophetic pragmatism may generate a set of theoretical oppositions that unintentionally deplete the resources of democratic faith and hope foundational to transforming conflict toward democratic ends. Ultimately, I argue that such risks are a matter of emphasis in prophetic pragmatism and not a matter of terminal deficiency. Yet much is at stake in these details. In fact, by the end of this chapter I make the case, correctively, that prophetic pragmatism already contains several resources to mitigate the potentially debilitating theoretical excesses in the account of "fugitive democracy," while retaining a robust conception of democratic social transformation of injustice.

The Indispensability of Critique for Reducing Violence, Cultivating Justice, and Transforming Conflict

Prophetic pragmatism unfolds against the backdrop of a distinctively modern form of traditionalism. It rests upon "two pillars of modernity" – the legacies of Athens and Jerusalem. The Athenian pillar stands upon the intellectual heritage of self-examination beginning with Socrates. The Jerusalem pillar is grounded on the prophetic tradition in Judaism and Christianity that goes back to Yahweh's calling of the Hebrew prophets and forward to the witness of Jesus. To participate in a democratic tradition entails grappling with the insufficiencies of the legacy that one has been handed no less than it involves framing one's present struggles and future hopes in light of the best resources that legacy has to offer. From a prophetic pragmatist vantage point, for all the precious and life-sustaining resources that the Socratic and prophetic traditions afford, *both* lack means by which to fight systemic forms of oppression and domination today. As a result, an adequately radical democratic project will be distinctively modern in that, along with its reliance on the Socratic and prophetic legacies, it must also deploy critical tools drawn from the modern tradition of social theory. Such tools are necessary in order to reckon with the past, critically illuminate the present, and self-reflexively envision future possibilities.[9]

Socio-theoretical critique is crucial to radical democracy because of a key deficiency in critical forms drawn from religious or moral traditions. *Moral criticism* draws upon moral or religious traditions to speak on behalf of the most disadvantaged and marginalized, in order to improve wretched social conditions. Yet such ameliorative visions are, however inadvertently, prone to remain implicated in the very dynamics of power they set out to criticize owing to their lack of systemic depth and self-reflexivity. In other words, moral criticism tends to lack sustained interrogation of the root causes of misery and injustice. The systemic causes of conflict and injustice require "demystification" – the kind of analytical explanation that "demystifies" the conditions for the possibility of some object of analysis. Demystification "lays bare the complex ways in which meaning is produced and mobilized for the maintenance of relations of domination."[10] On this basis, it relentlessly tracks the multilayered

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[9] West, "The Limits of Neo-pragmatism," 140.
[10] West, "Theory, Pragmatisms and Politics," in *Keeping Faith*, 90; cf. John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 5, ff.

operations of power. But moral criticism remains inadequate for this complex task.

The Socratic and prophetic legacies frequently reflect the limitations of moral criticism. They typically take up interpersonal facets of social and political relations, though usually at the expense of attending to the structural, cultural, and institutional dimensions of social misery. Thus, for instance, both Jesus and Socrates witnessed slavery without expressing any sense of incongruity with this state of affairs. Each embodied his respective vision of agapic love (Jesus) and the value of human critical intelligence (Socrates) by treating as fully human the slaves with whom they interacted. And yet, neither questioned the institutional structures and cultural understandings that made slavery an accepted norm in their respective contexts.

Furthermore, one liability of the Socratic investment in critical intelligence is that it tends to lack empathy and compassion. "Socrates never cries," West says. "Intellectual self-mastery becomes the 'tyranny of reason' – becomes idolatrous." The chief shortcoming of the prophetic legacy, on the other hand, is a persistent failure to sufficiently grapple with evil, especially in its systemic forms. It was, in fact, Christianity's against-the-evidence hope for eventual triumph over evil that attracted African slaves to it in the United States. Christianity afforded a theodicy that helped black people in the US endure the wretchedness of chattel slavery, the cruelties of Jim Crow America, and various forms of structural racism that reach into the present day, such as the "new Jim Crow."[11] Christianity's capacity to view the world "from below" is what suits it so well as a religion for the oppressed. Yet this vision sometimes emerges as a mode of *ressentiment* or as an opiate (so Nietzsche, Marx, and various liberation theologians have argued). In other words, although Christianity has afforded hope and sustenance to persevere through dehumanizing conditions, it often did so while manifesting a conservative quietism – shunning the revolutionary impulses that are indispensable to radical democratic social transformation. Thus, West argues, to adequately address structural and cultural forms of violence, one must seek insights from modern social theory.[12] In short, the Socratic and the prophetic traditions both stand to be supplemented by socio-theoretical critique.

[11] For exposition of the latter, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

[12] West, "The Limits of Neo-pragmatism," 140.

To consider one example, black liberation theologians scrutinized racism in the United States by employing the theological and biblical means available to them toward liberationist ends. And yet the *socioeconomic* inequalities perpetuating racism in America remained largely invisible to their critical frameworks. As a result, the political programs and social visions advocated by black liberation theologians generally failed to reckon with the complex inter-relations among imperialist domination, sexism, class exploitation, and racism. The economics of black empowerment became synonymous with successful entrance into the American middle class. Such a vision for social improvement "clamors for a bigger piece of the ever-growing American pie, rarely asking fundamental questions such as why it never gets recut more equally or how it gets baked in the first place."[13] This is no small oversight. In the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century US, socioeconomic marginalization and exploitation contribute at least as much to black people's powerlessness as the factor of race itself.

Responding to such challenges, black liberation theologians began, in the later twentieth century, programmatically addressing the late-capitalist roots of the crisis they faced.[14] The "social, media and political power systems" uniquely generated by capitalist economic frameworks devalue the capacities of everyday people to manage their lives as well as their social and political conditions. Capitalist frameworks place the means of production – along with the political and social processes related to those means – exclusively under the control of those who own them. They exclude those actually engaged in producing. Such claims marked important additions to the critical program of black theology as the twentieth century came to a close.

But if black theologians were to pay more than lip service to recognizing systemic forms of power, they needed to root their analysis of "existential issues facing individuals" in a critique of the capitalist society

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[13] Cornel West, "Black Theology and Marxist Thought," in James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One (1966–1979)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979, 1993), 409–424 (here 416).

[14] James Cone, "Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Do We Go From Here?" and "Message to the Church and Community," both presented at the Black Theology Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, 1977. Cone's essay is reprinted under the title "Epilogue: An Interpretation of the Debate among Black Theologians," in Cone and Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One*, 425–440.

of which they were part.[15] Deploying the best insights of "theoretical praxis" from progressive Marxism, their critique needed to issue in political activism aimed at replacing prevailing socioeconomic conditions with more humane, less exploitative arrangements. Such practical possibilities would be enabled by using socio-theoretical tools to "demystify" accounts of savagely unequal distributions of wealth and power. Those tools would explain both how those distributions arose in the first place and how they are sustained and made to appear "normal" or "unavoidable."[16]

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically liberating about tools of socio-theoretical critique. Moreover, the dynamics of power brought to light by socio-theoretical analysis depend on which set of socio-critical tools one employs and the critic who employs them. Every set of critical tools permits certain silences, and the ends to which those tools are put depend on the interests and purposes of the critic in question. There can be no guarantee that such tools will be employed for liberative and democratic purposes.

For these reasons, while it considers socio-theoretical critique essential to remedying injustice, prophetic pragmatism strives for an ad hoc theoretical eclecticism. Guided by solidarity with the oppressed (an interest that, in West's case, is axiomatic to the Christian commitments motivating democratic faith), prophetic pragmatism approaches critique as an improvisational practice in which the purpose at hand determines which tools to use. Thus, remaining vigilant against dogmatism in his Marxist proclivities, West goes on to enumerate several points at which black theology surpasses Marxist analyses owing to its nonreductionist account of religion and culture.[17] Elsewhere he pragmatically deploys a Foucauldian genealogical analysis of the emergence of white supremacy, and the concept of "race" itself, in the contexts of modern scientific and intellectual discourse.[18] He eclectically blends neo-Freudian and post-structuralist theories in order to critique the concept of race.[19] He

[15] Cornel West, "Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilization," in Cone and Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two 1980–1992* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 410–425 (here 416).

[16] Ibid., 416–417.

[17] West, "Black Theology and Marxist Thought," 417; cf. "Race and Social Theory," in *Keeping Faith*, 265–270 (esp. 267).

[18] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-Revolutionary Christianity*, 2nd edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), 47–68.

[19] West, "Race and Social Theory," in *Keeping Faith*, 265–270.

highlights the Weberian dimensions of the political philosopher Sheldon Wolin's analysis of imperialism at the heart of liberal states, and the anti-democratic dynamics inherent in representative democratic forms. At each turn, West's prophetic pragmatism recognizes both the need for theoretical analysis and the fact that any theoretical tool brought to bear on a problem will ultimately suffer from insufficiencies. By this approach, it exemplifies pragmatist sensibilities about the tools of socio-theoretical analysis and critique.

Still, critique plays an essential role in the prophetic pragmatist account of radical democratic social transformation. The centrality of critique to West's account – and in particular, how West sees it as indispensable to overcoming the deficiencies of pragmatist social criticism – raises challenging questions about the character and status of any would-be prophetic social critic. It implies that tools drawn from social theory accomplish ends that other critical forms cannot. Moreover, if radical democracy is predicated on applying the tools of social critique, then it is equally predicated on the skills and expertise of the social critics who wield them. Critique lies in the hands of those with the requisite knowledge of, and the training to use, the necessary socio-theoretical tools. Use of such tools requires immersion in and mastery of various intellectual traditions. All of this presupposes the luxuries of leisure and scholarship. How available are such tools to "the plebs" – the ordinary people for whom radical democracy is supposed to speak?

Prophetic pragmatism is not unreflective on this point. It acknowledges the "high quality skills required to engage in critical practices," as well as "the self-confidence, discipline and perseverance necessary for success without an undue reliance on the mainstream for approval and acceptance" required of any public intellectual who would pursue radically democratic ends.[20] Such a scholar engages in the intellectually enriching culture of the academy while simultaneously striving to participate in organizations, follow developments in the production of culture, and undertake activist interventions for social change outside the academy. Transgressing professionalized boundaries will likely take the form of consciousness-raising initiatives, social movement activism, and pre-party formations. A public intellectual in the prophetic pragmatist tradition may also engage with forms of culture production (connecting with, for example, musicians, artists, and popular performers), given the many ways that cultural forms can alternately obscure and normalize violence

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[20] Ibid., 27.

and injustice, or illuminate, scrutinize, and resist it. Even so, theoretical expertise makes the role of public intellectual particularly vital to radical democratic transformation. "Demystification," West writes, "gives theory a prominent role and the intellectual a political task."[21]

Kept in proper perspective, this account of the political dimensions of public intellectual's vocation, and the integral role that theoretical analysis plays therein, will neither fetishize theoretical means nor aggrandize the intellectual's political function. Antonio Gramsci presents a model of the "organic intellectual" – a politically and socially engaged intellectual who remains attuned to the concrete struggles of ordinary people. "For [Gramsci], the aim of philosophy is not only to become worldly by imposing its elite intellectual views on people, but to become part of a social movement by nourishing and being nourished by the philosophical views of oppressed people themselves for the aims of social change and social meaning."[22] Intellectuals of this sort must refuse to compromise in their exercise of critical intelligence, and in particular of socio-theoretical critique. At the same time, prophetic pragmatism cautions against forcing its conception of social criticism and critical intelligence on others, especially when doing so might undermine potential alliances for social change. Such a delicate balance is surely difficult to strike, and perhaps even more difficult to sustain.

Prophetic pragmatism's account of the organic intellectual initially calls to mind the efforts of classical pragmatists like William James and John Dewey to reorient the intellectual's vocation toward public life, political and social engagement, and practical results. However, West's prescription of social-theoretical critique to track structural and cultural violence diverges significantly from the respective approaches of his pragmatist predecessors. In fact, the insufficiencies that West diagnoses in Rorty's neo-pragmatism turn out to be flaws of early American pragmatist thought generally. Here prophetic pragmatism's own pragmatist commitments double back self-reflexively to critique the pragmatist tradition itself. It finds there a glaringly inadequate awareness of power and its complex operations, due either to lack of recognition of the necessity of social theory, or (as we saw in Rorty's appeal to moral imagination) abiding suspicion of the possible excesses of social theory.[23]

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[21] Ibid., 90.
[22] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 231–232.
[23] West, "The Limits of Neo-pragmatism," 135.

In politics, the pragmatist tradition stresses conversation, participation in civil society, and democratizing forms of education as the primary means of identifying and addressing forms of structural and cultural violence rooted in race, gender, and ethnicity. While prophetic pragmatism agrees that education is critical, it doubts its capacity to cut deeply enough. It doubts that democratic education is capable of overcoming the reluctance of so many privileged Americans to strive for racial justice, to overturn structural and cultural forms of violence on the basis of which they enjoy considerable – if often invisible – social privilege.[24]

Historically, West argues, classical pragmatist thinkers have been inadequately attuned to the plight of the oppressed in so far as they have neglected how thoroughly the dynamics of oppression suffuse social structures, institutions, and cultural understandings. Similarly, the diagnoses of many recent pragmatists fall short in so far as they fail to deploy tools of socio-theoretical critique in service of their democratic faith, or to maintain self-reflexivity about their own criticisms, interests, and purposes.[25] Thus, their criticisms fail to locate the root causes and systemic manifestations of social misery, political disenfranchisement, and injustice. In short, the kind of critical reformism exemplified by pragmatists like Dewey and Rorty remains deficient without Marxist analysis, or some comparable social-theoretical lens,[26] as the task at hand requires.

The Limits of Critique

As we saw in the previous chapter, Rorty remains deeply skeptical about the sort of radical critique West levels against standard pragmatist approaches to democratic social transformation. In Rorty's view, democratically minded citizens can find the resources they need for reform in James and Dewey, and the romance and imagination for democratic innovation and transformation in Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. Contemporary Americans can find a model for transformative grappling with tragic social realities – rooted in an understanding of evil as being

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[24] Ibid., 137; see also West's response to Scott Pratt, "Race, Education, and Democracy," in Bill E. Lawson and Donald F. Koch, eds., *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 188–202, 225–230 (esp. 226–227).

[25] West, "The Limits of Neo-pragmatism," 140.

[26] E.g., Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, W. E. B. Du Bois, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and so on.

of this world and, therefore, finally traversable – in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

Rorty resists the impulse to marry prophetic and imaginative impulses with philosophical or theoretical accounts. He genuinely believes that sustained engagement in the reformist possibilities afforded by a constitutional democratic framework can amend past deficiencies and decrease human suffering. Literary inspiration, moral imagination, and education of empathetic sentimentality are sufficient, he suggests, to cultivate in citizens the desire to imagine themselves in others' shoes, and most poignantly, the shoes of the despised and oppressed.[27] Sisterly and brotherly love – cultivated by way of stories and literary interventions – is more likely to accomplish the creation of more just social and political arrangements than socio-analytic critique. Rorty writes:

Whitman's image of democracy was of lovers embracing. Dewey's was of a town meeting. Dewey dwelt on the need to create what the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit has called a decent society, defined as one in which institutions do not humiliate. Whitman's hopes were centered on the creation of what Margalit calls, by contrast, a civilized society, defined as one in which individuals do not humiliate each other – in which tolerance for other people's fantasies and choices is instinctive and habitual. Dewey's principal target was institutionalized selfishness, whereas Whitman's was the socially acceptable sadism which is a consequence of sexual repression, and of the inability to love.[28]

Rorty holds up twentieth-century American writer and social critic James Baldwin as a visionary who, while facing the worst that America had to offer to both blacks and gays, nonetheless mustered hope for a future in which America would root out the shame and violence of its past and its present. Baldwin wrote of fellow Americans as lovers as well. "If we – and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others – do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world."[29]

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[27] See Chapter 1.

[28] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 25–26.

[29] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell, 1988; orig. pub. 1963), 98. Rorty borrows the title of his book from Baldwin. See Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 12. Some argue that Baldwin's later work is most characterized by rage and an increasing suspicion of hope for the future of America. Eddie Glaude argues, compellingly in my view, that Baldwin successfully mediated rage and hope for a more genuinely democratic and loving future even at the

For mutual self-creation and expansion of solidarity, of which Baldwin wrote, to become possible requires avoiding the forms of self-loathing to which excessive uses of social theory are prone.[30] Some theoretical postures tend to breed resentment. Under certain theoretical presuppositions, such as the utter inescapability of domination, critique often condemns conditions or institutions as irremediably depraved. The seductiveness of much theoretical analysis lies in its promise to "cut to the roots." Some theorists take this to invest their armchair (or academic seminar room) deliberations with instant political implications. Yet the real fruit of such enchantment with theory is often spectatorial contempt.[31] This makes the very idea of hope for democratic transformation appear self-deluded. It leads intellectuals "to step back from their country and, as they say, 'theorize' it. It leads them to … give cultural politics preference over real politics, and to mock the very idea that democratic institutions might once again be made to serve social justice."[32] Such critical theorists come to see the United States of America "as something we must hope will be replaced, as soon as possible, by something utterly different." Moreover, many of them contrast themselves with not only defenders of the status quo, but with other social critics who hold out hope for reform-minded responses to contemporary ills. Reform-minded critics allegedly operate under the delusion that conditions are not as bad as they seem. These would-be reformers, the critical theorists maintain, are insufficiently

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end of his career. "To be an Afro-American, or an American black, is to be in the situation, intolerably exaggerated, of all those who have ever found themselves part of a civilization which they could in no wise honorably defend – which they were compelled, indeed, endlessly to attack and condemn – and who yet spoke out of the most passionate love, hoping to make the kingdom new, to make it honorable and worthy of life." Glaude cites these lines from Baldwin's *No Name in the Street* as counter to Henry Louis Gates's argument in "The Welcome Table," in Gerald Early, ed., *Lure and Loathing: Twenty Black Intellectuals Address W. E. B. Du Bois's Dilemma of the Double-Consciousness of African Americans* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 101–102. For Glaude's exposition of Baldwin, see *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1–16.

[30] Richard Rorty, "The Professor and the Prophet," *Transition* 52 (1991): 72.

[31] "[Intellectuals] begin to think of themselves as a saving remnant – as the happy few who have the insight to see through nationalist rhetoric to the ghastly reality of contemporary America," Rorty writes. "But this insight does not move them to formulate a legislative program, to join a political movement, or to share in a national hope." Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 7–8.

[32] Ibid., 36.

radical, however withering their diagnoses may be. As a result, "radical criticism" comes to mean "the more severe the criticism, the better." Against such rhetorical postures, Rorty seeks to salvage the hope and modest sense of self-worth that must nourish any project of societal transformation.

My point is not to beat an "anti-theory drum" over some alleged theory–practice dichotomy implicit in pragmatism. Theory is not essentially resentful, nor need one wield a theory in order to settle into a resentful posture. Social theories can serve edifying, inspirational, and creative ends.[33] As I argued in the final pages of Chapter 2, socio-theoretical analysis provides a crucial enhancement to moral imagination. The danger is that critique can blind intellectuals to possibilities of actual change that moral and literary imagination envisions and perhaps inspires.[34] At issue, then, is the tendency of academics and what remains of the American Left to fixate exclusively on socio-theoretical analysis. In other words, my central concern is less with theoretical roots than with pragmatic fruits. Once analysts have rendered a verdict – when it comes time to ask "so what?" and "what next?" – what prospects for constructive change does socio-theoretical analysis envision and help accomplish? If critique enables us to imagine new possibilities and see in new ways, illuminates possible modes of action, inspires hope amid savage realities, then so much the better. We must still ask why it is not preferable to speak of the ideals of social democracy and economic justice, rather than in the terms of socio-theoretical critique and power analysis. Why, that is, should we not prefer the more familiar word when it will do? When, by contrast, socio-analytical explanation results in paralyzing self-contempt, spectatorial resentment, or an enclave mentality predicated upon categorical denunciation of conditions beyond repair or immune from even piecemeal improvement, then the primary problem is a destructive apocalypticism.[35]

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[33] See, for instance, Rorty's ringing endorsement of Gianni Vattimo's claim that "commonsense Heideggerianism" is just what democracy needs. Richard Rorty, "Foreword" to Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), ix–xx. I address this point at length below.

[34] Thus, with West in mind Rorty concedes that, occasionally, socio-theoretical critique has served as "a helpful auxiliary of romance. But just as often it has served to blind the intellectuals to the new possibilities that romantics and prophets have envisioned." Rorty, "The Professor and the Prophet," 78.

[35] Perhaps it results in the type of Romanticist escapism that kept Martin Heidegger in the provinces among a romanticized Black Forest peasantry. Perhaps it results in the terminal pessimism at the heart of the critical theorist Herbert

Whatever its guise, Rorty warned, "hopelessness has become fashionable on the Left, principled, theorized, philosophical hopelessness."[36]

To be fair, prophetic pragmatism is multidimensional and self-reflexive in its call for critique.[37] Its orienting concern to fight for justice for the least well-off enables it to avoid theoretical resentment and paralysis.[38] The point at issue, then, is not whether prophetic pragmatism's impulse for critique can coexist with its democratic commitments, but whether or not the pragmatist can wield his or her theoretical tools of critique in ways that avoid undermining his or her radical democratic bearings. This may be more difficult than it initially sounds. Given that prophetic pragmatism allots such a central role to power analysis – construed primarily in terms of socio-theoretical critique – and the theoretical frameworks that so fit that subject matter, how can it elude the specters of despair, self-loathing, and spectatorial contempt? Critics who exhibit the

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Marcuse's claim that technocratic domination had so assimilated the critical possibilities in the context in which he wrote that meaningful conflict was impossible. Or, for that matter, Marcuse's later optimism that meaningful intervention could come only from marginal groups outside the administered system, untainted by the pervasive conditions he diagnosed. See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), 253–257; for criticisms, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 70–82, 99–106; and the important contextualization and redirection of MacIntyre's criticisms by Jeffrey Stout in *Democracy and Tradition*, chap. 5; see Heidegger, "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces? (1934)" in Manfred Stassen, ed., *Philosophical and Political Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 16–18.

[36] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 37.

[37] Indeed, Rorty does not have West directly in mind in the foregoing cautions and criticism. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, Rorty aims these criticisms specifically at the Heideggerean pessimism evident in the "post-humanism" inspired by Michel Foucault, among others. He aims, as well, at dyed-in-the-wool Marxists who play up the distinction between "bourgeois reformers" and those convinced that capitalism must be defeated. "Because [the Foucauldians] regard liberal reformist initiatives as symptoms of a discredited liberal 'humanism,' they have little interest in designing new social experiments," he writes. (Ibid.)

[38] In fact, in a candid aside, Rorty plays down West's retrieval of Marxist analytical lenses. West, he wrote, is one among a few for whom "'Marxism' signals hardly more than an awareness that the rich are still ripping off the poor, bribing the politicians, and having almost everything their own way." Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 46; cf. "The Professor and the Prophet," 76–77.

tendencies Rorty decries may hear the diatribes of the prophetic pragmatist and ask, "What prevents you from being as radical as we are?"[39]

In the face of such difficulties, West places a Pascalian wager on the capacities of the "everyday people." But not all readers are inclined to make such a wager. Might not certain theoretical excesses leave some vulnerable to the temptations that bedevil theoretical critique? At stake in this question is nothing less than the grounds for hope for the kind of democratic social transformation that gives those affected by policies, laws, and institutions some direct and meaningful say in the political processes that inform their everyday existence.

We must also ask how often citizen-driven, grassroots movements have explicitly employed the tools of socio-theoretical critique. Such tools are not evident in the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement, the abolitionists' struggle against slavery, or Abraham Lincoln's moral and political opposition to slavery. Yet these are among the most important instances of democratic resistance and social criticism in US history. Moreover, each was pivotal in realizing an architectonic shift in the structure of American society – eliminating chattel slavery, upending the most conspicuous manifestations of Jim Crow, and securing civil rights for people of color. Can these thinkers and movements pass muster with radical social theorists? If they fail to do so, what hope can there be that an average citizen will – without, that is, relying on the expertise of those who wield socio-critical tools? Does West's prescription of specifically socio-theoretical critique wrest the radically democratic movement from the very people upon whose agency it predicates itself?

West will respond that such questions presuppose a vulgar leveling, homogenizing, or romanticizing of the citizenry. He might claim that they dismiss as specialist and elitist what are, in fact, *vocational* distinctions among its members. Different citizens have different aptitudes and talents, and thus may feel called to fill different roles in serving the common good of the demos. One such role happens to be that of the organic intellectual. In so far as she strives toward that ideal, she will seek to remain grounded in the particulars of concrete situations rather than abstractly removed from them.

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[39] One finds West positioned along these lines in Romand Coles, "Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess: A Review of Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (April 2005): 301–321; for Stout's rejoinder see "The Spirit of Democracy and the Rhetoric of Excess," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35, no. 1 (2007): 3–21.

West's response bears important insights. Given that fellow citizens have different vocations, to claim that a democratic project demands that the people be in some sense "the same" – or that excellence is a form of anti-democratic elitism – would clearly be false. It would also caricature the democratic ideals of prophetic pragmatism, and in particular, its conception of democracy as a range of historically extended, socially embodied practices that admit to varying degrees of proficiency and excellence. Democratic citizenship admits numerous variations.

Might it be possible, nonetheless, to differentiate among vocations and virtues without designating any one of them as more essential than the others to a radically democratic project? And even if certain vocations are more central to democracy *radically* understood, need a similar prioritization hold for the particular forms of critique that facilitate that democratic project? In other words, can we be certain that the tradition of social theory achieves critical ends that no other critical tradition can? Moreover, if radical democratic criticism depends upon traditions of social theory and historical sociology that must be executed by the prophetic critic, is it possible for other parts of the demos to track evil and systemic oppression through its workaday discursive practices?

Mere moral criticism – as we have seen – falls short because systemic domination often pervades the presuppositions of the critical practices themselves. Prophetic pragmatism's vision of radical democracy suggests that if the demos observes the operations of evil and power for itself – by way of moral, religious, and observational criticisms – its insights will remain incomplete. Its criticisms and ensuing actions may well ameliorate particular situations. However, they will ultimately remain mired in the deeper abuses of power such criticisms seek to alleviate.

Of course, appealing to open-ended possibilities of reform – poetic, moral, and imaginative resources in contrast to trenchant theoretical analysis – is all too easy when some would-be reformer has not himself or herself had to struggle to survive under the catastrophic, frequently Sisyphean conditions afflicting many poor and working-class people, and people of color. And indeed, as hopeful as Rorty is in the future of American democracy, his paean to Emerson, Whitman, and Dewey in *Achieving Our Country* (1998) and West's *Democracy Matters* (2004) stand on the opposite sides of a fault line that has threatened to sever America's post–September 11 identity from its past – the eruption of a global war on terror, both at home and abroad.

When Rorty admonished the theory-clad, spectatorial intellectual Left in the 1990s for its pessimism, his greatest worries were "suburban

complacency in the face of ever-increasing unemployment and misery," the greed and sluggishness of American voters, and "the grim joke they played on themselves when they elected Reagan and Bush."[40] No one at that time could have had an inkling of the whirlwind that would soon be reaped: a presidential election decided by Supreme Court judicial fiat strictly along party lines and in opposition to the results of the popular vote (*Bush* v. *Gore*, 2000); the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; a war justified to the American people on the basis of mass misinformation about weapons of mass destruction; disregard for civil liberties in the passage of the Patriot Act (by the George W. Bush administration) and its reaffirmation (by the Obama administration); suspension of habeas corpus rights; policies of indefinite detention, extraordinary rendition, and "enhanced interrogation techniques" (i.e., torture) such as waterboarding; warrantless wire-tapping and data-mining programs by the National Security Administration (NSA); a campaign of targeted killings of enemy combatants by unmanned drones; the upsurge of ethno-religious nationalism (i.e., predominantly white and Christian) and rage that propelled candidate Donald J. Trump to the US presidency. These developments have often gone unchallenged owing to a paralyzing dread and anxiety – perpetuated by declarations of state-of-emergency conditions and nationalist, self-protectionist rhetoric and policies – that followed (and persist now) in the wake of the attacks of September 11 and ensuing "global war on terror" (e.g., Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and so forth).

West refers to the production of this existential anxiety in intentionally incendiary terms: as what he calls the "niggerization of America." Pervasive fear of terrorist attacks at home and random violence and animosity toward Americans abroad was shockingly foreign to most white Americans, as was the freedom-constricting securitization that consequently entered many people's daily lives. "Never before have *all* classes, colors, regions, religions, genders, and sexual orientations felt unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated," West writes. "Yet to have been designated a nigger in America for over 350 years has been to feel unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated."[41] America's democratic experiment was predicated upon the enslavement and persistent subjugation of people of a particular race, just as it entailed the genocide of indigenous populations in that land. This is the "ignoble

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[40] Rorty, "The Professor and the Prophet," 76.
[41] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 20.

paradox" at the heart of democracy in the US. It is a hateful irony that inspirits the present in many ways. In the years following 9/11, West pointed to the generalized anxieties, vulnerabilities, and constricted civil liberties experienced by many US citizens for the first time. He used this shared experience to highlight the fact that people of color across the US have been forced to fight against being made vulnerable, marginalized, terrorized – and far worse – as part of their daily realities throughout the history of the country. Only in painfully attending to this blood-stained history of race apartheid, and interrogating its present structural and cultural manifestations, can contemporary Americans hope to resist the temptations of self-protective xenophobia in the wake of 9/11.

Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the city of New Orleans in 2005 brought to light how unaware the larger US public is to the situation West describes. The hurricane – still the deadliest US hurricane in the age of modern meteorology – affected hundreds of thousands of the city's poorest residents, disproportionately people of color, who lacked the resources necessary to avoid the well-anticipated path of the storm. Media portraits and celebrity attention to these events piqued the sympathies of the American public, resulting in an immediate outpouring of bottled water and cash. And yet, very little sustained thinking was devoted to diagnosing the deficiencies of structural arrangements that could allow for a humanitarian disaster of such proportions in the first place.

At the same time, responding to the reality of its own vulnerabilities, the United States proceeded to terrorize enemy combatants and noncombatants in officially and unofficially sanctioned torture hubs: Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq; and Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan stand out as the most notable exemplars.[42] The largely muted outrage and lack of concerted efforts to hold leaders accountable for such human rights violations suggest that many American citizens are content to forfeit their agency to corporations and professional politicians.

For a prophetic pragmatist approach, a central challenge to twenty-first-century America is resisting its free market and militarist imperialist projects while reviving a sense of democratic agency and vigilance. "We live in a propitious yet perilous moment," West writes:

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[42] For extensive recounting of these developments, see Mark Danner, *Torture and the Forever War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Supporting documentation appears in Danner's earlier *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).

It has become fashionable to celebrate the benefits of imperial rule and acceptable to condone the decline of democratic governance. The pervasive climate of opinion and the prevailing culture of consumption make it difficult for us to even imagine the revival of the deep democratizing energies of our past and conceive of making real progress in the fight against imperialism. But we must remember that the basis of democratic leadership is ordinary citizens' desire to take their country back from the hands of corrupted plutocratic and imperial elites. This desire is predicated on an awakening among the populace from the seducing lies and comforting illusions that sedate them and a moral channeling of new political energy that constitutes a formidable threat to the status quo.[43]

Crucially, West tempers the tone of his jeremiad with an occasional nod to the promise implicit in prevailing conditions. Amid his radical analysis of America's imperialist, plutocratic, and oligarchic predicament, which emphasizes the possibility that the world's oldest surviving democratic experiment is failing, West holds out for his audience a slender reed of hope. The way everyday people exercised democratic agency in momentarily "taking back power" from elites in the Occupy Wall Street movement (2011–13), for example, exemplified the prophetic pragmatist vision of radical democracy.

West exemplified such prophetic pragmatism in his work and activism during the years of Barack Obama's presidency, and now into the Trump era. In collaboration with political commentator and talk show host Tavis Smiley, West spearheaded efforts to advocate for everyday people suffering and in poverty. They aimed to raise awareness of the plight of the poor across the US, to place poverty on the national agenda of the 2012 presidential election, and to keep the plight of poor and working people on that agenda long after that election. To do so, Smiley and West led "The Poverty Tour," an eighteen-city bus tour "designed to highlight the plight of America's poor of all races, colors, and creeds."[44] They then co-wrote a book reporting the findings of their tour (*The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto*), and pressed each of these issues repeatedly in their nationally syndicated weekly radio show, *Smiley and West* (2010–2013). West rallied alongside and was arrested with fellow activists during the Occupy Wall Street and the Black Lives Matter movements. In these and many other contexts, West has not merely

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[43] West, *Democracy Matters*, 22–23.
[44] Tavis Smiley and Cornel West, *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto* (Carlsbad, CA: Smiley Books, 2012), 4.

articulated a prophetic pragmatist account of Gramsci's organic intellectual. He has increasingly come to embody it.

Any critical engagement that offers theoretical and ethical evaluation of democratic social transformation without engaging in the forms of activism that flow from a prophetic pragmatist vision would be inadequate. In the sections that follow, I examine West's intervention in the Occupy Wall Street movement and the ways it dovetails with West's prophetic confrontation with the Obama administration. These episodes in West's work as an organic intellectual, social critic, and activist exemplify the prophetic pragmatist vision that I have articulated in the preceding pages. My purpose is not merely to explicate how these activist efforts reflect prophetic pragmatist features. I also critically examine the theoretical background and intellectual resources that fuel West's approach, and how they influence the particular course that it takes. In so doing, I consider the pivotal role that the model of "fugitive democracy" plays for West, and its limitations for countering injustice and transforming destructive conflict. In the final section of this chapter, I ask whether the prophetic dynamism with which West seeks to hold Obama's administration accountable to poor, working, and marginalized peoples has, as some of his critics charge, lost its pragmatist democratic bearings.

Occupy Wall Street as Fugitive Democracy

The economic collapse of 2008 left the financial and housing sectors of the US economy in ruins. Many financial institutions avoided bankruptcy only because the federal government bailed them out. With these events, the already growing chasm between Wall Street investment bankers and financiers and Main Street's everyday citizens expanded wider than ever. Within the following year, the very financial institutions that had been bailed out with taxpayer dollars awarded record levels of bonus pay to many of their executives. Many of these bankers had directly participated in the risky and often fraudulent investment practices that precipitated the collapse of 2008 in the first place.

That the economic collapse occurred largely as the implosion of falsely inflated housing values meant that ordinary homeowners all across the US suddenly found the value of their houses capsized ("under water") – abruptly worth drastically less money than they owed on their mortgages. Among other factors, the industry came to practice high-risk, sub-prime mortgage lending (largely based upon industry-wide practices of soliciting "no income, no asset" borrowing) at adjustable interest rates that would

balloon over time. These practices came to be known as "predatory lending." They produced masses of homeowners who could no longer make their inflating mortgage payments. The result was an epidemic of foreclosures by many of the banks whose reckless practices precipitated the economic crisis in the first place. The economic collapse of 2008 witnessed tens of millions of US citizens lose their homes in this way. It evaporated life- and retirement-savings of working people whose funds had been invested in securities based on the housing market. Millions of citizens who, up to that point, had fallen squarely within the "middle class" by all metrics found themselves struggling to survive financially, and slipping below the poverty line.[45] At the same time, in the wake of the collapse, many of the very banks whose behavior precipitated the economic crisis were "bailed out" by federal government interventions using taxpayer funds. The banks were foreclosing on the houses of people whose taxes had been used to keep them solvent. These circumstances exemplify the catastrophic conditions prophetic pragmatism militates against.[46]

In September 2011, a small group of protestors unrolled their sleeping bags in Zuccotti Park, a tiny, privately owned park in the financial district of lower Manhattan. There they formed an encampment from which they declared that they would "occupy Wall Street." The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement thus began as a group of protestors bent on demonstrating their moral outrage at the lack of accountability of individuals and institutions who precipitated the 2008 global financial crisis. It sought to draw attention to and demonstrate against savagely unequal socioeconomic conditions, in which 1 percent of the US population had come to control 42 percent of the country's wealth. At the same time, more than 15 percent of the population (roughly 50 million people) lived below the poverty line on a long-term basis, according to revised Census results in 2011. In the months that followed, the OWS movement erupted

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[45] It is necessary to note – though, sadly, not surprising – that this catastrophe cut along color lines in savagely disproportional ways. The Pew Research Center documents that "from 2005 to 2009, inflation-adjusted median wealth fell by 66% among Hispanic households and 53% among black households, compared with just 16% among white households." Plunging house values was the primary cause of the decline in household wealth across all groups. See Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry, and Paul Taylor, "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics," *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends*, July 26, 2011: www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics.

[46] Smiley and West, "Portrait of Poverty," *The Rich and the Rest of Us*, chap. 1.

as the encampment in Zuccotti Park was replicated in cities across the United States and even throughout the world.

West found deep solidarity with OWS. He visited the Zuccotti encampment numerous times. He addressed their General Assembly[47] and demonstrated with them. Police arrested him along with many of the OWS activists in protest of the "stop and frisk" tactics of the New York City Police.[48] West saw in OWS just the kind of radically democratic interruption of a savagely unjust status quo that he had spent thirty years advocating and working for.[49] The numerous interviews, sermons, and speeches that he gave on OWS were not simply public appearances. West committed to practical engagement alongside the protesters encamped in the streets. Embodying the Gramscian organic intellectual, his solidarity with OWS took the form of both extemporaneous exposition of the movement and its historical moment, and theoretical critique of the causes and conditions in response to which it erupted.

OWS quickly spread across the US, spawning protests and encampments in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and numerous other locations. And West visited many other Occupy encampments. And yet, as spontaneously as it arose, as wide as it spread, and as powerfully as it captured popular imagination across the United States, the OWS movement retracted and seemingly vanished in 2013.[50] There

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[47] Amy Goodman, "Cornel West on Occupy Wall Street: It's the Makings of a U.S. Autumn Responding to the Arab Spring," *Democracy Now!*, September 29, 2011, www.democracynow.org/2011/9/29/cornel_west_on_occupy_wall_street_its_the_makings_of_a_us_autumn_responding_to_the_arab_spring.

[48] Noah Rosenberg, "Protesters of Police Stop-and-Frisk Practice Are Arrested," *New York Times*, October 21, 2011, http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/protesters-of-police-stop-and-frisk-practice-are-arrested. "Dozens of activists and people who described themselves as victims of stop-and-frisk began their demonstration in front of the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building on 125th Street, on a corner that Dr. West, an organizer of the rally, said had been 'consecrated by giants like Malcolm X.' The group, chanting and holding signs, marched along 125th Street, past the Apollo Theater, to the 28th Police Precinct station house, on Frederick Douglass Boulevard."

[49] Sally Quinn, "Cornel West Keeps the Faith for Occupy Wall Street," *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2011.

[50] Numerous analysts portray this as a process of breaking up and evolving into smaller, more focused, and achievable protest efforts such as campaigns to raise the minimum wage in cities across the US. See, for instance, Michael Levitin, "The Triumph of Occupy Wall Street," *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2015, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/the-triumph-of-occupy-wall-street/395408 (accessed June 21, 2016).

is a powerful sense in which Occupy epitomizes what prophetic pragmatism identifies as the necessarily fugitive character of any genuinely radical democratic effort. To what extent is the ephemeral character of the OWS movement indicative of limitations of prophetic pragmatism? Are these limitations intrinsic to West's reliance upon a fugitive model of social transformation?

Though his socio-critical analyses remain eclectic and pragmatically deployed, West turns to the work of his friend and teacher Sheldon Wolin for a means of critiquing numerous forms of domination. These include US imperialism, the calamitous conditions under which poor and working people generally – and poor people of color especially – suffer even in the wake of the recovery from the "Great Recession," and the apathy of the American citizenry about holding financial, corporate, and government elites accountable. In "fugitive democracy," West finds a model for the radical, participatory democracy exemplified by the Athenian polis. This model is predicated upon a deep critique of modern constitutional and representative political forms – forms often termed "democratic." Yet, as we will see, the "fugitive" dimensions of West's critique sometimes suggest that searching for genuinely democratic practices precludes hope that the institutional arrangements of our current situation can be repaired. Indeed, when West deploys the kind of socio-theoretical analysis most suited to demystifying the imperialism, oligarchy, and plutocracy of the contemporary United States, he approaches a tipping point – a point, I suggest, that presents a case study of how and when critique runs up against its own limits. In this case, it does so by overpowering the democratic faith – even a tragedy-tempered "hope against hope" – that makes possible the very sort of "on the ground" democratic social transformation for which prophetic pragmatism aims.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I examine the conception of democracy as a "fugitive in history." I pay specific attention to the socio-theoretical lens it deploys, and the presuppositions of that lens drawn from Max Weber's account of the state and state power. The categories Wolin employs, I argue, lend themselves to the theoretical excessiveness that Rorty warned against. I argue that prophetic pragmatism is not determined to stand or fall with Wolin's view of fugitive democracy. However, my larger task of developing a model of healthy conflict requires, at this point, finding an equilibrium between moral imagination, so important for transforming conflict, and socio-theoretical critique, crucial for tracking and resisting structural and cultural violence. To this end, I consider

the extent to which West can appropriate the best of Wolin's insights while avoiding the excesses of critique.

Fugitive Democracy, Democratic Faith, and Hope against Hope

Though persuaded of the merits of small-scale democratic communities, Max Weber was deeply pessimistic about the prospects for the survival of democracy in both his native Germany and the United States. In fact, he came to consider authentic democratic practice incompatible with the instrumental rationality that increasingly disenchanted the modern world. Weber attributed this incompatibility to "the unpredictability of the electorate" upon which direct democracy is predicated. The efficiency and uniformity intrinsic to large bureaucratic institutions such as nation-states and corporations stifled the passionate character of plebiscitary democratic practices. "In direct democracies, participation was an end in itself as well as a means, and for that reason efficiency mattered less than maintaining civic virtue," as James Kloppenberg frames Weber's position. "But with a few notable exceptions, such as the Greek and Italian city-states and the Swiss cantons, democratic communities quickly collapsed and frequently, as in Switzerland, the appearance of participation masked the reality of elite domination."[51]

Weber's doubts about the possibility of genuinely democratic practices rested on what he took to be the inescapability of modern forms of power as manifest in large-scale bureaucratic structures. Bureaucratic arrangements minimized the political agency of citizens. They reduced what had been the virtue-engendering participation in politics to momentary, instrumental acts by discrete "voters." As Weber wrote in a 1916 open letter to *Die Frau*, "Only communities which renounce political power are able to provide the soil on which other virtues may flourish, not only the simple, bourgeois virtues of citizenship and true democracy, which has never yet been realized by a *Machtstaat*, but also much more intimate and yet eternal values, including artistic ones."[52] In short, Weber thought that the highly professionalized, political machinations of the modern

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[51] James T. Kloppenberg, "Democracy and Disenchantment: From Weber and Dewey to Habermas and Rorty," in *The Virtues of Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90–91.

[52] Max Weber, "Between Two Laws," in Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, eds., *Weber: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76.

"power state" were intrinsically at odds with small-scale, grass roots, democratic practices through which virtuous citizenship might emerge and flourish.

In the face of modern forms of domination, Sheldon Wolin similarly restricts his definition of democracy to the local and direct action of the people. Constitutional democracy, by contrast – what he occasionally calls "electoral democracy" – is democracy mainly in name. Here, representative structures install elite and privileged bureaucrats: professional politicians who are lobbied by interest groups in the context of a free market run amok, such as our own. Representative structures repress the passionate interests and participation of citizens in the processes of self-government. The passions of the demos become denuded by the efficiency of modern forms of power – instrumentalization, bureaucratic organization, market forces. The capacities of the common citizen for democratic involvement dwindle as the demos loses the desire to speak and act for itself on the basis of its highest ideals, deepest concerns, and existential experiences. The more expansive the bureaucracy, the more likely average citizens are to perceive their direct participation as making no real difference. The result is pervasive discouragement, apathy, and even despair of one's political participation (one's vote) making any difference. On this account, bureaucracies do not merely constrain demotic passions, they inoculate citizens against those passions – an insidious form of domination. "The result of state-centeredness is a politics in which at one extreme are the experts struggling to be scientific and rational while at the other is a politics of mass irrationality, of manipulated images, controlled information, single-issue fanaticism, and pervasive fear."[53] Weber's insights about bureaucracy and modern power saturate these lines. Implicit in them is a theory about the nature of the legitimacy of the state. Wolin writes:

It is no exaggeration to say that one of the, if not the, main projects of ancient constitutional theorists, such as Plato (*The Laws*), Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero, as well as of modern constitutionalists, such as the authors of *The Federalist* and Tocqueville, was to dampen, frustrate, sublimate, and defeat the demotic passions. The main devices were: the rule of law, and especially the idea of a sacrosanct "fundamental law" or constitution, safeguarded from the "gusts of popular passions"; the idea of checks and balances; separation of powers with its attempt to quarantine the "people" by confining its direct representation to one branch of the legislature; the "refining" process of indirect elections; and suffrage

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[53] Sheldon Wolin, *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 149.

restrictions. The aim was not simply to check democracy but to discourage it by making it difficult for those who, historically, had almost no leisure time for politics, to achieve political goals. (Twentieth-century voter registration laws have a long genealogy.)[54]

According to Wolin, in the iron cage of bureaucracy today, authentic democratic possibilities are limited to fleeting, "rebellious moment[s]" that entail "the taking back of one's powers."[55] He grounds the possibility of these moments upon his own democratic faith "that ordinary individuals are capable of creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment":

Individuals who concert their powers for low-income housing, worker ownership of factories, better schools, better health care, safer water, controls over toxic waste disposals, and a thousand other common concerns of ordinary lives are experiencing a democratic moment and contributing to the discovery, care, and tending of a commonality of shared concerns. Without necessarily intending it, they are renewing the political by contesting the forms of unequal power which democratic liberty and equality have made possible.[56]

As this passage indicates, Wolin maintains a robust view of the capacities of the demos; he holds what West would call a democratic faith. Moreover, he inscribes democratic hope into his vision of radical democracy by making memory of past democratic moments the basis for future moments. In so far as democratic moments are possible in Wolin's view, they are not facilitated by constitutionally democratic structures. Rather, they occur primarily *in spite of* these institutional constraints. Institutionalization marks the birth of bureaucracy. Bureaucracies embody the forms of power that stifle authentic democracy. Authentic democracy must remain, in a word, fugitive.[57] "Democracy is a political moment, perhaps the political moment, when the political is remembered

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[54] Sheldon Wolin, "Democracy: Electoral and Athenian," *Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 3 (September 1993): 476.

[55] Ibid., 5; cf. Sheldon Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (August 1981): 415.

[56] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 31–45 (here 58). Wolin offers a book-length expansion on this account in the context of post-9/11 political developments, and further, of the election of Barack Obama under the banner of "change," in *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[57] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 58.

and re-created," Wolin writes. "Democracy is a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions, or may not."[58]

Like Wolin, Weber did not abandon all hope for authentic democracy, properly reconceived. Rather, Weber placed his hope for democracy in modern contexts in charismatic political leadership and small-scale movements – possibilities that he categorically opposed to bureaucratic politics. Weber thought that the more modern political structures and roles repressed the passions of the people, the more those passions would assert themselves unexpectedly – charismatically.[59]

Weber then set himself to answering the difficult questions that arise once one has rendered such a diagnosis and proposed such a solution. How to facilitate the in-breaking of charisma, in the form of leadership or otherwise? How to chisel out space in the midst of modern constitutional structures for some semblance of the political passions? Weber's effort to nurture charisma within bureaucratic structures ("to breathe the life of charisma into modern institutions") finally led him to advocate for Article 48 of Germany's Weimar Constitution – "the emergency article" – which would invest the Reichspräsident with tremendous decision-making powers in times of crisis. David Little describes this article as "the constitutional pretext for rise to power of Adolph Hitler," which occurred only a decade or so after its formulation.[60] Regarding the darker potentialities of charisma, Kloppenberg writes that "Weber was willing to entrust such power to a democratically chosen leader precisely because he feared the numbing effects of bureaucracy more than he doubted the ability of the people to select responsible leaders."[61] In West's terms, Weber had been willing to take his own democratic leap of faith.

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[58] Ibid., 43.

[59] Elsewhere Weber expanded upon these ideas: "In contrast to any kind of bureaucratic organization of offices, the charismatic structure knows nothing of a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment or dismissal. It knows no regulated 'career,' 'advancement,' 'salary,' or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or of his aids. It knows no agency of control or appeal, no local bailiwick or exclusive functional jurisdictions; nor does it embrace permanent institutions like our bureaucratic 'departments,' which are independent of persons and of purely personal charisma." Max Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 246.

[60] David Little, *Terrorism, Public Emergency, and International Order: The U.S. Example, 2001–2014* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 281–331.

[61] Kloppenberg, "Democracy and Disenchantment," 93.

Although Wolin likewise seeks to accommodate the democratic passions, he moves in a direction quite opposite to Weber's – toward the capacities, agency, and passions of the demos. Like Weber, however, he predicates his account upon an opposition between political, bureaucratic institutions and professionalism on one hand, and politically engaged passion on the other. This opposition presents a compelling view of what Wolin stands against, but his constructive vision remains ephemeral.[62] Wolin starkly contrasts the in-breaking of the fugitively democratic moment against the modern political structures that frame its occurrence. The charismatic element in such moments raises the question of how such moments coalesce and then disperse. Fugitively democratic moments don't "just happen." Wolin's invocation of "the common people bringing their powers into concert" implies mobilization of some sort or other. Presumably, bringing the agency of individuals into concert will require enlistment, mobilization and direction, leadership and funding. But at the point of articulating responses to these questions, Wolin's explication of fugitive democracy is at its most imprecise.

"Just what constitutes a restorative moment is a matter of contestation," he writes, perhaps in an attempt to avoid hazarding an a priori description. However, invoking the fugitive character of radical democracy unavoidably raises difficult questions. How, precisely, do democratic moments coalesce, gain a critical mass, organize to "take back power," and then dissipate? What of the potentially undemocratic temptations to which an aversion to institutional constraint may be prone? What of the compromise, struggle, and imposition of power that so often afflict even small-scale political efforts?

Wolin's silence about the complex internal dynamics of social movements arouses the suspicion that a romanticized conception of the demos is in play here. Might the coalescing of individuals into the fugitive moments that Wolin describes be subject to autocratic and anti-democratic temptations? His caveat that such moments or movements will remain small or of a grassroots form is no guarantee that they will not manifest such tendencies. Charisma routinizes. Movements stagnate. The memories that inspire democratic moments can take on mythic proportions. Whose memories they are, and what they signify, are points of potentially volatile contestation. Citizens of modern states cannot

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[62] For a prescient piece that highlights precisely this question, see Sheldon Wolin, "Inverted Totalitarianism," *The Nation*, May 19, 2003, 13–15. He expands on this work, in light of the 2008 economic collapse, in *Democracy Incorporated*.

extricate themselves from modern contexts any more than they could choose not to have been born. Simply opting out of modern forms of power – and all the challenges of institutionalization and bureaucratization they bring – is not an option.

"Democracy in the late modern world cannot be a complete political system and given the awesome potentialities of modern forms of power and what they exact of the social and natural world, it ought not to be hoped or striven for," Wolin writes. "Democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being that is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but as a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives."[63] Clearly, it is too much to expect any set of arrangements to achieve its ideal in the real world. However, does this mean that those ideals ought not to be hoped for, or striven toward in concrete ways? The rule of law within a constitutional framework can be more or less just. And when it is less so, ought citizens not strive to hold their representatives accountable for making it more so? Ought one not hope and strive for voting laws and procedures that are as encompassing as possible? Ought not citizens motivated by the democratic ideals Wolin espouses fight for campaign finance reforms that prohibit corporations from purchasing politicians or influencing election results in their favor? Not even Wolin's staunchest critics would accuse him of condemning such efforts.[64]

It is not to be denied that constitutions and representational procedures of modern politics constrain social movements, and often do so in elitist, plutocratic, and imperialist ways. And yet out of such constraints arise the needs and demands for further social movements of reform and resistance. This insight is the flip side of American democracy's "ignoble paradox" – that the people whose subjugation made possible this democratic experiment have manifest the ethical and spiritual ideals of democracy largely through their modes of resistance to their subjugation and their efforts to survive and transform the conditions of domination.[65]

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[63] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 42–43.

[64] George Kateb, "Wolin as a Critic of Democracy," in Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly, eds., *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 39–57 (esp. 44).

[65] E.g., the creation of the spirituals, jazz, and the blues, slave adoption and transformation of Christianity, social movements such as abolitionism and the civil rights movement. I consider several of these examples in Chapter 5.

Of course, the statement that the constraints of modern politics produce transformative social movements assumes that the hope and self-confidence required for such possibilities remain intact. As West says, it is "in the trying" that one salvages and sustains self-love and hope. Despair and terminal disdain for prevailing conditions are the surest ways *not* to make a difference. Reconceived in this way, constitutionalism can be an ingredient in facilitating democratic moments – itself a means of resistance as much as a buffer protecting elites from the people.

Constraint of the sort constitutionalism provides is a necessary condition for innovation even if – perhaps especially when – such innovation explicitly aims to turn back upon the constraints that made the moment possible in order to explicate, criticize, resist, and correct them. It is inadequate to reduce democracy to a set of institutional arrangements – or to a bundle of communal practices momentarily inspired by "the taking back of power." Conceptualizing democracy as either a set of institutional arrangements *or* a bundle of social practices is subject to a range of perils. Accommodating both understandings, with a case-by-case assessment of which is currently more relevant, will increase our chances of balancing social hope and democratic faith on the one side and radical, withering criticism and revolutionary moments on the other.

West is aware of the excesses to which a Wolinian approach is prone, and shows that prophetic pragmatism has its own resources to correct them. "Like love in Christian narratives, existential democratic practices are perennially crucified only to be resurrected and again betrayed by false prophets and grand inquisitors." He writes:

Hence, democracy in history is a tragic-comic phenomenon – a sad yet sweet dialectic of courageous agency and historical constraints, a melancholic yet melioristic interplay of freedom and limitations that identifies and confronts social misery only to see its efforts to overcome such misery often fall short of their mark. Hence it is neither sentimental nor cynical. Rather it is relentless and resilient – with compassion – yet usually disappointed with its results.[66]

Amid the Wolinian tones of these lines, note West's sense that terminal pessimism and apocalypticism are luxuries he cannot afford. Hope is too fragile to take for granted. It does not emanate of its own accord. Construed as a virtue, it requires practice at navigating the vices that stand on either side of it – unreflective or presumptive optimism on one

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[66] West, "Preface: The Tragicomic and the Political in Christian Faith," in *Prophesy Deliverance!* 9.

hand, and despair in present capacities and prospects for the future, on the other. One acquires the virtue of hope gradually, with time and sustained effort, only after confronting situations in which one's ability to maintain hope is tested. Hope that is both realistic and resilient is difficult to cultivate. It must be nurtured and renewed, rooted in memory and yet oriented toward the future. So conceived, hope is inevitably interwoven with other virtues, such as courage and faith. Democratic hope both makes possible and issues from the practices of critical deliberation that constitute democratic association.

On these bases, West declared the OWS movement to be successful in many ways. It altered the public discourse and generated social motion. It brought savage wealth inequality, poverty, and corporate greed onto the national political agenda. Like Smiley and West's "Poverty Tour" of 2012, West's activist solidarity throughout OWS and continued involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement were in tune with his broader efforts to change the policies of the United States' first African American president, Barack Obama. In this broader campaign to hold the president accountable, prophetic pragmatism has found perhaps its greatest test. And no account of prophetic pragmatism's strengths and liabilities for transforming conflict and prompting democratic social change could be complete without addressing West's encounters with Barack Obama. Indeed, as I note in the next chapter, West's engagement with Obama decisively illustrates the unique strengths, but also the potentially fatal weaknesses, of prophetic pragmatism as a mode of criticism aimed at democratic social transformation.

The Prophet and the President

Prophetic Rage in the Age of Obama

It is possible to approach Cornel West's criticisms of President Obama and his administration from several angles. Unfortunately, the most prominent treatments have occurred on the Internet and in the twenty-four-hour media cycle. There are several reasons for this. First, West's work in the 1980s and 1990s on race and inequality in the US launched him as an intellectual celebrity and to popular visibility. He became a nationally recognized intellectual, and various media outlets regularly featured his views and commentary. Since the 1990s, he has been precisely the kind of dynamic, Gramscian "organic intellectual" that prophetic pragmatism strives to cultivate. Hence, over time, West has gradually replaced his earlier prolific writing of scholarly articles and books with the public intellectual's work of lecturing widely, giving interviews, participating in televised panel discussions, broadcast commentary, and countless public events. Increasingly, he has carried out this public engagement through on-the-ground activism in sites of conflict and through nonviolent direct action. As a result, examining this period of his work requires analyzing not only articles and books but also transcripts of his most pivotal interventions in a mode of prophetic pragmatism. For this reason, in this chapter I reproduce several unusually lengthy excerpts from West's interviews and public commentary since 2007. I do so because the nuance and details of these interventions have been lost in the constant deluge of the twenty-four-hour media cycle.

West's critics have tended to treat his denunciation of Obama's policies as symptoms of an over-sized celebrity ego, personal foibles, hurt feelings,

and petty grudges.[1] This narrative has become easy fodder for the blogosphere and twenty-first-century gossip columns. Granted, the hyperbole of some of West's political commentary has fueled the sound-bite sensationalism on which many sectors of the media depend. However, the laser-like focus upon the most excessive sound bites of West's political commentary, in isolation from their context, has resulted in an erasure of the substance and incisiveness of his work.[2] It has enabled critics to deny the legitimacy of his reproaches of Obama for the points at which his policies actually neglected poor and working people, gave limited attention to structural racism, favoritism toward big banks, and imperialism and militarism.[3]

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[1] West has thrown his support behind and stumped for the presidential campaigns of New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley and then Ralph Nader (2000), Al Sharpton (2004), and Bernie Sanders (2016). He did the same for Barack Obama in 2008. West complained publicly that, after appearing in sixty-five campaign events in support of Obama's first presidential campaign, he was neither thanked nor invited to the presidential inauguration. He also expressed resentment at being, in effect, dropped from Obama's circle of advisors and consultants. Lisa Miller and Michael Eric Dyson both characterize West's criticism of and anger at the president as the furious response of a "jilted lover." Miller quotes a senior official from Obama's 2008 campaign as insisting that no one intentionally shut West out of the proceedings. "If something dropped there, that's unfortunate. But whatever happened, that isn't President Obama's fault." See Lisa Miller, "'I Want to Be Like Jesus': Cornel West Is a Self-Proclaimed Prophet Who Believes in the Virtues of Love and Justice. But in His Own Life, He Can't Seem to Find Either," *New York Magazine*, May 6, 2012, http://nymag.com/news/features/cornel-west-2012-5; and Michael Eric Dyson, "The Ghost of Cornel West: What Happened to America's Most Exciting Black Scholar?" *The New Republic*, April 19, 2015, https://newrepublic.com/article/121550/cornel-wests-rise-fall-our-most-exciting-black-scholar-ghost.

[2] See, for instance, Michael Eric Dyson, *The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 26–27.

[3] Both Miller, "I Want to Be Like Jesus," and Dyson, "The Ghost of Cornel West" frame themselves as analyses of West as a self-styled prophet and public intellectual against Obama, but both descend, to varying degrees, to the level of personal excoriation. In my judgment, the substantial points in these articles are answered in Dave Zirin, "Cornel West Is Not Mike Tyson," *The Nation*, April 20, 2015, www.thenation.com/article/cornel-west-not-mike-tyson. For an effort to bring balance to the assessment of West's work as public intellectual and critic of Obama, see Jeffrey Stout, "Cornel West and the President: What Are We Really Talking About?" *Huffington Post*, May 26, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-stout/cornel-west-obama_b_867436.html; Jeffrey

I will take a different approach. In my judgment, West's work as a public and organic intellectual in increasingly heated, prophetic critique of the Obama administration can be adequately understood only in light of the complex dynamics of prophetic pragmatism. An adequate grasp will situate the strengths of West's criticism and public presence in terms of his appropriation of the black prophetic tradition. By bearing witness to this tradition, West embodies his pragmatist commitments to the ethics of radical democratic transformation that I described in the opening sections of Chapter 3. At the same time, one can best understand the weaknesses and temptations of West's criticisms in terms of the limitations of prophetic pragmatism. West's prophetic criticism has sometimes veered headlong into rhetorical intemperance, and with counterproductive results. And, indeed, in certain moments his own prophetic rage has gotten the better of him. I do not propose to vindicate or defend those instances. At the same time, such moments afford an occasion to examine the respective strengths and weaknesses of West's account of prophetic criticism. In Chapter 5, I test his account against one of the most rigorous measures for identifying and assessing instances of prophetic criticism in contemporary US public life – set forth by Cathleen Kaveny's *Prophecy without Contempt*. I show ultimately that, liabilities of rhetorical excess notwithstanding, the heated rhetoric West has directed at President Obama nonetheless coheres with the critical substance of his opposition to the deficiencies of Obama's policies and Obama's efforts to symbolically claim features of the black prophetic and democratic traditions, yet without reflecting those traditions in his policies. Clearly, both West and Obama are merely mortal and fallible. And yet, the critical exposition I conducted in the previous chapter sheds new light on the meaning and significance of the prophet's relentless criticisms of the president. Indeed, when contextualized within the commitments and motivations of prophetic pragmatism, and embedded in the trajectory of his engagement with the administration dating back to Obama's first presidential campaign, even West's most bombastic "rhetorical grenades" take on different significance.

Stout, "The Character of Cornel West," *Huffington Post*, May 30, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-stout/the-character-of-cornel-w_b_868794.html; Marc H. Ellis, "In Defense of Cornel West's Prophetic Voice," *Mondoweiss*, April 23, 2015, http://mondoweiss.net/2015/04/defense-cornel-prophetic; and Elliot Ratzman, "In Defense of Cornel West," *Good: A Magazine for the Global Citizen*, April 21, 2015, www.good.is/articles/in-defense-of-cornel-west.

Bearing Witness

To position the prophetic pragmatist's encounter with Barack Obama is to situate it in the lineage of the black prophetic tradition. From this vantage point, one can see that West has improvised over time to take on various roles. Sometimes, he fulfills the kind of role that Frederick Douglass played during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. At other moments he acts as Martin Luther King, Jr. did in relation to Lyndon Johnson's administration. In his increasingly agonistic, prophetic interventions, West has also come to channel the frank and fearless speech of Malcolm X. Likewise, he strives to follow the models of the grass-roots public engagements of Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Ella Baker.

One year after Obama's first inauguration, West posted online a video of himself delivering an open letter to President Obama. This open letter set the tone for the witness he bore during the first half of Obama's first term. He stated:

My Dear Brother President Barack Obama:

I salute your unprecedented historic victory. Just a year ago we were there celebrating on the mall. And here we are 12 months later. And I must say, despite your brilliance, despite your charisma, I'm disappointed when it comes to the fundamental question – which is a question of priorities, a question of urgency: How deep is your love for poor and working people? We need democratic policies not technocratic policies. Your economic team has little or no concern about poor and working people. Job creation is an afterthought. You say the recession is over, but 10.2% of our precious citizens are still unemployed and many of those have given up working. How deep is your love for poor and working people? Don't be seduced by the elites. I applaud your brilliance. I applaud your charisma. You changed the image of America. But don't simply be the friendly face of the American empire. Many lives depend on your courage and you cannot do it alone. Like Abraham Lincoln who needed the abolitionist movement, like FDR needed the labor movement, you need a progressive movement to push you. That's what we – I – plan to do. But you have to be receptive. You are in a tough situation. I understand that. But as you recall from the discussion we had two years ago: If you cannot keep alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Myles Horton, and Dorothy Day, and Cesar Chavez in the states and connected to the empowerment of those that Frantz Fanon called "the wretched of the earth," you will end up just another colorful caretaker of an empire in decline and a culture in decay. I believe like Martin King that democracy can be reinvigorated, can be revitalized. But it takes courage. You can't just cut deals. You have to take a stand. You have to have backbone. So I wish you well. I will continue to put pressure on you – loving pressure – because

in the end it's not about you, it's not about me, it's not about any isolated set of individuals. It's about forces that will ensure the poor and working people can live lives of decency and dignity. Bless you my brother. Stay strong.[4]

West's approach here is motivated by the kind of witness that the abolitionist movement, through leaders like Frederick Douglass, provided during Lincoln's presidency. Lincoln's role in ending slavery is widely celebrated today. And yet, Lincoln finally expressed abolitionist opposition to slavery in his policies and politics – even more than in his moral reasoning and rhetoric – only as the result of tremendous pressure from numerous critics and activists. Indeed, early on, Lincoln had been willing to tolerate slavery.[5]

In an 1857 speech, Douglass characterized the influence that he had striven to exert upon the status quo of his time. "Power concedes nothing without a demand," he famously declared. "It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both."[6] These words reflect West's own efforts early in Obama's first term to galvanize some social movement that would hold the administration accountable to those who suffered most from the 2008 financial crisis. West also sought to keep visible the administration's rising use of drone strikes to carry out the targeted killing of suspected terrorists and their affiliates, a tactic that Obama inherited from the George W. Bush administration and expanded exponentially.[7]

[4] Cornel West, *Note to Obama*, *BBC News*, January 20, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/world_news_america/8471606.stm.

[5] Initially, Lincoln had supported the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In his First Inaugural Address, he supported a proposed Thirteenth Amendment, which would have made slavery permanent in the South as a concession to the Southern states. See Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, edited by Christa Buschendorf (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2014), 32–33.

[6] Frederick Douglass, "West India Emancipation," Canandaigua, New York, August 3, 1857, www.blackpast.org/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress.

[7] On July 1, 2016, the Obama administration released a report of combatant and civilian deaths resulting from its drone strikes outside official combat areas (the report included piloted and cruise missile strikes). It reported that, since the program began in 2009, between 2,372 and 2,581 combatants have been killed in 473 strikes. These strikes occurred in Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, outside the areas of conventional combat (Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan). The administration report estimates between 64 and 116 noncombatant and "unknown"

Through the 2010 midterm elections, West strove primarily to hold Obama accountable to the needs and the suffering of everyday people. Obama's popularity among his constituents made West's task of prophetic criticism doubly difficult. Many Americans perceived the election of the country's first black president as the fulfillment of the civil rights movement. Thus, one of West's tasks in speaking about Obama's policies was to dispel the belief that Obama's election had achieved the ultimate goals of the civil rights movement.

deaths from these strikes. As the administration acknowledges in the report, these numbers approach roughly half of the totals estimated by independent monitoring organizations. The lowest such independent estimate, by *The Long War Journal*, counts 207 civilian deaths in Pakistan and Yemen alone. Washington, DC-based security policy group, New America, estimates 216 in those two countries. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, in London, estimates the noncombatant death toll under the Obama drone campaign to be between 380 and 801. See Bill Rogio, "Charting the Data for US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004–2015," *Long War Journal*, www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes; Peter Bergen, David Sterman, Alyssa Sims, and Albert Ford, "U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan," *New America*, http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/pakistan-analysis.html; and Jack Serle and Jessica Purkiss, "Drone Wars: The Full Data," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, March 8, 2017, www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/drones-graphs (all accessed August 7, 2017). Clarifying the difficulty of the statistics reported by the administration, one analyst wrote:

"With no breakdown by year or country, let alone a detailed strike-by-strike account, the Obama administration's new data was difficult to assess. For example, according to multiple studies by Human Rights Watch, Yemen's Parliament and others, an American cruise missile strike in Yemen on Dec. 17, 2009, killed 41 civilians, including 22 children and a dozen women. At least three more people were killed later after handling unexploded cluster munitions left from the strike. If those 41 are included in the new official count, as appears likely, that would leave only 23 civilians killed in all other strikes since 2009 to reach the low-end American estimate of 64. By nearly all independent accounts, that number is implausibly low. Obama administration officials declined over the weekend to discuss any specific strikes or otherwise elaborate on the statistics." Scott Shane, "Drone Strike Statistics Answer Few Questions, and Raise Many," *New York Times*, July 3, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/drone-strike-statistics-answer-few-questions-and-raise-many.html (accessed July 7, 2016).

For succinct accounts examining the illegal status of the Obama administration's drone attacks outside of armed conflict zones by international law standards, see Mary Ellen O'Connell, "International Law and Drone Attacks beyond Armed Conflict Zones," in David Cortright, Rachel Fairhurst, and Kristen Wall, eds., *Drones and the Future of Armed Conflict* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 63–73. For a thoroughly documented overview of the emergence of the administration's policies on this issue, see Karen J. Greenberg, "Drone Strikes and the Law: From Bush-Era Detention to Obama-Era Targeted Killing," in *Drones and the Future of Armed Conflict*, 74–87.

West has long warned against the taming of Martin King's legacy – what he calls the "Santa Claus-ification of Martin Luther King, Jr." This is not to present himself as a scholarly curator of King's legacy. Rather, this impulse emerges from the conception of a democratic tradition at the heart of prophetic pragmatism. A moral and political tradition is constituted, in part, by the models set forth by exemplary practitioners within that tradition. Recognizing past exemplars can be no mere celebration of their legacies – merely romanticized hagiography. To merely celebrate the memories of exemplary democratic practitioners would be to respond to them as if their undertaking were complete. This would position such exemplars as discrete, exceptional individuals who happen to appear in their respective historical moments. Recognizing them as part of a living tradition, by contrast, repositions them in a set of embodied social practices extended over time. It recognizes them as woven into a loosely shared social and political enterprise – open-ended and self-correcting – that encompasses the present and opens out toward the future. It positions their legacies as an inheritance to be grappled with, critically appropriated, and carried forward. The motivating purpose is to expand and further pursue justice in the shared construction, sustenance, and expansion of a democratic social and political enterprise. It highlights the sinews and connective tissue of social practices and shared histories that connect such exemplary figures. These figures are exemplary participants in the historically extended, socially embodied argument over the very goods (as well as practices and institutions) around, in, and through which this shared democratic enterprise organizes itself.[8]

Of course, such a democratic tradition comprises more than just exemplary figures. It calls out to be "lived into" by the everyday people in the society within which that moral and political tradition unfolds. In such a tradition, like it or not, each citizen is a participant. All of them make daily choices about what kind of democratic citizen they will be, and over time, are becoming. Part of the ethical substance of a democratic tradition, therefore, entails examining the legacies of exemplary practitioners, critically wrestling with them in light of their respective strengths and weaknesses, learning from them, and enabling them to inspire creative action and thought that carries the best of their exemplarity forward.

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[8] Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* develops the concept of "democratic tradition," which I deploy here. West largely endorses Stout's characterization, and indeed, sees himself participating within such a tradition. For his own exposition of the concept, see "The Deep Democratic Tradition in American," in *Democracy Matters*, 63–105.

For the tradition to remain a tradition, to remain in healthy and working order so as not to fall into disarray, the legacies of exemplary practitioners must challenge the present, even as they aid in envisioning a shared future. So it is for the legacy of Martin King.

At the heart of West's prophetic pragmatism is the conviction that, for the democratic tradition to survive and perhaps flourish, King's legacy must not be romanticized, domesticated, or commodified. Martin Luther King, Jr. cannot be merely a name for a federal holiday, various streets and schools, and public statues in virtue of what we recall as his great success long, long ago. If King's legacy fails to challenge us in the present – if contemporary citizens do not hear and respond to, for example, his call to be acutely maladjusted to, and fight to change, the conditions of racial and economic injustice and lovelessness that pervade US society, even today – then we will have reduced King's legacy to a feel-good memory, an annual cause to celebrate the (putatively) remarkable progress our society has made since the days of Jim Crow. In the context of a democratic tradition, every generation must come to terms with King's example in its full beauty and inspiration. Each generation must also grapple with the fallibility and transgressiveness of that example for the sake of telling truth and fighting for justice. The "handing down" of tradition occurs in recasting and innovating with the best of that legacy in ever new circumstances, in the face of ever new challenges. This entails, in part, remaining vigilant against the onset of decay of the tradition, and the domestication of its exemplars.

The fact that many Americans saw the election of an African American president as the fulfillment of King's dream was difficult in itself. Hence, West called upon Obama to live up to the demands of the black prophetic tradition – that those in power attend to the plight of the poor and "wretched of the earth." At the same time, West called for a more accurate understanding of the radical character of King's legacy.[9]

In January 2011, Tavis Smiley convened a panel on C-SPAN that discussed how to advocate for poor and working people in the last two years of Obama's first term in office. In a pivotal exchange in the conversation, West and Smiley clarified:

TAVIS SMILEY: If I'm Barack Obama, I'm saying to myself, "For all of your protestations, you all ain't got nowhere to go. What you going to do, Doc?"

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[9] For this reason, West collected and edited speeches by King that are often overlooked in popular celebrations of his legacy. See Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Radical King*, edited and introduced by Cornel West (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2015).

CORNEL WEST: Bear witness, Brother. That's all you can do in your life. Tell the truth and fight for justice.

TAVIS SMILEY: And hold your nose and still vote for him.

CORNEL WEST: Well … we've got two years now. It's very clear that the two-party system is part of the brokenness we are talking about. We've got both parties that are dominated by the same interests – corporate big banking. You've got ordinary citizens – different political ideological racial groups feeling relatively powerless, relatively impotent. Now that could be the makings of a crypto-fascism if we don't begin to come to terms with this.

The Tea Party brothers and sisters, they're going to become more and more upset with the establishment in the Republican party because the business interests and their populist interests begin to be more and more in tension. And at the same time, Barack Obama – masterful, eloquent, charismatic in his language; in his policies – you can't bring in [Timothy] Geithner[10] and [Lawrence] Summers[11] and say that you're building on the legacy of Martin King.

Martin died for sanitation workers. He died because he sided with poor babies in Vietnam against American occupation. He was anti-militarism. He was anti-imperialist. He was against the American Empire in terms of its presence around the world undercutting what he thought to be certain principles. But all Martin could do was bear witness. That's why when he died: 75 percent of Americans [were] against him, 55 percent of black people [were] against him; because he was *too* loving.

When you love poor people that much; when you love working people that much, that makes you the freest man in the country; or the freest woman in the country. But you are also the biggest threat to both Republican and Democratic parties. Now what I'm calling for is the legacy of Martin. But I can only call for it. I can only live a life based on it, because I don't control history, I don't control the system. The whole system has a rot in a certain way. [Turning to fellow-panelist, David Frum[12]] Now that's not beating America down. That's just Socratic criticism. I want my brother to understand that we are still working on this thing together.

[10] Timothy Geithner is a former American central banker who served as the 75th United States Secretary of the Treasury under President Barack Obama from 2009 to 2013. Geithner led the charge in the bailout of the banks during the Great Recession, allocating $350 billion in funds under TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) to groups such as Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers. He now works as the head of Warburg Pincus, a private equity firm.

[11] Lawrence Summers served on the United States National Economic Council from 2009 to 2010 and was a major decision maker in the bailout process. During the Clinton administration, he fought for a platform of US financial system deregulation – including the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act.

[12] David J. Frum is a Canadian American neoconservative political commentator and former speechwriter for President George W. Bush.

TAVIS SMILEY: Dr. West, the president does have a bust of Dr. King in the Oval Office.

CORNEL WEST: He's got Brother Martin, but what is Brother Martin saying to him every day he walks in? "How deep is your love for poor and working people? I died fighting an illegal, immoral war in Vietnam. What makes you think the war in Afghanistan doesn't have the same status?" That's what Martin is saying to him every day. The problem is, and this is part of the lies of the mainstream: people have reached the conclusion that Barack Obama is *the* fulfillment of King's dream. That's not true. Our beloved president is *a* fulfillment of King's dream. He's not *the* fulfillment of King's dream. *The* fulfillment is poor people, not just black people, white, red, not just in this country, but around the world. That's a hell of a dream. Martin was that kind of dreamer. We've got to be honest about that.[13]

This exchange, and so many like it, aimed to draw attention to the Obama administration's policies regarding international militarism and imperialism, and the stubborn realities of vicious poverty and structural racism in America.[14] West sought to hold Obama accountable to the democratic ideals and policies he had espoused in his first presidential campaign – many of which had originated in the black prophetic tradition, and which Obama continued to invoke in his rhetoric.

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[13] Cornel West and Tavis Smiley, "America's Next Chapter Forum," George Washington University, Washington, DC, C-SPAN, January 13, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNYArBYbmEs (38:35–42:08).

[14] The post-2008 Recession recovery, led by the Obama administration, resulted in a drop in the overall unemployment rate to just over 5 percent by mid-2016. West, however, argues that such numbers obscure the ways that large segments of the general population (typically those marginalized by race and class) have been persistently excluded from the benefits of this statistical improvement. "The ratio of the unemployment rate among blacks versus that among whites has been amazingly consistent – between 2 and 2.5 – for the 40 years that official data go back. In 1972, the jobless rate among African-Americans was 2.04 times that among whites. In 2013, the ratio was 2.02 … [In other words,] since the early 1970s, the unemployment rate among black Americans has been persistently around 2 to 2.5 times as high as that among whites, with no decisive improvement … Even among people with similar levels of education, the black unemployment rate is higher. There was a 5.7 percent unemployment rate among African-Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2013, compared with 3.5 percent among white Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher. Indeed, joblessness is higher among blacks in every education level tracked by the Labor Department." Neil Irwin, Claire Cain Miller, and Margot Sanger-Katz, "America's Racial Divide, Charted," *The New York Times*, August 19, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/upshot/americas-racial-divide-charted.html.

West's posture toward Obama and his policies became increasingly radical as he saw that the efforts of a progressive social movement to influence him went largely unheeded. It is possible to read Obama's refusal to promote more progressive policies as his falling prey to the temptations of presidential power. I think that to fully understand it, however, one must consider the opposing intellectual and moral legacies upon which Obama and West draw (a point I elaborate in the section that follows). In any case, during the latter half of Obama's first term, West's prophetic anger would tilt into prophetic rage. But even West's most severe criticisms remain tied to the vital resources of the black prophetic tradition in its prophetic pragmatist mode.

Prophetic Rage

As Cornel West pointed out, Barack Obama evinced some hesitancy to embrace the full substance of Martin King's legacy and that of the civil rights movement. West saw this as an abdication of King's dream. And yet, he might have felt less cause for prophetic intervention had he believed that inconstancy toward King's dream was Obama's only failure. Much as West may lament it, Obama's refusal to take King's dream as his guiding ideal is consistent with his intellectual and political evolution.

Throughout Obama's books *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, Martin King appears as a lesser influence relative to other major figures. As early as his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama articulated reservations about King's idealism. In Oslo he did cite the revolution in civil rights led by King as the precondition for his having been elected president. "I am living testimony to the moral force of nonviolence," Obama acknowledged.[15] But as president of the world's lone military superpower, he asserted with equal energy that he had an obligation to deploy lethal military power against forces of evil and threats to the United States. On precisely this basis Obama went on to expand the use of unmanned drones to a level ten times higher than that of George W. Bush.

The bust of Abraham Lincoln in Obama's Oval Office was counterbalanced by a bust of Martin King. And yet, arguably, it is Reinhold Niebuhr,

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[15] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize," Oslo City Hall, Oslo, Norway, December 10, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize.

not King, whose influence stands in balance with Lincoln's.[16] Niebuhr's Augustinian realism pulled him into an increasingly neoliberal "balance of power" political realism during the Cold War. West pinpointed this development in his fine-grained account of Niebuhr in his genealogy of the American pragmatist tradition, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989). In the 1960s, Niebuhr affirmed Martin King, the civil rights movement, and some of the student-driven anti-war protests. But he did so within the framework of an increasingly gradualist approach to social change. Niebuhr's gradualism finds an echo in Obama's Oslo speech as well. There Obama affirmed John F. Kennedy's appeal to pursuing incremental progress toward peace and justice through "gradual evolution in human institutions."[17] West points out that by 1968, Niebuhr had come to support the moderate Republican political platform of Nelson Rockefeller.[18] Comparably, Obama turned from the pronounced progressivism of his 2008 campaign toward institutional centrism, appealing to the necessities of leading the world's dominant military power.

West is not particularly concerned with Obama's refusal to commit himself to King's witness to the moral force of nonviolence. His main concern is with Obama's abdication of King's commitment to the revolutionary power of love and justice, and the ways these should influence policy and law. As King clarified in his later sermons, love and power are not inimical to each other. In fact, each needs the other to find its proper role in building the beloved community. "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic,"

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[16] James Kloppenburg provides perhaps the most textured and detailed account of Obama's intellectual background and development, and how they influence his presidency. See James Kloppenburg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). For other sources that highlight the distinctive influence of both Lincoln and Reinhold Niebuhr on Obama, see Susan Schulten, "Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln, and John Dewey," *Denver University Law Review* 86 (2009): 807–818; David Brooks, "Obama, Chapter and Verse," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html; and David Brooks and E. J. Dionne, "Obama's Theologian: Reinhold Niebuhr and the American Present," *On Being with Krista Tippet*, August 13, 2009, www.onbeing.org/program/obamas-theologian-david-brooks-and-ej-dionne-reinhold-niebuhr-and-american-present/136.

[17] Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize."

[18] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 163.

King declared. "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."[19] It was the demands of love for people generally – and for "the least of these" especially – that compelled King to expand his social organizing to include fighting poverty, systemic and structural forms of racism, and the effects of militarism and US imperialism in Vietnam.[20] This understanding of the complex interrelation of love, justice, and power orient policies aimed at improving the plight of poor and working people, a need later pinpointed by the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, and addressing forms of structural racism, an issue urgently highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement.[21]

West has consistently been in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. He describes it as having a "marvelous new militancy." He spoke and marched in the streets of such sites of conflict as Charlottesville, Virginia, and Ferguson, Missouri (among others) on numerous occasions. During two of these marches, he was arrested and jailed alongside fellow activists for acts of civil disobedience.[22] These disruptive direct actions served to raise public awareness. They put the names of victims of state-sanctioned violence, abuse of force by police, and the near absence of legal accountability for law enforcement front and center in the national consciousness. These were names such as Michael Brown in Ferguson (MO), Freddie Gray in Baltimore (MD), Sandra Bland in Waller County (TX), Tanisha Anderson and Tamir Rice in Cleveland (OH), Laquan McDonald in Chicago (IL), Aiyana Stanley-Jones in Detroit (MI), Eric Garner in New York City, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge (LA), and Philando Castile in St. Paul (MN), to name just a few of the most high-profile cases.

But the purpose of prophetic pragmatist intervention in an organic intellectual mode is not merely to draw attention to the "state of

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[19] King, "Where Do We Go From Here?" in Cornel West, ed., *The Radical King*, 172.

[20] Ibid., 172–179. For an example of the concrete policy proposals this approach led King to make, see "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," *The Radical King*, 201–217.

[21] For an example of how King's later work turned his attention to the impact of poverty and class-based exclusion, see "The Other America," *The Radical King*, 235–244.

[22] "Cornel West on Ferguson: 'I Went There to Go to Jail,'" *CNN*, August 12, 2015, www.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/08/12/cornel-west-arrested-ferguson-wrn-intv.cnn.

emergency" for African Americans caused by police abuse of force and arbitrary treatment. It aims equally to persuade the organizers and activists of movements protesting these conditions to orient their righteous anger to the kind of love and justice that Martin King articulated throughout his life and work, rather than destructive forms of conflict and retribution. "The fundamental challenge always is – will their rage be channeled through hatred and revenge or will it be channeled through love and justice?" West explained. "You got to push 'em toward love and justice."[23] King's account of love and justice seeks to open channels of solidarity and alliance for any who recognize love's demand to fight for justice alongside those who most suffer the brunt of a white supremacist society. "So even when black rage and righteous indignation have to look white supremacy in the face – in all of its dimensions that still persist – the language of love still allows black brothers and sisters to recognize that it's not all white people, and it's not genetic," West continues. "White brothers and sisters can make choices … No one is pushed into a pigeon-hole or locked into a convenient category."[24]

One factor that tipped West's prophetic anger into rage is how Obama has symbolically appropriated King's legacy. His assimilation of King's legacy at the level of symbol, rhetoric, and presidential pageantry makes sidestepping King's dream at the level of policy especially perilous: Obama risks portraying his policies as the fulfillment of King's dream when in fact they are not so.

For example, in his second inauguration, Obama chose to be sworn into office using a Bible that had belonged to Martin Luther King, Jr. Indeed, officials placed King's Bible as a second Bible in the ceremony in addition to Abraham Lincoln's Bible (which Obama had used for his first inaugural ceremony). Further, Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of the iconic civil rights activist Medgar Evers, led the second inaugural invocation. Even more than Obama's first inauguration, the second sought to convey symbolically that the civil rights movement was "coming full circle." The symbolic glow of King's legacy around Obama was amplified further a few months later, in August 2013, at the march and celebration marking the fiftieth anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

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[23] Cornel West, "We're in bad shape," from the script of *"Cornel West," 60 Minutes,* March 20, 2016, www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-cornel-west-on-race-in-the-u-s.

[24] Cornel West, *Hope on a Tightrope* (Carlsbad, CA: Smiley Books, 2008), 161.

It is important to note that West's outrage on this score was not at the mere appropriation of a moral legacy and intellectual ideal. West was indeed scandalized by what he considers to be the domestication of King's legacy. His primary grievance, rather, was Obama's failure to fight for King's legacy in its entirety. King's dream is the unrelenting (because never fully achieved) fight for justice for "the wretched of the earth" through advocating policies that support the dignity and sustain the livelihood of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society, and that resist racist, classist, and militarist impulses.

Skittles and Juice: Prophetic Rage Meets Moral Imagination

There were two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro. The house Negroes – they lived in the house with master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good 'cause they ate his food – what he left. They lived in the attic or the basement, but still they lived near the master; and they loved their master more than the master loved himself. They would give their life to save the master's house quicker than the master would. The house Negro, if the master said, "We got a good house here," the house Negro would say, "Yeah, we got a good house here." Whenever the master said "we," he said "we." That's how you can tell a house Negro.

On that same plantation, there was the field Negro. The field Negro – those were the masses. There were always more Negroes in the field than there was Negroes in the house. The Negro in the field caught hell … The field Negro was beaten from morning to night. He lived in a shack, in a hut; he wore old, castoff clothes. He hated his master. I say he hated his master. He was intelligent. That house Negro loved his master. But that field Negro – remember, they were in the majority, and they hated the master. When the house caught on fire, he didn't try and put it out; that field Negro prayed for a wind, for a breeze. When the master got sick, the field Negro prayed that he'd die. If someone come to the field Negro and said, "Let's separate, let's run," he didn't say "Where we going?" He'd say, "Any place is better than here." You've got field Negroes in America today. I'm a field Negro. The masses are the field Negroes. When they see this man's house on fire, you don't hear these little Negroes talking about "our government is in trouble." They say, "*The* government is in trouble." Imagine a Negro: "Our government"! I even heard one say "our astronauts." They won't even let him near the plant – and "our astronauts"! "Our Navy" – that's a Negro that's out of his mind. That's a Negro that's out of his mind.

Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, twentieth-century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent. That's Tom making you nonviolent. It's like when you go to the dentist, and the

man's going to take your tooth. You're going to fight him when he starts pulling. So he squirts some stuff in your jaw called novocaine, to make you think they're not doing anything to you. So you sit there and 'cause you've got all of that novocaine in your jaw, you suffer peacefully. Blood running all down your jaw, and you don't know what's happening. 'Cause someone has taught you to suffer – peacefully.[25]

Winning a second term in 2012 had the effect of drawing many African American critics of Obama into his administration's institutional orbit. Not Cornel West. It was arguably in 2013, at the beginning of Obama's second term, that West took on an increasingly stark prophetic role. This is the point at which West's language about the "Obama plantation" – highly reminiscent of Malcolm X's language regarding field and house negroes with which I opened this section – begins to take front and center stage in his analysis. He extends his criticisms beyond Obama's policies on drone warfare, catastrophic poverty, corporate banking, the prison industrial complex, and other forms of structural racism. His denunciations now come to address the ways that other public figures in the African American community came under the influence of the Obama administration as advocates of its policies. West's criticism on these points surged to the fore following the murder of Trayvon Martin, which drew the national attention to the plight of young black men.

Trayvon Martin was an African American teenager who was fatally shot on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida. Martin, who was seventeen, was unarmed. He was killed on his way back from a nearby 7–Eleven with Skittles candy and a can of juice as he walked through the gated community in which he was living with his father. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer on patrol that night, racially profiled, stalked, and after a physical altercation, shot and killed Martin. After several hours of questioning, the police released Zimmerman. The police did not charge Zimmerman for the killing until six weeks later, only after vocal outcry and public protests prompted inquiries into the killing at the state and federal levels. The case sparked outrage among African American and justice-minded citizens across the US. Protestors staged demonstrations from Baltimore to Los Angeles. On July 13, 2013, a six-woman jury (five white women, one African American) acquitted George Zimmerman of

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[25] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," November 30, 1963, in George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Grove, Weidenfeld, 1990), 10–12.

both second-degree murder and manslaughter of Trayvon Martin. Protests erupted around the US in response, and racial tensions mounted. Perhaps most famously, this moment prompted a writer and community organizer from Oakland (CA), Alicia Garza, to pen an open letter that would spark – in collaboration with activists and community organizers Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi – the Black Lives Matter movement.

In the wake of the verdict, African American leaders (Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton among them) implored the president to address the issue from the White House. Obama's advisors acknowledged their plan to have him speak about the Trayvon Martin case in several brief interviews. However, the interviewers in question never broached the subject. The matter went publicly unaddressed until President Obama made an impromptu appearance in the White House press room six days after the Zimmerman verdict. There he delivered an eighteen-minute speech addressing the Trayvon Martin case and its implications for the criminalization of black men in America. He contextualized African Americans' deep disappointment with the verdict. This speech constituted the most explicit attention that Obama had devoted to race relations and racial injustice in the US since before becoming president.[26] His address also represents a powerful instance of the sort of social transformation through moral imagination I described in the previous chapter. The president spoke as follows:

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away.

There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. And there are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me – at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often.

And I don't want to exaggerate this, but those sets of experiences inform how the African American community interprets what happened one night in Florida.

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[26] Mark Landler and Michael D. Shear, "President Offers a Personal Take on Race in U.S.," *New York Times*, July 19, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/07/20/us/in-wake-of-zimmerman-verdict-obama-makes-extensive-statement-on-race-in-america.html.

And it's inescapable for people to bring those experiences to bear. The African American community is also knowledgeable that there is a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws – everything from the death penalty to enforcement of our drug laws. And that ends up having an impact in terms of how people interpret the case.

Now, this isn't to say that the African American community is naïve about the fact that African American young men are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system, that they are disproportionately both victims and perpetrators of violence. It's not to make excuses for that fact – although black folks do interpret the reasons for that in a historical context. They understand that some of the violence that takes place in poor black neighborhoods around the country is born out of a very violent past in this country, and that the poverty and dysfunction that we see in those communities can be traced to a very difficult history.

And so the fact that sometimes that's unacknowledged adds to the frustration. And the fact that a lot of African American boys are painted with a broad brush and the excuse is given, well, there are these statistics out there that show that African American boys are more violent – using that as an excuse to then see sons treated differently causes pain.

I think the African American community is also not naïve in understanding that statistically somebody like Trayvon Martin was probably statistically more likely to be shot by a peer than he was by somebody else. So folks understand the challenges that exist for African American boys, but they get frustrated, I think, if they feel that there's no context for it or – and that context is being denied. And that all contributes, I think, to a sense that if a white male teen was involved in the same kind of scenario, that, from top to bottom, both the outcome and the aftermath might have been different.

Now, the question for me at least, and I think for a lot of folks, is where do we take this? How do we learn some lessons from this and move in a positive direction? I think it's understandable that there have been demonstrations and vigils and protests, and some of that stuff is just going to have to work its way through, as long as it remains nonviolent. If I see any violence, then I will remind folks that that dishonors what happened to Trayvon Martin and his family. But beyond protests or vigils, the question is, are there some concrete things that we might be able to do?

I know that Eric Holder is reviewing what happened down there, but I think it's important for people to have some clear expectations here. Traditionally, these are issues of state and local government, the criminal code. And law enforcement is traditionally done at the state and local levels, not at the federal levels.

And then, finally, I think it's going to be important for all of us to do some soul-searching. There has been talk about should we convene a conversation on race. I haven't seen that be particularly productive when politicians try to organize conversations. They end up being stilted and politicized, and folks are locked into the positions they already have. On the other hand, in families and churches and workplaces, there's the possibility that people are a little bit more honest, and at least you ask yourself your own questions about, am I wringing as much bias out of myself as I can? Am I judging people as much as I can, based on not the color of their skin, but the content of their character? That would, I think, be an appropriate exercise in the wake of this tragedy.

And let me just leave you with a final thought that, as difficult and challenging as this whole episode has been for a lot of people, I don't want us to lose sight that things are getting better. Each successive generation seems to be making progress in changing attitudes when it comes to race. It doesn't mean we're in a post-racial society. It doesn't mean that racism is eliminated. But when I talk to Malia and Sasha, and I listen to their friends and I see them interact, they're better than we are – they're better than we were – on these issues. And that's true in every community that I've visited all across the country.[27]

This intervention by Obama was widely covered in the media and warmly received by the public. It manifests one of the benefits of having an African American man elected to the highest office in the country. The president himself could empathize imaginatively and publicly with the fate of a teenaged black male who had been racially profiled, stalked, shot, and killed, and whose killer had been acquitted.

Yet in performing the critical analysis indispensable to prophetic pragmatism, West called into question the moral credibility and socio-analytical adequacy of Obama's speech. Personal, empathetic identification is moving and captivating. However, without robust attention to the system in which Trayvon Martin's killing is embedded, it risks camouflaging the structural and cultural forms of violence that provide the causes and conditions of Trayvon Martin's murder and George Zimmerman's acquittal (and so many similar events).

Perhaps West's most searing analysis of Obama's response to the Trayvon Martin case occurred in an interview with Amy Goodman broadcast on the news show *Democracy Now!* roughly a week after the president's press room speech. There West framed the events surrounding Trayvon Martin's killing as emblematic of US militarism, poverty, and structural racism (e.g., the new Jim Crow and the racial profiling of "stop and frisk" tactics). While West does not explicitly invoke critical social theory in his analysis here, it is in a socio-critical mode that he moves to expose the contradictions and missing dimensions of the appeals to moral imagination made by Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder. The interview ran as follows:

July 22, 2013

AMY GOODMAN: President Obama surprised not only the press room at the White House, but the nation, I think, on Friday, in his first public remarks following the George Zimmerman acquittal. What are your thoughts?

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[27] Excerpt from Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin," James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, The White House, July 19, 2013, www.white-house.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin.

CORNEL WEST: Well, the first thing, I think we have to acknowledge that President Obama has very little moral authority at this point, because we know anybody who tries to rationalize the killing of innocent peoples, [is] a criminal – George Zimmerman is a criminal – but President Obama is a global George Zimmerman, because he tries to rationalize the killing of innocent children, 221 so far, in the name of self-defense, so that there's actually parallels here.

AMY GOODMAN: Where?

CORNEL WEST: In Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen. So when he comes to talk about the killing of an innocent person, you say, "Well, wait a minute. What kind of moral authority are you bringing? You've got $2 million bounty on Sister Assata Shakur.[28] She's innocent, but you are pressing that intentionally. Will you press for the justice of Trayvon Martin in the same way you press for the prosecution of Brother Bradley Manning[29] and Brother Edward Snowden?"[30] So you begin to see the hypocrisy.

   Then he tells stories about racial profiling. They're moving, sentimental stories, what Brother Kendall Thomas called racial moralism,[31] very sentimental. But then, Ray Kelly, major candidate for Department of Homeland Security, he's the poster child of racial profiling. You know, Brother Carl Dix and many of

[28] Assata Shakur was a member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army and was sentenced to life in prison for allegedly killing a New Jersey state police officer. Escaping from prison in 1979, she fled to Cuba and received political asylum. She was of recent renewed interest given her 2013 addition to the FBI's Most Wanted list and categorization as a domestic terrorist. Several scholars such as Angela Davis and members of the black activist community view her arrest and criminalization as an act of political censorship and jailing of dissidents by the American government.

[29] Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley prior to her male-to-female transition) was a US soldier responsible for leaking classified US Army documents to Wikileaks including videos of the July 12, 2007 Baghdad airstrike, and the 2009 Granai airstrike in Afghanistan; 251,287 US diplomatic cables, and 482,832 Army reports (known as the Iraq War Logs and Afghan War Diary). Manning was sentenced under a US court martial to thirty-five years' imprisonment with possibility of parole in the eighth year as well as a dishonorable discharge from the Army. President Obama commuted her sentence prior to leaving office.

[30] Edward Snowden was a former CIA employee and contractor for the US government who leaked classified NSA documents and information revealing the extent of American global and domestic surveillance. He has been charged with theft of government property, unauthorized communication of national defense information, and willful communication of classified intelligence to an unauthorized person. He fled to Russia for political asylum and has remained abroad in the aftermath of his disclosures.

[31] See Kendall Thomas, "Moral or Political?" in Austin Sarat, Bryant Garth, and Robert A. Kagan, eds., *Looking Back at Law's Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

us went to jail under Ray Kelly.[32] Why? Because he racially profiled millions of young black and brown brothers. So, on the one hand, you get these stories, sentimental … And yet … he even says Ray Kelly expresses his values, Ray Kelly is a magnificent police commissioner. How are you going to say that when the brother is reinforcing stop and frisk?[33] So the contradictions become so overwhelming here.

AMY GOODMAN: But President Obama, speaking about his own life experience, going from saying, "Trayvon Martin could have been my child," to "Trayvon Martin could have been me"?

CORNEL WEST: Well, no, that's beautiful. That's an identification. The question is: Will that identification hide and conceal the fact there's a criminal justice system in place that has nearly destroyed two generations of very precious, poor black and brown brothers? He hasn't said a mumbling word until now. Five years in office and can't say a word about the new Jim Crow.

These lines offer, in part, a textbook display of how prophetic pragmatism recognizes and affirms the power of identification through moral imagination. But they simultaneously highlight the deficiencies – indeed, the potential insidiousness – of the moral imagination when it is deployed in isolation from socio-theoretical critique of broader forms of injustice and structural violence.

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[32] Carl Dix is a founding member and representative of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. He was incarcerated in a military prison for refusing to serve in Vietnam for two years. Ray Kelly was Police Commissioner of New York City from 2002 to 2013.

[33] Stop and frisk refers to New York Police Department (NYPD) policy from 2002 to 2014 in which police officers were permitted to regularly target people under vague premises to search their persons. Causes for stops included "furtive movement" as if following a victim, acting as a lookout, or selling drugs; carrying a suspicious object, or appearing to have a "suspicious bulge" under their clothing. Statistically, 80–90 percent of all stops were deemed by NYPD data as demonstrating the person's innocence. Black and Latino men were disproportionately stopped due to racial profiling tactics. At the height of stop and frisk in 2011, 87 percent of those stopped were black or Latino. Moreover, the NYPD during this period used violence against minorities far more frequently than against whites. According to The Center for Constitutional Rights, one-third of all stops were unconstitutional given that the Supreme Court deemed "inchoate and unparticularized suspicion or [a] 'hunch'" to be insufficient cause in *Floyd, et al* v. *City of New York* (August 2013). Other cities such as Chicago have pursued similar tactics under different names and have even surpassed New York in their rate of stops. See "Stop-and-Frisk Data", New York Civil Liberties Union, www.nyclu.org/content/stop-and-frisk-data; and "Chicago Leads New York City in Use of Stop-and-Frisk by Police, New Study Finds," ACLU, March 23, 2015, www.aclu.org/news/chicago-leads-new-york-city-use-stop-and-frisk-police-new-study-finds.

Obama appeals to the moral imagination in a highly personal mode. A popular president and powerful rhetorician evocatively places himself in the shoes of the young black teenager whose killer has just been acquitted. "That's beautiful," West acknowledges. "That's an identification." But then West pivots immediately to the level of the socio-analytical. He pinpoints Obama's inattention to the systemic causes and conditions that precipitated Trayvon Martin's murder and George Zimmerman's acquittal – and numerous similar cases of racial injustice.

When used apart from critique, empathetic acts of the moral imagination easily devolve into a form of cultural violence: a mode of empathetic imagining, aesthetics, or some other form of cultural expression or production that – however inadvertently – makes direct or structural forms of violence look and feel right, or at least "not wrong." West's analysis here pinpoints the critical fault lines in the pragmatist program of democratic social transformation that I unpacked in the previous chapter. Rorty was inclined to celebrate the transformational powers of moral imagination while remaining suspicious of the excesses of socio-theoretical analysis. West himself, I argued, favored social theory in earlier years. Here we see West convey the importance of striking an integrative balance between the two.

West then turns the interview toward one of his most consistent concerns in the Age of Obama – the symbolic appropriation and domestication of Martin Luther King, Jr. The "Obama plantation" becomes, for West, the trope for the institutional capture and taming of the critical impulse of the black prophetic tradition. Here his analysis explicitly invokes the rhetorical work of Malcolm X.

CORNEL WEST [continuing from above]: And at the same time, I think we have to recognize that [Obama] has been able to hide and conceal that criminalizing of the black poor as what I call the re-niggerizing of the black professional class. You've got these black leaders on the Obama plantation, won't say a criminal word about the master in the big house, will only try to tame the field folk so that they're not critical of the master in the big house. That's why I think even Brother Sharpton is going to be in trouble. Why? Because he has unleashed – and I agree with him – the rage. And the rage is always on the road to self-determination.

But the rage is going to hit up against a stone wall. Why? Because Obama and Holder, will they come through at the federal level for Trayvon Martin? We hope so. Don't hold your breath.[34] And when they don't, they're going to have to

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[34] On February 24, 2015, US Attorney General Eric Holder announced the results of the Justice Department's investigation of George Zimmerman. There would be no federal civil rights charges for the shooting of Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

somehow contain that rage. And in containing that rage, there's going to be many people who say, "No, we see, this president is not serious about the criminalizing of poor people." We've got a black leadership that is deferential to Obama, that is subservient to Obama, and that's what niggerizing is. You keep folks so scared. You keep folks so intimidated. You can give them money, access, but they're still scared. And as long as you're scared, you're on the plantation.

CORNEL WEST: We're talking about a criminal justice system that is criminal when it comes to mistreating poor people across the board, black and brown especially. And let us tell the truth and get off this Obama plantation and say, "You know what? We're dealing with criminality in high places, criminality in these low places, and let's expose the hypocrisy, expose the mendacity, and be true to the legacy of Martin." You know there's going to be a march in August, right? And the irony is – the sad irony is –

AMY GOODMAN: This is the march of the – honoring the fiftieth anniversary ... of the "I Have a Dream" speech.

CORNEL WEST: And you know what the irony is, Sister Amy? Brother Martin would not be invited to the very march in his name, because he would talk about drones. He'd talk about Wall Street criminality. He would talk about the working class being pushed to the margins as profits went up for corporate executives in their compensation. He would talk about the legacies of white supremacy. Do you think anybody at that march will talk about drones and the drone president? Do you think anybody at that march will talk about the connection to Wall Street? They are all on the plantation.

AMY GOODMAN: Are you invited?

CORNEL WEST: Well, can you imagine? Good God, no. I mean, I pray for him, because I'm for liberal reform. But liberal reform is too narrow, is too truncated. And, of course, the two-party system is dying, and therefore it doesn't have the capacity to speak to these kinds of issues. So, no, not at all.

AMY GOODMAN: So you're saying that President Obama should not only say, "I could have been Trayvon Martin," but "I could have been, for example, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki," the 16-year-old son ... of Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed in a drone strike.[35]

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[35] Anwar al-Awlaki was the first American citizen targeted and killed in US drone strikes. Government sources have tied him to Al Qaeda operations and recruitment, having preached to some of the 9/11 hijackers and corresponded with Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan. President Obama authorized placing al-Awlaki on a CIA kill list in April 2010, and he was ultimately assassinated in 2011. Al-Awlaki's sixteen-year-old son Abdulrahman was killed in a strike two weeks later in Yemen. The legality of extra-judicial assassinations of American citizens in countries such as Yemen with which the US is not at war has been challenged on issues of constitutionality. See Conor Friedersdorf, "How Team Obama Justifies the Killing of a 16-Year-Old American," *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2012, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/10/how-team-obama-justifies-the-killing-of-a-16-year-old-american/264028/; and Nasser Al-Awlaki, "The Drone that Killed My Grandson," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2013,

CORNEL WEST: Or the name of those 221 others, precious children, who are –
who were as precious as the white brothers and sisters in Newtown that he
cried tears for.[36] Those in Indian reservations, those in Chinatown, Koreatown,
those in brown barrios, each child is precious. That is a moral absolute, it
seems to me we ought to embrace. And if that's true, then we've got monstrous
mendacity, hyper hypocrisy and pervasive criminality in high places. That's
why Brother Snowden and Brother Manning are the John Browns of our day,
and the Glenn Greenwalds and the Chris Hedges and Glen Fords and Bruce
Dixons and Margaret Kimberleys and Nellie Baileys are the William Lloyd
Garrisons of our day, when we talk about the national security state.[37]

AMY GOODMAN: Clearly, the power of the personal representation is what
grabbed people on Friday … You also had Attorney General Eric Holder doing
the same thing – when he was speaking at the NAACP convention on Tuesday.
Holder drew parallels between his own experience as an African American
male and those of Trayvon Martin, when he recalled times in his life when he
was racially profiled [cut to clip of Eric Holder speaking].

ATTORNEY GENERAL ERIC HOLDER: The news of Trayvon Martin's death last
year and the discussions that have taken place since then reminded me of my
father's words so many years ago. And they brought me back to a number of
experiences that I had as a young man – when I was pulled over twice and my
car searched on the New Jersey Turnpike, when I'm sure I wasn't speeding, or
when I was stopped by a police officer while simply running to catch a movie
at night in Georgetown in Washington, DC. I was, at the time of that last inci-
dent, a federal prosecutor.

Trayvon's death last spring caused me to sit down to have a conversation
with my own fifteen-year-old son, like my dad did with me. This was a father–
son tradition I hoped would not need to be handed down. But as a father who
loves his son and who is more knowing in the ways of the world, I had to do
this to protect my boy. I am his father, and it is my responsibility, not to burden
him with the baggage of eras long gone, but to make him aware of the world
that he must still confront. This – this is a sad reality in a nation that is chang-
ing for the better in so many ways.

www.nytimes.com/2013/07/18/opinion/the-drone-that-killed-my-grandson.
html (both accessed July 27, 2016).

[36] The Newtown shooting refers to the December 14, 2012 murder of twenty
children ages six to seven and six staff members by Adam Lanza. The incident
sparked a national debate on issues of gun control and background checks for
gun applicants.

[37] Glenn Greenwald is a civil rights and constitutional law attorney known for his
role in the publishing of the information provided by Edward Snowden about
the NSA PRISM program in *The Guardian*. Chris Hedges is a well-known
journalist and Presbyterian minister who is known for his coverage and pro-
testing of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Glen Ford, Bruce Dixon, Margaret
Kimberly, and Nellie Bailey are journalists known for their blog "Black Agenda
Report: News, Information, and Analysis from the Black Left."

AMY GOODMAN: That's US Attorney General Eric Holder. They're the ones, in the Justice Department, who are deciding whether or not to bring civil rights violations, criminal charges against George Zimmerman, who was acquitted in the Trayvon Martin killing. Professor Cornel West?

CORNEL WEST: And, no, there's no doubt that the vicious legacy of white supremacy affects the black upper classes, it affects the black middle classes. But those kinds of stories hide and conceal just how ugly and intensely vicious it is for black poor, brown poor. And so you end up with, if that's the case, why hasn't the new Jim Crow been a priority in the Obama administration? Why has not the new Jim Crow been a priority for Eric Holder? If what they're saying is something they feel deeply, if what they're saying is that they're – themselves and their children have the same status as Brother Jamal and Sister Latisha and Brother Ray Ray and Sister Jarell, then why has that not been a center part of what they do to ensure there's fairness and justice?

Well, the reason is political. Well, we don't want to identify with black folk, because a black president can't get too close to black folk, because Fox News, with their reactionary self in oft – in so many instances, will attack them, and that becomes the point of reference? No. If they're going to be part of the legacy of Martin King, Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker and the others, then the truth and justice stuff that you pursue, you don't care who is coming at you. But, no, this black liberal class has proven itself to be too morally bankrupt, too hypocritical, and indifferent to criminality – Wall Street criminality, no serious talk about enforcement of torturers and wiretappers under the Bush administration.

Why? Because they don't want the subsequent administration to take them to jail. Any reference to the hunger strike of our brothers out in California and other places, dealing with torture? Sustained solitary confinement is a form of torture. And we won't even talk about Guantánamo. Force-feeding, torture in its core – didn't our dear brother Yasiin Bey point that out, the former Mos Def?[38] God bless that brother. Jay Z got something to learn from Mos Def. Both of them lyrical geniuses, but Jay Z got a whole lot to learn from Mos Def.[39]

AMY GOODMAN: Explain that. Yasiin Bey actually underwent … force-feeding … to see how it felt, and broke down and started screaming "Stop! Stop!" in the middle of it, and it was a videotape that went viral.[40]

CORNEL WEST: And it happens twice a day for those precious brothers in Guantánamo Bay. And, of course, that's under Bush. People say, "That's under

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[38] Yasiin Bey, formerly known as Mos Def, is an American hip-hop recording artist, actor, comedian, and activist from Brooklyn. He has worked on issues of police brutality and racial oppression in the US. He is also known for his choice to undergo force-feeding to demonstrate its effects to an American audience ignorant of Guantanamo human rights abuses.

[39] Jay Z, like Yasiin Bey, is a famous rapper from Brooklyn, but he is known for his material success far more than his political activism.

[40] Yasiin Bey, "Yasiin Bey (aka Mos Def) Force Fed under Standard Guantánamo Bay Procedure," YouTube video posted by *The Guardian*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6ACE-BBPRs (accessed July 24, 2017).

Bush." OK, Bush was the capture-and-torture president. Now we've got the targeted killing president, the drone president. That's not progress. That's not part of the legacy of Martin King. That's not part of the legacy of especially somebody like a Dorothy Day and others who I think ought to be at the center of what we're all about, you see.[41]

West levels blistering criticism in this interview. Yet these are not the railings of a self-proclaimed prophet whose mode of criticism is simply "the more severe and insulting, the better." Just the opposite, in fact. Each element in this analysis reflects a textbook dimension of the prophetic pragmatism that West had articulated with meticulous rigor in his scholarly writings of the 1980s and 1990s. Here we see critical Socratic interrogation and opposition, moral denunciation, and socio-analytical unmasking of what sincere moral imagination can conceal.

Obama and Holder call for greater recognition of the context that contributes to the anger that the killing of Trayvon Martin provoked among African Americans. Obama calls for fuller inclusion of young black men in mainstream society, and insists that this proposal does not deviate from his previous views on these matters. And yet, he had long remained silent about the criminalization of black and brown young men and women in the structural context of the new Jim Crow. Nor did he initiate any policy changes that would illuminate and rectify those structural causes and conditions. Obama affirmed the work of Michael Bloomberg and New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, whose "stop and frisk" practices disproportionately targeted black and brown men for harassment, arbitrary searches, and arrest. In short, by pointing to Obama's inconsistencies, West refuses to permit him to appeal imaginatively to the plight of Trayvon Martin in calling for greater sensitivity to African American young men. That is, not without simultaneously illuminating how Obama's policies have neglected the systemic roots of precisely those issues over the course of his prior five years in office. If empathetic appeals to the moral imagination are to be viable methods for promoting change, they will have to be paired with rigorously self-reflexive critique. The aim must be to act and alter policies in ways that relieve those who are poor and marginalized by structural forms of racism.

West later likened his rhetorical approach in this interview to the frank and fearless speech of Malcolm X. Clearly, Malcolm saw the reformist

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[41] Amy Goodman and Cornel West, "Cornel West: Obama's Response to Trayvon Martin Case Belies Failure to Challenge 'New Jim Crow,'" *Democracy Now!*, July 22, 2013, www.democracynow.org/2013/7/22/cornel_west_obamas_response_to_trayvon.

pretensions of the civil rights movement leaders reflected in the differences he described between the "house Negro" and "field Negro." Like West after him, Malcolm positioned himself as a "field Negro" bent on exposing the domesticated and self-subverting behavior of the "house Negroes." "Malcolm specialized in de-niggerizing Negroes. He took the nigger out of them," West argues. "To niggerize a people is to make them afraid and ashamed and scared and intimidated, so that they are deferential to the powers that be. They scratch when it doesn't itch; they laugh when it ain't funny."[42] West channels Malcolm in his moments of bold speech. And just as Socrates admitted to suffering the scorn of the people of Athens for his own *parrhesia* – fearless, unintimidated speech – in Plato's *Apology*, so West is willing to suffer unpopularity for his fiery, piercing language.[43] As a result of it, he was excluded from the inner circle of Obama's administration and from the ceremony commemorating Martin King's "I Have a Dream" speech on the National Mall.

And yet, just as importantly, the question presents itself: How many people in West's audience can easily move beyond his opening salvo in the above interview, when he labeled Obama a "global George Zimmerman"? That line seizes attention. But it does so at the risk of such severity that it becomes the only piece of the interview that listeners attend to. Its rhetorical effect is to give audience members who are so inclined all the reason they need to stop listening further. Its harshness gives critics fodder for characterizing West as an intellectual celebrity driven by a bruised ego for not receiving a ticket to Obama's inauguration.

Another infamous example of "rhetorical grenade-lobbing" occurred on November 9, 2012. In an interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!* West referred to Obama as "a Rockefeller Republican in blackface." Plucked from its context, this phrase went viral among pundits and bloggers. West's critics continue to invoke it as evidence of his unhinged hatred of Obama, putatively inspired by his not receiving a ticket to the presidential inauguration and his exclusion from Obama's circle of influence. In an interview two weeks later, an interviewer pressed West to clarify the significance of his remark:

SHOZAB RAZA: On *Democracy Now!*, with Amy Goodman, you referred to Obama as a "Rockefeller Republican in blackface." Can you explain why that description is fitting?

[42] West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 115.
[43] Ibid., 112 (the allusion to Plato refers to line 24A of the *Apology*).

CORNEL WEST: Well because discourse in America has moved so far to the
   Right that Romney is far Right, and Obama is centrist.[44] And a Rockefeller
   Republican in the '60s and '70s was in many ways very much what Obama is
   now. He's calling for cuts with a little bit of revenue increase with the tax from
   the well-to-do, but it's going to be very modest, he keeps saying. There's no
   serious talk about a massive investment, private or public, for jobs, for decent
   housing, and for education. And his foreign policy is not only continuous with
   Bush but in some ways even worse.
PARMBIR GILL: For that much, Rockefeller Republican would've been suffi-
   cient. So, why "blackface"?
CORNEL WEST: Well, because he's a black man. Because, you see, a black face
   in America makes a difference. Race matters in America. You can get away
   with a lot. Just by being black, people just assume you've got some connection
   to folk catching hell. Because when you get to New York, as soon as you get
   there, just go to the chocolate side of town and see the levels of social mis-
   ery: the 50% of unemployment amongst young people, the 20% unemploy-
   ment for *everybody*, the 40% of young kids in poverty, and so forth. So with
   a black face, they just figured that Obama must be progressive. *Not neces-
   sarily*! Clarence Thomas? No! Barack Obama is much more progressive than
   Clarence, but he's in the center. He's a centrist.

Contextualizing the comment makes clear the substance of the critique
to which it is related. In the racialized inflections of US politics, thor-
oughly gradualist, centrist policies (which tend to tilt – or be pushed –
rightward in the contemporary climate) may be *perceived* as empathizing
with the suffering of African American poor and disadvantaged people
because the figure articulating those policies is African American. In fact,
those policies are thoroughly centrist, gradualist, and tend to overlook
the persistent suffering and severity of conditions under which large seg-
ments of the African American population (and other groups) live. And
yet, the "in blackface" part of the sound bite is the only part that seizes
attention. The crucial exposition of the criticism vanishes.

The same can be said of West's claim that Obama became "a black
mascot of Wall Street oligarchs and a black puppet of corporate pluto-
crats." Asked to clarify such disparaging remarks, West replied:

CORNEL WEST: When I call the president a black puppet of Wall Street, I was
   really talking about the degree to which Wall Street had a disproportionate
   amount of influence on his policies as opposed to poor people and working
   people.

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[44] Mitt Romney was the Republican candidate for President against Obama
   in 2012. He is a businessman and politician who served as Governor of
   Massachusetts from 2003 to 2007.

JAMES BROWN: Why use such harsh language with – showing no respect for the office of the president?

CORNEL WEST: I tend to be one who just speaks from my soul, and so what comes out sometimes is rather harsh. In that sense I'm very much a part of the tradition of a Frederick Douglass or a Malcolm X who used hyperbolic language at times to bring attention to the state of emergency. So all of that rage and righteous indignation can lead one not to speak politely sometimes.[45]

As a public figure, Malcolm was covered in numerous media outlets of his day. His frank and fearless speech was widely controversial in mainstream society, from which he was marginalized as a result. His legacy forms a central and indispensable current of the black prophetic tradition. And yet, when transposed into the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the viral dynamics of contemporary social media, speech of the kind Malcolm wielded so powerfully presents a set of liabilities foreign to his day. In the contemporary context, certain streams of black prophetic fire risk blowing back upon, and scorching, the prophet. So too for Cornel West.

This point raises more specific questions about the conception of "the prophetic" at the heart of prophetic pragmatism. What kind of agency does the prophet have? Does the prophet invoke an authority that is "unassailable" by definition? In what ways might he or she be held accountable? By whom or to what? Might the moral outrage that fuels a prophet's indictment of some state of affairs be interspersed with other discursive modes and resources? How are these questions to be answered if West's account of the prophetic is to be at all consistent with his democratic commitments? In the following chapter, I examine this conception in the light of recent assessments of the virtues and limits of prophetic indictment.

[45] For the full interview in which West's "Rockefeller Republican" comment occurred, see Amy Goodman, "Tavis Smiley, Cornel West on the 2012 Election and Why Calling Obama 'Progressive' Ignores His Record," *Democracy Now!* November 9, 2012, www.democracynow.org/2012/11/9/tavis_smiley_cornel_west_on_the. For West's clarification, see Parmbir Gill and Shozab Raza, "An Interview with Cornel West on Occupy, Obama and Marx," *Counter Punch*, November 30, 2012, www.counterpunch.org/2012/11/30/an-interview-with-cornel-west-on-occupy-obama-and-marx. For the full interview in which West characterized Obama as the "black mascot of Wall Street oligarchs," see Chris Hedges, "The Obama Deception: Why Cornel West Went Ballistic," *Truthdig*, May 16, 2011, www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_obama_deception_why_cornel_west_went_ballistic_20110516. For West's clarification, see Cornel West, "We're in Bad Shape," from the script of "Cornel West," *60 Minutes*, *March 20, 2016*, www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-cornel-west-on-race-in-the-u-s.

5

Testing the Spirits

Discerning True Prophecy from False

Contemporary America is rife with speech that presents itself as prophetic – strong and unyielding moral and political claims and indictment justified under the auspices of religious identities and divine prerogatives that allegedly invest one's claims with unassailable authority. Is it possible to distinguish good prophetic criticism from bad? What are the marks of a genuinely prophetic critic? In what ways, if at all, is a would-be prophetic to be held accountable? Is there some identifiable difference between the indictments leveled by Cornel West in previous chapters and, say, those of the Westboro Baptist Church? Answers to these questions are crucial to the prospects of carrying forward a model of prophetic pragmatism in ways that might contribute to a model of healthy conflict and democratic transformation in contemporary society.

In what follows, I examine two critical treatments of prophetic criticism in contemporary American society. Each attempts to identify marks of genuine prophetic criticism in order to distinguish the genuinely prophetic from certain forms of excessive rhetoric that mask themselves as prophetic criticism within contemporary US culture wars. I argue that the vantage point provided by prophetic pragmatism makes clear that, despite a public life characterized by strident denunciations and indictments that base themselves on putatively unassailable authority, contemporary public discourse actually suffers from an impoverishment of genuinely prophetic criticism. Finally, I explore prophetic pragmatism's relation to – and in some ways retrieval – of the work by Jewish rabbi, philosopher, and activist Abraham Joshua Heschel. I demonstrate how the democratic tradition, of which virtuous prophetic discourse is a vital component, can be retrieved and re-enlivened in order to conceptualize

and deploy a model of healthy conflict for the purposes of democratic social transformation.

Prophecy without Contempt?

One of the most influential definitions of the prophetic in late twentieth-century US thought is found in the work of Christian theologian and ethicist James Gustafson. Prophetic speech, as he defines it, "takes the form of moral or religious indictments. It is the word of the Lord proclaimed *against* the moral evil and apostasy of the world and societies. It shows in dramatically vivid language just how far the human community has fallen from what it ought to be."[1] Such indictment is an essential feature of the prophetic. Gustafson defines the prophetic as intrinsically unconcerned with daily details regarding matters of public policy and legislation. Indeed, from the perspective of the prophetic, attempting to fine-tune or incrementally adjust public policy and law is tantamount to "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic."[2] Unless the root of the systemic problem is altogether excised, and the society's outlook transformed, the people and society in question will remain implicated in evil.[3]

The second key point of Gustafson's definition is that the prophet "does not usually make arguments."[4] He or she offers demonstrations that aim to "evoke a sense of moral indignation." Thus, for example, the anti-abortion activist decries, prophetically, that "abortion is murder." He claims that nothing short of overturning *Roe* v. *Wade* will alter the effects of this radical evil. By this definition, the prophetic stance does not conduct careful analyses of the step-by-step processes necessary in order to make meaningful changes in law and policy.[5] What is clear is that the language by which the prophet sparks moral outrage is "very different from that of ethical argumentation or economic and social policy."[6] Prophetic language aims, above all, to move its hearers.

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[1] James M. Gustafson, "Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical, and Policy," *Seeking Understanding: The Stob Lectures, 1987–88* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College and Seminary, 1988), 7–8.

[2] Ibid., 50–51.

[3] Typically, Gustafson explains, prophetic speech aims at the root or sustained pattern of a problem, and not just an isolated instance (though not always). Ibid., 8.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 267–268.

[6] Gustafson, "Varieties of Moral Discourse," 52.

Prophetic discourse, Gustafson argues, is typically "negatively uto-pian." It is relentlessly critical of actual conditions (negative), and mea-sures those deficiencies against an ideal, but nonexistent, state of affairs (utopian). He contrasts such discourse with Martin King's "I Have a Dream" speech, which he characterizes as "positive utopianism." This is also a form of the prophetic, but one that is aspirational. It forwards a moving vision according to which, one day, the lion will lay down with the lamb. Of course, what that "laying down together" might look like, or how it might be achieved, is not really the prophet's concern.[7] While the prophetic is legitimate as a variety of moral discourse, says Gustafson, it is deficient on its own. It identifies "the devil" – a root of a present evil. It "does not concern itself with incremental choices that have to be made by persons and institutions in which good and evil are intricately inter-mingled."[8] Below I argue that Gustafson's account of the prophet hinges too greatly upon the form that a speaker's claims must take, and this produces a segregated account of moral reasoning in which the prophetic is, in effect, an overly idealized type.

Important recent analysis of the role of the prophetic in US public life draws upon Gustafson as its starting point, positioning the prophetic as, typically, utopian and negative.[9] "Those who employ prophetic indict-ments speak unequivocally and from on high: from a position of an unas-sailable authority, whether God, or Reason, or Common Sense," writes Catholic theologian and legal scholar Cathleen Kaveny.[10] This stance evokes a conception of the Hebrew prophets who claimed some divine sanction, delivering indictments that are "unassailable" and "from on high."[11] In this model, prophetic intervention takes the form of "*indict-ment* on the basis of the covenant between the Hebrew people and God."[12] Historically, indictment was predicated on a legal relationship between the people and the divine being. This understanding of the prophetic was appropriated by late seventeenth-century covenantal theology in North America, which derived from it a distinctive form of prophetic criticism – the American jeremiad.[13]

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[7] Ibid., 53–54.
[8] Ibid., 55.
[9] Kavany, *Prophecy without Contempt*, 244–247.
[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 245n11.
[13] Ibid., 179–181.

Of course, in the eventual absence of a shared, binding covenantal reference point, contemporary prophetic indictment is always at risk of degenerating into the mere trappings of prophecy – irate denunciation, attack, and ad hominem. Thus, prophetic discourse is an especially volatile form of engagement in the public sphere. It is best considered a kind of "moral chemotherapy." While it may have crucial uses, it must be used ever so sparingly and cautiously. Deliberative construction of arguments must be the default mode. Prophetic indictment is permissible when something goes morally awry with the deliberative mode. This risk of prophetic indictment does not render it intrinsically vicious in a modern, pluralist context. Kaveny thus develops a "just prophecy theory," conscripting "just war" principles into a decision procedure for determining when and how a sustained pattern of chemotherapeutic prophetic indictment should be deployed.[14]

Kaveny offers an urgently needed, learned, and exacting intervention in a contemporary public context that is filled with frequently shrill and categorical denunciation of one group by another, and vice versa. How does her account of prophetic speech, its uses and liabilities, relate to the vision of the prophetic forwarded by prophetic pragmatism?

Prophetic pragmatism understands the mark of the prophetic to be, at its core, courageously speaking the truth in love, whatever consequences might ensue.[15] However, West's conception of the prophetic is, at various points in its lengthy evolution, influenced by the rabbi and Jewish philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose account of prophetic impetus, agency, and accountability diverges from Kaveny's.[16] And because of this, from the inception of their projects, Kaveny and West assume somewhat different accounts of the prophetic. What difference does it make that prophetic pragmatism draws on Heschel?

First, Heschel claims that the prophet is no passive conduit. The prophet is always and already a responsible agent, however much that

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[14] Ibid., 332.

[15] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 233. West has been remarkably consistent in his articulation of the prophetic. See, for instance, George Yancy and Cornel West, "Cornel West: The Fire of a New Generation," The Stone, *New York Times*, August 19, 2015, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/19/cornel-west-the-fire-of-a-new-generation/ (accessed August 1, 2017).

[16] Ismar Schorsch and Cornel West, "Abraham Joshua Heschel Remembered" (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993). Part 1 available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL8vlia8BxQ; and Part 2 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_bbiaG1DN4 (accessed August 1, 2017).

person might invoke – or might seem to invoke – a higher or divinely sanctioned, exceptional mission. By Heschel's lights, any message of prophetic indictment stands to be parsed, weighed, and measured for its validity, its moral implications, and with some suspicion toward any putative exceptional status claimed by (or imputed to) the prophet. This requires that the intended audience of any would-be prophet attend to, and assess, his or her "temperament, concern, character, and individuality."[17] The person and story of the prophet is interwoven with the integrity of the message. Such attention is, in part, how true prophetic criticism is to be distinguished from false.

Heschel's account lends itself to a distinctively democratic conception of prophetic criticism and activism as a mode of moral reasoning, one that becomes foundational to prophetic pragmatism.[18] On one hand, any would-be prophet renders his or her claims in virtue of what he or she understands to be the truth, truth's relation to justice, and how both precipitate from love and compassion for one's fellows. At the same time, the prophetic pragmatist recognizes himself or herself as an intrinsically fallible agent. Even when making some claim to truth – perhaps making a morally absolute claim in the process – the prophetic pragmatist remains aware of his or her limitations as a fallible agent, and aware of the inherent partiality of vision.[19] The prophet and her message are both

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[17] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), xxii.

[18] West referred to this as a "prophetic framework of moral reasoning" (*Democracy Matters*, 32). The significance of this complex combination will become clear below. Heschel is but one of the central influences upon prophetic pragmatism on this score (West also names Sojourner Truth, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Wendell Phillips, Emma Goldman, A. Phillip Randolph, Harvey Milk, Robert Moses, Barbara Ehrenreich, and King). In my view, Heschel's influence becomes increasingly pronounced in West's work over time, in large part because of the very close relationship that Heschel shared with Martin King from 1963 onward. Heschel also succeeds in characterizing the full significance of King's work during that period, and in indicating the trajectory that it implied for any who would follow King's example in un-denuded ways. Indeed, it is precisely the trajectory that Heschel named that West understands himself to be carrying forward today. See *Black Prophetic Fire*, 66–68.

[19] On this point the constraints that Kaveny places upon prophetic speech – and her prescription of humility, in particular – overlap with the prophetic pragmatist account. Indeed, as Martin Kavka puts it, "for social critics … to be humble is the overwhelming message of Kaveny's work." See, in particular, Kaveny's treatment of Jonah, p. 392. Martin Kavka, "What Does a Prophet Know?" *Journal of Religious Ethics*. 46, no. 1 (forthcoming): 181–189.

earthbound, and he or she is accountable for his or her claims. This is true however much they might force their recipients to confront a declared higher good or cause, or awaken to injustices and forms of evil that permeate the ground on which both prophet and listeners stand.

Thus, prophetic indictment always stands to be examined by virtue of the consistencies and tensions it generates among the values and ideals with which it is interwoven in the discursive tradition itself. For example, Martin King persistently tested instances of righteous anger and nonviolent militancy for their consistency with the law of love.[20] Prophetic criticism might be examined by standards external to the specific context, tradition, or "revealed" status from which a prophet may make his or her categorical denunciation. King, for instance, invoked constitutional norms in his civil rights activism. He appealed to human rights norms to guide his later activism against systemic poverty, such as housing, jobs, and adequate income.[21]

Heschel's insights here – and certainly West's appropriation of them – complicates the characterization of prophetic indictment as a likely conversation stopping deliverance from an ostensibly coercive, putatively unassailable, moral or religious authority. It imputes no de facto power to the prophet to stand in indisputable judgment over her interlocutors. Moreover, this account of the prophetic does not buy into a binary dualism between prophetic and deliberative modes of reasoning. Inflected by Heschel's account prophetic indictment is intrinsically accountable to moral deliberation, and critical analysis. On this account, prophetic discourse in modern democratic contexts will be, at its best and perhaps of necessity, a mixed discourse.

Nonetheless, there are points of overlap, and important points at which each can learn from the other. For example, Kaveny gives us exemplary models of prophetic indictment in Abraham Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address" and Martin King's "I Have a Dream" speech. It is crucial to keep in mind that neither of these emerged from a vacuum. And neither was essentially exceptional. Both King and Lincoln evolved in important ways; neither can be held up as an unalloyed specimen. I think this fact

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[20] King, "The Power of Nonviolence," in James M. Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992), 31–32.

[21] See, for example, Martin Luther King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," in James Melvin Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 131.

does not compromise their examples as prophetic actors so much as it forces us to think more expansively of prophetic discourse.

Kaveny rightly points out that King's work of prophetic indictment in his "I Have a Dream" speech administered a kind of moral chemotherapy to specific community practices, laws, cultural contexts, and forms of deliberation, which were being eaten alive by the cancers of Jim Crow.[22] At the same time, the structural and cultural forms of violence King encountered altered the way in which he conceived of, and exemplified, prophetic discourse. When he turned his attention to Chicago's South and West sides in 1966, King found that desegregated lunch counters, toilets, and buses had done relatively little to change the workaday realities of black, brown, and destitute people of all colors in the North. These realities forced King to recognize the nonexceptional and necessary character of the prophetic indictment that would need to be administered there. He recognized that structural and cultural forms of violence in the North ran deeper, and operated sometimes even more insidiously, than the more visible Jim Crow laws of the South.

Conditions in the North were not isolable and conspicuous like malignant tumors. They were dispersed manifestations of persistent poverty, marginalization, humiliation, and internalized forms of self-abnegation. They could not be resolved by changing a few laws or altering the legal status of citizens. These forms of structural violence produced (and, in fact, continue to produce today) conditions of moral crisis, and indeed, human catastrophe. At the same time, these are also highly routinized modes of crisis, and as oxymoronic as it might sound, normalized catastrophe. They are not exceptional conditions urgently calling forth an exceptional mode of discourse (i.e., chemotherapeutic). King increasingly found that these conditions would require sustained prophetic vigilance – a kind of medicine that might treat the analogue to a chronic, autoimmune disease that manifests as Sisyphean misery, persistent psycho-social, legal, and economic vulnerability, and often, bare survival.

As a result, King's prophetic relentlessness did not abate in the wake of the now vaunted – and indeed, largely romanticized – glories of his

[22] Kaveny refines and expands upon Gustafson's basic definition of the prophetic. The criteria she develops enable her to identify why, precisely, King's "I Have a Dream" speech is exemplary prophecy: It (1) invokes a conception of covenant or law as its basis, (2) offers a factual basis for the complaint conveyed through vivid and affective imagery, and (3) draws a legal conclusion on the basis of the law and facts (*Prophecy without Contempt*, 364–366).

"I Have a Dream" speech (1963), his Nobel Peace Prize (1964), and the great victories of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts (1964 and 1965). Rather, his prophetic work evolved. King was pushed in an increasingly radical direction. This occurred, in part, through the deliberative give and take with Stokely Carmichael and the Black Power movement, and in particular, its uses of Frantz Fanon's socio-theoretical analysis.[23]

But it was not any negative and utopian strains of his prophetic tones (or "chemotherapeutic" character of his later work) that gave rise to his increasing unpopularity and loss of earlier allies. It was, largely, the change in the issues that he targeted. De-segregation of lunch counters, public toilets, buses, public parks, and movie theaters were highly visible and isolable issues. That is, in part, why they could be so successfully cut as issues and frozen as targets for community organizing campaigns to "move power," and thereby change specific segregationist laws. These issues were sympathy-inspiring. They enabled the movement of which King was a national leader to tap into local community organizing campaigns that had, in some cases, been building for decades. King relied on – and was challenged by – the local and grassroots organizing by the likes of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Bob Moses, among countless other local leaders who would send out a call to the national leaders.[24] These local campaigns, stitched together as a national movement, garnered more broad-based and popular support than did opposition to the war in Vietnam, or long-term transformation of the structural causes and conditions of poverty and structural violence that cut so deeply into communities of color.

As King refocused his efforts, as with most prophets, he came to be treated as one without honor.[25] White and black allies had been eager to

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[23] Louis Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man* (Los Angeles, CA: Holloway House, 1968), 113–122.

[24] Ibid., 113–114. See Albert Raboteau, *American Prophets* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 141–143. West argues that this intimate relationship between the prophetic figure and social movement is essential to the work of the prophet. He demonstrates the relevance of the point for Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ella Baker, and Malcolm X. See *Black Prophetic Fire*, 2–3.

[25] King's negativity rating rose steeply by the Gallup poll of August 1966 (66 percent unfavorable overall; 72 percent unfavorable rating among white respondents). In comparable polls, such a high negativity rating has been surpassed only by that of Richard Nixon in the wake of the Watergate scandal. See Sheldon Appleton, "Martin Luther King in Life … and Memory," *The Public Perspective*, February/March 1995, 11–16, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-perspective/ppscan/62/62011.pdf.

integrate lunch counters and public parks, and guarantee voting rights. They rallied in support when the opponents wore white hoods, or blue uniforms and billy clubs. But many of them abandoned King when he turned his vocal resistance to what he called the "triple evils": racism, the Vietnam War and US militarism, and the perils of materialism and consumerist capitalism.

This was neither negative nor positive utopianism. King and the movement continued to call for concrete social and policy objectives. They fought for humane housing, quality education, guaranteed meaningful employment, and livable incomes for poor people of all colors.[26] Indeed, they were following Gandhi's method for nonviolent direct action. This was carefully reasoned and tested for its practical implications in achieving concrete goals *at the same time* that it rendered both prophetic speech and prophetic witness regarding the evils suffered especially by African Americans.[27]

Poverty and the Vietnam War interwove inextricably with racism in the US. Poor and black people were drafted and sent into combat at rates far higher than those who were white and economically advantaged. Poor people were disproportionately people of color. Of course, to join with the anti-war movement was to risk being branded unpatriotic. Association with that movement alienated donors supporting the movement for civil rights. It disaffected President Johnson and his administration. Johnson had ultimately taken King's part in the fight for civil and

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[26] E.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Other America," speech at Stanford University, April 14, 1967; and *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968).

[27] King followed Gandhi's method of nonviolent direct action and distilled it to six guiding principles: (1) that nonviolence is not passive, but entails courageous action; (2) that it seeks the good of one's adversary, even reconciliation with him or her, not his or her defeat; (3) that it seeks to combat and eliminate evil, not the person who does or is complicit in that evil; (4) nonviolent action accepts that suffering may be a necessary means of challenging and changing injustice and evil, but the nonviolent actor refuses to inflict suffering; (5) nonviolence rejects any form of hatred, and even violence of the spirit. It aspires to love one's enemy, and for King, this meant white people especially. "Since the white man's personality is greatly distorted by segregation, and his soul is greatly scarred, he needs the love of the Negro. The Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities, and fears." Finally, (6) nonviolence maintains faith that eventually justice will prevail. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1958), 90–95.

voting rights. King was aware that Johnson expected loyalty in return. Yet King refused to let Johnson's support in achieving concrete legislative and policy successes rope him into a grand bargain with American empire and militarism.[28] In this he was joined by Heschel, whose vocal opposition to the Vietnam War led the Johnson administration to threaten to diminish its military support for the state of Israel.[29] King continued his criticism of the war, even as he turned his attention to developing a Poor People's Campaign, which was to result in a "bill of rights for the poor" as a proposed constitutional amendment. But King was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

King's journey indicates that prophetic criticism, at its best, is not exceptional in the way that the medical analogy of chemotherapy suggests. Nor, *pace* Gustafson, is it essentially a counter-point to the deliberative giving and taking of reasons, or for policy considerations for that matter. In fact, some element of prophetic analysis will be necessary against the persisting realities of structural violence, and the cultural artifacts and understandings which cloak, camouflage, and conceal structural violence – which make it seem unavoidable, or "at least not wrong." It will be necessary as interwoven with moral deliberation and policy work into the whole cloth of a successful social movement.

Kaveny highlights the impact upon the effectiveness of King's prophetic criticism once he trained his attention upon the War, poverty, and consumerism. The prophet's certainty in identifying and denouncing a problem is likely to become counterproductive for purposes of constructing a solution to a political quagmire as complicated as, say, US involvement in the Vietnam War. "I suspect that one reason King's later writings on the Vietnam War and social and economic inequality were not as well-received as his earlier work on race equality is that the remedies for the problems of the late 1960s weren't as obvious."[30] In effect, King trod upon the stony ground of "radical commitment to moral principle" in order to negatively denounce the war. Such a position and approach could not accommodate "the soft sands of differential policy analysis."[31]

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[28] Vincent Harding, "Introduction," in King, *Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community*, xiv–xv.

[29] Raboteau, citing Robert McAfee Brown, *American Prophets*, 22.

[30] Cathleen Kaveny, "Response to Interlocutors," September 7, 2016, http://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/response-to-interlocutors (accessed July 28, 2017).

[31] Kaveny, *Prophecy without Comtempt*, 267. In her argument, Kaveny applies this distinction between utopian negativity and moral absolutes, on one hand,

It is true that King's popularity trended precipitously downward in later years, especially in terms of opinion polling. It is important to note that his favorability rating was never high to begin with.[32] He was viewed with deep suspicion – as a busy body and troublemaker – even at his most (putatively) restrained and exemplary. Recall, he led the Montgomery bus boycott (1955–56), marking the point at which the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began monitoring him in December of that year. The FBI monitored and engaged his organizing efforts and continued through the time of his assassination in 1968. King was excoriated as an outside troublemaker and for (allegedly) inciting violence and hate by the local white clergy during the Birmingham campaign (1963). These examples multiply. There is no easy distinction to be made between an earlier, more domesticated King in contrast to the later, radical Martin King.

At the same time, clearly, the focus of King's prophetic vision expanded and deepened in ways rightly termed "radical" in his later years. It certainly became multi-focal. It became attuned to different forms of violence and subjugation, and how these symbiotically interrelate and persist, even once unjust laws are abolished. His criticism "radicalized" in the sense that it increasingly "cut to root causes and conditions" of the marginalization, exclusion, and humiliation suffered predominantly by people of color. And he recognized the need for transforming social, political, and economic structures, as much as equal access and basic civil rights. He called for the spiritual and psychological transformation of black and white folks from the diseases of white supremacy. Yet, in the context within which he worked, King remained throughout his career lovingly and nonviolently militant and prophetic.

King's journey as Christian minister, prophet, critic, activist, and movement leader further demonstrates that virtuous prophetic discourse in the context of democratic traditionalism *must* be an enterprise of discursive integration. From the vantage point of prophetic pragmatism, prophetic discourse will entail socio-critical analysis, observational criticism, moral and theological judgment, and deliberative accountability. These will not be neatly parceled into discrete packets (exclusively deliberation on this

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and differential policy assessment on the other, in her meticulous assessment of the contemporary anti-abortion debate in the US. I transpose that distinction to King's work as a prophetic critic and activist.

[32] The first Gallup negativity rating for King occurred in May 1963. At that time, he came in at 46 percent, a rate exceeded only by Nikita Kruschev in that survey. See Appleton, "Martin Luther King in Life … and Memory," 11.

occasion, exclusively observational or socio-analytical critique on that one). Rather, the prophetic pragmatist's form of analysis will reflect more of disciplined and learned – and because of this, improvisational – jazz-like extemporaneity. He or she will make arguments in support of his or her claims that certain forms of treatment of persons are moral evils. Moreover, in a religiously and morally plural setting, any such prophetic intervention has not the luxury of, say, a shared covenantal reference point by which to inveigh against the unfaithfulness of the people. Nor can she invoke a putative mandate based upon shared recognition of a divine being. In this context, the prophet must practice moral bricolage. He or she confronts some problem – circumstances of injustice or moral outrage, crisis or catastrophe. To render criticism effectively, and to persuade, the virtuous prophet must draw from received moral and religious resources in order to pragmatically construct the moral language he or she will deploy for the purposes at hand.[33]

King exemplified such fluency in multiple moral and religious languages. He studied Henry David Thoreau's and Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and deployed the latter's method of nonviolent direct action.[34] He drew personalist insights from Reinhold Niebuhr, and deployed the I–Thou philosophical anthropology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber as an orientation for basic justice.[35] King took prophetic inspiration

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[33] This is a significant point of contrast with Kaveny's account. She takes a basic shared, underpinning agreement (historically, a legal concept of covenant) as a necessary basis for prophetic indictment (I am grateful to Kyle Lambelet for emphasizing the significance of this point to me in conversation). I draw the concept of "moral bricolage" as a mode of coherent moral reasoning and prophetic intervention in pluralist concepts from the account robustly developed throughout Jeffrey Stout's *Ethics after Babel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Albert Raboteau highlights King's fluency in multiple moral languages. See his *American Prophets*, 142–143.

[34] Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," *A Testament of Hope* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 23–30. King opted for Gandhi's conception and method of nonviolent direct action in tandem with his rejection of Reinhold Niebuhr's characterization of pacifism as passive and utopian. See his juxtaposition of the two in *Stride toward Freedom.*

[35] See Martin Luther King, Jr., "An Encounter with Niebuhr (1 Sept. 1958)," in Clayborn Carson et al., eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., vol. 4, Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–September 1958* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 480; King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (April 1963), in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 289–302. For the crucial philosophical and theological background for King's understanding of personalism, see Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Touchstone, 1970).

from his friend Abraham Heschel, who marched with him from Selma to Montgomery and introduced him in the pulpit of the Riverside Church in New York City on the occasion that he formally declared his opposition to the Vietnam War.[36] King argued immanently – and prophetically – against unjust laws by invoking their irreconcilability with constitutional norms and the values enshrined in various features of US civil religion. He appealed to human rights norms where constitutional norms were silent. On occasion, he invoked St. Thomas Aquinas's account of natural law, and what St. Augustine described as "the moral law." He rendered analysis of social-psychological character of consciousness formation.[37] And perhaps most influentially, King drew upon his understanding of having been born into and nurtured throughout his life in "the faith of the Black experience."[38] Of course, King was, from first to last, a Baptist preacher and Christian theologian whose recognition of Jesus's love, and his deep engagement with the Exodus narrative in the Hebrew scriptures, compelled him to fight for justice in public for people of all colors and creeds, but especially for those who suffered directly the evils of racism in all its forms. He punctuated this array of resources and discursive tools with recurrent "biblical critique."[39]

On a prophetic pragmatist account, genuine rhetoric of prophetic indictment will always be caught up in what King, Heschel, and West demonstrate to be a broader and extended prophetic dialectic. The process of push

[36] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam – A Time to Break Silence," April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York City. For the mutual influence between Heschel and King, see Susannah Heschel, "Theological Affinities in the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Yvonne Chireau and Nathanioel Deutsch, eds, *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 168–188.

[37] See, for instance, the description of the "mental clouds of inferiority" forming in the consciousness (the "mental sky") of his daughter and son in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in James M. Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992), 125–134.

[38] James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1991).

[39] For the distinctive blend of what Andrew Young calls King's "biblical critique," along with the remarkable breadth of philosophical, religious, and ethical resources upon which he drew, see my article "Structural and Cultural Violence in Religion and Peacebuilding," in Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

and pull, resisting and succumbing, entails moral judgment, deliberative considerations, and self-correcting reflection (expansively and integratively construed). But it also involves the journey and progress of the prophet himself or herself – the prophet's experience, story, and personal development, as well as the broader social situation and movement to which he or she is beholden. Such a dialectical dimension comes as no surprise. This is an insight drawn from the deep democratic tradition in America. To take one example, Lincoln's exemplary prophetic intervention had required Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe – and indeed a social movement inflected by public interventions ranging from the searing, categorical denunciations of David Walker, William Lloyd Garrison, even John Brown, to the more measured (but no less categorical and exacting) Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, among many others – to press, and push, and hold him accountable.

Similarly in the case of Martin King, as Ella Baker famously stated, "The movement made Martin, and not Martin the movement." Baker cautioned against any simple appeal to charisma as the source of a leader's effectiveness, or the validity of prophetic intervention. She challenged the temptations of a top-down configuration of the national movement, one that would model itself on the institutional configuration of the Black Church. And she pointed out that King was not as accountable as he should have been to the women and young people in the movement.[40] This example further suggests that the embodied- and embeddedness of the would-be prophetic figure is essential to the conception of democratic prophetic figure that emerges from prophetic pragmatism.[41] And this insight is essential to prophetic pragmatism's conception of the prophet,

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[40] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 77–102.

[41] West notes with specific reference to the Black prophetic tradition, "any conception of the charismatic leader severed from the social movements is false. I consider leaders and movements to be inseparable. There is no Frederick Douglass without the Abolitionist movement. There is no W. E. B. Du Bois without the Pan-Africanist, international workers', and Black freedom movements. There is no Martin Luther King Jr. without the anti-imperialist, workers', and civil rights movements. There is no Ella Baker without the anti-US-apartheid and Puerto Rican independence movements. There is no Malcolm X without the Black Nationalist and human rights movements. And there is no Ida B. Wells without the anti-US-terrorist and Black women's movements." West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 2–3.

and prophetic criticism. It is a key point at which West's account of the prophetic intersects with Heschel's.

King was not a prophetic pragmatist. But he stands as an exemplary prophet in the formulation of prophetic pragmatism. Like King, West's most severe criticisms are not immune from challenge. Like most, he believes his claims to be true, but does not claim for them a putative "unassailable authority." His criticisms do not "veer heavenward" after categorically excoriating present conditions and persons.[42] Very much the opposite, in fact. He expects to be held accountable. Like King, West himself ultimately grounds his hope in the redemptive, self-sacrificial love of Jesus. And, like King, he strives to deploy the law of love as the measure of his criticism of would-be opponents.[43] Yet prophetic pragmatism recognizes that prophetic criticism – while persistently critical of present conditions when necessary – nonetheless depends upon certain of the received resources, and present historical and social conditions, from which that criticism emerges.

The present conditions, including the resources of a democratic tradition that has carried the people into the present, contain resources necessary to combat corruption, decay, and disarray in the tradition itself. However great its challenges, the present cannot be wholly and entirely rotten. Otherwise there would be no place for the prophetic critic to stand at all in order to discern injustice from justice, to render criticism, and to spur change. Prophetic criticism thus interweaves with the more broadly democratic practice of giving and asking for reasons, oriented by norms of mutual recognition and reciprocal accountability, and nondomination. Thus, when pressed, West recognizes himself – like any would-be prophet – as accountable to give

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[42] Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 58.

[43] King explains this as the implication of taking agapic love as the orientational center of the movement. "When you come to love on this level you begin to love men not because they are likeable, not because they do things that attract us, but because God loves them and here we love the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does." King, "The Power of Nonviolence" (1958), *I Have a Dream*, 32. West refers to this as "charitable Christian hatred" – "Christians must learn how to hate right – hate injustice, hate poverty, hate unfairness, hate cowardice, hate forms of conformity in which we are well-adjusted to injustice. Hatred ought not to be something alien to those who are fundamentally committed to loving persons." West cites the influence of Puritan Joseph Bentham, who wrote in 1636: "To hate the sin, and love the person, is a charitable Christian hatred." West, Public Address, American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX, November 19, 2016.

reasons for even his most bracing rhetorical moves.[44] In short, prophetic pragmatism sets forth an account in which virtuous prophetic discourse is intrinsically a mixed discourse. But indictment and deliberation are only two of the discursive modes that it integrates. For these are but two of the rhetorical elements of which prophetic intervention may consist.

Kaveny's juridical analogy for prophetic discourse posits a specifically "legal indictment" by a prosecutor before a judge and jury as an essential feature to prophetic discourse. Prophetic indictment accuses its target of "violating the basic commitments of our society."[45] Thus, "the prophetic" works so long as it grounds itself in the agreed upon legal parameters. It will not work in the courtroom context if prophetic critics seek to persuade the courtroom judge of the dubious – or perhaps unjust or illegitimate – nature of the law itself. "If I am indicted for theft, no judge will be patient with my efforts to call into question the wisdom of the law protecting private property," Kaveny writes. Such legal evaluation and revision is the business of legislators, not of the prophet.

This analogy highlights the discursive presupposition of a normative reference point that enables characterizing the prophetic as nondeliberative, and fundamentally not concerned with policy. For, on this account, the prophet does not need to provide arguments on behalf of, nor defend, the norms and standards on the basis of which he or she denounces some evil. This is the point at which Kaveny's legal analogy becomes somewhat constraining. Kaveny is surely correct to point out that public life is not a college seminar classroom.[46] And thus, the careful, cautious, deliberative exchange of reasons – and putatively straightforward vindication of public argument by the force of the better reason – is never entirely adequate in itself.[47] At the same time, of course, public life is not a courtroom either. In modern, democratic, and pluralistic contexts the virtuous prophetic critic should be prepared to articulate, and perhaps justify and defend, the normative bases that ground his or her accusations, even wielding the form of indictment.

In a prophetic pragmatist frame, any would-be prophet in democratic public life must strive not to be simply a virtuous oncologist (wielding the "chemotherapy" of prophetic critique against isolable malignant tumors)

[44] I placed many of these moments of accountability on display throughout the previous chapter.

[45] Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt*, 321–322.

[46] Ibid., 419.

[47] On this point I agree emphatically, and devote Chapter 8 to developing ways of addressing this.

but a virtuous pharmacologist (i.e., one who blends medicinal substances). Such an account expands the purview and integrative character of prophetic analysis and intervention. The prophet would verge upon imprudence and intemperance in those moments when he or she swerves toward purposes as extreme, absolute, and putatively pure as those that call for the last resort of chemotherapy. But if that's the case, then a univocal analogy to chemotherapy – while instructive – also risks becoming overly constraining. A prophetic toxicology (where the poisons of chemotherapy must be cautiously weighed, measured, and deployed toward an overall good) and pharmacology (in which the full range of medicinal substances are blended, re-mixed, and applied as the circumstances require) weave together and intermingle. To my mind, this is exemplified in King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."[48] For prophetic pragmatism this is essential rather than exceptional.

Arguably, King's "I Have a Dream" speech, with its moving tones and cadences, can be (indeed, has been) one of his most easily tamed public interventions. By contrast, one point at which King was effectively prophetic *and* engaged in a mode of mixed discourse is in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" of 1963. Indeed, King had been indicted by the Birmingham clergy for "violating the basic commitments of our society" (i.e., intruding as an outsider, allegedly claiming the mantle of nonviolence but actually causing disruption, inciting anger and even hatred). He was literally indicted as a law-breaker. He proceeded to call into question the wisdom – the validity, actually – of numerous laws (including the one he was indicted for breaking – disorderly conduct). But King's intervention was neither utopian nor negative. Indeed, the organizers of the Birmingham campaign followed the established pattern that Gandhi had set forth. They collected facts about the injustices in that situation. They made their case that these were circumstances of injustice and dehumanization. They pursued some resolution with the authorities regarding the injustices of that situation. When negotiation was refused, activists undertook self-purification and then nonviolent direct action. Their direct actions aimed to generate tension and bring latent conflict, and camouflaged injustices, to the surface and out into the open. Dramatizing this injustice would enable them to name it, identify and confront its causes and conditions, and begin the process of concretely changing them.[49]

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[48] I treat this case at greater length in Chapter 8.

[49] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." I follow Gustavo Maya in pointing this out in the context of Kaveny's account. I address in greater detail in Chapter 8

King called the laws of the land into question by appealing to norms such as moral law (Augustine and Aquinas) and ethical personalism (Martin Buber). In doing so, he was, in effect, "arguing with the judge" (on Kaveny's analogy) about the integrity of the actual laws, and the norms that undergirded them. These were laws by which he had been indicted (denounced by the Birmingham clergy, and literally indicted by the legal authorities). He also called into question the conception of "negative peace" that held sway in that context, at least among the white authorities and citizenry. This norm construed peaceable social order as the absence of explicit conflict, direct violence, and social tension. Advocates of "negative peace" might admit the ultimate unacceptability of Jim Crow laws, but vied to change them gradually, incrementally, and nondisruptively. And, of course, King was jailed for his civil disobedience, and excoriated as an intruding troublemaker by the white, moderate Birmingham clergy (held in contempt of court, if we extend the judicial analogy). But King's refusal to obey laws he argued were unjust, and his challenges to the widely shared conceptions of "peace" and "nonviolence," were a practical, embodied implication of his prophetic criticism. It was prophetic witness mediated through the giving and taking of reasons (i.e., mediated deliberatively). Indeed, his letter contains measured exposition of his prophetic witness (the reasons and moral bases upon which King disobeyed unjust laws).

At the same time, King's letter interweaves deliberation with indictment.[50] He offers careful prophetic reasoning as to why the laws are both evil (e.g., personality degrading), should be changed, and the ways they should be changed (in concrete ways that upbuild, rather than degrade, human personalities). But it also contains explicit moments of indictment – indictment of the police, and perhaps most famously, indictment of white moderates (i.e., those who purport to be allies of the movement, but whose gradualism and calls for "peace" actually subvert it; those who prioritize order over justice).[51] King's "Letter from a

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the processes by which the Birmingham activists generated tension and spurred change as an exemplary instance of healthy conflict.

[50] In as far as civil rights activists followed Gandhi's method, policy analysis was in the background as well. It entailed concrete counter-proposals for the kinds of laws that would need to take the place of unjust laws that were abolished. Gandhi argued that these elements must all be bound up together (policy, argument, loving denunciation of injustice, nonviolent direct action, counter-proposal). See Joan Bondurant, "The Gandhian Dialectic and Political Theory," in *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 189–233.

[51] I return to the details of this episode in Chapter 8.

Birmingham Jail" exemplifies virtuous democratic prophetic discourse in virtue of presenting a crowning example of a "mixed discourse" that is contained in a single rhetorical instance.[52]

In my view, it is the dichotomous – indeed, mutually segregated – oppositions (i.e., prophetic vs. deliberative vs. policy) that get Gustafson's definitions of prophecy and deliberation off on the wrong foot from the start. His conception of the prophetic is thoroughly formal and abstract in the sense that any speech that takes the designated form qualifies as prophetic. It is the *form* of the message that denotes it as "prophetic" (i.e., negative or positively utopian; affective and aspirational; neither deliberative nor concretely practical; attacking some radical evil). But this sets the bar terribly low as to what constitutes prophetic criticism. Much like liberal Protestant scholars who appropriated the tradition of Hebrew prophets before him, Gustafson's understanding divorces prophetic speech from the personality and experience – the embodied- and embedded-ness – of the prophet himself or herself. In fact, on Gustafson's account the category (and form of speech) become dis-embodied. In effect, this plucks the concept and practice of prophecy from its Jewish history and heritage. Gustafson's account is not only disconnected from Heschel's corrective retrieval of the prophetic tradition (and the influence of his work upon that tradition's evolution in the twentieth-century United States). In effect, Gustafson resurrects a problem that Heschel had devoted his masterwork, *The Prophets*, to solving.

Heschel sought to retrieve the understanding of the prophet from predominantly liberal Protestant Christian appropriation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[53] Protestant Christian theologians, Susannah Heschel points out, had come to fixate upon the prophet's message. They had split that message free from the prophet's life and his groundedness in an experience of divine pathos, and in his trained and sustained sympathy for humanity. In so doing, they vitiated the prophecy by disconnecting it from its vital context, and from who the prophet was.

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[52] On this point I find myself persuaded by the particularly lucid exposition of King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" set forth by Gustavo Maya, "Indictment and Deliberation in Late Modernity," *Prophecy without Contempt: A Contending Modernities Book Symposium*, *Contending Modernities*, August 31, 2016, http://sites.nd.edu/contendingmodernities/2016/08/31/indictment-and-deliberation-in-late-modernity/ (accessed July 26, 2017). I address the Birmingham campaign, and each of these features of King's letter, in greater depth in Chapter 8, where I assess it as a model of strategic nonviolence.

[53] Susannah Heschel, "Introduction to the Perennial Classics Edition," in Heschel, *The Prophets*, xv–xvi.

Much like the liberal Protestant scholars from whom Heschel worked to recover the full substance of prophetic discourse, Gustafson is primarily concerned with the *form* of the message, along with a few tell-tale characteristics. Heschel and the tradition so deeply beholden to his work labor to move beyond that. The prophet shares in the pathos of God and conveys that through his or her well-trained sympathy. The prophet is "moved to action by a deep compassion for those suffering unjustice or oppression."[54] The prophet conveys the pathos that God has for humanity. It is a pathos that the prophet comes to experience, share, and embody; he or she feels it "like a fire in the bones."[55] Through his experience and groundedness the prophet, in effect, is both qualified and compelled to speak on behalf of the poor and the least of these. The prophet speaks on behalf of the suffering because he or she suffers alongside them. But this makes who the prophet is – his or her journey, and commitment, and accountability – part and parcel to his or her criticism or message. Who the prophet is thus becomes central to the designation of the message as "prophetic."

Gustafson's definition sets up a problem that isn't really there – or need not be, at least. For if the prophet's journey, experience, and calling constitute both the basis of genuine prophetic criticism and the means by which the prophet and her message is to be tested, tried, and evaluated,[56] then not just anyone who experiences moral outrage (religiously justified or by some putatively "unassailable authority"), and renders an indictment on that basis, counts as a prophet, nor ought their message be considered prophetic. In other words, without the journey, commitment, and accountability essential to the prophet's person *and* message, some activist's categorical denunciation is really just that – denunciation. In such a case, exclusively negative and utopian criticism from a putatively unassailable authority is, again, just that – utopian wishful thinking and putative unassailability, not prophetic criticism.

Not just any speech that takes the form of categorical indictment and righteous denunciation is, or should be considered, prophetic. In fact, in most such cases, such speech acts simply are what they are – categorical indictment and righteous denunciation, or just plain ad hominem or insult. So, when Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell portray the September 11

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[54] Raboteau, *American Prophets*, xiv.

[55] Ibid.

[56] For example, the message is examined in light of the prophet's "temperament, concern, character, and individuality."

terrorist attacks as God's wrathful judgment upon the nation for the sins of its gay and lesbian citizens (along with "abortionists and feminists"), they are not being prophetic – not according to Heschel and the tradition he both retrieves, and further transmits to the modern, twentieth-century democratic context.[57] Robertson and Falwell are being insulting and hateful, and invoking the name of God to justify it. Both claim religious identification. Both claim divine prerogative and see themselves as calling the US back to its original identity as a God-fearing nation – such denunciations are hateful and self-aggrandizing. They marginalize and humiliate. They do not reflect compassion and love for those who suffer injustice, and are marginalized. They do not bear the marks of true prophetic speech. If we see their rhetoric as bearing a family resemblance at all, it is as *false* prophetic speech.

On Heschel's account, the tradition – understood in its full depth – has the resources necessary to identify and constrain false prophecy, or speech that bears only the semblance of the prophetic. How, then do we discern true prophecy from false? In Heschel's exposition of the ancient prophets of the people of Israel, a true prophet was an exceptional figure. In its modern democratic manifestation, Heschel held up Martin King as an exemplar of a prophet. "The situation of the poor in America is our plight, our sickness. To be deaf to their cry is to condemn ourselves," Heschel declared a mere ten days before King's assassination. "Martin Luther King is a voice, a vision, and a way. I call upon every Jew to hearken to his voice, to share his vision, to following his way. The whole future of America will depend upon the impact and influence of Dr. King. May everyone present give of his strength to this great spiritual leader, Martin Luther King."[58]

Of course, one need not be an exemplary democratic prophet to participate in prophetic speech, or in a prophetic movement. However, to take seriously Heschel's account and the democratic tradition for which his account provides a touchstone, prophetic speech cannot be defined simply by virtue of its rhetorical form (again, *pace* Gustafson). The purpose, commitment, experience, and actions of one who would intervene prophetically matter. Moreover, some degree of practiced, *virtuous* engagement in prophetic discourse is a feature of virtuous democratic citizenship.

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[57] Marc Ambinder, "Falwell Suggests Gays to Blame for Attacks," *ABC News*, September 14, 2001, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=121322&page=1 (accessed August 1, 2017).

[58] Susannah Heschel, ed., *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2011), 83–84.

The first mark of genuine prophetic intervention in a modern democratic context is love and compassion for the vulnerable, poor, and suffering as both the impetus and the goal of speech that would be prophetic. Indictments that work to protect institutions, doctrinal purity, or maintain a status quo – and do so in any way that is not unequivocally and explicitly normed and oriented by the love and compassion for the vulnerable and suffering – are not prophetic.

A second mark is that the speaker's engagement with the audience of one's prophetic discourse is in the hope of their altering their path. Prophetic speech is not merely righteous denunciation at a distance. It neither desires, nor relishes the thought of, punishment, expulsion, or exclusion of its target, however apparently wayward. "The prophet is sent not only to upbraid, but also to 'strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees' (Isa. 35:3)," Heschel explains. "Almost every prophet brings consolation, promise, and the hope of reconciliation along with censure and castigation. He begins with a message of doom; he concludes with a message of hope."[59] Criticism that indicts, but does not also interweave with hope for change is not prophetic.

Third, prophetic speech is not marked by the mere *invocation* of hope for change. It is marked, rather, by the prophetic speaker's *embodying hope* for reconciliation through committed action (for the Hebrew prophet, this was participation in the pathos of God).[60] So understood, the prophetic is self-involving, as the prophet "suffers in himself the harm done to others."[61]

Fourth, prophetic intervention in no way fully exempts the speaker from implication in the situation he or she criticizes. "Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but *all are responsible*," Heschel tells us. "If we admit that the individual is

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[59] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 14.

[60] Heschel writes, "The words of the prophet are stern, sour, stinging. But behind his austerity is love and compassion for mankind. Ezekiel sets forth what all other prophets imply: 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather than he should turn from his way and life?' (Ezek. 18:23). Indeed, every prediction of disaster is in itself an exhortation to repentance. The prophet is sent not only to upbraid, but also to 'strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees' (Isa. 35:3). Almost every prophet brings consolation, promise, and the hope of reconciliation along with censure and castigation. He begins with a message of doom; he concludes with a message of hope" (*The Prophets*, 14).

[61] Raboteau, *American Prophets*, 10.

in some measure conditioned or affected by the spirit of society, an individual's crime discloses society's corruption."[62] The true prophet experiences profound maladjustment to conditions characterized by injustice and the suffering of the vulnerable and poor. But he or she also remains implicated in the society of which he or she is a part, and whose practices she criticizes. This situation mandates persistent self-reflexivity on the part of the prophet. "All are responsible" for a state of affairs in which the prophet has some awareness of being implicated in himself or herself.

Fifth, the prophet is accountable for who the prophet is, as well as for his or her claims. The same would go for any who would follow exemplary prophets by rendering criticism that would be prophetic in kind. The prophet is accountable for his or her motivations, temperament, and character. The prophet aims to inspire anxiety and self-doubt in the face of the vices of indifference to those who suffer, or despair that anything can be done. But such anxiety is not an invitation to blindly follow. It invites – or perhaps incites – the prophet's audience to sift and test his or her message as part of the search for how to respond.[63]

Finally, as we saw above, any would-be prophetic message must be interwoven with the story and personality of the prophet, and his or her embeddedness in a historical and social location. The application of this insight to modern, democratic, and pluralist settings sees exemplary prophetic figures as nurtured and enabled by a social movement.

So, for example, to extend Heschel's account, the Westboro Baptist Church mantras of "God hates fags" and "Thank God for 9–11" are not instances of prophetic speech; they are instances of hate speech. Of course, the Westboro Baptist Church members understand their indictments as an attempt to awaken a nation they think is dangling by a thread over the pits of hell due to its wayward, persistent permissiveness of homosexuality that they take to contravene God's law. What greater act of love could they have than their relentless commitment to fight to save the nation from hell by jarring them from their idolatry? Though it may bear some semblance of prophetic speech, on Heschel's account it is not. It is absent compassion; it stands at a distance; it is self-absolving; it demonizes its targets, relishes the thought of their punishment, and pours forth scorn.[64]

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[62] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 19.
[63] Raboteau, *American Prophets*, 14.
[64] Adrian Chen, "Unfollow: How a Prized Daughter of the Westboro Baptist Church Came to Question Its Beliefs," *The New Yorker*, November 23, 2015,

On Gustafson's account, by contrast, such criticism would formally count as prophetic. Using Kaveny's oncological re-description, the Westboro Baptists might be taken to exemplify how rancid an overdose of moral chemotherapy can become (perhaps well-intentioned by the one who delivers it, but utterly destructive and counterproductive). But, for Gustafson, it remains prophecy nonetheless. Again, as Gustafson has it, prophetic speech is determined by the formal character of the claim – purporting unassailable authority, negative, utopian, and categorical indictment in response to which the counterpoints of deliberative reasoning or legal-rational policy wonkishness are tantamount to rearranging the deck chairs on a sinking Titanic. By Heschel's lights, if criticisms are not clearly born of compassionate self-involvement, and aim toward the same, they do not genuinely participate in the prophetic.[65]

As Heschel's perspective helps us to see, the Catholic bishops and activists who sought to deny John Kerry Communion during the 2004 US Presidential election, or claimed that any Catholic who voted for Kerry was committing a serious sin, were not being prophetic.[66] Moreover, the urgent political occasion that framed their efforts, and the nationally publicized campaign by which they placed those efforts on display leading up to the 2004 Presidential election, does more than simply suggest political maneuvering as their motivation – it thoroughly stamps it as such. Indeed, if anything, they were protecting the institutionalized Church and its doctrine, and vindicating what they took to be its political implications.

In short, from Heschel's account of the prophetic, sometimes – indeed, perhaps most times – denunciation is just denunciation, and indictment

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www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/conversion-via-twitter-westboro-baptist-church-megan-phelps-roper (accessed August 2, 2015). See Megan Phelps-Roper, "I Grew Up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here's Why I Left." TED Talks, February 2017, www.ted.com/talks/megan_phelps_roper_i_grew_up_in_the_westboro_baptist_church_here_s_why_i_left (accessed August 2, 2017).

[65] "The prophet disdains those for whom God's presence is comfort and security; to him it is a challenge, an incessant demand. God is compassion, not compromise; justice, though not inclemency. The prophet's predictions can always be proved wrong by a change in man's conduct, but never the certainty that God is full of compassion." *The Prophets*, 19.

[66] As Kaveny explains, the features of this example all reflect Gustafson's definition of prophecy. See *Prophecy without Contempt*, 265–274. See David Paul Kuhn, "Kerry's Communion Controversy," CBS, April 6, 2004, www.cbsnews.com/news/kerrys-communion-controversy.

merely indictment, even if dressed in the trappings of the prophetic religious justification. Speech characterized by fundamentalist self-righteousness, self-absolving and self-distancing, putatively unassailably authoritative indictment gives the lie to itself. For Heschel, the marks of the truly prophetic are the practiced interweaving of deep love, with powerful dissent, and painful rebuke, but with unwavering, embodied, lived hope.

The model of healthy conflict I develop in the coming chapters does not see the rising tide of categorical denunciation, negative and utopian indictment that characterizes the so-called culture wars in the US as beset by a glut of prophetic criticism. Typically, these deploy religious justification as a cudgel, and often are a mask for what is in fact political power struggle. This is false prophecy, if we call it such at all. In fact, these conditions awash in mutual indictment from all sides suggest *too little* of the genuinely prophetic in the midst of the culture wars. At the same time, I will demonstrate that the strains of intolerance and conflict that characterize our political and cultural present are not to be dismissed, ignored, or merely belittled either. Rather, they must be engaged as charitably and intently – and as creatively – as possible.

The Prophetic as an Ingredient to Healthy Conflict

The tradition of prophetic discourse in American public life does not merely serve moral and political health by attacking an identifiable and isolable malignant growth through rhetorical indictment. It participates in a robust tradition of democratic virtue.[67] Prophetic speech might hope to be effective in spurring awareness and evoking a response to conditions of injustice and evil. But it must be practiced carefully. It must at least attempt to grapple with the witness and virtuous performances of prophetic exemplars (here the likes of David Walker, Harriet Tubman, Douglass, Du Bois, Heschel, Day, Merton, Baker, Wells-Barnett, Malcolm X, King, A. J. Muste, Howard Thurman, Fannie Lou Hamer, and so forth), as well as the movements in which they were inextricably and dynamically embedded.

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[67] I take this tradition to be helpfully, though not exhaustively, illuminated by Raboteau's *American Prophets*. Raboteau demonstrates how each exemplary prophetic figure did not work discretely, or in abstraction from the others. He demonstrates, rather, how each worked in relation to the other, in commonly shared struggles, and in conversations and debates with each other, and in relation to a shared legacy. West's *Black Prophetic Fire* is another text that grapples with exemplary figures of the prophetic current of democratic tradition in the US.

I have argued that a key feature of prophetic virtue is practical wisdom in the form of dialectical integration and deployment of the different moral, rhetorical, socio-analytical, and activist elements that are necessary in a given circumstance and point in time. The true democratic prophet is an embodied actor, embedded in a movement and historical context to which he or she is accountable. He or she is not a lone charismatic figure. Indeed, Jeffrey Stout describes the virtuous prophetic social critic as "virtue in motion."[68] We recognize such social critics not by whether or not they stand here *or* there – say, *either* the deliberative *or* the prophetic. We recognize them, rather, "by the character of their movement from here to there." In other words, we know the virtuous democratic prophet by his or her growth and evolution in the face of answerability and accountability even to the average, everyday citizenry; their facility in the mixing of discourses for their prophetic purposes; navigating the dialectical push and pull of those they work alongside, and learning even from those they oppose. And, of course, we know them most of all by their struggle to maintain integrity and compassion in the face of the catastrophic conditions they criticize and seek to change. We know them by their active and practiced embodiment of transformational hope in the face of persisting tragedy. We identify exemplary prophetic social critics in virtue of their demonstrating "enough wisdom to recognize the temptations of each critical posture they assume and the ability to change position, courageously but temperately, as justice requires."[69]

Of course, as the strengths of Cornel West's criticisms emerge from prophetic pragmatist engagement with the democratic prophetic tradition, so too his temptations. Hyperbolic prophetic speech is always subject to the temptation of becoming so overwrought by rage that it loses its balance between righteous anger and compassion. The prophet thus risks teetering into the vice of intemperance and ungenerosity. The more pressing and catastrophic the conditions within which he or she works, the more the prophet must embody practical wisdom – a "constant, intricate shifting and catching of balance" – to avoid the vice of rhetorical rashness.[70] The more searing and bold the speech the prophetic critic deploys, the

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[68] Stout speaks here of Michael Walzer's prophetic model.

[69] Jeffrey Stout, "Walzer on Exodus and Prophecy," in Theodore Vial and Mark Hadley, eds., *Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Wendell S. Dietrich* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001), 307–338.

[70] Richard Palmer Blackmur, "A Critic's Job of Work," *Selected Essays of R.P. Blackmur* (New York: Ecco Press, 1986), 19–46.

more he or she must persistently catch and catch again a rhetorical stance that avoids intemperance that will devolve into insult. Such virtuosity is crucial especially because of the hindrance that intemperance can have upon the effectiveness of his or her criticisms.

Arguably, intemperance is the vice to which West has succumbed in his most heated rhetorical moments in response to Obama's policies. The danger is that, however inadvertently, such scorching rhetoric will be used to feed the invidiousness of political discourse more generally, rather than participating in the transformation of that conflict. In other words, moments of intemperate rhetoric become fuel for destructive and degenerative conflict, rather than conflict that is healthy and love-driven.

Even so, West remains beholden to the tradition of black prophetic fire. This is nowhere more evident than in his description of how he would have contributed to the fiftieth-anniversary celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, had he been invited.

AMY GOODMAN: If you were invited to speak at the 50th anniversary celebration of the "I Have a Dream" speech, the March on Washington – August 28th, 1963, is when it happened, 50 years ago – what would you say? Give us a few minutes.

CORNEL WEST: I would say we must never tame Martin Luther King, Jr. or Fannie Lou Hamer or Ella Baker or Stokely Carmichael. They were unbossed. They were unbought. That Martin was talking about a beloved community, which meant that it subverts any plantation – Bush's plantation, Clinton's plantation, Obama's plantation – and the social forces behind those plantations, which have to do with Wall Street, have to do with multinational corporations. And we're going to focus on poor people. We're going to focus on working people across the board. We're going to talk about the connection between drones, which is a form of – a form of crimes against humanity outside the national borders. We're going to talk about Wall Street criminality. We're going to talk about how we ensure that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters have their dignity affirmed. We're going to talk about the children.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a free black man. He was a Jesus-loving free black man. Will the connection between drones, new Jim Crow, prison-industrial complex, attacks on the working class, escalating profits at the top, be talked about and brought together during that march? I don't hold my breath. But Brother Martin's spirit would want somebody to push it. And that's part of his connection to Malcolm X. That's part of his connection to so many of the great freedom fighters that go all the way back to the first slave who stepped on these decrepit shores.[71]

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[71] Amy Goodman and Cornel West, "Cornel West: Obama's Response to Trayvon Martin Case Belies Failure to Challenge 'New Jim Crow,'" *Democracy Now!*

Conclusion

"The quest for truth, the quest for the good, the quest for the beautiful all require us to let suffering speak, let victims be visible and let social misery be put on the agenda of those with power," West frequently says.[72] These words also capture the vocation of the organic intellectual in a prophetic pragmatist mode.[73] Yet a radical democratic project based on "letting those who suffer speak" must equally emphasize the practices that go into listening to those who suffer. Letting those who suffer speak on their own behalf is likely to generate testimony and observation, rather than analysis leveled in the idiom of social theory. A positive correlate of this thesis is a pragmatic preference for the more familiar word when it will do. It also enables us to recognize the multiplicity of ways in which "everyday people" diagnose social evils and articulate their resistance. For these purposes, we should be inclined to grant priority to the testimonies of those involved directly, rather than those of the social theorist. In no way is this to deny the indispensability of socio-theoretical analysis. It is, rather, to hold up the democratizing of our discourse as the guiding norm of analysis, thereby maintaining the priority of democracy to social theory.

At this point, West's intense attention to literary inspiration *and* socio-theoretical analysis starts to be refined by a central insight that emerged from my case for the moral imagination in Chapter 1. There we saw that merely *looking* is different from *seeing* others, especially from seeing them empathetically and as like oneself and one's own. Moral perception elicits

The "I Have a Dream" commemoration was headlined by luminaries like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, and President Obama. Indeed, none of the speakers at that event spoke of drones, or Wall Street and Big Bank criminality.

[72] West, "Prophetic Religion and the Future of Capitalist Civilization," 99; see also Cornel West, "A World of Ideas: An Interview with Bill Moyers," in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 294. The line echoes Theodor Adorno's claim that "the need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 17–18.

[73] Christa Bushendorf and Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 66–67; West, "Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual: Martin Luther King, Jr.," in *The Cornel West Reader*, 426; see also James Cone, "'Let Suffering Speak': The Vocation of a Black Intellectual," in George Yancy, ed., *Cornel West: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 108.

normative attitudes in the perceiver. Where these normative attitudes and the skilled perception of the moral imagination have been intentionally developed, they reflect acculturation and perhaps reflective cultivation. Just as seeing and feeling for others that one may be inclined to despise or not recognize at all are capacities that require development and implementation, so does *listening* to the speaking of those who suffer. The notion of *listening* to the demos that emerges from my engagement with West differs from merely *hearing*.

Listening to the demos is not a neutral reception of sound waves. It is an acquired skill, and must become a practice of perception. Merely to hear the multiplicity of voices in political contest, and to call that democracy, is liable to invite frustration, confusion, and a repudiation of the fray as incoherent and emotivistic – a cacophony of arbitrary self-assertion and pseudo-democratic babble, if not sheer manipulation.[74]

The first part of the challenge before us, then, is to incorporate both the expansive creativity of moral imagination, as a means of conceptualizing moral progress and mitigating oppositional "otherness," and persistent socio-analytical critique, as means for illuminating the roots of injustice and structural and cultural forms of violence. The second part requires moving beyond the apparent opposition of these two approaches. These challenges require seeing social theory as an instrument that can challenge and enrich the vision of moral imagination that began to emerge in Chapter 1. And this invests the theoretical task with new meaning. Specifically, it repositions it as a practice-oriented task to be supplemented with the literary and artistic inspiration and moral imaginings that are crucial to recognizing others as like, and relationally bound up with, oneself.

More importantly, this balanced integration of socio-theoretical analysis opens up forms of self-reflexivity and self-criticism less vulnerable to the temptations of imagining others as simply reflections of oneself, merely in service to one's own interests and purposes, and of putting forward un-interrogated and glibly therapeutic conceptions of relationship and change. Of course, such an integrative vision must also conceptualize the possibility of agency and action that might effect change in the midst of conflict, injustice, and domination.

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[74] Indeed, a powerful current of thought that challenges the tenability of democratic practice in the contemporary US declares precisely this (this is a current that, along with the debates to which it gives rise, I engage and counter in Chapter 6).

In the previous five chapters, I have worked to identify an approach that can mediate the apparent standoff between efforts to forward moral imagination and efforts to emphasize socio-theoretical critique, while fending off the temptations to which cultural and social theories are prone. At the same time, I insisted that pragmatist approaches must incorporate social theory in order to avoid glib optimism, cheap faith in moral progress, or shallow reformism. To demonstrate this point, I have placed two of the most influential contemporary pragmatist visions of democratic social transformation in mutually instructive dialogue. It remains for me to elaborate on an integrative path between them – to demonstrate what avenues for attunement to structural forms of domination it will provide, and what possibilities for critical resistance *and* practical action for change it will suggest. I have yet to show what avenues this synthesis opens up for sustaining a sense of practical agency and concrete engagement for democratic transformation in the midst of deadlocked political conditions and "culture war" religious intolerance. Here I move to the center stage of my analysis a thinker who is rarely associated with the pragmatist thinkers and activists concerned about democratic social transformation.

In the chapter that follows, I draw into this conversation the work of pragmatist philosopher Robert Brandom. Of the pragmatist thinkers I take up in Part I of this project, Brandom is the most positively inclined toward analytic philosophy. Yet his highly technical account of expressive freedom provides useful conceptual tools when read with an eye toward making explicit both the normative substance of democratic practices and the possibilities for critically assessing those practices and subjecting them to revisions. I will use these tools to account more precisely for what persists of the apparent opposition between theoretical critique and practical activism for the purposes of democratic social transformation.

I deploy Brandom's account of expressive freedom to frame the case I have made so far for conjoining moral imagination with socio-theoretical critique. Brandom offers an account of agency that is especially suited for interrogating the real-life dynamics of domination and conflict. I use the concept of expressive freedom to show how people caught up in a system of domination can alter those conditions in innovative ways to make them more just. Such an account of agency, I show, not only illuminates the dynamics of domination by integrating moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique, but also suggests potential ways to transform those dynamics and the elements of conflict within them.

In this engagement with Brandom, I draw from Rorty's insights into democratic social transformation while moving beyond his tendencies toward romantic quietism and moderating West's theoretical excesses. I do so, first, by identifying the constructive features of Brandom's inferential pragmatism for the purposes of democratic social transformation. Then, I place that account of inferential pragmatism in conversation with theoretical literature assumed by many to be least likely to aid in mediating the theory–practice opposition we have reached – a theorist whom many consider to exemplify paralysis of critique and the excesses of theoretical analysis, Michel Foucault. In drawing Brandom and Foucault into mutually corrective conversation, the pragmatist concerns to intervene in democratic society to resist and transform injustice become most rarified. Yet this exchange lays the groundwork for the account of "healthy conflict" I set forth in Chapters 6 to 8.

6

"Dismantling the Master's House"

Using the System to Transform the System

The year was 1979. The event was a New York University panel discussion addressing feminist perspectives on "The Personal and the Political." Identifying herself as a black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet, and warrior, Audre Lorde rose to the podium to deliver a searing indictment of what she characterized as an all-too-easy, white, North American, academic feminism for its inattention to systemic forms of subjugation extending beyond the margins of the academy. She said:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.[1]

Lorde's words still resound today as a powerful caution to those attempting to analyze systemic forms of domination inscribed in religious or political institutions and practices. In fact, her language about "the master's house" has come to serve as a watchword for the claim that tools of resistance forged within prevailing practices, structures, and institutions are ultimately useless in the task of overturning their hegemonic

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[1] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 112.

conditions. Any such tool will be so implicated in the very thing it seeks to dismantle that its use will replicate the same patterns of domination, though perhaps under a new guise. "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" Lorde asked. "It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable."[2] In other words, the changes effected by such tools will embody intrinsically conservative reform – either permitted by "the powers that be," or quickly assimilated to their purposes. In this view, genuine measures of resistance and liberation must come from somewhere else, somewhere "outside," whether outside "the canon," outside mainstream academia, outside modern political institutions, structures, and social processes, or perhaps from outside history altogether.

Lorde's claim that "the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house" draws into acute focus what lies at stake in the opposition between moral imagination and socio-analytical critique in the currents of pragmatist thought examined so far. Is it possible to imagine present conditions of injustice differently – expansively and empathetically – to ameliorate them while remaining attuned to the pervasive structural violence in which one's own moral imaginings may be implicated? Is it possible to undertake sufficiently deep and sustained critique of systemic evils, injustice, and domination without falling prey to the paralysis and despair to which critique is prone?

In this chapter, I further expand the pragmatist approach to the democratic social transformation of conflict that I have assembled across the previous chapters. Here I make the case for an account of agency and freedom that aims to facilitate sufficiently radical critique while simultaneously pursuing resistance and constructive change. The conception of agency and freedom I develop permits both systemic critical analysis *and* the kind of moral imagination that enables people caught up in oppositional relationships (e.g., relationships that exclude or marginalize) to challenge and alter violent structures and cultures from within. I am specifically concerned with practical transformation of conflict in the face of persistent, systemic forms of power and domination. And yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, a central aim of the present project is to open spaces for the voices, experiences, and efforts of everyday people, thereby facilitating attention to and, where possible, amplifying those voices. I attempt to present these innovative forms of agency as

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[2] Ibid., 110–111.

possibilities within particular contexts, while at the same time addressing the structural and cultural violence that underpins injustice and destructive conflict.

Resistance and Transformation

The pragmatist accounts of democratic social transformation examined so far understand agency in terms of participation in existing social practices. That is, agency is a product of the normative constraints that constitute those practices (rather than as the absence of or liberation from such constraints). In such accounts, the norms that constitute practices provide crucial leverage by which to deliver criticism and transform structures of power and domination. Yet, because the resources assumed by these accounts are *implicit* in existing practices and institutional contexts, and because the forms of criticism they facilitate are *immanent* to the conditions they aim to criticize, the pragmatist conception of agency appears to founder upon the kinds of criticisms leveled by Audre Lorde.

For instance, as we have seen in Sheldon Wolin's account of fugitive democracy, the fact that purportedly democratic politics are implicated in vast networks of state power, bureaucratic structures, and consumerism means that *genuine* democratic action must, in effect, intervene fugitively, as though "breaking in" from outside. On this account, what presents itself as – and is widely (mis)taken to be – democracy is, in fact, a form of despotism.[3] Authentically democratic action must erupt in spite of the allegedly democratic elements that structure the context. Rarely, if ever, is genuine democratic action positively *facilitated by* the structures and institutions of contemporary (so-called) democracy.

Allegedly, pragmatist approaches to social transformation exemplify the conservative reformism of "the master's tools" that Lorde indicts and that Wolin insists any genuinely democratic efforts must combat. To address such challenges, I take up two accounts of social practice that appear to suffer from the very weaknesses Lorde articulates: those of social theorist Michel Foucault and pragmatist philosopher Robert Brandom. As I will show, although Foucault's account of power analysis rightly aims to uncover unjust but hidden modes of domination, nonetheless it remains liable to the potentially devastating criticism that the

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[3] See, for instance, Sheldon Wolin's account of "democratic despotism" in his *Tocqueville: Between Two Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 570–571.

pervasive domination he describes leads to paralysis. Brandom's pragmatism, by contrast, is rightly faulted for being unconcerned with precisely the kind of domination that Foucault sought to track, and even tone-deaf to the structural and cultural forms of violence I have taken up in previous chapters. Prima facie, Brandom's work is politically quietist, and even, as we will see, displays "ivory tower aestheticism."

By reading certain central claims of these thinkers correctively against each other, I will develop a constructive account of agency for the purposes of transforming conflict. My account draws from both Foucault's notion of "expressive freedom" and Brandom's "freedom as ethical practice." It aims to mediate the opposition of imagination and critique that emerged from the first three chapters, and uniquely fits the model of healthy conflict I have unfolded in subsequent chapters. Two features make it especially helpful. First, it conceptualizes agency as essentially relational. Thus, it provides a concrete account of "relationality," appeal to which – I suggested at the end of Chapter 1 – is central to transforming conflict and pursuing justice through moral imagination. The account of agency that I develop in this chapter characterizes relationships among agents as the source of social and political norms. But it also views such relationality as the source for the possibility of agency and innovation that can transform structural and cultural violence from within a given context. This relational conception of agency, I argue, overcomes the difficulties posed by the excesses of socio-theoretical critique because, although it shows that while agency is necessarily immanent in contexts characterized by structural injustice, it is also capable of transforming them. As will become clear (especially in Chapter 7), this account of expressive freedom is uniquely suited to a conception of "healthy conflict." This is because it conceives agency as progressively self-reflective and self-correcting forms of action that permit an array of innovations. Such innovations contribute to modes of resistance that can lead to social and political transformation, which is integral to healthy conflict in contexts riven by persistent religious intolerance. In other words, this account of agency can identify and counter structural and cultural forms of injustice without becoming paralyzed or degenerating into theoretical resentment.

The critical reconstruction I offer following my engagement with Foucault and Brandom's respective accounts of expressive freedom and freedom as ethical practice is that repurposing "the master's tools" is not only a genuine form of criticism. In fact, it turns out to be a condition of

the possibility of systemic critique and action that not only disassembles but might also truly transform injustice and domination (what Lorde calls "the master's house").

To this end, I first examine Foucault's attempt to fashion a social practice framework for analyzing systemic forms of power. Here I explore criticisms of Foucault put forward by the pragmatist philosophical critics Nancy Fraser and Richard Rorty. They contend that Foucault's analysis results in normative aimlessness because it is at once systemic in its aims and immanent in its orientation. Thus, they argue, Foucault offers no position from which to critique power that is not itself just another manifestation of power. I propose to sidestep these criticisms by reconstructing Foucault's account of "power as productive" in critical conversation with Brandom's social-practical account of "expressive freedom." I explicate Brandom's account of social practice, focusing particularly on the possibility of expressive freedom through normative constraints, and then contrast it with Foucault's in order to illuminate their respective weaknesses and offer a modified proposal in which each is informed by the other's best insights. My way of reading Foucault's expressive freedom answers Fraser and Rorty's criticisms by clarifying a normative trajectory for Foucault's diagnoses of power and domination, thereby resolving the alleged ethical aimlessness of his account. Foucault's work, in turn, confronts Brandom's expressive freedom with insights that force it to take up questions of domination, and thus to overcome charges that Brandom's account issues in idle abstraction and default conservatism. Both of my interventions will demonstrate the potential of social-practice explanations of agency and freedom to resist systemic forms of power and domination, elucidating the capacity of "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house."

The Problem with "Power Analysis"

Nancy Fraser credits Foucault's work in the 1970s with reconceiving power as productive rather than a merely prohibitive or repressive force. On Foucault's account, power is not administered by discrete, identifiable holders and distributors; instead, it is "a complex, shifting field of relations in which everyone is an element." Power is "capillary" – "operating at the lowest extremities of the social body in everyday social practices." Practices and power, then, are not separable entities that momentarily interact. Rather, power is constitutive of social practices. It is inscribed

upon "bodies, gestures, desires, and habits."[4] In the use of language, for instance, words and linguistic norms "enable us to speak precisely insofar as they constrain us."[5] Thus, in order to say anything at all, language speakers submit themselves to the proprieties and exigencies that constitute the language. "Such norms make communication possible," Fraser writes, "but only by devaluing and ruling out some possible and actual utterances."[6] In constraining users of a language, norms enable the production of particular performances just as they rule other performances out.

Of course, to say that "power is productive" in this sense is to say that power is everywhere and inescapable. Fraser calls this a "normatively neutral" account of power. "Every power regime creates, molds, and sustains a distinctive set of cultural practices, including those oriented to the production of truth," she writes. "It follows, in [Foucault's] view, that one cannot object to a form of life simply on the ground that it is power-laden. Power is productive, ineliminable, and therefore normatively neutral."[7] As she sees it, the neutrality of Foucault's account means that it lacks an explicit normative orientation for resisting the pervasiveness of power, or even adjudicating between its various forms. In other words, he offers no basis for preferring one power regime or set of social practices over another. While he occasionally calls for resistance to domination, he provides no coherent standard by which to orient such resistance. "Why is struggle preferable to submission?" Fraser presses. "Why ought domination to be resisted? … Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it."[8] The result is a "one-sided, wholesale rejection of modernity as such," without any alternative with which to replace it.[9]

[4] Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29.

[5] Ibid., 32.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 31.

[8] Ibid., 29. To reconcile the ethical aimlessness of Foucault's account of power with the normative force of some of his categories (e.g., domination, subjugation, struggle, resistance), Fraser entertains the possibility that a liberal framework concerned with such values as individual autonomy and dignity may be tacitly present in his writings of the 1970s. She concludes that however one reconciles this self-contradiction, Foucault's work is ultimately confused. She writes, "Because he fails to conceive and pursue any single consistent normative strategy, he ends up with a curious amalgam of amoral militaristic description, Marxian jargon, and Kantian morality" (31).

[9] Ibid., 33.

Fraser's charge finds an analogue in Rorty's criticisms of Foucault. Rorty pinpoints "a crippling ambiguity between 'power' as a pejorative term and as a neutral, descriptive term" in the theorist's work. This ambiguity causes the term to "los[e] its contrastive force" and become "vacuous." The result is not merely normative confusion, according to Rorty, but tends toward "political anarchism."[10] For instance, Rorty agrees wholeheartedly with Foucault's claim that "the self" is "a contingent product of contingently existing forces." However, he rejects Foucault's claim that it is, therefore, impossible to determine which of those "contingently existing forces" and states of affairs are better, and which are worse – "that every social institution is equally unjustifiable, that all of them are on a par. All of them exert 'normalizing power.' "[11] As Rorty sees it, Foucault's account of power threatens the possibility of ameliorating actual social conditions.

As I have suggested, what matters most on Rorty's account is "devising ways of diminishing human suffering and increasing human equality." He believes that the North American democratic experiment has accomplished this task better than most other social and political arrangements to date.[12] "You would never guess, from Foucault's account of the changes in European social institutions during the last three hundred years, that during that period suffering had decreased considerably, nor that people's chances of choosing their own styles of life increased considerably," Rorty writes.[13] For Foucault, every attempt to identify and

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[10] Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195–196.

[11] Ibid., 197.

[12] Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 4–5. Rorty provides a thumbnail sketch of his faith in American democracy: "Most people who admire Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida as much as I do … participate in what Jonathan Yardley has called the 'America Sucks Sweepstakes.' Participants in this event compete to find better, bitterer ways of describing the United States. They see our country as embodying everything that is wrong with the rich post-Enlightenment West. They see ours as what Foucault called a 'disciplinary society,' dominated by an odious ethos of 'liberal individualism,' an ethos which produces racism, sexism, consumerism and Republican presidents. By contrast, I see America pretty much as Whitman and Dewey did, as opening a prospect on illimitable democratic vistas. I think that our country – despite its past and present atrocities and vices, and despite its continuing eagerness to elect fools and knaves to high office – is a good example of the best kind of society so far invented."

[13] Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy," 196.

reform undesirable conditions will, itself, be implicated in another form of the very power that it seeks to resist. From Rorty's point of view, this presents a theoretical analogue to the Christian doctrine of original sin, "the old religious idea that some stains are ineradicable." He adds: "The ubiquity of Foucauldian power is reminiscent of the ubiquity of Satan, and thus of the ubiquity of original sin – that diabolical stain on every human soul."[14] The result is a paralysis that prohibits improving concrete social conditions, and helps breed a dangerously debilitating form of theorized self-disdain. "Because [Foucauldians] regard liberal reformist initiatives as symptoms of a discredited liberal 'humanism,' they have little interest in designing new social experiments."[15]

Even if Foucauldians truly lack such interest, the charge was not entirely true of Foucault himself. Peculiarly enough, in the period when he was most emphatic about the inescapability of power in his writings – the late 1960s and 1970s – he was also most politically active.[16] Throughout his career, Foucault asserted that there is a "permanent and fundamental" connection between philosophy and theoretical analysis on the one hand, and political activism on the other.[17] Fraser suggests that his persistent use of terms like "domination, subjugation, struggle, and resistance" hints at a normative orientation implicit in his work. However, she claims that Foucault lacks the resources necessary to make it explicit. Assuming that Fraser's observation is correct, how might Foucault make such an orientation explicit and develop it in ways that would permit him to differentiate between better and worse social practices, institutions, and forms of agency?

In his final interviews and lectures, Foucault considerably altered his earlier claims about the nature of power and the contingencies of personal identity. However, he held fast to his earlier view that "the self" is not an essential something waiting to be uncovered. Rather, "selves" are historically local productions formed in relations of power such as linguistic formations, religious and economic institutions, romantic and familial relationships, among other examples. In its extreme form, this

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[14] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 37, 95.

[15] Ibid., 37.

[16] For instance, Foucault became a vocal member of the Group on Prison Information (GIP), a group that attacked the prison institutions and practices of criminal reform in France.

[17] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," reprinted in Paul Rabinow, ed., *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 293.

view implied that selves are simply determined by the arbitrary outworkings of bundles of power dynamics that happen to arise in a given context. This challenged the very possibility of individual agency and responsibility. The subject was merely a "function of discourse."[18] What appeared to be individual agency was more like a momentarily distinguishable wave that swells across the underlying body of historical and social formations, and was little more than a fleeting manifestation of them.

In his later writings, Foucault refined his earlier views about the self on these points. He came to argue that while selves are not wholly imaginary, neither are they purely arbitrary extensions of whatever practical and institutional forces produce them. They are, thus, not simply determined – nor equally un-free – in all circumstances and contexts. Rather, Foucault began to view the various relations of power in which selves consist as "mobile, reversible, and unstable." In other words, the constraints that limit – and even constitute – a self in given circumstances simultaneously enable possibilities for innovation and resistance insofar as that self was intentionally, perhaps artistically, cultivated. He concluded it was possible to nurture or manipulate, to transgress and unlearn relations of power in caring for, and thereby in effect creating, one's self.[19]

On the basis of these insights, in his later work Foucault spoke of "self-creation" in terms of a range of practices made possible by the antecedent constraints of the time and place in question. He came to see self-creation as a task that deployed the all-pervasive dynamics of power that he had invested so much effort in identifying in his earlier work. "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art," he wrote. "Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"[20]

[18] Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), part 1.

[19] Alexander Nehamas incisively clarifies this development. On Foucault's later understanding, "The self may not be the final reality underlying history, but it is not exactly a fiction either; and though it is not ultimately (or 'metaphysically') free, it is not exactly a puppet. Moreover, every form of power … contains the potential of its own undoing, since every prohibition, [Foucault] came to realize, creates the possibility of a new transgression. Since power is productive, the subjects it produces, being themselves forms of power, can be productive in their own right. See Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 177.

[20] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," reprinted in Paul Rabinow, ed., *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 261.

As Foucault understood it later in life, the goal of artistic self-fashioning was not to identify some power-free location from which to resist power. The point, rather, was to explore the possibilities of manipulating the inescapable, historically contingent power dynamics that make the self a self in the first place. Self-cultivation meant that one would seek to "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking, what we are, do, or think." This task would seek to "give a new impetus … to the undefined work of freedom."[21]

This conception of self-cultivation rejected both the idea of discovering "who one truly is" and the notion that one can invent one's self ex nihilo. Instead, self-cultivation entailed "rearranging the given" and "manipulating the dated." More specifically, it meant critically engaging the "models that [the subject] finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group."[22] "Self-creation" thus came to look like a decidedly artistic endeavor with distinct ethical implications. Rather than a state of liberation from all constraints, Foucault spoke of freedom as a range of practices by which one might nurture one's self within the constraints that conditioned one's life. Ethics, on this account, referred to one's self-reflective development of these practices of self-cultivation.[23]

Of course, if "becoming someone else" was, in effect, a goal of self-creation, the question quickly presented itself: Does it matter *who* or *what* one becomes? Will any old possibility do so long as it is born of the recognition of the historicity of the given self?[24] Foucault's celebration of becoming something other than what one happens to be appears to (re-) invite the charge that his account lacks a normative orientation. And yet,

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[21] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" reprinted in Rabinow, ed., *Ethics*, 315–316.

[22] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 287–291; cf. Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 177.

[23] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 284.

[24] Foucault's thought about self-creativity was still fairly preliminary at the time of his death. He had just begun to explore the ways that "care of the self" had been practiced in Greek, Roman, and Christian contexts, in various forms of asceticism, and in the exploration and management of pain and pleasure. What is clear is that at no point did he derive a distinct program for resistance in his work on the care of the self. See Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," reprinted in Rabinow, ed., *Ethics*, 93–105. For a helpful account of self-care in Foucault's latest work, and how it coheres with his genealogical work of the 1970s, see Todd May, *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology,*

at this point in his work, Foucault may actually have had the resources necessary for the sort of normative orientation that Fraser accused him of lacking. In the following section, I argue that the normative orientation provided by Brandom's expressive freedom is not only compatible with Foucault's account of the ethics of self-creation, but in fact illuminates an orientation already implicit in that account.

Freedom through Constraint by Norms

Much like Fraser's reading of Foucault, Robert Brandom takes language use as a distinctive feature of humanity. In particular, for Brandom, becoming the speaker of a language is not simply about learning to respond to specific situations by applying the correct phrase out of a set stock (like the parrot trained to respond by saying "red car" each time a red car passes the window in front of his cage). The human capacity to apply concepts (paradigmatically, words) is marked by the capacity for novelty. As Noam Chomsky influentially argued, most of the statements that a given language-user makes have never been uttered before.[25] Even the phrases passed back and forth between speakers in a quotidian exchange – "Have a nice day" and "Please pass the salt" – vary in meaning depending on the situation. Different collateral commitments make the same string of words mean something slightly different in the mouths of different speakers. Brandom calls this capacity for novelty and innovation "expressive freedom."[26]

Expressive freedom is possible only through constraint by norms – that is, through the application (and perhaps eventual mastery) of the proprieties that constitute a given practice. For instance, the ostensibly boundless capacity that individual language-users have to say things never before said is possible only in virtue of the regularities and norms that constitute language use. These constraints are what make speaking possible in the first place.[27] A language-user exercises expressive freedom in performing the practice in new ways – innovating, improvising, and thereby transforming

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Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993), 111–128.

[25] Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), chap. 1.

[26] Robert Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), 186; cf. Robert Brandom, "Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism," in *Rorty and His Critics*, 17.

[27] Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," 188–189.

the practice. In principle, the practice will evolve much like case law, in the sense that particular applications of its norms further enrich the practice itself, as well as the capacities of the practitioner to perform it. Occasionally these will converge to produce precedent-setting instances of the practice and practitioners who transform the practice itself.

Consider a musical example. The great jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong learned to play the trumpet in accord with all the constraints of tone, pitch, and musical grammar. He apprenticed himself to the best trumpet players of his day, such as Joe "King" Oliver. With increasing adeptness – and eventual mastery – Armstrong came to innovate with the trumpet in ways never before heard, thus transforming and expanding the practice itself. His playing opened new possibilities for how a trumpet player could play and what trumpet playing could sound like. He changed what it meant to be a virtuoso trumpeter, jazz player, musician, and entertainer. Many of the trumpet players who followed Armstrong emulated his virtuosity, perhaps in hopes of surpassing mere imitation. The best of these sought to find their own voice, fashion their own artistry, and thereby further expand the expressive possibilities of the practice. Innovation was possible in virtue of the flexibility of the normative constraints implicit in (and constitutive of) the practice. In all this, Armstrong exemplified how a precedent-setting performance of an established practice can transform the practice itself and give rise to new ones.

This conception of expressive freedom does not fixate upon novelty. Such freedom is "expressive" because it is also characterized by an increasingly explicit and self-critical understanding of the practices in question. Increasing adeptness at the practice is accompanied by a greater capacity to become critically reflective about the practice – to identify and articulate the proprieties that implicitly organize it. This puts practitioners in a position to subject those proprieties – and the practice itself – to contestation and revision.

To extend the previous example, even though in the 1950s Louis Armstrong would come to disparage Dizzy Gillespie's invention of bebop jazz trumpeting as so much "Chinese music," Gillespie's innovation was just as beholden to Armstrong's precedent as his playing radically departed from it: "No him, no me," Dizzy would say on the occasion of Armstrong's death. Moreover, their occasionally abrasive exchanges raised questions about what jazz was and what it ought to be. Once made explicit, the normative presuppositions behind these questions – and the proprieties implicit in the practice itself – became candidates for

reflection, modification, and transformation in ways that they had not been before.

Expressive freedom presents an account of constraint and freedom similar to Foucault's "productive power" as it occurs in the "simultaneously constraining and enabling … practice-governing norms." In Fraser's example, the limits that constitute language use "enable us to speak precisely insofar as they constrain us."[28] Expressive freedom thus acknowledges that freedom is made possible through normative constraint. Where Foucault speaks of "self-creation," Brandom uses the term "creative self-cultivation." He writes,

Creative self-cultivation is possible only by means of the discipline of the social practices which constrain one, just as the production of a poem requires not only submission to the exigencies of a shared language, but the stricter discipline of the poetic tradition as well. One must speak some language to say anything at all, and the production and comprehension of novel performances requires a background of shared constraints.[29]

Where this account of expressive freedom differs from Foucault, however, is in its explicit concern with its own social and political implications. For Brandom, the capacity for self-cultivation intrinsic to those who perform expressive social practices provides a normative orientation for distinguishing better and worse types of constraints, and thus, social practices:

What matters about us morally, and so ultimately, politically is not ultimately to be understood in terms of … the avoidance of mammalian pain. It is the capacity each of us discursive creatures has to say things that no-one else has ever said, things furthermore that would never have been said if we did not say them. It is our capacity to transform the vocabularies in which we live and move and have our being, and so to create new ways of being (for creatures like us).[30]

In other words, because our social practices are oriented toward the expressive freedom of self-cultivation, they provide standards for assessing the legitimacy of social and political arrangements. Brandom clarifies:

Constraint of the individual by the social and political norms inherent in communal practices may be legitimate insofar as that constraint makes possible for the individual an expressive freedom which is otherwise impossible for him … Political constraint is illegitimate insofar as it is not in the service of the cultivation of the expressive freedom of those who are constrained by it.[31]

[28] Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, 31–32.
[29] Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," 188–189.
[30] Brandom, "Vocabularies of Pragmatism," 178.
[31] Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," 188–189.

Here, Brandom's approach differs subtly, but importantly, from Rorty's account of moral imagination. Where Rorty would have us move directly to utilitarian calculus – asking, "Has the sum total of human suffering, construed as mammalian pain, decreased in our society over the past century?" – the normative orientation of expressive freedom encourages us to ask other questions first: "Have our political and social arrangements facilitated novel performances of received practices? Have they fostered the capacities of communities and individuals to engage in, critically reflect upon, and revise or resist those practices? Have those practices been expanded to recognize a broader range of practitioners and encompass increasingly diverse understandings and transformation of the practice itself?" Indeed, we might also apply the analytic lens of expressive freedom that generates these questions to Foucault's conception of self-creation, and thus uncover criteria for identifying better and worse instances of self-creation.

Yet, even if expressive freedom holds the potential for distinguishing between better and worse sets of social practices and norms, Brandom leaves the political implications of his account woefully underdeveloped in his work. If Foucauldian power analysis errs in the direction of over-emphasizing the inescapability of power in social practices, expressive freedom errs in the direction of neglecting the ways that the social practices in question are inscribed with systemic inequalities or violence, and thus tend to give rise to states of domination. Indeed, Rorty suggests that Brandom's account of expressive freedom positively invites charges of "pseudo-aristocratic condescension and ivory-tower aestheticism." Rorty writes, "[Brandom] courts [these charges] when he sympathizes with my suggestion that 'our overarching public purpose should be to ensure that a hundred private flowers blossom.'" "He courts [these charges] … when he goes on to say that 'pain, and like it various sorts of social and economic deprivation, have a second-hand, but nonetheless genuine, moral significance.'"[32]

Giving expressive freedom primacy of place as a criterion of assessment does not preclude attending to mammalian pain, nor social and economic deprivation. In fact, freedom from pain is a prerequisite for the cultivation of expressive freedom, just as certain basic physical and biological conditions are necessary for human survival and flourishing. Using expressive freedom as a normative gauge does, however, preclude *reducing* our criteria for assessment to the sum total of human suffering.

[32] Rorty, "Response to Brandom," in *Rorty and His Critics*, 189.

Nonetheless, Rorty's concern about the liability of assigning pain and suffering a secondary place raises important considerations. Does expressive freedom have a sufficiently sharp normative edge to incorporate the aims of power analysis? Is its appeal to *Bildung* (creative self-cultivation) yet another variation of privileged, bourgeois reformism?

Audre Lorde might object that expressive freedom is insufficiently radical in that it seeks to transform practices and institutions "from within." Can expressive freedom accommodate revolutionary *praxis* – the radical overturning of alienated conditions? This objection is all the more pressing because it might be voiced not only by those who insist that truly radical criticism must come from "outside," but from thinkers who avow immanent forms of criticism as well. On precisely this basis, African liberation theologian Emmanuel Martey counters Lorde's repudiation of the master's tools in a way markedly different from the forms of resistance facilitated by expressive freedom. "Unlike Audre Lorde, who might be wondering whether the master's tools could indeed be used to dismantle the master's house, African theologians are fully convinced that the gun, in efficient hands, could well kill its owner."[33]

A trumpet is not a gun – a banal observation worth stating only in order to highlight the crucial distinction that these images convey in the present context – namely, the difference between the pretensions of revolutionary praxis and the resistant, transformative potential of expressive freedom. The former seeks to annihilate the conditions of mastery (and, ostensibly, the master along with them) in order to reconstitute altogether the context and self. Brandom's account of expressive freedom, by contrast, proposes to transform the conditions of mastery through innovative application of the antecedent norms and structures, thereby converting the master to a position of nonmastery. The revolutionary impulse is exemplified by Jean Paul Sartre's claims in the context of the Algerian War of Liberation against French colonial occupation that the colonized subject can reclaim his true humanity from subjugation only by exorcizing the colonizer. Thus Sartre writes that "killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free."[34] Here the master's tools – the colonizer's gun and the violence by which he colonized – are necessary instruments for eradicating the master's house.

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[33] Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 46.

[34] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Introduction" to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), lv.

Of course, Sartre's prescription for recreating oneself by exorcizing one's oppressor presupposes his conception of "the self" – a self that is free only apart from, and in spite of, external normative constraints. Such a self "surges up in the world – and defines itself afterwards."[35] On this account, one extricates oneself from constraints through an act of self-creation conceived of as an assertion of one's will. "The Other" is the source of restriction: "Hell is other people," Garcin famously concludes in *No Exit* (Sartre, 1944). Sartre's self is authentic in so far as it unbinds itself from its organic context by projecting itself into the future in the interests of self-creation and emancipation. On such a view, annihilation of "the Other" is a viable – if not even necessary at times – means for relieving oneself of external constraints. Transposed into Sartre's prescriptions for Algerian resistance to the French, "the colonized are cured of colonial neurosis by driving the colonist out by force."[36]

Sartre's account of freedom and constraint provides an instructive contrast to the account of expressive freedom I am defending here. Expressive freedom presupposes that selves become synthesized in inescapably normative encounters of mutual recognition. Here Brandom draws from Hegel's account of the normative constraints generated when social actors hold one another accountable in mutual recognition. "To call something a self," Brandom explains, is "to treat it as an I, is to take up an essentially normative attitude toward it. It is to treat it as a subject of commitments, as something that can be responsible – hence as a potential knower and agent."[37] Such engagement with others is governed by the reciprocal responsibility of one practitioner to another, and the accountability of all the practitioners to the norms constitutive of the practice in question. It is the norm-laden form of sociality that makes social interaction possible and makes a practice a practice in the first place. So understood, mutual recognition is an essentially social achievement. One becomes an "I" by recognizing another – "a Thou" – and, in turn, being recognized.[38] However, while selves are synthesized in mutual

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[35] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufman, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 290–291.

[36] Sartre, "Introduction," versus Foucault contrasts Sartre's conception of "self" to his own account of self-creation in "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in Rabinow, ed., *Ethics*, 262.

[37] Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 216.

[38] The idea at the center of this account is that "to be a self – a locus of conceptual commitment and responsibility – is to be taken or treated as one by those

recognition, this does not reduce "selfhood" to a product of intersubjective consensus. Mutual recognition is a normative engagement in the sense that it is something about which any (or every) participant in the engagement can be right or wrong, can either recognize or misrecognize another.

Say, for instance, that some "I" who recognizes other "Thous" as agents responsible for their attitudes and claims, and to whom he or she is responsible in turn, is refused recognition in return as a Thou. Say that she is recognized instead as an "It" – an object. She is considered to be interacting with others in a derivative sense, and has had conferred on her something analogous to the status of a household pet or livestock. In a political framework that systematically denies some group's capacity to participate in the practices of mutual recognition, each member of that group would be recognized not as an "I" or "Thou," but would be designated an "It." They would suffer some degree of what sociologist Orlando Patterson has called "social death" – a status that Patterson finds exemplified in chattel slavery in the United States.[39] A society characterized by the institution of slavery is predicated upon *misrecognizing* a group of people as lacking the basic capacities for expressive freedom. Frequently, such institutional frameworks are designed to prohibit the exercise of expressive freedom of those deemed sub- or nonhuman.

Moreover, the dominant practices and institutions within this framework produced and disseminated forms of knowledge that sustained those conditions. In the slave-owning American culture, many thought it self-evident that the creatures in question were less than fully human – that they were created for labor, and thus to be property. The political framework instituted rules and practices in order to perpetuate these understandings. For more than a century, slaves were prohibited from receiving religious instruction. Once permitted to adopt the masters' religion, they were usually subjected to accounts of it that perpetuated the masters' understandings. Slaveholders employed their own religious practices in ways intended to perpetuate slavery. In reading Christian scripture, for instance, they claimed that Jesus sanctioned the institution of slavery in his own day because he interacted with slaves lovingly without

one takes or treats as one: to be recognized by those one recognizes." Ibid., 216–217.

[39] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5–9, 38–45, 337; cf. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 32–33.

ever condemning the institution itself. They claimed that God created a race of slaves by cursing Noah's son Ham, and invoked St. Paul's charge that slaves should obey their masters.[40] Slave masters justified slavery as a means of "converting the African heathen" to Christianity. They portrayed faithful service to one's master as the surest way to be faithful to one's heavenly Master.[41]

Of course, often in such frameworks expressive freedom has flourished among parties whose capacities for expressive freedom have been systematically denied. It was, for instance, in the context of slavery and Jim Crow in the United States that musical forms like spirituals, the blues, and jazz were born among the black population and came to thrive. Improvisational religious practices such as "call and response" and the rhetorical extemporization of black preachers arose in the same way. In these contexts, was it not the repressive and inhumane constraints of slave-ownership that made "possible for the individual an expressive freedom which is otherwise impossible for him"?[42] Does the fact that these forms of expressive innovation occurred within a political and social framework predicated upon slavery legitimate that framework? If so, does not the conception of "expressive freedom as part of a process of cultivation of the self and of the community" lend legitimacy to that framework?

The answer is no, for in such instances, the realization of expressive freedom on the part of those misrecognized and excluded as practitioners occurs *in spite of* the framework's efforts to prevent it. Hence, these instances constitute acts of resistance and critique. They challenge the stories, understandings, and legal practices used to legitimate and perpetuate the framework. In many cases they do so by appropriating and transforming the dominant practices, employing their elements for different ends and in different contexts.

For example, the Negro spirituals and the blues grew out of the Christian scriptures.[43] In some cases, slaves lifted hymns from the master's hymnbook and stories from the master's scriptures, and resituated them in the context of the work fields and slave congregations, or in the

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[40] Katie Geneva Canon, *Katie's Canon* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 40–46.

[41] Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), chap. 6.

[42] Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," 188.

[43] James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

secrecy of slave quarters and "hush harbor" worship services. Such new contexts radically altered their meanings. Recast to capture in song the suffering, longing, and hope of slaves in the fields, they became tools for coping and survival. Eugene Genovese argues in his monumental text *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974) that for the individual slave, the stories of Jesus relativized the master's authority. They "placed a master above his own master and thereby dissolved the moral and ideological ground on which the very principle of absolute human lordship must rest."[44] Just as importantly, "the religion practiced in the quarters gave the slaves the one thing they absolutely had to have if they were to resist being transformed into the Sambos they had been programmed to become. It fired them with a sense of their own worth before God and man."[45]

Christian stories and hymns also provided tools of subversion when they were deployed as coded speech to facilitate passage along the Underground Railroad.[46] In each of these cases, the practitioners found innovative ways to "use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house." Such examples illustrate how the norms that make expressive freedom possible are everywhere, and can be employed in novel and resistant ways. In the process, new traditions of creative expression come into being. In the case of slavery in the US, appropriating the master's tools did not merely permit periodically "beating the master at his own game." It made it possible to resist the game, and in time to transform it in fundamental ways.

The legacy of slavery in the United States is a rather stark example of a political framework that we can deem illegitimate by appealing to its failure to cultivate expressive freedom. At first glance, this might seem to apply the account to an exceedingly easy test case. Do we really need a theoretical account to provide a normative trajectory away from chattel slavery? Is not the path beyond such utter dehumanization fairly self-evident? In the contemporary US, slavery is no longer considered morally or socially acceptable, let alone legal. Does this mean that the forms of domination that slavery quite publicly manifested have ceased to exist? The comforting sense that such is the case belies the fact that the legacies of slavery and the ensuing era of Jim Crow remain alive in insidious

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[44] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll!: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1974), 165.
[45] Ibid., 283.
[46] Brian Blount, *Cultural Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

and pervasive forms (e.g., the "new Jim Crow").[47] Foucault describes these forms as invisibly inscribed upon our bodies and souls, shot through our personalities, desires, and languages.

The formal institutions of chattel slavery in the US have ceased to exist, as have many of the more obvious forms of domination, suffering, and mammalian pain that accompanied them. But this is the point at which expressive freedom provides a helpfully trenchant mode of assessment. For, if we gauge the justness of present conditions exclusively by the decrease of mammalian pain since the days of chattel slavery, then severe forms of exclusion, inequality, and injustice remain invisible. Black people and people of color, the poorest and most at risk, continue to struggle for full inclusion in North American and European societies that have long outlawed slavery. Many fight to be recognized as full participants in institutions and practices subtly (or explicitly) coded by race, sexuality, class, and age. For many of these people, the forms of expressive freedom that they exercise – in spite of conditions that would prohibit them – are strategies for bare survival and minimal resistance. As an ideal point of normative orientation, expressive freedom will serve higher ends than these: the cultivation and expansion of human flourishing.

Holding the lens of expressive freedom up to Foucault's later work helps to illuminate the normative orientation for power analysis that he was beginning to articulate at the time of his death. In his latest work, he moved into a position that at once accommodates the best insights of expressive freedom and supplements its deficiencies through an unrelenting focus on the micro-operations of domination. Foucault rephrased his earlier claim that "you see power everywhere, thus there is no room for freedom" to read, "If there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere."[48] On this understanding, freedom is not merely a possibility, but a *necessity* that opens the way for multiple possibilities. Freedom understood as "ethical practice" becomes possible, according to Foucault, not in spite of but as a necessary correlate of inescapable relations of power. In fact, he goes so far as to claim that the very possibility of relations of power presupposes freedom – that

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[47] See, for example, Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; and Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

[48] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 292.

freedom is "the ontological condition of ethics." He explained this complex relation this way:

> In power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all … Power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides.[49]

At this point, Foucault's position comes quite close to the account of expressive freedom I am here developing. To be an agent is to be constrained as a user of norms. To be a user of norms is to have the capacity (in principle) to resist prevailing practices and structures of domination by using their normative constraints. In fact, these constraints presuppose freedom for their existence. To render the other a "thing," as Foucault describes it here, is analogous to the social death that occurs when a Thou is recognized merely as an It in the terms of the I–Thou account I set forth above. It would require the eradication of the capacity for expressive freedom altogether. As we saw in the case of chattel slavery above, it would result in social death.

Of course, at times, the freedom of ethical practice allows no more than momentary transgressions of domination – creating miniscule cracks and fissures in the edifice of the master's house. Foucault explains:

> In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom. To take what is undoubtedly a very simplified example, one cannot say that it was only men who wielded power in the conventional marital structure of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; women had quite a few options: they could deceive their husbands, pilfer money from them, refuse them sex. Yet they were still in a state of domination insofar as these options were ultimately only stratagems that never succeeded in reversing the situation. In such cases of domination, be they economic, social, institutional, or sexual, the problem is knowing where resistance will develop.[50]

Such cracks and fissures may be short-lived and incidental. Or they might give way to larger rifts and gaping holes. In any case, the account of freedom as ethical practice that emerges in Foucault's later interviews and lectures – and of the care of the self as an ethical practice,

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 292–293.

in particular – still remains concerned with the systemic and immanent character of power analysis. The above account of expressive freedom helps us see that power analysis need not jeopardize a normative orientation by which to discern better and worse states of affairs, nor deny the possibility of agency (however slim) through which to resist injustice. In the final section of this chapter, I consider several objections to the social-critical potential of expressive freedom and self-creation.

Dismantling the Master's House: Objections and Replies

Demonstrating the normative orientation for critique and agency for resistance at a theoretical level will invite objections at the level of practical application. Some might claim, for instance, that the innovation made possible by expressive freedom could be assimilated by the circumstances of domination, and applied in ways that (however inadvertently) perpetuate those circumstances. The American sociologist and social critic W. E. B. Du Bois offers such a claim in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, originally published in 1903, when he described black people in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States as "born with a veil" – a "double consciousness." "This American world … yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." Du Bois continues:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[51]

With these words, Du Bois identified conditions of self-loathing inscribed (often tacitly) in the personalities, upon the bodies, and in the self-conceptions of the people most disadvantaged in a United States determined by white supremacy. His notion of double consciousness points toward the ways that expressive freedom might be co-opted and deployed to perpetuate oppression.

For example, while Armstrong is widely recognized as one of the premiere innovators in the history of jazz, many of his fellow musicians

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[51] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 5.

remained skeptical. Despite his genius and transformation of that art form, they doubted that he ever fully escaped the prevailing conception of what a black entertainer could be and should do within a social and political context predicated upon white supremacy. In Lorde's terms, Armstrong became a house entertainer for the master – applauded and admired so long as he fulfilled the master's expectations and kept his customers satisfied. For all its beauty and expressiveness, such critics demurred, his innovation did little more than "keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns."[52]

Similarly, Frantz Fanon wrote disdainfully about the intellectuals among the colonized who had absorbed "the manners and forms of thought" of the colonialist bourgeoisie. He thought that they had been insufficiently traumatized by the struggle for liberation. Their assimilated selves remained largely intact, and thus, in service to their colonizers.[53] Fanon's remarks lead us back to Fraser's criticism of Foucault with which we began: If, as Foucault claims, power so suffuses all practices, can there be no way to critique, resist, and transform it? Is a double consciousness or assimilated self inescapable for those who are subjugated? Is every innovation doomed to reflect and perpetuate the master's system, even if in a novel formulation?

At this point, my account of expressive freedom provides a crucial addition to Foucault's account. As we saw above, the upshot of expressive freedom is the ability to perform a given practice in ways never-before seen and thereby contribute to the transformation of that practice. Again, this entails the capacity of making explicit the norms implicit in the practices and subjecting them to examination, making them candidates for further inspection and revision. From the vantage point of expressive freedom, then, it is no coincidence that the assimilation of Armstrong's genius into mainstream, white supremacist culture was as much a point of contention between Armstrong and Dizzy, and later between Miles Davis and John Coltrane, as their musical differences. The social and political implications of their music and musicianship – along with the terms under which they were praised – all became objects of contestation. The arguments that ensued highlighted the ways that their practices were beholden to various institutions, and laced with insidious dynamics of power. Jazz musicians and critics brought the institutional modes of exploitation to the level of conscious reflection (for instance, so-called

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[52] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1 1 3.
[53] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1 9 6 3), 3 8–3 9.

junkie labels, such as Prestige, came to be known as "plantations" for under-paying musicians in small bills cash to make it easier for them to get from heroin fix to heroin fix).[54] They questioned why black musicians were prohibited from recording with whites early on, and what parts they were permitted to play or sing when such collaboration was later permitted. Illuminating the conditions that made the practice of jazz music possible, the institutional structures that sustained it, and the implications of the practice became a means of critically interrogating the past and innovating increasingly self-reflective forms of awareness and resistance. From the critical perspective of expressive freedom, any innovation that did not open up the practice to critical scrutiny, and thus to transformation, did not contribute to genuine freedom.

Even so, one might argue that the work of deliberately explicating the norms implicit in practices remains at a potentially troubling level of abstraction. Indeed, the critical task of holding others accountable to the implications of their claims often takes the form of a "disembodied logic of immanent critique." Moreover, such work is often put in the hands of professional logicians and philosophers trained to examine the logic implicit in ordinary practices. The present account of expressive freedom is open to this charge in so far as it suggests that "making explicit what is implicit in concept-use generally is precisely the expressive role distinctive of logical vocabulary." Or in other words, that "the road to ethics is paved with logic."[55]

Furthermore, heavy reliance upon deliberative explication risks passing over the potential validity of "tacit," intransigent forms of knowledge such as intuitions, feelings, and perceptions that often resist explication, as well as the usefulness of nondeliberative modes of expression in resistance. Hence, expressive freedom's privileging of deliberative modes may lead it to discount Du Bois's profound point about self-loathing and disdain for one's skin color, which, even once explicitly identified, resist correction

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[54] Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and His Quest* (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 66.

[55] Robert Brandom, "Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: A Reply to Habermas," *European Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (2000): 372. Brandom does not fully endorse this characterization. Rather, he sets it forth as a possible reading of his project in *Making It Explicit* that will most likely appeal to Habermas. Hence, this criticism may be better addressed to Habermas's project. For Habermas's assessment of Brandom's project, see "From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Philosophy of Language," *European Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (2000): 322–355.

through deliberative interrogation. Embodiment is messy; the prejudices, intuitions, and desires that shape actors' normative attitudes become entrenched, and are not easily changed by conceptual explication, deliberative interrogation, and acts of the will. At the same time, acquiring an increasingly self-reflective and critical awareness of a practice might take forms other than the explication of the proprieties of logical inference.[56]

Foucault, by contrast, pointed out time and again that the norms of practices are inscribed upon our bodies as much as they are shot through our vocabularies. They configure our spaces, practices, and institutions. They manifest themselves as habits that often are not amenable to adjustment on the basis of explication, criticism, and argument. William Connolly provides an example to amplify the point:

> Suppose you become wary of the sense of disgust or panic you feel in your gut when, say, atheists or gays articulate their orientations to death, marriage, or sex in public forums. The gut, we now know, contains a simple cortical organization; and the cultural transactions through which it is organized issue in thought-imbued intensities that make powerful claims upon your habits, actions, and intellectual judgments. Such heartfelt intuitions may not be movable by will or deliberation alone, then. But they might yield a little to arts of the self and micropolitical practices that enact new versions of those interactions between sound, feeling, image, touch, concept, and belief through which the intuitions were organized in the first place.[57]

Connolly's insight about the frequently extreme difficulty of refashioning one's self fits more readily with Foucault's notion of "micro-politics" of the self than with the logical interrogation of norms implicit to expressive practices. Though this is a particular strength of Foucault's analysis, Charles Taylor points out that he never employs it at the level of association in common action. The politics of "self-creation" remained for Foucault "a completely solo operation, the achievement of lone virtuosi, who could learn from each other but did not need to associate with each other."[58] If the present account can incorporate the best insights of

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[56] As I demonstrate at length in Chapter 8, these messy features of embodiment serve vital purposes for the model of healthy conflict I am constructing.

[57] William E. Connolly, "Politics and Vision," in Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly, eds., *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

[58] Charles Taylor, "A Tension in Modern Democracy," in Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly, eds., *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 94–95.

Foucault's attention to the micro-political dimension of self-cultivation, it might have the virtue of applying those insights at the level of collaborative social and political action as well.

To be fair, the term "deliberation" by itself does not capture the full scope of the irreducibly social character of expressive freedom.[59] All forms of perception and action, including the nonlinguistic, are inferentially significant for expressive freedom. They interweave with explicitly inferential practices of logical deliberation as "entryways" into and "exits" from chains of reasoning and speech.[60] In other words, what I attend to in a given context, how I pay attention to what is going on around me, and the ways that I act and interact in response to those events are all part and parcel of the deliberative practices to which expressive freedom pertains. And yet, because both observation and embodied action are forms of discursive activity, this account is, in principle at least, amenable to explicit attention to embodiment, spatial configurations, and any perceptual or contextual consideration.[61]

Of course, if expressive freedom can attend to community concerns in a way that Foucault's account of artistic self-creation does not, we must see whether it can avoid erring in the opposite direction, thus losing any sense of the individual. Consider an objection sometimes posed to "I–We" accounts of social practices.[62] On such accounts, the individual (I) stands over against the composite collection of individuals that takes the form of the community (we). Consensus of the community based upon intersubjective agreement (we) cannot provide a final authoritative

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[59] The Hegelian background of expressive freedom draws the sphere of the discursive inclusively (a factor I develop at length in Chapters 7 and 8).

[60] Wilfrid Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games," in *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1991), 321–358; Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), esp. 330–333, 618–612. A helpful elucidation of these ideas can be found in Jeffrey Stout, "Radical Interpretation and Pragmatism: Davidson, Rorty and Brandom on Truth," in Nancy Frankenberry, ed., *Radical Interpretation in Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25–52 (esp. 35–43).

[61] It cannot be denied that Brandom does little to explicitly develop the implications for embodiment and spatial situation of the embedded character of his inferentialism. For trenchant criticism of Brandom's project along these lines, see Joseph Rouse, *How Scientific Practices Matter: Reclaiming Philosophical Naturalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 210–233 (esp. 222–225).

[62] Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 593–601 (especially 599).

perspective. Rather, both communal consensus and individual claims are accountable to the norms implicit in the practices as well as the constraints that fill out the context.[63]

Consider, for instance, the extemporaneous speech delivered by the black abolitionist Sojourner Truth to the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in May 1851. There Truth rose to the podium and addressed the audience in the face of protests from many white women who feared having their cause mixed up with blacks and abolitionism. "Don't let her speak … It'll ruin us!" several insisted. According to an observer named Frances Gage, some in attendance that day were inclined to exclude her from the category of "women" altogether because she was black and had been a slave. In this context, she made an incision in the deliberative engagement by the very act of rising to the podium.

Truth first responded to the white Protestant ministers who had addressed the convention the previous day. She began by referring to some of the resources they had invoked, yet, using their own reasons to challenge their conclusions, held them accountable to their commitments, and affirmed her own conclusions as correct. One minister had claimed that the biblical witness commends that women should have fewer rights than men because "Christ wasn't a woman." "Whar did your Christ come from?" Truth responded, "From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him."[64] She addressed a second objection that women were the fairer and frailer sex, and thus their status should be contingent upon that of men. Her response addressed both those who would assimilate her into the general category of "women," and those who would exclude her altogether.

"Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibs me any best place!" And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked. "And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm!" (and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power). "I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear de lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and

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[63] Ibid., 631–632.
[64] Mari Jo and Paul Buhle, eds., *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage and Harper* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 104.

seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"[65]

Truth's response addresses two persistent concerns about immanent criticism. First, it exemplifies how immanent criticism need not take the form of philosophical "logic chopping." In this instance, Truth challenges and corrects her interlocutors' misrecognition of her in an immanent fashion. Specifically, she invokes her body as a black slave, her experiences as a mother whose children had been taken from her and sold into slavery, Christian scripture, and the fact that her grief and anguish – even if refused recognition by white masters – was recognized by Jesus. This is anything but "logic-chopping immanent critique." This encounter might be redescribed as Truth's challenging her interlocutors on the basis of the norms implicit in the practice of mutual recognition. She essentially says, "You may think that you have deliberated effectively by factoring my standpoint into your assessments (either by absorbing it into a general category of 'woman' or excluding it altogether with the qualifications of 'black' and 'slave'). However, here is how my standpoint defies your claims and commitments – and 'ain't I a woman?!'" For Truth's purpose of correcting the dominant usage of the word "woman" in that context, "[baring] her right arm to the shoulder, showing her muscular power" was no less discursively significant than the explicit edge of the question – "Ain't I a woman?" Her body entered into the deliberation – in a way that Foucault's analysis highlights, but remains only implicit in the present account of expressive freedom.[66]

   Second, Truth's speech demonstrates that a social-practical account of critical deliberation need not leave the individual at the mercy of

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Here again we find the relevance of Jane Smiley's argument on behalf of the unique power that Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exerts through its sentimental portrayal of the inescapably tragic – and intrinsically false – character of the I–It relationship between the slave and the slaveowner. Smiley describes Stowe's novel, in effect, as an imaginative, literary mode of the kind of immanent critique that I identify in Sojourner Truth's monologue above. "Stowe never forgets the logical end of any relationship in which one person is the subject and the other is the object," Smiley writes. "No matter how the two people feel, or what their intentions are, the logic of the relationship is inherently tragic and traps both parties until the false subject/object relationship is ended. Stowe's most oft-repeated and potent representation of this inexorable logic is the forcible separation of family members, especially of mothers from children." Smiley, "Say it Ain't So, Huck," 61–67 (here 65).

intersubjective consensus about what is or is not, should or should not be, the case. Rather, it was an instance of a lone voice standing against the prevailing consensus and saying, in effect, "I am right and everyone else here is wrong!" and, indeed, being correct about it. The normative traction of her claim came from the norms internal to the practice in question as well as those implicit in the commitments of her fellow participants. Every perspective, including the deliberative (intersubjective) consensus of the group itself, is accountable to these normative constraints.[67]

In the intervening century and a half, Truth's address has been far more than a crack in the foundation of the white-supremacist, misogynistic house of the master in the United States. Her indictment has proved to be at least as incisive, persuasive, and inspiring as Lorde's remark about the master's house would become roughly a century later. When read through the lens of expressive freedom, Truth's speech models how the I–Thou encounter avoids investing the community with unassailable authority, and thereby losing the individual in a tangle of intersubjectivity.

It is crucial to note here that this is not a recipe for the mere celebration of particularities, and thus a tolerant multiculturalism or politics of difference. On this point, Lorde is correct that the talk of "toleration of difference," so common in the mainstream academy in recent decades, amounts to easy reformism. "Difference" – understood as the normative particularity of the individual perspective – is a basis for resistance. It is a central feature of a framework of discursive exchange based upon reciprocal accountability and judgment, and thus (plausibly) confrontation and agonism. It is a framework within which each participant can, in principle, challenge any other participant in the exchange.

Obviously, in practice, there is no perfectly level discursive playing-field. And, in spite of expressive freedom's potential for expansion in the directions I have noted above, clearly it needs something like Foucault's unrelenting attentiveness to the forms of domination and inequalities inscribed within – and perpetuated by – the expressive practices themselves. If I am right about the ways that Foucault's and Brandom's projects might be deployed to challenge one another, then the work of freedom, while "undefined," is not without direction. Rather, freedom is exercised

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[67] Brandom makes this crucial point when he draws a distinction between I–Thou and I–We accounts. See *Making It Explicit*, 593–601 (esp. 599).

as agency in which the agent is increasingly becoming aware of engaging in ethical practice.[68]

Some inquiring skeptic will want to know why, from the perspective of expressive freedom, "freedom" is to be preferred to oppression. It is important to keep in mind the conception of personhood at the center of this account. On one hand, it is essentialist in the sense that to be a "self" is to be a norm-using creature. To be norm-using is to be constrained in ways that result in freedom. This banal freedom is reflected at the workaday level by the fact that originality is the norm rather than the exception in human speaking and acting. Even the most concerted efforts to exactly replicate some action or performance will be nonidentical, and thus unique. Of course, the ethical and political import of expressive freedom is actualized only once it has been identified, critically reflected upon, improvised with, and expanded. This is what it means for the exercise of freedom to occur as agency in which the agent is increasingly becoming aware of engaging in ethical practice. But here, another potential objection emerges: Does this not tie expressive freedom to a troublingly *teleological* claim – a claim that expressive freedom is the given end of what it means to be human, that humans ought to be able to pursue that end? Have we finally identified a point at which expressive freedom and power analysis are intrinsically at odds?

The above account of expressive freedom is consistent with Foucault's view that one can never tell in advance from which quarter, or in what forms, innovation and resistance will come. So understood, the teleological dimension of freedom thus "un-defined" is open-ended. The particular form of freedom will be conceived within and in response to particular social and historical circumstances. The forms it will take, and exactly how it might press against its antecedent constraints and concrete circumstances, are impossible to predict beforehand. What it will entail is the expanded agency of the people involved in those circumstances, as well as their accountability to one another and to the practices in which they engage.

Using the example of linguistic practices, Brandom describes the increased agency afforded by expressive freedom as the increased "capacity [of practitioners] to transform the vocabularies [and practices] in which we live and move and have our being." This is an open-ended telos in the sense that transforming vocabularies also transforms conceptions

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[68] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 286–287.

of the telos, and thereby "creates new ways of being."[69] In other words, the telos of expressive freedom can be fulfilled only in so far as any particular conception of the telos remains subject to critical revision, and is, from time to time, rearticulated and transformed. To become an adept user of a vocabulary (and thus, to fulfill the telos of a language-user, so conceived) is to speak in ways that no one has ever spoken before, and thereby to enrich the vocabulary and the practice, potentially to alter the vocabulary itself, and thus, to revise (however subtly) conceptions of the telos of the practice. It is to become able to articulate ideas and intentions that were previously unknown to or impossible for the speaker, and perhaps the entire community of speakers. Hence, expressive freedom is "teleological" in a formal sense. It has no endpoint that is not subject to revision, just as Armstrong's mastery of the trumpet redefined what it meant to "master" the trumpet. Armstrong's virtuosity at the practice altered the practice and the normative conceptions organizing it. He exemplified freedom through normative constraint in which the telos of a practice can be fulfilled only if it is simultaneously challenged, enriched, and transformed.

The question about revolutionary praxis implied by Lorde's claim about dismantling the master's house remains to be answered. In contrast to Sartre's claim that annihilating the self's oppressor frees the self, the account of expressive freedom I am developing remains – like Foucault's account of self-creation – deeply suspicious about claims that a self can ever wholly "dis-encumber" and refashion itself from scratch. Likewise, both are deeply skeptical of claims that the ground of a given context can be cleared and entirely reframed. In fact, revolutionary pretensions to accomplish as much – promising "absolute emancipation" – usually result in the opposite of what they intend.

Foucault remained convinced that it is not sufficient (though perhaps it is necessary) simply to speak of *liberation from* repressive circumstances. "When a colonized people attempts to liberate itself from its colonizers, this is indeed a practice of liberation in the strict sense," he wrote. "But we know very well … that this practice of liberation is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of freedom that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society."[70] Expressive freedom

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[69] Brandom, "Freedom and Constraint by Norms," 178.
[70] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 282–283.

affords an orientation by which to gauge the development of those practices of freedom, namely, in the direction of more widely encompassing forms of expressive freedom. These will be marked by expansion in the capacities and opportunities of those who had been dominated – or had their capability for expressive freedom denied – to participate in, and indeed, to become the architects of the dismantling of that domination, and in refashioning and transforming societal conditions.

The resistant and transformative potentials of expressive freedom do not present one horn of the old revolution–reform dilemma. Rather, they aid the kind of analysis that might mediate it. The best scholarship on slave religion in the United States has already articulated the complex relationship between reform and revolution in that context. In his landmark study *Slave Religion*, Albert Raboteau made the case that the roles within slave religion defied the simple categories of resisting or sustaining the status quo. He writes:

Institutionally, the egalitarian impulse of evangelical Protestantism, leveling all men before God and lifting some up to declare his word with power and authority, gave slaves and free blacks the opportunity to exercise leadership. Usually this leadership was not revolutionary and from the perspective of political strategy it was overwhelmingly conservative. Yet political action is not the only measure of resistance to oppression. Despite political impotence, the black preacher was still a figure of power as an unmistakable symbol of the talent and ability of black men, a fact which contradicted the doctrine of inherent black inferiority. As white slaveholders occasionally recognized, black preachers were anomalous, if not dangerous, persons under the system of slave control precisely because their authority could not be effectively limited by whites.[71]

This anomalous element of the black preacher's role in that context demands further analysis.[72] Preaching became effective as a form of resistance precisely because it did not fit easily on either side of a

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[71] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 63.

[72] The literature on slave religion offers mixed conclusions on the roles of slave preachers and black preachers as exemplars of expressive freedom, and calls for cautious consideration in light of the framework I am developing here. While Genovese's assessment is compatible with Raboteau's above remarks, he further emphasizes the political limitations that accompanied the forms of resistance and innovation that slave and black religion make possible. See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll*, 280–284; cf. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 32–36; Cornel West, "Foreword," in Madeleine Burnside, *Spirits of the Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 8–10; Eddie S. Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue*.

revolution–reform opposition. By contrast, Nat Turner and John Brown had both attempted to lead slaves in rising up against their masters. The perspective of expressive freedom is compatible with the claim that they were morally justified in doing so if they employed just and proportionate means. However, in both cases, revolutionary violence presented a highly manageable form of resistance. The masters knew how to quash resistance in the form of direct violence, and both uprisings were quickly put down by military responses. As I have demonstrated, various manifestations of expressive freedom produced forms of resistance and critique that proved far more unpredictable and unmanageable for the "the master" to contain and control over time. They also proved more effective for the transformation of the master, himself, into positions of nonmastery.

Used as a gauge for assessing social and political arrangements – and thus when and how to challenge them – expressive freedom provides grounds for declaring the structures that support oppressive conditions deficient and defying them. Revolutionary activity is not precluded in principle. And yet, the term "revolutionary" has come to be reconceived within a framework of expressive freedom. It can no longer be understood as the forever-deferred arrival of a new age (or reinstatement of a previous one) in which absolute emancipation finally overcomes all that was. Instead, the notion of "revolution" is reframed by the recognition that freedom is an ever-unfinished but ever-possible project made possible by normative constraints, rather than by eradicating those constraints.

Conclusion

We have arrived at a curious paradox. On one hand, the notion of expressive freedom I have drawn from Brandom does not seek the destruction of one's opponent – even one's enemy. It seeks a conversion of one's opponent, at least in the sense of converting "mastery" (the dominant position) to a position of "nonmastery" (i.e., nondomination). At the same time, I argued that the process by which these conversions occur ought not be expected to be easy, irenic, or even ultimately resolvable. The commitments and motivations that stand to be altered are often deep and long-established. As such, they will likely not be remade through simple persuasion or deliberative, conversational exchange. Indeed, in some conflicts, what is at issue is considered nonnegotiable; there may be a standing opposition between irreconcilable claims, where integrative mediation is impossible. Opponents in these cases may not recognize the possibility for tolerant coexistence. What

may emerge is a standing opposition that requires, nonetheless, full efforts to overcome dynamics of domination of one person or party by another.

In short, two of the most distinctive features of our position seem to stand in tension: (1) the aim of converting the dominant to non-domination; and (2) the potentially agonistic character of the relation between the dominating and dominated parties. These points may not be as incompatible as they appear at first blush. In fact, they can be seen as two of the central commitments of an approach to conflict referred to as "conflict transformation." In this approach, the way to deal with conflict and intolerance is not to resolve it. In the chapters that follow, I unpack and deploy the conflict transformation approach to deep-seated conflict. As we shall see, the goal of conflict transformation is the conversion of the dominant to a position of nondomination, while at the same time recognizing that conflict is not inevitably destructive and thus something to be eliminated. In the view I develop, conflict has a life-giving potency and might be engaged constructively, as I try to show in the next two chapters.

PART II

BEYOND AMERICAN INTOLERANCE

Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due

Agonistic Respect and the Transformation of Conflict in a Post-Secular Society

In this chapter, I explore the possibility that intolerance and conflict motivated by moral and religious commitments and identities might serve as resources for constructive political and social purposes. Part I revisits efforts by political philosophers and religious ethicists over the past three decades to accommodate in political discourse those religious actors who, because they are allegedly inclined toward intolerance, are considered likely to spawn destabilizing conflict. These debates have made considerable headway in showing the plausibility – if not the necessity – of accommodating religion-specific reasoning in public discourse in liberal-democratic contexts. Arguably, they have helped to illuminate and overcome the deficiencies of an exclusively secular framing of public space, and contributed to conceptualizing and bringing about a "post-secular society." In exploring the limits of these efforts to accommodate religion in public life, I argue that many such attempts to manage religiously motivated conflict tend either to domesticate the voices they aim to accommodate, or to further marginalize religious voices deemed irremediably intolerant of the basic parameters of democratic discourse itself.

This leads me, in Part II, to a sustained interrogation of attempts to overcome the limits of "accommodation" through fostering mutual understanding between opponents with rival identities. I argue that each of these approaches to religiously motivated conflict in political life fails to fully appreciate the depth and gravity of such conflict. This failure raises two explanatory challenges for the model of "healthy conflict" I am developing here. First, it means that the prevailing understanding of "tolerance" will have to be reconfigured. What are the limits of tolerance? What are its liabilities when it comes to cultivating just and sustainable

peace? Are there in fact strengths and resources to be uncovered in what presents itself as intolerance? A second, and related, endeavor I must take up is the extent to which agonistic models of democracy can illuminate these resources.

The remainder of the chapter explores the possibility of reframing religiously motivated intolerance and the conflicts that often spring from it. In contrast to strategies of accommodation and mutual understanding, I explore the potential goods of forthright and intentional conflict that come into view when we recognize the true depth – and perhaps irremediability – of expressions of intolerance. I will not argue that intolerance is good, or even that political life that is tumultuous because riven by intolerance and resentment is to be preferred to one that is tranquil, yet marked by indifference and disengagement. Instead, I examine Chantal Mouffe's account of agonistic pluralism as a proposal for decentralizing tolerance as an orienting value that aims to contain or resolve persistent conflict. I conclude that Mouffe's account finally suffers from certain of the same shortcomings as the accommodationist and recognition-based approaches. Still, her model of agonistic pluralism provides crucial resources for conceptually reframing religious intolerance and conflict, and thus points toward a workable model of transforming and constructively using conflict that is liable to be intransigent.

The Religion in Public Life Debates: Culture of Disbelief and Prospects for a Post-Secular Society

Stephen Carter's book *The Culture of Disbelief* challenged liberal conceptions of tolerance by identifying their limits and highlighting their internal contradictions.[1] So-called liberal tolerance proposed norms of common

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[1] I use Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Harper, 1993) as an entry point into debates over the legitimacy of religious commitments in political debate that have spanned several disciplinary fields. These debates did not begin with Carter's book, nor do all the relevant texts explicitly refer to it (though *The Culture of Disbelief* may have been the most widely circulated intervention in these debates). Carter's book does helpfully draw together many of the most important issues, court cases, and philosophical arguments into a single discussion. A sampling of the most influential installments from legal and political philosophers to whom Carter responded at that time includes Thomas Nagel, "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16 (1987): 215–240; Kent Greenawalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Robert Audi, "The Separation

rationality to which participants in public, political discourse must conform in order to maintain a stable, just, and free society. This position, Carter complained, entailed intrinsic biases against religious commitments.[2] Some of its variations prescribed deliberative restraints upon reasoning in political discourse by prohibiting explicit appeals to religious and moral commitments that discussion participants often considered to be ultimate and obligating. Requiring that religious claims and commitments be revised to conform to, or be translated into, terms of "public reason" placed an asymmetrical burden on religiously motivated citizens.

In the hope of producing stable social conditions and universally accessible political justifications, some political liberals had stipulated that substantial (or "comprehensive") religious commitments would need to be bracketed from public, political discourse regarding matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials. Such deliberative restraints served two purposes. First, they would allow for the broadest possible range of moral and religious viewpoints, while reducing the likelihood of conflict between them. In the US, this framework had been called "the Jeffersonian compromise," referring to the position articulated by Thomas Jefferson. In the interest of honoring the autonomy, basic rights, and freedom of conscience of individual citizens, the state agreed to tolerate equally a variety of often incompatible and potentially conflicting religious and moral views, practices, and institutions among its citizenry.[3] It would permit this plurality on the condition that all practitioners in public debate tolerate one another, and thereby contribute to the overall stability of the society. Citizens have the freedom to practice any religion they choose, or none at all, so long as, in doing so, they do not interfere with their fellow citizens' pursuit of their own conception of the good life. Moreover, to promote stability and mutual respect, religiously motivated citizens ought to avoid religion-specific reasoning when participating in public life and political operations of the state.

of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 259–296; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Moral Conflict and Political Consensus," *Ethics* 100, no. 1 (October 1990): 64–88; Michael Perry, *Morality, Politics, and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Michael Perry, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[2] Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*, 51–56, 213–232.

[3] Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in Merrill Peterson and Robert Vaughan, eds., *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 257–282 (esp. 257–258).

Second, the restraints articulated by the "Jeffersonian compromise" were meant to ensure that legitimate use of coercion by the state would be justified on publicly accessible grounds. The liberal state was predicated on the idea that coercive actions of the state should not be motivated by a particular religious authority, and thus tradition-specific reasoning. In contrast to the substantive conceptions of the good or truth around which religious and moral traditions organized themselves – and over which their adherents were, historically, all too willing to enter into violent conflict – common political terms could provide a framework for at least minimal cooperation amid increasing religious, ethnic, and moral diversity. Conflicting conceptions of how people ought to live their lives should be tolerated – permitted to coexist peacefully – so long as their adherents all conformed to certain basic laws.

Carter argued that such restraints, though claiming to be neutral, entailed their own substantive value claims. The proposed deliberative rules aimed not just to accommodate the reality of increasing diversity in the US, but to promote such diversity as a good that any society ought to cultivate. It was in the interest of both accommodating pluralism and cultivating pluralism as an orienting value, for instance, that the liberal state came to frame its public square as a "marketplace of ideas." Any view could enter this marketplace so long as it did not threaten stability, inhibit plurality, or seek to reduce openness of the marketplace itself. Some went so far as to argue that participation in that "marketplace" is necessary to cultivating the values essential to liberal-democratic citizenship (such as tolerance), and thus that "opting out" of participation in the marketplace is not justifiable.

This quandary was illustrated by the case of *Mozert* v. *Hawkins County Public Schools* (1983). The case was brought by several self-identified "religious fundamentalist" families seeking to exempt their children from a reading program in a public school. The parents claimed that the program's aim of exposing their children to cultural and religious diversity interfered with their freedom to inculcate their own religious beliefs in their children. The complaint noted "that of 47 stories referring to, or growing out of, religions (including Islam, Buddhism, American Indian religion and nature worship), only three were Christian, and none Protestant."[4] The plaintiffs did not challenge the school's use of the program, or public school education generally. In fact, they desired to

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[4] Circuit Judge Danny J. Boggs, concurring in *Mozert* v. *Hawkins County Public Schools*, 827 F.2d 1058 (6th Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 484 U.S. 1066 (1988), 1080–1081n13.

keep their children enrolled in the schools in question. They sought only exemption from the specific program.

Judge Danny Boggs conceded that the program placed a burden on the parents' ability to instill in their children their own religious values and way of life. He noted further that options of home-schooling or enrolling children in Christian schools "amounted to about a doubling of the state and local tax burden of the average resident." Nonetheless, Boggs joined the court's majority in ruling that the parents did not have the right to exempt their children from the program, though they surely could withdraw their children from the public school system altogether, and enroll them in private education or home school. Some defended this as a ruling for "enforced tolerance" on the grounds of the necessity of political liberalism. "Do families have a moral right to opt out of reasonable measures designed to educate children toward very basic liberal virtues because those measures make it harder for parents to pass along their particular religious beliefs? Surely not," Stephen Macedo argued. "To acknowledge the legitimacy of the fundamentalist complaint as a matter of basic principle would overthrow reasonable efforts to inculcate core liberal values. It would provide religious fundamentalists with a right to shield their children from the fact of reasonable pluralism."[5] The decision exemplified how the law imposes "tolerance of diversity" and underlined the exclusion of a broad range of "exclusive" viewpoints. As one commentator summed up the central complaint, the "all-questions-are-open-society" cannot "practice tolerance toward those who disagree with it."[6]

[5] Stephen Macedo, "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God *v*. John Rawls?" *Ethics* 105, no. 3 (April 1995): 468–496 (here 485–486); William Galston counters Macedo's reading of this case in his essay, "Diversity, Toleration, and Deliberative Democracy: Religious Minorities and Public Schooling," in Stephen Macedo, ed., *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39–48. Particularly influential treatments of the case include Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, "'He Drew a Circle That Shut Me Out': Assimilation, Indoctrination, and the Paradox of Liberal Education," *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993): 581–667; and Stephen Bates, *Battle Ground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of our Classrooms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

[6] Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 249, quoting Willmore Kendall, "The 'Open Society' and Its Fallacies," in John Stuart Mill and David Spitz eds., *On Liberty* (New York: Norton, 1975), 164.

Carter's book brought into focus a range of debates that continued in the ensuing decade over the legitimacy of religious commitments, reasoning, and speech in public life and political debate. These debates highlighted the inaccuracy of earlier predictions by secularization theorists that, positioned within a broad multiplicity of views in tolerant societies, religion would recede from public and political significance of its own accord as modernization trends continued.[7] Since religion was not only *not* receding but in many places positively growing as a force in public life, efforts to restrain religious voices were, as a practical matter, counterproductive. Imposing restraints on religious speech appeared to achieve the opposite of what they intended. A self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts played out: When advocates of a liberal and secular polity imposed restrictions on religiously motivated citizens, they inspired in these citizens the very perception of threat and feelings of resentment that some advocates of liberalism had attributed to religious voices from the start. It stood to reason that religiously committed citizens would be less likely to assert their views confrontationally, and might be more amenable to compromise, if they felt less marginalized politically and were not assigned an asymmetrical burden in public discourse. It was plausible to think that, if such disparities were mitigated, citizens otherwise uncompromising in their religious commitments would participate in public, political discourse with less resentment and perhaps greater tolerance toward views that opposed their own. The solution, it seemed, would be to acknowledge liberalism's anti-religious proclivities, cultivate self-reflectiveness about its "intolerance of intolerance," and become more accommodating of morally and religiously motivated voices and tradition-specific identities in public life. A new "post-secular" era, one that could allow for religious commitments in political engagement – and which might acknowledge to some degree their indispensability as counterparts to secular reason – appeared to have dawned.[8]

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[7] A locus classicus for this view is Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor, 1967), a position he later reversed. Cf. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World* (Washington, DC: The Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999).

[8] Jürgen Habermas was one participant in these debates who revised his position in these terms. See, for instance, Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005); Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010); and Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25. Habermas largely credited his change of mind to the impact of Paul Weithman's book *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Despite the headway made in these debates, several participants maintained reservations about religious interventions in political life. To take a high-profile example, Richard Rorty, while admitting that appeals to religion-specific justifications might bear positive fruit in political exchange, held fast to his claim that strong religious convictions run contrary to, and generally endanger, democratic political discourse.[9] Every positive example of religious intervention in political discourse was outnumbered exponentially by negative ones. As a practical matter, Rorty insisted, "[F]or every Martin Luther King, Jr., you get ten Joseph Ratzingers and ten Pat Robertsons."[10] Critics pointed out that even the more accommodating account of public reason that John Rawls set forth in the later edition of *Political Liberalism* placed an unnecessary and unfair justificatory burden upon tradition-specific forms of reasoning, speech, and action regarding constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice.[11] Upon closer inspection, moreover, the celebrated strides

Press, 2002), as well as to arguments made by Nicholas Wolterstorff. For a helpful synopsis of this transition in his thinking, see Richard Wolin, "Jürgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 5 (September 23, 2005).

[9] Jason Springs, ed., Cornel West, Richard Rorty, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jeffrey Stout, "Pragmatism and Democracy: Assessing Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (June 2010): 413–448; for Rorty's initial rebuttal of Carter's arguments, see "Religion as a Conversation Stopper," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999); but Rorty considerably revised that position in "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2003): 142–143. He did so largely in response to arguments set forth by Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting for Religious Reasons," in Paul J. Weithman, ed., *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); and "Audi on Religion, Politics and Liberal Democracy," in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Religion in the Public Square* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1997), 145–165; see also Wolterstorff, "An Engagement with Rorty," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2003): 129–139. Another pivotal intervention that aimed to address the limitations of Rorty's revised position was Jeffrey Stout, "The Folly of Secularism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (September 2008): 533–544.

[10] Springs et al., "Pragmatism and Democracy," 443.

[11] Rawls was rigorously pressed about the restraints he places on religious-specific speech in a Harvard Divinity School Symposium addressing the first edition of *Political Liberalism*, in which he responded to criticisms from Ronald Thiemann, Martha Minow, Cornel West, and Michael Sandel. See "Political Liberalism: Religion and Public Reason," *Religion and Values*

that Jürgen Habermas made in engaging religious belief and practice in terms other than those of secularization theory arguably did not carry him much further than the revisions that Rawls had made.[12] More, it seemed, would be needed.

The Politics of Recognition and the Fusion of Horizons

One influential idea that promised to overcome the contradictions of liberal tolerance, by attending to the tendency to alienate the "intolerant" actors it restrains, was the philosopher Charles Taylor's proposal for a "politics of recognition." Drawing upon the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Taylor introduced the "fusion of horizons" as a model for political and moral engagement. The model refuses to ignore substantive disagreements and differences of identity in the name of stability or conflict resolution. At the same time, it opens a way to resolving value-driven conflicts by engaging in mutual recognition that leaves no party unaltered. Identifying and taking up the differences that occasion intolerance and conflict are inscribed in the terms of engagement as Taylor frames it. Dialogical encounter is a necessary means toward charitable interpretation, mutual understanding, and thus, enriched coexistence. Moving beyond the mere acknowledgment and toleration of identity-constitutive differences, it transforms understanding on the part of all parties to disputes. Instead, for Taylor, these differences are occasions for

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in Public Life 3, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 1–11. He revised his position in the form of the "proviso" in his "Introduction to the Paperback Edition," *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), li–lii. Stout pointed out that, under Rawls's proviso, "religious reasons are to IOUs as contractarian reasons are to legal tender. You have not fulfilled your justificatory obligations until you have handed over real cash." Jeffrey Stout's meticulous critical analysis of Rawls appears in *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), chap. 3 (here 68–69). Critical treatments of Rawls's account of public reason that pressed for loosening its restrictions on comprehensive doctrines include Michael Sandel, "Review of *Political Liberalism*," *Harvard Law Review* 107 (1994): 1765–1794; and Ronald Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), chaps. 4 and 5. Perhaps the most sustained critical analysis of Rawls's principle of restraint is Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Convictions in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[12] Melissa Yates, "Rawls and Habermas on Religion in the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33, no. 7 (2007): 880–891.

the parties to learn about each other and thereby find their respective self-understandings transformed.[13]

To illustrate, Taylor considers examples from the so-called culture wars in the US. "Life-style" or "cultural conservatives" understand their religious and moral commitments as constitutive of their identities, and thus find norms of deliberative restraint alienating. "They are being told to bracket these, to remove them in various ways from the public square, e.g. through banning prayer in schools, or through redefining marriage to include homosexual unions," Taylor explains.[14] Certainly, toleration of a multiplicity of ideas is necessary for the existence of any society home to a plurality of conceptions of the good. Yet pluralism and tolerance tend to assert themselves hegemonically in such contexts. This leads many "cultural conservatives" to perceive the liberal framework of their society as intrinsically dismissive and even contemptuous of their most important values and commitments – in some cases, values about which they simply cannot compromise. The resulting alienation and sense of disenfranchisement fuel the very aggressiveness that the liberal framework aims to combat.

To defuse such a situation, Taylor appeals to the kinds of mutual understanding made available through the fusion of horizons. Specifically, he calls for more accommodation by self-identified liberals of those inclined to be intolerant of views that oppose their own. Marginalization or outright rejection of opposing views as irrational, irrelevant, or simply untenable (because at odds with mutual toleration) invites the alienation of the cultural subgroups who hold them. "The sense 'we're not being heard' is close to the sense: 'we can't talk to those people; we can only defeat them.' People engage in politics on issues which have aroused this reaction rather as though they were engaging in a war," Taylor explained. "The other side has to be wiped out or totally neutralized. The goal is not to go on living with them, but under a new arrangement. It is somehow to root them out, or subjugate them, so that one does not have to deal with what they stand for anymore."[15]

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[13] Charles Taylor, "Living with Difference," in Anita Allen and Milton Regan, eds., *Debating Democracy's Discontents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212–228 (here 215); Taylor developed Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" as a model for engagement in "The Politics of Recognition," and "Comparison, History, Truth," both collected in his *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 225–256, 146–164.

[14] Taylor, "Living with Difference," 216.

[15] Ibid., 215.

A primary objective of Taylor's model is avoiding *ressentiment* among religiously motivated citizens by actually listening to and understanding them. The "cultural conservative" needs to be understood on his own terms, appreciated, respected, and negotiated with, rather than dismissed as puerile, evil, or simply irrational and thus deliberatively "out of bounds" from the start. Even if the end result of such conversation is mutually understood disagreement, it is plausible to think that the conflicting parties will part company with enriched views of each other and the world in which they must coexist. The possibility, perhaps even likelihood, of modification to the parties' commitments (even if unintended, or not fully recognized at the time) offers the prospect for constructive mediation of potentially intractable points of conflict. In the case of the "culture wars" in the US, this would mean coming to recognize what, for example, school prayer means to the people who advocate for it, and striving to explore its plausibility within the context of religious pluralism. "Once engaged in this kind of discourse, there is a premium on helping the other side toward a rearticulation of their outlook which can allow them to live with the new restriction; in this case, some way of conceiving their communal Christian life in which the absence of school prayer would not just be a truncation," Taylor explained.[16]

Even as many parties to the debate began to revise their views, some raised instructive objections. Stanley Fish was not persuaded that much had been gained from the varied debates over "religion in public life." He claimed that, though the arguments for greater accommodation of religion in political life may be valid, they amount at most to a series of debater's points. Fish put the point tersely:

To persuade liberalism that its dismissive marginalization of religious discourse is a violation of its own chief principle, all you will gain is the right to sit down at liberalism's table, where before you were denied an invitation. But it will still be liberalism's table that you are sitting at, and the etiquette of the conversation will still be hers … [A] person of religious conviction should not want to enter the marketplace of ideas but to shut it down, at least insofar as it presumes to determine matters that he believes have been determined by God and faith.[17]

Clearly, Fish's language veers into rhetorical overstatement. It is not the case that maintaining uncompromising religious commitments requires – or even necessarily inclines – one to shut down the so-called marketplace of ideas. Religious actors and traditions often have their own distinctive

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[16] Ibid., 217.
[17] Fish, *The Trouble with Principle*, 250.

reasons to be tolerant, to respect conflicting viewpoints, and to remain open to engagement – even collaboration in some cases – in religiously and politically diverse contexts.

Even so, the critical edge of Fish's point is that there may remain communities that resist even the most well-intentioned efforts to include them in democratic (liberal tolerant) processes. These groups do not simply desire a seat at the table of democratic exchange. They seek to alter the nature of the exchange, or to transform the framework within which it occurs.[18] For such groups and thinkers, to take a seat at the table of deliberation according to liberal norms is to compromise their identity and most binding commitments. These communities usually reject the idea of "a faith held so lightly that it leaves the everyday world unaltered," and, in some cases, claim that "religion deprived of the opportunity to transform the culture in its every detail is hardly a religion at all."[19] On occasion, such groups are referred to as fundamentalists, culture warriors, or theocrats.[20] Groups of this sort understand themselves to possess truth, and a central feature of their identity is the obligation to seek the conversion of those they encounter with opposing viewpoints. In some cases, they see this mission as concomitant with the transformation (in law and culture) of the society in which they live. For such groups, at least on certain issues, to express tolerance – conceived as cultivated indifference,

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[18] Susan Harding characterizes the motivation behind the early formation of the Moral Majority in precisely this way. By her account, it was their intention to broadly transform society that set Jerry Falwell's social and political program apart from "separatist" fundamentalist counterparts. See Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), chap. 5.

[19] Fish, *The Trouble with Principle*, 251.

[20] These monikers remain subject to much debate. One account portrays such groups as reacting to or "fighting back" against the encroachment of moral relativism and religious pluralism uniquely associated with modernity. For a thumbnail sketch, see Martin Marty, "Explaining the Rise of Fundamentalism," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 39, no. 10 (October 28, 1992), and for a more sustained treatment of the same, see Gabriel Almond, Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003). An account that views "religious fundamentalist" groups not as hostile reactionaries to encroachment by "secularism," but as critical participants within increasingly plural modern contexts, is Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

"living and letting live," or even entering into a dialogue whose primary purpose is to achieve compromise or mutual acceptance – is already to have conceded the substance of their commitments and the demands of their faith.[21]

In principle, accommodationist efforts to incorporate religious particularity expand the circle of tolerable voices by loosening the restraints upon public deliberation. In practice, however, accommodation comes at a cost. Viewed positively, it is a legitimate effort to revise exclusionary tendencies to which political liberalism is prone. At the same time, it aims to orient all parties to the debate according to a conception of mutual toleration that would manage differences that may well be irreconcilable. Viewed suspiciously, accommodation forgoes the task of *explicitly* policing religious and moral convictions through deliberative restraints. Yet, in the interest of making such voices "safe" for liberal-democratic politics, the requirements for participation in effect still "domesticate" those religious commitments.[22]

[21] Note that I am not characterizing the oppositional positioning of these commitments either as incommensurable, or as conflicting "worldviews" (that is, complete and internally integrated belief systems or conceptual schemes). Both characterizations have been thoroughly worked through, and fruitfully countered, in my judgment. See, for instance, Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press), part 2, and a more recent restatement of the central insights in "The Specter Haunting Multiculturalism," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 36, nos. 3–4 (2010): 381–394. Rather, I am describing the opposition as a matter of particular, contradictory truth claims and the practical and propositional inferences that extend therefrom. Such oppositions, while they may be categorical, may occur alongside commonly shared belief or elements of ambiguity in other areas. On such an account, it is possible to recognize and even respect the person whose commitments on some issue(s) contradict one's own, while nonetheless viewing that person's commitments or actions as morally evil and politically unjust, and thus insisting that the policy implications of those views ought to be fought against (culturally, politically, and legally).

[22] As I suggest in Chapter 8, one instance of the domesticating effect of reasonable accommodation emerged in contemporary France when former French President Nicholas Sarkozy called for French society and social policy to invite Muslim immigrants and citizens to devise a distinctively French Islam (much like French society has fashioned a "French Judaism" and "French Catholicism"). A French Islam would win a larger social and political role in exchange for conforming to the criteria of "reasonable accommodation" set forth in the terms of *laïcité*. John R. Bowen, "Muslims and Citizens: France's Headscarf Controversy," *The Boston Review* (February/March, 2004). Bowen makes this point more explicitly in his book *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*

Consider, for example, how the Texas Board of Education revised its social studies textbook curriculum in May 2010.[23] In that state, a voting bloc of self-identified Christian conservatives had come to exert prominent (not controlling) influence over public school textbook guidelines. Their primary objective was to revise social studies textbooks to impart their shared conviction that "the United States was founded by devout Christians and according to biblical precepts," that these facts inform its founding documents, and that contemporary US culture and laws ought to reflect this legacy. On their view, the understanding of "church and state separation" expressed in laws and court decisions that removed Christian prayer and Bible reading from public schools, and the Ten Commandments from school and courthouse walls, is a relatively recent accretion to constitutional law. They argue that such laws and verdicts are based upon selective (mis)applications of fairly peripheral documents: Jefferson's "Letter to the Danbury Baptists" of 1802, in which he coined the "wall of separation" metaphor, and the much later retrieval and elevation of that phrase by Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black in 1947.[24]

In revising textbook guidelines, the board did not aim to gain a hearing within a deliberative framework that had previously shut them out,

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(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 3, and further in chap. 6 of *Can Islam Be French?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). Talal Asad articulated a comparable line of criticism – primarily through lenses of power analysis – against Jose Casanova's critical assessment and recalibration of the classic secularization thesis in the latter's *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Asad's analysis of this point appears in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), chap. 6 (esp. 183–187). For another argument along these lines, but regarding the cultural and political domestication of Christianity in US contexts, see Stanley Hauerwas, "The Democratic Policing of Christianity," in *Dispatches from the Front* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 95–106; and *After Christendom: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991).

[23] See Russell Shorto's coverage in his article "How Christian Were the Founders?" *New York Times Magazine*, February 11, 2010.

[24] One member of the Texas school board, law professor and attorney Cynthia Dunbar, articulated her justification of this position in her book *One Nation under God* (Oviedo, FL: Onward Press, 2008). While popular treatments sometimes frame such arguments as selectively ideological, many of the claims find rigorous and substantial vindication in legal and historical scholarship. See, for instance, Philip Hamburger, *Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), esp. 479–492.

or to achieve parity of participation where they previously were assigned an asymmetrical justificatory burden, or to come to mutually understanding disagreement. They did not seek simply to be tolerated or respectfully understood as one viewpoint among many. Their objective – quite forthrightly stated in some cases – was to alter the Texas public school curriculum, specifically, and more broadly to transform contemporary US society over time in ways consistent with what they understand to be the truth about the Judeo-Christian origins of its founding documents, and the original biblical and theological intentions of its founders. "The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next," board member Cynthia Dunbar put the point. It would be wrong to suggest that the program Dunbar and others aimed to establish has no capacity for toleration and pluralism. However, for them, those concepts must be understood in terms of what they take to be plain, historical facts about the broadly Christian framework of the founding of the US, and laws consistent with these facts.[25]

The question facing Taylor at this point is the extent to which, in circumstances such as these, "charitable understanding" can overcome the weaknesses of accommodationist models. To be fair, his description of the inescapability of difference has a double aspect: one is rather mundane, while the other has a more explicit normative edge. On one hand, "living with difference" is an unavoidable reality. That is, whatever one's commitments or worldview may be, and however unfalteringly one may hold to them, there exists a myriad of alternatives. Moreover, in today's hyper-interconnected world, these alternatives will exist in close proximity to one's own. At this level, Taylor's claim simply reiterates the facts of pluralism.

Yet Taylor connects this descriptive aspect with a more normative point about the unavoidability of "living with difference." This second aspect implies that the fact of plurality entails the necessity to accommodate that plurality, at least in the sense of articulating one's commitments as just one among many viable options. The fusion of horizons – the encounter, recognition, and engagement, which are hard to avoid in a pluralistic

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[25] Texas textbook reforms are particularly influential in the US. Because Texas is the second-largest textbook market in the US (with an annual distribution of 48 million textbooks), national publishers typically tailor their publications for all states to the requirements of that one. See Shorto, "How Christian Were the Founders?"; and James C. McKinley, Jr., "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2010.

society – expands one's own horizon so that, as Taylor phrases it, "the other's way of being can figure undistortively as one possibility among many."[26] Yet this second, normative aspect of "living with difference" does not necessarily follow from the first, descriptive aspect. In the most pressing and volatile cases, some perspective considers another worldview or lifestyle deviant an abomination, a moral evil – something that (from the perspective in question) ought to be legally banned or culturally ostracized. It is clear, then, that recognition of the existence of multiple lifestyle possibilities does not automatically entail believing them viable, acceptable, or worthy of accommodation.

So, for instance, while Taylor describes his proposed solution to "culture wars" as an encounter of mutual understanding, the realities of difference in fact require that the "rearticulation" occur unidirectionally, namely, in the direction of helping cultural or lifestyle conservatives rearticulate their commitment to (for instance) the need for formal, tradition-specific prayer in public schools to fit in a context of religious and moral diversity. And yet these hypothetical "cultural conservatives" might not be interested in this effort. They may be concerned primarily that their views are true. They might argue that they have pressing reasons to assert their views unequivocally, and seek to change and/or resist their society politically, legally, and culturally in ways consistent with those views.[27]

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[26] Taylor, "Living with Difference," 215.

[27] One finds examples of this in some conservative Christian responses to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States as of 2015. As Daniel Philpott argues, from the perspective of canon law, when two men or two women declare themselves to be married, they "espouse a falsehood and announce their availability for sexual acts that mimic but distort those intrinsic to marriage." Philpott argues that legal compulsion to provide floral arrangements, catering, or any other services for same-sex weddings – even under the auspices of nondiscrimination laws – is, from this perspective, compulsion to actively and formally cooperate with sin (i.e., to facilitate the wrongful actions of other people). On this account, both the formal cooperation (even the appearance of such) and institutional legitimation of sin (e.g., Catholic institutions extending medical benefits to same-sex couples) are intolerable. On this account, the only option for Christian persons and institutions that are concerned to witness faithfully to the love of Christ is either to plead for a conscientious exception to the law, or conscientious refusal to cooperate – explicit refusal to cooperate in any way with the sin of "same-sex 'marriage'," and to suffer the religious persecution that ensues. "When a Christian organization appears to endorse same-sex unions, even in ways that avoid formal cooperation, the world views it as proclaiming, at least tacitly, that it does not believe

From such a perspective, the fusion of horizons, which aims at fostering mutual understanding, risks trivializing the magnitude of what is at stake when orienting commitments conflict.

At moments, Taylor's hypothetical scenario of the lifestyle conservative who is helped to adapt his position to the realities of diversity comes across as subtly analogous to telling an anti-abortion activist that her views about abortion are fine, so long as she does not impose them on everyone else by seeking to "legislate" her moral commitments. Yet, from the perspective of many anti-abortion advocates, abortion is the unjust taking of an innocent human life, and thus murder. So understood, it is as patently unjust as any other act of murder, and ought to be categorically banned. From a natural law standpoint, in fact, laws that permit the killing of innocent life are necessarily unjust, and by implication, not valid laws. On this line of reasoning, such laws ought to be positively resisted. Accepting anything short of abortion's legal exclusion is, in effect, an admission of defeat.[28]

Such examples show why appealing to a fusion of horizons as the way to overcome the limits of mere tolerance invites criticisms like Fish's. The "fusion of horizons" model moves beyond mere "live and let live" tolerance so that opponents can "admire or appreciate or enjoy or sympathize with or (at the very least) 'recognize the legitimacy of' the traditions of cultures other than their own."[29] In fostering this process, it improves

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that marriage is between man and woman or that sex is reserved for marriage," writes Philpott. He argues that the current constellation of laws on the issue of same-sex marriage constitutes conditions of "soft tyranny," and places Christians under conditions of "polite persecution" in the United States. Daniel Philpott, "Polite Persecution," *First Things*, April 2017: www.firstthings.com/article/2017/04/polite-persecution. See also Gerard Bradley, John Finnis, and Daniel Philpott, "The Implications of Extending Marriage Benefits to Same-Sex Couples," Public Discourse, The Witherspoon Institute (2015), www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14522.

[28] For an argument along these lines, see Robert P. George, *Clash of Orthodoxies* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2001). George assesses the capacity of deliberative democracy to accommodate such a position in his essay "Law, Democracy, and Moral Disagreement: Reciprocity, Slavery, and Abortion," in Stephen Macedo, ed., *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 184–197. For a sketch of George's role in political engagement over abortion and related "culture war" issues, see David D. Kirkpatrick, "The Conservative-Christian Big Thinker," *New York Times Magazine*, December 16, 2009.

[29] Fish, *The Trouble with Principle*, 56.

upon deliberative restraint. Since it aims, through mutual understanding, to win some degree of compromise from all parties in a dispute, it arguably holds out hope for more than is granted by those who concede some accommodation of religious voices. However, the kind of transformation Taylor's proposal would produce in the most charged and irremediable conflicts remains basically unidirectional. Lifestyle conservatives, Taylor suggests, must reconcile themselves to the realities of plurality by positioning their view as one viable option among many. But this prohibits them from exercising their views on the issues over which they would most forthrightly assert themselves politically and legally.

At each turn, such criticisms present the possibility that in some cases, the goal of accommodation is pinned to the furthest point on an ever-advancing horizon. Models of accommodation pursue a well-ordered, stable, and just society through processes of political engagement that conceive of stability in terms of the containment or resolution of conflict. They attempt to draw uncompromising moral and religious commitments into the ambit of tolerant and relatively tranquil diversity. But this mission underestimates the gravity of at least some of the differences and in the orientation and basic commitments in question. The pivotal insight is that advocates of some commitments, in so far as they enter into public discourse and political engagement on their own terms, will altogether resist being "tolerated" or "accommodated."[30]

If my analysis is right, it appears that even expansive conceptions of accommodation involve limitations and exclusions similar to those of unrevised forms of liberalism, albeit in less conspicuous ways. And in so far as this is the case, models in which competing and irreconcilable comprehensive views ought to accommodate one another fail to recognize the depth of the oppositions and conflicts that moral and religious commitments sometimes motivate.

In spite of my focus on the shortcomings of accommodationist efforts, I will not argue that religiously and morally motivated intolerance necessitates more stringent forms of deliberative restraint. In my judgment, the headway made in the "religion in public life" debates has contributed to a more robust understanding of democratic practice and public discourse. Various interventions in these debates have demonstrated that the case for restraint is

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[30] Those who refuse to be accommodated need not propose or use direct violence to count as unyielding, uncompromising, committed to seeing their views implemented legally, or effecting a cultural transformation.

untenable.[31] These debates have shown, moreover, that charitable interpretation in the pursuit of mutual understanding, and exchanging views in a context-sensitive manner that respects particular identities, are indispensable. An implication of my account above, however, is that these pivotal insights do not eliminate the need to grapple with the severity and intractability of the conflicts that can arise when opponents' most deeply held convictions are at stake.[32] As I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, finding a path forward requires appreciating the full weight of conflicting and nonnegotiable convictions. It requires working, nonetheless, to engage and reframe these oppositions in ways that strive to be as constructive in addressing the elements of conflict as they are realistic about the severity and persistence of the oppositions at stake.

The question I take up in the remainder of this chapter is whether it may be effective to devise a different set of lenses for contemplating the forms of intractability that emerge when we give intolerance – religious and otherwise – its due. Thus, rather than attempt to further expand the debates about reasonable accommodation, or extend the criticisms already leveled at toleration as a means of containing conflict, my aim is to investigate resources for sketching a constructive proposal. I propose to reconstrue deliberative models of democracy that view the purpose of political engagement as achieving a workable consensus (and gauge the success of a political process by that criterion) in terms of what some political philosophers have called "agonistic" models of democracy.

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[31] Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Wolterstorff's contribution to Audi and Wolterstorff's *Religion in the Public Square*, and Christopher Eberle, *Religious Convictions in Liberal Politics* provide three examples of such criticisms.

[32] Admittedly, the deeply held convictions in question here may be identifiably religious, moral, political, or – as exemplified by the "free-market fundamentalism" that has recently helped to fuel the Tea Party movement in US politics – economic. Most likely, they will consist of some mixture of these (and the foregoing list does not purport to be exhaustive). In short, I am not claiming that religiously identified commitments are neither uniquely strong nor prone to be intolerant. Various contributions to the recent literature on religion and conflict have demonstrated that both of the prevailing currents of argument in this literature – (1) that religion intrinsically inclines toward political and cultural violence, and its converse, (2) that religion, properly embodied and/or understood, is a benign or peaceful force that can be discretely separated from the darker dimensions of political processes and psychological motivations – suffer from the same terminal deficiencies. For example, see Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

Specifically, I examine Chantal Mouffe's account of *agonistic pluralism* as a way to de-emphasize tolerance as the orienting value for purposes of resolving conflict. My aim is to investigate the possibility that placing intransigent conflict at the center of the model will permit reframing and transforming such conflict. I conclude that, while Mouffe's application of agonistic pluralism finally finds itself caught up in some of the same exclusions of deliberative democracy that it aims to overcome, the conflict-centered reframing effected by this model points the way toward novel possibilities for constructively utilizing religious intolerance and conflict.

Hegemony and Fundamentalist Strategy

Deliberative models of democracy typically see the cultivation of stability amid pluralism as an essential goal of democratic politics. They view free, equal, and rational discussion as the best means by which collective political goals can be achieved and needs met. While such models recognize dissent and conflict as inherent in the contest of political interests, generally they frame these as obstacles to the overarching goal of a sustainable consensus, and seek to manage or resolve them. It is with the goal of achieving a workable consensus that deliberative models confer premium value on the norms of stability, accessibility of reasons, and legitimacy.[33]

Models of "agonistic" democracy, by contrast, posit the facilitation of dissent and conflict as essential to democratic politics.[34] A distinctive

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[33] The term "deliberative democracy" encompasses a range of specific proposals. In her seminal essay on the topic, Mouffe identified Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib as exemplars of the deliberative model that she aims to move beyond. She also endorsed Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of the deliberative features of John Rawls's work in Cavell's *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. See Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 745–758. In his article "Coping with Moral Conflict and Ambiguity," *Ethics* 102 (July 1992): 763–784, David Wong leveled powerful criticisms at a range of proposals for accommodating moral disagreement within self-identified deliberative frameworks (he assessed proposals by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Thomas Nagel, and Stuart Hampshire).

[34] In this chapter, I draw exclusively from the model of agonistic pluralism developed by Mouffe, but she does not represent all thinkers associated with "agonistic" theories. It is crucial to keep in mind that there is no such thing as "agonistic democracy" per se. There are, rather, what have come to be termed "agonistic" models of democracy. While the moniker of "agonism" has come

feature of Chantal Mouffe's account of "agonistic pluralism" is her attempt to harness the antagonistic energies intrinsic to democratic political engagement. Because political engagement occurs within a plurality of conflicting values, identities, and aims that compete for realization, it is, at its root, antagonistic.[35] The antagonism intrinsic to political conflict tends to develop through differentiation and opposition. Where differences and oppositions emerge, there will be conflict – "the creation of an 'us' by the determination of a 'them,' " and vice versa.[36] Because the motivating differences are persistent and sometimes irreconcilable, they frequently defy people's efforts to contain, ignore, or resolve them through the measured exchange of reasons. For Mouffe's model, the question is not whether political clashes will entail the construction of another against whom one struggles. The central concerns are how such oppositional relationships will be formed, and how the ensuing struggle will be framed and pursued. The model does not ask potential participants to play by certain rules in deliberative exchange, nor does it hold consensus as the overarching objective.

Agonistic pluralism instead seeks to facilitate dissensus and contestation, and to use the inevitable – indeed necessary – roles they play in a democratic society. Conflict is reconceived as an intrinsic feature of human sociality. While grappling with the depth, persistence, and severity of many conflicts, this reconceptualization aims to motivate respect for one's opponent as an adversary to be contended with, rather than an enemy to be destroyed. Mouffe's account seeks this goal especially in conflicts that may not prove susceptible to compromise or straightforward mediation. Of necessity, democratic political engagement will entail points of concession and compromise. Moreover, because respect is the basis on which enemy is reframed as adversary, the model aims

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to serve as shorthand for a range of thinkers and projects that share a diverse array of family resemblances and points of common interest, the differences between the particular accounts are important, sometimes contentious, and occasionally more pronounced than their similarities. Other theorists broadly identified as articulating "agonistic" accounts of democratic engagement – and some of whose work will be pivotal in the lengthier version of the account I propose here – include William Connolly, James Tully, Ernesto Laclau, Bonnie Honig, and David Owen. In some cases, Sheldon Wolin and Hannah Arendt are read with an eye to the agonistic impulses of their writings.

[35] Chantal Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Model of Democracy," in *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 99.

[36] Ibid., 101.

to accommodate – even hold out hope for – moments of reconciliation between opponents. Mouffe's agonistic model sees these as moments in the persistently unfolding processes of change in which conflict continues, emerging in new forms and cutting across varying constituencies. In other words, agonistic pluralism expects moments of compromise to occasion further contestation and conflict.

Mouffe aims to constructively reframe the tumultuousness of political engagement by first drawing a distinction between "antagonism" and "agonism." Antagonism construes an oppositional engagement as occurring between enemies, each intent upon eliminating the other and rejecting the claims and demands of the other as illegitimate.[37] Agonism reframes this opposition as taking place between adversaries – those "whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question."[38] She proposes to transform antagonism into agonism by setting the sustainability of political association as the orienting goal of political engagement. This permits her to reconceptualize its perennial features. Mouffe's attention to the features of passion, intolerance, and conflict is especially relevant to my present inquiry.

Many deliberative democratic models identify passion, intolerance, and conflict as obstacles to deliberation and consensus, and thus as elements that need to be resolved, or at least mitigated. Mouffe, however, posits them as intrinsic to, even necessary for, democratic political association. She then distinguishes between constructive and destructive varieties of each element.

From the perspective of agonistic pluralism, a primary task of democratic politics is "not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. It is, rather, to attempt to mobilize those passions toward democratic designs."[39] Agonistically reconceived, tolerance does not mean cultivated indifference, restrained aversion, putting up with what one opposes in the interest of "getting along," "agreeing to disagree," or refusing to take sides. It entails the explicit recognition and engagement of views and policies that one stands against. "Toleration" refers to the *character* of one's engagement with one's opponent, rather than to nonengagement,

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[37] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 20–21.
[38] Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Model of Democracy," 103.
[39] Chantal Mouffe, "Religion, Liberal Democracy, and Citizenship," in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 324.

or noninterfering disapproval. It means recognizing those who champion different viewpoints – perhaps ones irreconcilable with one's own – as legitimate opponents. Indeed, sometimes tolerant engagement takes the form of active contestation. To "tolerate" opponents is to respect them as one respects an adversary to be contended with, rather than an enemy to be destroyed.

On this account, agonistic political contest occurs over which values will most inform a society's sense of "common good," and most importantly, how – and the extent to which – some conception of a common good will function hegemonically (that is, will establish itself with a degree of "social objectivity"). As a result, the agonistic contest is social and cultural, as much as it is political and legal. The point is not simply to pass laws that reflect one's understanding of justice, or to elect legislators and judges who will devise and apply laws in ways that reflect that orientation. More important is cultivating frames of common understanding, or "common sense" – a key way of attaining hegemony. In the political contest of agonistic pluralism, the point is not to contend against some particular hegemonic frame so as to protect social and political life as a "hegemony-free" space. The contest, rather, is over which hegemonic frames will become orientational – that is, which will predominate in determining basic values and seemingly self-evident, common-sense understandings. Agonistic pluralism assumes a plurality of conceptions of the common good, and a persistent and necessary tension between them.

When examined through the lens of agonistic pluralism, the Christian fundamentalist faction on the Texas School Board has not merely commandeered a controlling share of regional political power that enables them to bring social studies textbooks into alignment with their views. The events become, rather, one episode (albeit critical) in a social and cultural contest over symbol systems and national narratives, and how those systems and narratives orient popular memory, shape imagination, and constitute notions of collective identity. The Texas School Board seeks to determine which resources will come to shape "common-sense" understandings of the nature and character of US society and history – understandings that influence perceptions of which laws and legal rulings are just or unjust, consistent or inconsistent with "who we are." As such, they present a type of hegemony, and one facet of a broader attempt to determine what counts as social objectivity.

When disseminated widely enough, hegemony makes it possible to achieve specific political and legal objectives that would not be possible without it. In this light, the school board members' assertion that "the

philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next" takes on multiple resonances. At one level, it refers to the process of inspiring and training particular individuals who go on to pursue positions of political influence. At another, it refers to the fact that which stories get told and how they are told, which historical figures appear and which are occluded, which episodes and themes are valorized and which are vilified – down to the character of the reflective exercises and assignments required by the texts – all contribute to shared presuppositions and understandings that become broadly disseminated as "common sense."[40] In all of this they aim to cultivate hegemony. They intend not merely to inspire individuals to run for public office and pursue political objectives in line with the hegemonic frame in question. Simultaneously they aspire to foster a public whose common-sense understandings incline them to vote for such leaders, support the legislation they propose, or find amenable the justifications offered for the appointment of a certain judge. The Religious Right in the United States appears to have understood the dynamics of hegemony acutely when they declared that their efforts were not merely political and legal,

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[40] Sensationalized disputes over biology textbooks (over evolution vs. intelligent design, in particular) have overshadowed disputes over no less pivotal revisions to social studies and history textbooks. To take just a few examples from its 2010 social studies textbook revisions, the Texas board voted to note in textbooks that birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger "and her followers promoted eugenics," that Ronald Reagan's "leadership in restoring national confidence" followed Jimmy Carter's presidency, and that the suspicions motivating McCarthyism were substantiated when "the later release of the Venona papers confirmed communist infiltration in U.S. government." In addition, the board approved textbook assignments that require students to "describe the causes and key organizations and individuals of the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract with America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority and the National Rifle Association." The board determined names of "significant Americans" whose contributions students will evaluate as part of in-text assignments. These included Thurgood Marshall, Billy Graham, Newt Gingrich, William F. Buckley, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Edward Kennedy (though Kennedy was voted down). One board member's proposed amendment that students be required to "study the reasons that 'the founding fathers protected religious freedom in America by barring the government from promoting or disfavoring any particular religion above all others' " was voted down along party lines. Shorto, "How Christian Were the Founders?"; and McKinley, Jr., "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change."

but a contest for predominant cultural understandings and interpretive frames. Read in this light, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism illuminates the broader ambition behind Ralph Reed's quip that he would "rather have a thousand school-board members than one president and no school-board members."[41]

Agonistic pluralism aims to reframe the conflict intrinsic to politics in order to direct the energies of that conflict for the enrichment of political processes and institutions. This move takes seriously the depth of citizens' differing commitments and clashing identities for which Taylor's "fusion" metaphor cannot fully account. Moreover, it exposes the tendency of accommodationist models to surreptitiously reassert a form of hegemony that was more explicitly in place in models emphasizing the requirements of deliberative restraint. Viewed through the lens of agonistic pluralism, countering the fundamentalist enterprise requires entering into a contest not only at political and legal levels, but also at the levels of society and culture. Agonistic pluralism views this conflict as invigorated politics.

At the same time, the range of agonistic positions that qualify as candidates for this model turns out to be surprisingly constrained. As Mouffe articulates it, the agonistic pluralist framework presupposes that the relationship between political enemies – once agonistically reconceived – is grounded in more basic, shared commitments to the principles of democracy. Any who reject the democratic framework itself are excluded.[42] This draws the scope of pluralism more narrowly than one might expect. It underestimates the severity of agonism that pluralism can permit. The cases of intolerant opposition and conflict that test the limits of democracy are those most in need of examination and testing; most in need of an approach that will transform the terms within which they engage their adversaries. The real measure of any attempt to positively utilize conflict is its capacity to deal with those conflicts that are most deeply rooted, resistant to mediation, and volatile. If an approach fails this test, it enables its users only to manage conflict with those with whom they already agree on the most fundamental – often the most explosive – issues.

Of course, while Mouffe cannot accommodate outright rejection of the practices and institutions of democratic political engagement, she does foreground contestation over the value of democratic engagement,

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[41] See, for instance, Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 75–80, 182–189.

[42] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 120–122.

the meanings of its basic practices and institutions, what forms these ought to take, and even what counts as "democratic." But the same question arises here: What are the limits of this interpretive contestation?

A key strength of Mouffe's model is its conception of contestation as a struggle to establish a hegemonic orientation. This insight draws attention to the legal and political features of the contest, as well as its cultural and symbolic dimensions. Mouffe's multidimensional account would not attempt to restrain religiously motivated actors from intervening in politics. And yet, in her attempt to come to grips with the depth, severity, and persistence of the conflictual character of hegemonic contests, Mouffe does not recognize the potential implications of religiously motivated conflict for the basic framework within which the conflict takes place. For instance, she does not envision the possibility that Christian fundamentalists may succeed in establishing their framework for society, achieving such hegemonic ascendancy that they can exclude or constrain other frameworks.

Consider how Mouffe's claims for agonistic pluralism might apply to the case of the Texas School Board's textbook revisions. Mouffe agrees that keeping religious and moral views within the "private sphere" would be untenable, and acknowledges that the activism of religiously and morally motivated groups in the political arena is as legitimate as that of any other interest group, so long as they "act within constitutional limits."[43] In the case of the Texas School Board, the democratic parameters of her account stipulate that the parties in conflict must remain within the constitutional parameters that separate religion and state power. Yet that constitutional basis – the meaning of "church and state separation" – is exactly what is at issue.[44]

Mouffe, however, takes the principle of separation of church and state as the point at which interpretive contestation terminates; she argues that this principle is necessary for the state to avoid privileging one religion over another, or investing any religion with the coercive power that properly belongs only to the state. So understood, the separation of church and state provides an indispensable constitutional parameter within which the agonistic contest about religious commitments in policy and law must occur. "Those who do not share those values will of course claim that this is 'liberal fundamentalism,' and they will see the institutions of liberal constitutionalism as a form of violence imposed upon

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[43] Mouffe, "Religion, Liberal Democracy, and Citizenship," 325–326.
[44] For an overview of the debate, see Shorto, "How Christian Were the Founders?"

them," she writes.[45] This is indeed what some religiously motivated citizens claim. However, the principle of church–state separation does not mark, for them, the unfortunate boundaries within which the contest must occur. Rather, it is the point at which the truly agonistic contest begins. It is this understanding of the default parameters of debate that has inspired Christian fundamentalists' programs to contest the meaning and application of the principle of church–state separation at all levels of the judiciary, and motivated them to cultivate a new hegemony. Such a hegemonic program – carried out in no small part through curriculum revisions – constitutes a form of agonistic participation at the level of public school boards.

On these points, Mouffe's conception of agonism is vulnerable to the charge that the effort to invite into public engagement those who hold un- or even anti-democratic commitments and live in illiberal ways is yet another form of domestication – a charge made all the more difficult because she seeks to overcome the limitations of consensus-driven models of democracy. Yet, for Mouffe, once the democratic parameters of agonistic engagement are called into question, all bets are off.[46] At that point she comes to carry out just the kind of exclusion in the name of consensus that her agonistic pluralism intends to overturn.

Nietzsche or Wittgenstein?

Mouffe's admission of the limited applicability of agonistic pluralism points to a pivotal objection raised against it. How is the nonnegotiability of the democratic parameters of conflict not itself a hegemony imposed by default? Why should it not be called into question by non- or anti-democratic groups? The Nietzschean critic presses this criticism further. How, she will ask, can agonistic pluralism avoid degenerating into a clash of preferences and wills played out under the pretense of democratic procedures? Nietzsche, after all, celebrated the virtues of the agonistic contest as well, though he derided any attempt to disguise the agon through democratic posturing. Such democratic window-dressing would only obscure

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[45] Mouffe, "Religion, Liberal Democracy, and Citizenship," 325.

[46] As Mouffe puts the point, "The category of the 'enemy' does not disappear but is displaced; it remains pertinent with respect to those who do not accept the democratic 'rules of the game' and who thereby exclude themselves from the political community." Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), 4.

the fact that the contest was no more "humane" than the thoroughgoing and contingent clash of wills that it is. Democratic pretenses would, moreover, dilute the virtuous nature of the contest. Once the intransigence of the conflicts in question is fully reckoned with, how is Mouffe to avoid slipping from a democracy-that-would-be-agonistic to what is, in fact, a self-deceived agonism-that-purports-to-be-democratized?[47]

Mouffe responds with a Wittgensteinian appeal to the form of life in which she finds herself. The Wittgensteinian features of her account exert influence in several crucial ways.[48] The influences and uses of Nietzsche's thought in various agonistic models of democracy have received considerable scrutiny. Yet the (arguably) more subtle impact of Wittgenstein as a counter to Nietzschean tendencies in certain of these models (and in Mouffe's thought in particular) remains underexamined. One aim of the present section is to highlight the importance of investigating and developing these Wittgensteinian features to grapple with the challenges unique to religiously motivated conflict in contemporary public life.

Mouffe's use of Wittgenstein highlights the particular social, cultural, and historical context of her model. In short, the democratic form of life within which she works is already up and running; webs of democratic culture and history shape subjectivities, corresponding social objectivities, and an ethos of contestation and practice. To take this form of life as given is not to make an arbitrary and unquestionable appeal to what happens to be the case. It does not, for instance, eliminate the demands of accounting for how this form of life emerged, reflecting on how it might have been (and needs to be) different, drawing upon past achievements, learning from past failures, or offering reasons why this form of life is superior to other possibilities. Moreover, each of these tasks will itself be subject to recurring

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[47] Christa Davis Acampora brilliantly traces the potential Nietzschean implications of Mouffe's work in her article "Demos Agonistes Redux: Reflections on the *Streit* of Political Agonism," *Nietzsche-Studien* 32 (2003): 374–390; see also Paul Muldoon, "'The Very Basis of Civility': On Agonism, Conquest, and Reconciliation," in Bashir Bashir and Will Kymlicka, eds., *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114–135. Dana Villa highlights the risks attendant to the Nietzschean tendencies in several "agonistic" accounts of democratic engagement in his "Democratizing the Agon: Nietzsche, Arendt, and the Agonistic Tendency in Recent Political Theory," in *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 107–127.

[48] Mouffe, "Wittgenstein, Political Theory, and Democracy," in *The Democratic Paradox*, 66.

contestation. Indeed, a central aim of "agonistic pluralism" is to facilitate the kinds of conflicts intrinsic to a democratic form of life.

Even so, the risk to which Mouffe's account is liable is that commitment to the democratic "given" may become a stultifying limit; refusal to genuinely test a kind of living faith in democratic practices and culture could become an arbitrary and stubborn fundamentalism about them. In eliminating the chance of nondemocratic outcomes by excluding nondemocratic interlocutors – in reserving the label "enemy" for those who do not accept the democratic rules of the game – Mouffe risks eliminating different possibilities for democratic futures. It is conceivable, after all, that new democratic vistas could be opened through the agonistic engagement between democratic and nondemocratic interlocutors and their concepts of legitimacy – situations in which democratic presuppositions are legitimately called into question and become candidates for revision. A faith that will not ponder genuine doubt is a meager faith. And yet, there are many degrees between a (fundamentalist) faith that refuses to grapple with its own contingencies and the kind of paralysis that results from radical skepticism, unremitting playfulness, or radically unconstrained self-creation that Nietzsche's line of questioning invites.[49] Though Mouffe seems not fully to recognize this implication, a more modest, critically self-reflective, and genuinely revisable democratic faith – one that strives to balance a sense of contingency with an open-ended accountability to the causes and conditions that brought it into being and to the ethical substance in which it persists – is already implicit in the reading of Wittgenstein upon which she draws.[50]

Of course, such a Wittgenstein-inspired appeal to a democratic form of life must itself be subject to interpretive contest. But this conception of

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[49] Acampo recognizes this risk in her own interrogation of Mouffe (as does Muldoon). "By insisting that deep democracy must be willing to authorize or re-authorize its constitutional principles, perhaps I expose democracy to risks it cannot afford … hold[ing] its constitutive value of liberty and equality too lightly, all too playfully, such that it could not truly offer a viable framework for political action at all." Acampora, "Demos Agonistes Redux," 386.

[50] Mouffe does recognize a Wittgensteinian path through the thicket of sheer arbitrariness on one hand and paralyzing skepticism or playfulness on the other. Not just any reading of Wittgenstein will afford this. Mouffe is quite particular in her appeal to Stanley Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. However, she does not recognize Cavell's account of Wittgenstein as opening a vista beyond what I have argued are the more rigid tendencies of her account of agonistic pluralism. Nor, for that matter, does she recognize in Cavell's particular reading of Emerson on self-reliance (in the same text) a more modest alternative to the Nietzschean conception of the

that form of life provides resources by which agonistic pluralism can avoid degenerating into agonism garbed in the robe of democracy. Adversaries are such in virtue of sharing a "form of life" – a broadly encompassing symbolic context of practices and ethico-political principles. At the bare minimum, Mouffe suggests that this mutuality occurs in the recognition by each party of the other's basic right to exist, accompanied by recognition of the other as a legitimate participant to whom one is accountable in the social and political contexts the two parties share. The Wittgensteinian dimension of this position means that the features of this shared background are subject to multiple meanings, innovations, and applications. It entails, further, that the practices of citizenship and democratic engagement by which adversaries hold one another accountable, and take responsibility for their claims, ought to be conceived as expansively as possible. The processes of accounting for, explicating, critically assessing, contesting, and justifying should accommodate the full range of forms of rhetorical engagement and persuasion. This principle stands in sharp contrast to the rationalist model of communication of "deliberative democracy," which, by "invoking the commands of general rules or principles," compels one's interlocutors to submit to the force of deliberative argument in pursuit of a finally inclusive rational consensus. Mouffe derives the latter insight from Wittgenstein's account of "following a rule," writing:

If we follow [Wittgenstein's] lead, we should acknowledge and valorize the diversity of ways in which the "democratic game" can be played, instead of trying to reduce this diversity to a uniform model of citizenship. This would mean fostering a plurality of forms of being a democratic citizen and creating the institutions that would make it possible to follow the democratic rules in a plurality of ways … To be sure, we need to be able to distinguish between "obeying the rule" and

democratic citizen as a "sovereign self-creator" toward which some "agonistic" models gravitate. For a particularly pronounced example of the latter, see David Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 24 (Fall 2002): 113–131. James Tully – another philosopher whose work often receives the "agonistic" moniker, and whose reading of Wittgenstein on "following a rule" is particularly pivotal for Mouffe – has most precisely and powerfully explicated and applied Wittgenstein's work in these conversations. Tully's reading of Wittgenstein appears in "Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection," *Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (May 1989): 172–204. He has further developed and applied these Wittgensteinian insights in *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and most expansively in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, Vols. I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

"going against it". But space needs to be provided for the many different practices in which obedience to the democratic rules can be inscribed.[51]

On one hand, the agonistic model of pluralism to which Mouffe gives voice strives to account for the fact that in some issues participants may be able to engage one another only as adversaries. In such cases, the contest will play out as a struggle for hegemonic prevalence and political and legal success. In other words, her appeal to Wittgenstein is not another call for mutual tolerance and a dose of fallibilism in how opponents hold to their views. In fact, the pivotal insight is that, in addressing some conflicts, fallibilism and tolerance will be ineffective.

At the same time, in Mouffe's case, the shared context makes it possible for potential antagonists to be adversaries. After all, some shared background is necessary even for opponents to be enemies. To investigate those instances on a case-by-case basis holds open the possibility of uncovering "similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them" and "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" that might keep the opposition from being finally intractable, or absolute after all.[52] It makes possible areas of ambiguity. Perhaps it illuminates points of contact on issues related to the one underlying the conflict. Moreover, conceptualizing as expansively as possible the forms that encounter might take, while inevitably messy and subject to agonistic contest, nonetheless helps to uncover the ambiguities and ambivalences likely to emerge in agonistic framing of intransigent conflict.

By no means does this present a solution to irremediable conflict. But it does highlight the fact that within the messy complexity of diametrical and persisting opposition, there is never outright incommensurability. And recognition of this fashions spaces within which creative or unexpected engagement might occur. One might find some point from which to begin thinking about, rethinking, coping with, and transforming the elements of conflict that are rooted in intransigent opposition and intolerance. I explore these unexpected possibilities in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter began to explore the possibility of constructively reframing religiously motivated intolerance and conflict. I have remained in a

[51] Mouffe, "Wittgenstein, Political Theory, and Democracy," in *The Democratic Paradox*, 73.

[52] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), I, sec. 66–67.

critical posture throughout. I first reviewed the important progress political philosophers have made in accommodating religion-specific speech and reasoning in political life. I argued that the positive gains they accomplished, while important, have not brought the respective debates to conclusion. In fact, they highlight the persistence of the challenges presented by forms of intolerance rooted in moral, religious, and political commitments and identities. Moreover, sometimes genuine efforts to accommodate religious particularity in effect assert deliberative restrictions in new – if often less conspicuous and apparently more palatable – forms. I argued that Charles Taylor's appeal to fused horizons incorporates the headway made by accommodationist concessions, and improves upon them through its appeal to potential transformation through charitable interpretation and mutual understanding. But the transformation Taylor prescribes is ultimately unidirectional. It takes with insufficient gravity the fact that many of the most intransigent instances of intolerance are not amenable to mediation. In such cases, actors do not seek to be understood or tolerated; they seek to win – to alter the discourse, laws, and culture. This is the pivotal insight with which Mouffe's account of agonistic pluralism begins.

Finally, I investigated Mouffe's account of agonistic pluralism as an explicit attempt to reframe and constructively utilize the inextricability of conflict. Her agonistic decentralizing of "tolerance" and her corresponding effort to reconfigure intolerance, conflict, and passion represent an instructive attempt to constructively harness those features of political and cultural life typically seen as problems to be rooted out, or at least pushed to the margins. Mouffe, I argued, does not finally succeed in her aims. Her own application of agonistic pluralism finally fails to account for intolerance in its most irremediable varieties. Nonetheless, I hope to have suggested that, in her strategy to reconceptualize conflict, and particularly in the Wittgensteinian resources she brings to this endeavor (curtailed though her use of them may finally be), her model of agonistic pluralism offers a promising beginning for constructive engagement with severe forms of religiously and morally motivated intolerance and conflict. In the chapter that follows, I draw upon the key insights I distilled from Mouffe's account in order to articulate constructively the robust account of healthy conflict that I have intimated so far throughout this book.

8

Looking It Up in Your Gut?

Visceral Politics and Healthy Conflict in the Tea Party Era

On October 17, 2005 the hyper-conservative journalist, political commentator, and cultural icon Stephen Colbert introduced the concept "truthiness" during the inaugural episode of his show, *The Colbert Report*. Colbert explained "the Word" as follows:

Now I'm sure some of the Word Police, the wordanistas over at Webster's are gonna say, "Hey, that's not a word." Well, anybody who knows me knows that I'm no fan of dictionaries or reference books. They're elitist. Constantly telling us what is or isn't true, or what did or didn't happen. Who's Britannica to tell me the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? If I want to say it happened in 1941, that's my right. I don't trust books. They're all fact, no heart. And that's exactly what's pulling our country apart today. Because face it, folks, we are a divided nation. Not between Democrats and Republicans, or conservatives and liberals, or tops and bottoms. No, we are divided between those who think with their head, and those who know with their heart …

   [W]hat about Iraq? If you *think* about it, maybe there are a few missing pieces to the rationale for war. But doesn't taking Saddam out *feel* like the right thing? Right here? Right here in the gut? Because that's where the truth comes from, ladies and gentlemen, the gut. Do you know you have more nerve endings in your stomach than in your head? Look it up. Now somebody's gonna say, "I did look that up, and it's wrong." Well mister, that's because you looked it up in a book. Next time, try looking it up in your gut. I did, and my gut tells me that's how our nervous system works. Now I know some of you may not trust your gut yet. But with my help, you will. The truthiness is: anyone can read the news to you. I promise to *feel* the news *at* you.[1]

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[1] Stephen Colbert, "The Word: Truthiness," *The Colbert Report*, October 17, 2005. *The Colbert Report* is a late-night talk show and political news satire that ran from October 17, 2005 to December 18, 2014 (1,447 episodes).

At one level, when its irony is acknowledged, Colbert's diatribe about "truthiness" is an instance of political satire pure and simple. And yet, when taken to mean the opposite of what it says, "the Word's" message is clear: the opposite of fact is feeling or wishful thinking, and much of political and media culture today ideologically exudes and manipulates feelings, casting reason and empirical evidence in opposition to what masquerades as intuition and common sense. In contemporary North American public discourse, this opposition typically manifests antagonistically. On one side stands so-called intellectual elitism that extols the force of the better argument, factual evidence, and measured exchange of reasons. On the other side, one finds what is sometimes derided as a "know nothing" populism that affirms the sufficiency of what it considers common sense, or the self-evidence of moral intuitions or religious truths. The former espouses open-mindedness, fallibilism, and tolerance toward reasonable differences. The latter claims that self-evident truths compel those who recognize them to stand against the relativism toward which the alleged moral high ground of "tolerance" is actually a slippery slope.[2]

Understood as a value that aims to defuse potentially explosive conditions of religious and moral diversity, tolerance has roots in Enlightenment rationalism. This tradition of thinking considers tolerance a correlate of the human capacity to entertain and evaluate a range of alternative ideas, and to use reason to select among them. So conceived, tolerance stands in contrast to the urgings of passion, affect, and visceral inclinations.[3]

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[2] For a meticulous articulation of the former, see Catriona McKinnon, *Toleration: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006). For examples of the latter, see Bob Hostetler and Josh McDowell, *The New Tolerance: How a Cultural Movement Threatens to Destroy You, Your Faith, and Your Children* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998); and Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti, *The Truth About Intolerance: Pluralism, Diversity, and the Culture Wars* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

[3] Modern conceptions of toleration emerged largely in the form of an opposition between reason and independent thinking on one hand, and religious superstition, fanaticism, and the alleged arbitrariness of the claims of traditional authority on the other. To take an example that would become particularly influential in the US context, in works such as "A Letter Concerning Toleration" and "The Reasonableness of Christianity," John Locke made the case that religious beliefs that were held reasonably stood in stark contrast to the dangerous dictates of urge, inclination, and prejudice most exemplified by the "religious enthusiasts" of his day. Locke argued that such enthusiasts neglected their epistemic duties in refusing to weigh the reasonableness of what they took to be instances of direct enlightenment from God. They thus mistook their own passions and

From this perspective, the dictates of "the gut" that manifest themselves in passionate convictions, prejudices, and sentiments risk rendering some people impervious to "the force of the better argument" and factual evidence. The gut, one might say, anchors a perspective inclined to see measured reason-exchange as smooth-talking sophistry – cleverly "making the weaker argument appear the stronger, and the stronger the weaker" – and to view Socratic interrogation as "intellectual bullying." The present chapter attempts to think transformatively about, and perhaps beyond, such oppositional framing.

In this chapter, I suggest that hope for democratic discourse and coalition-building across deep – and potentially irreconcilable – moral and religious divisions in US public life depends less on further calls for tolerance and more on learning to use conflict and intolerance constructively. Is it possible to distinguish between constructive and destructive forms of intolerance? If so, what are the prospects for reorienting analysis of democratic practices so that apparently intolerant acts and beliefs, which seem to deserve marginalization or exclusion from political processes, might be redirected in order to change those practices and processes in constructive ways? Further, what sort of analytical framework is needed first to distinguish between "healthy conflict" and degenerative conflict, and then to cultivate the former? How would such an approach foster concrete efforts to recognize, understand, and transform religiously motivated conflict?

To answer these questions, I bring strands from the "religion in public life" debates treated in the previous chapter into conversation with conflict transformation literature in peace studies. Together, these resources will help to reframe basic assumptions about tolerance and conflict – a

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interests for God's special revelation to them. They suffered, Locke wrote, from a "warmed or overweening brain" (IV, xix, 7) and "melancholy … mixed with devotion" (iv, xix, 5). The result was socially dangerous: "Their minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless opinion comes to settle itself strongly upon their fancies, is an illumination from the Spirit of God, and presently of divine authority: and whatsoever odd action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from heaven, and must be obeyed" (IV, xix, 6). Along with a reasonable approach to religious belief, Locke argued, tolerance would promote social stability and peace. For an account of the opposition between reason and tolerance, and passion and fanaticism, as it emerged in Locke's work, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118–119.

pivotal first step in transforming conflicts motivated by, or identified with, moral commitments and religious identities.

In placing these fields in conversation, I hope for two outcomes. First, ethicists stand to gain an enriched set of analytical concepts for assessing and intervening in the persisting divisions in US public life driven by religious and moral differences. Arguably, the debates over religion in public life have demonstrated that a properly construed tradition of democratic practices can indeed mediate conflict amid the challenges of religious and moral pluralism. Despite the success of the case for such tradition-constitutive practices at the level of scholarly debate, critics still doubt whether those practices prove sufficient amid the cacophony of contemporary US public life. The fractious nature of on-the-ground realities tempts analysts to frame current conditions either as beyond hope of repair, or as concrete evidence of the inability of existing democratic practices to mediate deep and persistent conflict. I aim to show that the practice-oriented conflict transformation literature has much to contribute regarding these points of contention. Second, the literature in conflict transformation stands to be enriched, in turn, by applying its analytical approach to contexts where conflict is neither explicitly violent, deadly, nor plainly in view.[4] In fact, its insights become all the more important – perhaps even urgent – in contexts where the roots of conflict are papered over with a veneer of tolerance and the result is valorized as the achievement of peace.

I first situate the motivating questions of this chapter within a particularly intense episode of religiously motivated conflict of recent years. I then examine how the possibility of distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy forms of conflict emerged as a point of debate in the field of religious ethics. In the second half of the chapter, I carry forward some underdeveloped strands of this debate by elaborating a framework for

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[4] The tendency to take deadly conflict and explicit forms of violence as a point of orientation is most apparent in the seminal account of religion and conflict transformation articulated by David Little and Scott R. Appleby, "A Moment of Opportunity?" in Harold Coward and Gordon Smith, eds., *Religion and Peacebuilding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2004), 1–23. As I discuss below, the multidimensional account for which I am arguing has been the subject of much debate in the peace research literature for several decades. This account has recently found more refined articulation in John Paul Lederach and Scott R. Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview," in Daniel Philpott and Gerard Powers, eds., *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–24. The present chapter aims to contribute to, and press forward, that trajectory.

thinking in terms of "healthy conflict." To do so, I critically re-evaluate the broadly shared presupposition that tolerance is a necessary and orienting value for addressing conflict generally, and religiously motivated conflict in particular. I argue that "tolerance," when understood as a means of resolving or containing conflict through the principled admittance of a range of incompatible religious, moral, and political views, can risk perpetuating – sometimes even aggravating – the very conflicts that proponents of tolerance hope to resolve. The constructive aim of the chapter is to sketch a model of "healthy conflict" that moves beyond the standard tolerance–intolerance dichotomy and reorients the fact–feeling or reason–gut dichotomies that characterize US public discourse today.

When the Culture Wars Came to Campus

For a scholar of religion and conflict in public life, it was nearly a dream come true. Invitation had gone out to newly elected President Obama to give the year's commencement address and receive an honorary degree from Notre Dame, the university where I teach. Outrage ensued on the part of many students, various administrators and faculty, a number of alumni, and seemingly legions of outside groups. The objections centered on the president's positions on abortion and stem cell research, which stood at odds with the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. And while Notre Dame had hosted Democratic presidents for commencement in the past, it had never done so in the context of the so-called culture wars that have dominated the US political scene since the early 1980s.[5] Upon Obama's acceptance of the invitation, near pandemonium erupted.

Within weeks of the announcement, anti-abortion protesters descended upon the campus. Randall Terry, formerly of Operation Rescue fame, set up headquarters in a rented house about a mile from campus. Each morning, several dozen protesters lined the main entryway to campus with signs and the occasional bullhorn. Many held four-foot by four-foot color placards portraying the bloody remains of late-term aborted fetuses. Others held signs that read: "Stop killing our children," "Thousands more murdered today," "Shame on Notre Dame," and "Our lady is weeping." During the weeks leading up to commencement, a biplane circled

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[5] Senator John F. Kennedy gave the commencement address in 1950. President Dwight Eisenhower spoke at commencement in 1960, Jimmy Carter in 1977, George H. W. Bush in 1992, and George W. Bush in 2001.

over the campus nonstop, pulling behind it a giant, bright-colored banner picturing yet another bloody, aborted fetus. A "truth truck" circulated through town, pulling behind it large color panel portraits of the university's president and President Obama at either hand of Judas Iscariot.

Mary Ann Glendon, a Harvard Law School professor and previously the US Ambassador to the Vatican, was slated to address the graduating class at commencement and to receive the Laetare Medal, the university's highest honor, which is awarded annually to an influential Catholic in the US. Upon learning that Obama would be awarded an honorary degree (as previous presidential speakers had been), Glendon withdrew. Stating that she favored serious debate, she nonetheless noted that honoring Obama expressly contradicted the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' charge that Catholic institutions "should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles." In such cases, the bishops held that opponents "should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions."[6]

With the culture-warriors in combat all around us, my senior seminar in Religion, Multiculturalism, and Conflict was working through the introduction to the updated edition of John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. My students were eager to discuss the events unfolding around us in light of their reading. The graduating seniors' minds were sharpened by the prospect of having their commencement turned into a circus (as Randall Terry and company promised to do). Our seminar room conversations unfolded quite differently from the exchanges one could witness at the entryway to campus. The class disagreed passionately about the merits of Rawls's claim that preserving stability and reasonableness in public deliberation requires religiously committed citizens to restrain their religious-specific reasoning in some public forums when engaging in public discourse about matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials. Yet, wherever they stood on that question, the students universally agreed that protesters bearing signs declaring that "Abortion is not something we will dialogue about" were doing something wrong.

"Serious dialogue" between rival viewpoints became the term by which university administrators justified Obama's invitation in the face of mounting public criticism. The protesters' signs responded directly to this justification. The students all agreed that such refusal of dialogue was a grave vice. It was symptomatic of an egregious form of intolerance – a

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[6] Mary Ann Glendon, "Declining Notre Dame: A Letter from Mary Ann Glendon," *First Things*, April 27, 2009.

kind of unreasonable, conversation-stopping fundamentalism – uncompromising in its views to the point of refusing debate altogether. The students thought it clear that reasoned debate required a measure of tolerance, and thus that tolerance and dialogue are goods that any citizen of a democracy ought to acknowledge, however strongly he or she feels about a particular issue. This claim emerged as "moral high ground" in our discussions. My students saw themselves as willing to enter serious dialogue with those whose views they opposed, and saw the protesters as unwilling.

I pressed them: intuitive as this position appeared to them, did it account for the possibility that the deeply conflicting views presented by this case might simply be irreconcilable? In so far as it provided a warrant for dismissing those deemed intolerant, the students' notion of tolerance risked producing its own refusal of engagement. The protesters at the campus gates did not refuse engagement altogether; else they would not have been standing where they were. By holding up graphic signs of aborted fetuses, they aimed to evoke revulsion in those who passed by. There was engagement here, even if those involved refused to participate in reciprocal, reasonable conversation. The prospects for constructive intervention thus seemed to depend on recognizing the protesters' mode of engagement, grappling with its nuances, and imagining some form of response (other than dismissal). What were the prospects for doing so without rendering more invidious the oppositions that already marked out the context?

Religious Dissension and Healthy Conflict

"If religious differences are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, how are we to reason with one another respectfully, productively, on issues of public importance? And how might we build coalitions among citizens of various persuasions to fight effectively for a just social order?"[7] These questions were two of the most pivotal to emerge from the religion and public life debates that unfolded among religious ethicists and philosophers over the last three decades. In voicing them, Jeffrey Stout gestured toward forms of public engagement that he described as "achievable by our efforts, in which citizens who disagree on religious and ethical questions create a political discussion that is

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[7] Jeffrey Stout, in Springs, ed., "Pragmatism and Democracy: Assessing Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," 441.

more genuinely democratic in form and content than the one we're having now."[8] Engaging apparently stultifying forms of conflict that arise in religiously and culturally diverse contexts *more democratically* involves not just widening the circle of participants in public debate. It requires broadening the scope of the kinds of reasons and forms of reason-giving that they might employ. To these ends, Stout invited his interlocutors – and, in particular, fellow citizens motivated by deep religious commitments and strong moral convictions – to "love justice, think hard about civility, and then say what they wish to the rest of us, whether that happens to be religious in content or not."[9]

John Kelsay pointed out in response that expanding the compass of argument and engagement – at times working to track claims, counterclaims, and the validity of the inferences therein – would call upon skills common to comparative ethical analysis: "listening carefully to others, interpreting them as reason-givers like oneself and one's near companions, arguing with them in the spirit of fellow seekers, and with the possibility of personal and social expansion."[10] Kelsay added that such practices avail themselves for democratic purposes not because they hold the key to *resolving* pressing and persistent conflicts. Rather, they afford fairly ordinary means by which citizens might understand and meaningfully engage each other in "healthy conflict" over divisive, seemingly intractable issues.[11]

Critics of these positions had claimed that encouraging citizens to enter political debates, urging them to cultivate civility, and then inviting them to speak as they saw fit was a strategy inadequately attuned to

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 434.

[10] John Kelsay, "Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, and Contemporary Islam," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 698.

[11] Kelsay's point responded directly to Sumner Twiss's claim that "the theme of moral conflict resolution is, for Stout, the principle and proper aim of comparative ethics." See Sumner Twiss, "Comparative Ethics, a Common Morality, and Human Rights," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 653. Stout endorsed Kelsay's characterization to the extent that it aided in illuminating his motivating concern not merely to resolve moral conflicts, but simultaneously to aim "for justice, practical wisdom, and civic friendship as conceived by democratic lights." As I demonstrate below, these positive dimensions of Stout's approach to moral conflict place his project in close proximity to the key insights that I draw from the "conflict transformation" literature in the final segments of this chapter. See Jeffrey Stout, "Comments on Six Responses to *Democracy and Tradition*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 724.

the harsh realities of contemporary public discourse. Some argued that the overriding concern with epistemic justification in giving and asking for reasons made these debates ideally suited for scholarly circles, but ill-suited for lay audiences. It remained, allegedly, out of touch with how strident political discourse is.[12] Could the cultivation of deliberative virtues by which fellow citizens hold one another accountable for the validity of their inferences through the exchange of reasons really overcome the combative cacophony that characterizes much of public discourse in the US?

This question presented itself starkly in the so-called age of Barack Obama, whose stated aims have been to inspire and elevate the character and content of political discourse in the US. A host of responses to his presidency – those who demanded for years that Obama hand over his Kenyan birth certificate, or who insist that he is a committed Muslim; the Tea Party movement; protesters shouting down congressional representatives at town hall meetings in protest of "death panels" supposedly mandated by the 2009 health-care reform; gun-toting attendees at presidential town hall meetings; Congressman Joe Wilson's irrepressible cry, "You lie!" during a presidential address to a joint session of Congress; and much of what gets broadcast by Fox News and other corporate media networks – lead some to the conclusion that efforts to hold fellow citizens accountable for their claims through the civil, mutually respectful exchange of reasons in US public life may be a figment of an idealistic democratic imagination.[13]

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[12] Criticisms along these lines were perhaps most trenchantly leveled by Gilbert Meilaender in his review of *Democracy and Tradition*, "Talking Democracy," *First Things*, April 1, 2004, 25–30. Paul Weithman touched on similar concerns in his review in *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2006): 221–229.

[13] Susan Herbst highlights some of these developments in *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010). For a particularly trenchant analysis of the role of contemporary media in public discourse, see Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Capella, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For pointed examples, see Thomas Friedman, "Too Good to Check," *New York Times*, November 16, 2010; Pew Research Center, "Growing Number of Americans Say Obama Is a Muslim: Results from the 2010 Annual Religion and Public Life Survey," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, August 18, 2010, www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Growing-Number-of-Americans-Say-Obama-is-a-Muslim.aspx; and Stephanie Condon, "Poll: One in Four Americans Think Obama Was Not Born in the U.S.," CBS News, April 21, 2011, www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20056061-503544.html.

One response to such ugly conditions is to insist that they reflect a fringe element and that the vociferousness of these voices demonstrates how removed they are from the mainstream. In effect, this response maintains that, for the most part, things are not as bad as they seem.[14] A second response is to denounce the fray as irrational and emotivist, and to see it as further evidence that what aims to pass for democratic discourse really boils down to "pseudo-democratic babble," or the arbitrary contest of will against will in what can be characterized only as "civil war carried on by other means."[15] Indeed – the skeptic of democracy might add – the debating parties consistently refuse to listen to one another, rebuff norms of reciprocity, and deny that their opponents are fellow seekers. The only feasible approach is thus to ensure that one's opponents either embrace one's own position or suffer utter defeat. This lamentable state of public discourse gives new life to deep skepticism about the viability of democratic practices for arbitrating morally and religiously motivated conflict.

At this point, it is worth remembering that skepticism about democratic practices did much to set contemporary debates about religion in public life in motion in the first place. Consider, for instance, the closing pages of *After Virtue*, where Alasdair MacIntyre indexed what he characterized as the incapacity of liberal democracies to resolve moral conflict. The laws of liberal states, and the US Supreme Court in particular, basically serve "peace-making" or "truce-keeping" functions. "What our laws show is the extent and degree to which conflict has to be suppressed," he wrote.[16] The argument suggested that, in a society as litigious as the contemporary United States – where the weightier a social or moral issue is, the more likely it is to be decided by the Supreme Court – the impossibility of meaningful moral conflict is offset by the functioning of the state, which "imposes a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus."[17] Of course, in this view, even legal adjudication does not actually hold conflict in abeyance. Rather, the contest of preferences gets pushed back one level, playing out (for instance) in the form of opposing efforts to influence or obstruct the procedures through

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[14] Such a position comes through particularly clearly in William A. Galston and Pietro Nivola, "Delineating the Problem," in Pietro Nivola and David Brady, eds., *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 1–48 (esp. 8–9).

[15] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 236.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

which pivotal judicial rulings are made (e.g., through Supreme Court and other judicial appointments).[18]

Advocates of healthy conflict must think transformatively about the conditions that motivate the complaints of skeptics. They should resist the dual temptation to draw polarizing contrasts, thus exacerbating conflict, or to diminish the severity of the disagreements in question, perhaps in hopes of making them go away. Instead, we need to find ways of reframing intolerance, identifying the constructive potentialities of conflict, and developing strategies for engagement between citizens.

In an effort to further develop the conception of healthy conflict that emerged from the religion in public life debates, the following sections work to unsettle a persistent opposition that tends to orient contemporary public discourse – the one between tolerance and prejudice. My aim is to sketch an account of "healthy conflict" that might creatively engage, rather than overlook or marginalize, the passionate and visceral registers that are often seen as giving rise to intolerant, irrational conflict that cannot be addressed through the measured exchange of reasons.

When Tolerance Is Not Enough

"Tolerance" is widely endorsed as an antidote to the negative effects of religious and moral difference. Yet work by Robert Wuthnow has suggested that, in the contemporary US, the concept is broadly misunderstood.[19]

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[18] For one example among many, consider the Senate's refusal to hold a confirmation hearing for President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland (2016). In a more recent essay, MacIntyre has reflected explicitly on the goods that conflict makes available when it is situated in an epistemic context that is sufficiently unified. In the absence of such coherence, he reiterates in his current work, conflict in liberal-democratic settings tends to inspire what he calls "pseudo-democratic babble," which he sees exemplified by much grassroots political activism in the US today. To counter this, MacIntyre has proposed forms of censorship in contemporary US public discourse modeled on the laws that criminalize Holocaust denial in various European states. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," in Susan Mendus, ed., *The Politics of Toleration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 133–156; and his Phillip Quinn Memorial Lecture, University of Notre Dame (December 2009), "Intolerance, Censorship, and Other Requirements of Rationality."

[19] See Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 286–287.

In fact, contemporary US discourse seems especially liable to Herbert Marcuse's critique of "pure tolerance."[20]

Marcuse claimed that tolerance in the 1960s was widely understood as cultivated indifference. He further claimed that the behaviors that accompanied it – restrained aversion, or suppression of revulsion at perceived deviance – were insidiously repressive. First, despite heralding itself as impartial, tolerance was partisan. It amounted to default support of a social and political status quo, "the already established machinery of discrimination."[21] If "pure tolerance" successfully fostered the tranquil coexistence of volatile opponents, it did so at the cost of leaving the root causes of potential conflict – things like racial discrimination and economic injustice – untouched. Second, Marcuse claimed that as tolerance came to be seen as a commonsense position, it was recast "from an active to a passive state, from practice to non-practice."[22] A nearly unquestioned "civic virtue" thus served to discourage attempts to expose unjust conditions and to inspire positive change.[23]

The same holds true today: a thin veneer of tolerant, "live-and-let-live" detachment frequently veils or represses more deep-seated attitudes, rendering these more explosive when they finally surface.[24] To

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[20] Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in Herbert Marcuse and Robert Wolff, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), 32–59.

[21] Ibid., 36.

[22] Ibid., 34.

[23] Marcuse cautions that, even if tolerance is a key ingredient for peace and social stability, there are great dangers in seeing tolerance as sufficient in itself, and in overlooking its capacity to take on vicious and repressive forms.

[24] As I show at greater length in the following chapter, the "Religion and Diversity Survey," (2002–2003) found that, while 80 percent of the representative survey sample agreed that tolerance of religious diversity is good for America, 60 percent of the same sample favored the US government's monitoring and collecting information about Muslim religious groups in the United States (51 percent favored the same for Hindu religious groups, and 48 percent for Buddhist religious groups). Nearly 40 percent of the same sample favored making it harder for Muslims to settle in the US, while 66 percent favored "keeping a close watch on all foreigners" here. Robert Wuthnow offers a sobering analysis of this segment of the project's findings in "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation': American Identity and American Democracy," in Thomas Banchoff, ed., *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151–170. Full results of the Responses to Religious Diversity Project appear at: www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/DIVERSTY.asp. For more recent survey work that is largely consistent with the findings of Wuthnow's project, see Pew Research Center, "Public Remains Conflicted Over Islam," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, August 24,

tolerate is to "bear with" or "endure" – to sublimate disapproval of – practices or beliefs that one considers "objectionable or deviant."[25] Such a conception, when it serves as the primary approach to political and religiously motivated conflict, leaves citizens under-equipped to respond to circumstances in which passions boil over and calls for peaceful coexistence fall on deaf ears. From this perspective, tolerance is like antibiotics: overreliance can lead to immunity against the antidote, rather than the disease. Calls for more tolerance often gloss over or repress the kinds of conflict that derive from the antagonism between uncompromisingly held commitments. Appeals to tolerance, moreover, suppress passions that, within the framework oriented by the tolerance–intolerance dichotomy, appear "incorrigible" or not amenable to rational argument. Arguably, such dichotomies perpetuate the very conflict that they aim to contain.

How ought one grapple with the possibility that incivility and intolerance are not merely accidents to which democratic processes and practitioners are occasionally prone, but are elements intrinsic to democracy? After all, Walt Whitman described the American democratic experiment of his own day as an "appalling spectacle" saturated by "melodramatic screaming, patriotic and jingoistic gestures," a "mass of petty banter."[26] Our context is thus not unique. If uncivil behaviors are endemic to democratic practices, then it will not do to aim at eliminating them once and for all. And gauging the viability of democratic practices – and the healthiness of the conflict therein – by the degree to which such elements have been rooted out may be a formula for despair. The challenge, then, is to develop an account of democratic practice that helps us think creatively and constructively about the persistence of incivility and intolerance. How is this possible?

2010, www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Public-Remains-Conflicted-Over-Islam .aspx.

[25] I take this definition of tolerance from David Little, "Tolerance, Equal Freedom, and Peace: A Human Rights Approach," in W. Lawson Taite, ed., *The Essence of Living in a Free Society* (Dallas, TX: University of Dallas Press, 1997), 34.

[26] Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas" (1871), in *Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 953–1017. For particularly instructive use of this passage from Whitman, see Cornel West, "The Prospects for Democratic Politics: Reconstructing the Lippmann-Dewey Debate," *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993), 189–205.

Speaking Truthiness to Power

Nearly a decade before Stephen Colbert made his critical intervention on behalf of "truthiness," political philosopher William Connolly was investigating the discursive, political, and cultural consequence of "the gut," or what he calls at times "the thought-imbued feelings of the stomach."[27] Historically, the fault line between the gut and the brain was broadly understood to divide prejudice, passion, experience, and belief associated with religious commitment from reasonableness, fact, and tolerance. This understanding has been central to the ascendance of secularism in Europe and North America, and similarly indispensable to the framing of the so-called culture wars.

Connolly sought to subvert this dichotomy. He argued that the visceral registers are in fact inextricable from our rational capacities, and are thus as susceptible to engagement as reason is. He explains:

For we now know, the stomach has a simple cortical organization of its own. This infrasensible center stores thought-imbued feelings of sadness, anxiety, happiness, disgust, anger, and revenge to be activated under particular circumstances, as when, for example, an intense feeling of disgust rises up when you observe someone picking his nose and eating it. Or when you observe public signs of a practice of sexuality that disturbs the sense of naturalness sedimented into your own … It is no longer feasible to treat "the sensible" as simply dumb, or automatic, or equipped with only slight capacities for sublimation and augmentation. The sensible [is a] domain in which we think, within which intensities of cultural appraisal are stored, and through which we value and devalue … The visceral register, moreover, can be drawn on to thicken an intersubjective ethos of generous engagement between diverse constituencies or to harden strife between partisans.[28]

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[27] William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 175, 177.

[28] Ibid. Connolly is far from the first to uncover this insight. He traces his own interest in it to Nietzsche's claim that "we think with our stomachs," referring to "thoughts behind your thoughts and thoughts behind those thoughts" and "'concealed gardens and plantings' below the threshold of reflective surveillance" (28, 175). It would be insufficient to trace the relevant concerns only to Nietzsche, however. Another precursor no less influential is Michel de Montaigne's articulation of "toleration" as a process of acknowledging and grappling with what might be called the incorrigibility of embodiment. Montaigne's conception of what it means to "tolerate" differences reflects the insights of Renaissance humanism rather than a Cartesian approach, which aimed to overcome authoritarian and prejudice-based intolerance with sober and calculated rationalism. For Montaigne, "tolerance" of external oppositions might emerge in the wake of recognizing one's internal proclivities

This approach takes seriously the truth in "truthiness." The crucial premise here is that the visceral register is not so easily transcended. In fact, it cannot really be transcended at all. At times, "thought-imbued intensities" well up into the frame of consciousness without warning. Sometimes they operate at a level below conscious recognition, yet still inform and frame perception and experience. To dismiss them as irrational, or conceive of them as intrinsically antithetical to democratic discourse, is to blind oneself to a mode in which much of contemporary political engagement plays out. Moreover, such blinkering truncates possibilities of understanding, engaging, and utilizing or countering the gut feelings people experience.

Exploring and finding ways to constructively harness "truthiness" is vital to contemporary democratic engagement. The "visceral registers" thus present a domain in which a model of "healthy conflict" must be capable of intervening in the hope of reframing and transforming seemingly intransigent and irrational oppositions.

Of course, to reconceive the visceral registers as a medium through which one's fellow citizens participate in public life is not to grant those registers unquestionable authority. The deliverances of the gut are not "brute data of the body" and nothing more. Though they may well up in an instant – may overflow in ways that make them unruly – they are, nonetheless, discursively nested. They are not sui generis, essentially private, or uncontestable. Nor do the deliverances of the gut stand entirely outside the "space of reasons." Visceral reactions can be analyzed with respect to justice and, in principle, are subject to suasion and revision.[29]

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toward intolerance and the multiplicity of selves in oneself – conflicting desires, "inconstancy," internal particularities – and realizing that even these multiple selves harbor intolerances toward one another. See Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 37–40; and Ingrid Creppell, *Toleration and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 65–90.

[29] William E. Connolly devotes his book *Neuropolitics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) to delineating a program of concrete micro-political strategies by which one might cultivate one's sensibilities – one's "gut" reactions – in ways that overcome inclinations toward resentment and revenge. As I argued in Chapter 1, the point is consistent with Stout's characterization of "normative attitudes" that are noninferentially elicited in perception and experience. See Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 213–224; and Jeffrey Stout, "Radical Interpretation and Pragmatism: Davidson, Rorty, and Brandom on Truth," in Nancy Frankenberry, ed., *Radical Interpretation in Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36–37.

What this approach rules out is a dismissal of the claims of the gut on grounds that they prohibit meaningful engagement, are intrinsically conversation-stopping, and thus ought to be excluded or repressed across the board. A viscerally reflective perspective aims to remain attuned to ways that the gut – even at its most unruly – can convey insight and wisdom, motivate crucial practical interventions, or provide an avenue for persuasion. This insight is indispensable for a model of healthy conflict.

Reframed in this way – even if the visceral registers do resist explication and deliberative exchange – they might still be engaged constructively. This possibility is crucial, perhaps especially in contexts that defy received conceptions of civility, or are prohibitive of the measured exchange of reasons or patient conversation (such as Randall Terry's threat to turn Obama's commencement address at Notre Dame into a circus). Under such circumstances, a sufficiently expansive model of healthy conflict must remain flexible about what engaging and utilizing the visceral registers might entail. This posture aims to sidestep the temptation to limit engagement to transposing the deliverances of "the visceral" into propositionally articulated assertions that then can be traded in standard forms of reason-exchange (typically adjudicated by the principle of noncontradiction, where logical inconsistency in one's commitments is understood to vitiate the normative force of one's claims).[30]

Explicating normative attitudes in the form of commitments and assertions whose internal coherence and truth can be tracked is indispensable for democratic exchange (and communication generally). This is especially the case in circumstances that are amenable to conversational, patient, and charitable engagement. However, a viable model of healthy conflict must remain useful even when conversational modes of engagement are not available, or are positively refused. The measured exchange and evaluation of reasons may quickly become overwrought by

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[30] This point is consonant with John Kelsay's concept of "healthy conflict" discussed above. In fact, Robert Brandom, whose *Making It Explicit* afforded many of the philosophical materials with which Stout constructed his account of democratic practices in *Democracy and Tradition*, demonstrated much earlier (and at great analytical length) that logical consistency in thought and assertion is not an absolute good, and thus that *inconsistency* need not be viewed as intrinsically and entirely vitiating. Examining in detail the extent to which the work by Brandom and Rescher on this point can accommodate, and perhaps inform, the approach I am sketching here would carry me too far from my present argument. See Nicholas Rescher and Robert Brandom, *The Logic of Inconsistency* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 136–141.

the ambiguities, ambivalences, and internal contradictions of the visceral, especially when a conflict is explosive or not amenable to straightforward resolution. Such circumstances require modes of engagement beyond deliberative conversation. Thus the pressing question becomes: How best to conceptualize a sufficiently capacious account of engagement – one that can nonreductively account for, interact with, and counter the passion, anger, fear, and disgust that are natural to, indeed largely constitute, contemporary political discourse?

Connolly's analysis invites us to envision a political encounter characterized by a kind of generosity. Participants seek to struggle with what they oppose while at the same time respecting their opponent. Here, "generosity" seeks to avoid what Connolly calls "an ethos of cultural revenge." To put it another way, generosity involves the cultivation of "agonistic respect," a sensibility that recognizes the inescapability and severity of conflict over issues about which people care deeply.[31] A "generous ethos" recognizes the wide variety of registers in which political engagement occurs. The aim is to reframe the features of deep conflict and deploy them in constructive ways. But how shall we accomplish this?

Developments in peace and conflict studies can help. Conversation with these literatures, I suggest, complicates and enriches the notion of healthy conflict to which Kelsay gestures above. My goal is to move toward a model in which reconceived notions of "tolerance" and "conflict" provide a conception of political involvement and social change that can encompass both reason-giving and impassioned, viscerally charged engagement, which are typically conceived as standing at odds. My proposal draws upon recent work in peace studies that might reframe the limitations inherent in deliberative models of democracy, models that view the purpose of political engagement as achieving a tolerant consensus.

Strategic Nonviolence as a Mode of Healthy Conflict

Prevailing conceptions of tolerance aim to promote a stable, well-ordered, and peaceful society. Stability and peace are understood to be conditions of relative tranquility accomplished through the preemption, containment, or resolution of conflict. On this account, conflict is antithetical to social stability; it is the opposite of peace. From the conflict

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[31] On the "ethos of cultural revenge" see William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4; for his account of agonistic respect, see Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 157.

transformation perspective, however, such thinking simply perpetuates the problem it seeks to resolve. This judgment rests, in part, on the way that appeals for tolerance reflect a negative conception of peace.

"Negative peace" assumes that "conflict" designates a problematic departure from a normal, presumably tranquil, state of affairs. To resolve conflict is thus to produce conditions of tranquility. Peace, in turn, refers to the absence of conflict. This conception is highly contested among scholars because it seems to elide the systemic causes of conflict. To put this another way, an emphasis on tolerance – by assuming a negative conception of peace – leaves untouched those structural, cultural, and relational forms of injustice that typically perpetuate violence. Conflict resolution focuses so intently on managing – and resolving – overt conflict in the interest of accomplishing peaceful conditions that, however inadvertently, it leaves "the root structural causes of conflict … untouched," and may not address the question of such structural causes at all.[32]

Conflict transformation practitioners agree that the pursuit of peace in its negative dimension – the reduction, containment, and cessation of explicit situational conflict – remains necessary. In some cases, it is urgent. Yet for the transformational model, negative peace is insufficient. Transformationists emphasize the necessity of building the conditions of a "positive peace" through "the integration of human society" and the development of "a pattern of cooperation and integration between human groups."[33] Without the intentional and sustained pursuit of

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[32] Johannes Botes, "Conflict Transformation: A Debate over Semantics or a Crucial Shift in the Theory and Practice of Peace and Conflict Studies?" *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 8, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2003): 1–27.

[33] Johan Galtung, "Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation: The First Law of Thermodynamics Revisited," in Kumar Rupesinghe, ed., *Conflict Transformation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 29. In his 1964 editorial on the subject, Galtung defined "negative peace" as "the absence of violence, the absence of war," and positive peace as "the integration of human society." Debates ensued over the extent to which the burgeoning field of peace research ought to concern itself only with "negative peace," rather than peace in both its negative and positive forms. In a follow-up essay of 1968, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," Galtung elaborated upon "negative peace" as "the absence of organized violence between such major human groups as nations, but also between racial and ethnic groups because of the magnitude that can be reached by internal wars," and positive peace as "a pattern of cooperation and integration between major human groups." See Kathleen Maas-Weigert, "*Structural Violence,*" in Lester Kurtz, ed., *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, vol. 3 (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2008). 2004–2011 (here 2005).

justice, conjoined with attention to structural and cultural violence, "peace" becomes a cover for continuing oppression. Recall Marcuse's critique of pure tolerance: as he had it, superficial conditions of tolerance-enabled tranquility often mask pervasive structural and cultural violence. The resulting conditions may be placid, but they are also unjust.[34]

Of particular relevance to my effort to expand upon the notion of "healthy conflict" emerging from the religion in public life debates is that conflict transformation views violence, rather than conflict, as the converse of peace. While standing against violence in all its forms (direct, structural, and cultural), it is equally adamant that "violence is not simply the intensification of conflict."[35] A conflict transformation lens reconceptualizes conflict as a driving force for systemic change – change that can move in more or less destructive or constructive directions.[36] It recognizes two distinct forms of conflict: the first may be termed situational, and the second, structural.

At the situational level, conflict transformation conceives of conflict as a catalyst that can be deployed for strategic reasons. On this account, the pursuit of conflict is "healthy" insofar as that conflict can help expose unjust conditions, illuminate latent elements of conflict, and serve as a vehicle for struggling against violence and actively pursuing justice. This is a pivotal way that conflict transformation lenses intentionally reposition conflict to play a central role in its approach at the situational level, and strive to cultivate "healthy," as opposed to degenerative, forms of it.

An instructive example of this sort of healthy conflict is what Martin Luther King, Jr., described as the intentional effort by civil rights activists to generate "tension" and "crisis packed" circumstances. They did so in order to provoke a dramatic confrontation over conditions of injustice,

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[34] John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 16. The deficiency of conceiving conflict resolution in abstraction from justice is the pivotal insight to which Stout pointed when he responded to Sumner Twiss's characterization of his conception of comparative ethics as "moral conflict resolution." Stout responded that "merely resolving moral conflicts is not an adequate goal, even in relatively limited contexts. One reason for this is that a conflict can be resolved when two parties who were once at loggerheads come to share the same vicious or mistaken moral judgments." Stout, "Comments on Six Responses," 724.

[35] Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 182–183.

[36] Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, 18; Lederach, *Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 18.

making it impossible for those in power to neglect, trivialize, or deny them. King argued that conflict precipitated by direct, nonviolent forms of civil disobedience and noncooperation would illuminate unjust conditions and oppressive forms of power. It could prod opponents into negotiation, thereby facilitating change toward just ends.[37] Even if nonviolence provoked violent responses from defenders of the status quo, it might still serve the cause in so far as such violence undermined the legitimacy of existing arrangements.[38]

It might seem intuitively true that a crucial measure of healthy conflict is the extent to which the parties in question intend to tolerate the view of their opponents, compromise, and negotiate a settlement. And yet, King's justice-oriented conception of conflict qualifies the roles that negotiation and compromise play in conflict delineated as "healthy." King's aim in compelling his opponents to enter into "negotiation" was not to reach a compromise maximally tolerable for both sides. Rather, he aimed to abolish unjust laws. To be sure, willingness to negotiate and compromise was sometimes crucial. Nevertheless, negotiated settlement and compromise are *relative* goods – good in so far as they serve the ends

[37] King wrote: "My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the non-violent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension.' I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue." King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *I Have a Dream*, 125–134. All quotes from the "Letter" in this chapter come from this version, which may also be accessed at: www.massresistance.org/docs/gen/09a/mlk_day/birmingham_jail.html.

[38] Gene Sharp describes this effect as "political jiu-jitsu": "By combining nonviolent discipline with solidarity and persistence in struggle, the nonviolent actionists cause the violence of the opponent's repression to be expressed in the worst possible light." See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Parts 1–3* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 1973), 657; and Sharp, "Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Nonviolent Struggle toward Justice Freedom and Peace," *The Ecumenical Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1996): 235–236.

of justice. The Montgomery bus boycott, for instance, required different instruments – namely, refusing to comply with racist laws and carrying out a boycott – to disrupt existing patterns of race relations. Conflict transformation views such a disruption not only as an act of protest and resistance, but also as a potential catalyst for transformation. Acts of resistance may transform the elements of conflict if they can serve as "reframing enactments."

The Montgomery bus boycott did not merely bring economic and social pressure to bear upon those in power. It aimed to inspire new "ways of thinking," to spark recognition, especially about the nature of the relationship between whites – many of whom believed themselves to be free of harshly racist attitudes and commitments, yet nonetheless benefitted from and perpetuated racist social structures – and their black fellow citizens.[39] In such a case, rejection of piecemeal negotiation and compromise was the appropriate response: the virtue at stake was justice, rather than or at least more than tolerance.

It is important that King operated with a conception of justice that joined realism about the dynamics of power with respect for the humanity of his opponents. More precisely, he described his strategic use of conflict as a dialectic between love and power.[40] Love compels one to refuse to cooperate with evil. This refusal took forms of prophetic speech, righteous anger, and nonviolent direct action.[41] It was, however, the same love that infused any denunciation and prophetic witness to truth with respect for the dignity of his opponents. Indeed, King spoke of desiring opponents' good (in the present example, their liberation from racist commitments and dispositions), despite the fact that they sought to preserve conditions properly denounced as evil.

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[39] Louis Kriesberg, "Transforming Conflicts," in *Constructive Conflicts* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003), chap. 3.

[40] "What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." King, "Where Do We Go From Here?" in *I Have a Dream*, 172.

[41] King wrote that even the most deeply engrained anger, if constructively reframed and creatively utilized, could motivate and fuel a campaign of militant, massive nonviolence," rather than simply devolve into rioting. King, "Showdown for Nonviolence 1968," in James M. Washington ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991), 69.

For King, love compelled engagement with power at the same time that it qualified its use. It compelled an engagement with power in the form of active resistance to oppressive social structures and attitudes. Love also placed limits on the use of power by requiring that coercive action and civil disobedience remain nonviolent. Tempered by love, such "militant nonviolence" ought never to undermine the hope for reconciliation with one's adversary.[42] For King, nonviolence entailed the hope of altering one's opponents' frame of reference, of inspiring in them a recognition of injustice and a desire for change. The aim, as it had been attributed to Gandhi, was to bring one's adversary to his senses, not to his knees.

Of course, at times "bringing one's adversary to his senses" may look very much like "bringing him to his knees" through nonviolent direct action. Indeed, when strategically necessary, such action may be adversarial and strenuously confrontational. An example of this emerges in the final paragraphs of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."[43] There King responds to claims by a group of white moderate Birmingham clergy who partially inspired his letter. The clergy in question had claimed that police in Birmingham had in some instances reacted to civil rights demonstrators' disruptive uses of nonviolent direct action with marked restraint and discipline. In his letter from jail, King conceded that the police had indeed responded "nonviolently" to the protests in some instances. And yet, he argued, their restraint and uses of nonviolence were in several crucial ways more violent than the deadly force that police had used in other instances. Even the less violent tactics of the Birmingham police were still more insidiously violent than the disruptive, tension-generating direct action of the civil rights protesters.

Some Birmingham police responses to protesters were less physically coercive than others. The white moderate clergy seized upon this fact. In their open letter, they portrayed those police efforts to keep order as broadly commendable.[44] Especially when juxtaposed with the tension-exposing, disruptive, and at times intensely dramatic character of the

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[42] "Conversations with Martin Luther King," in *A Testament of Hope* (1991), 661.

[43] S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

[44] C. Carpenter, J. Durick, H. Grafman, P. Hardin, N. Harmon, G. Murray, E. Ramage, E. Stallings, "A Call for Unity," Public Statement by eight Alabama clergymen, April 12, 1963, www.massresistance.org/docs/gen/09a/mlk_day/statement.html.

direct actions of the nonviolent demonstrators there, the police responses to protesters appealed to white moderate sensibilities. The use of discipline by the police allegedly reduced the sum total of direct violent action in that context. Invoking that reduction as their justification, the Birmingham clergy urged local community members – especially African American community members – to withdraw their support from the demonstrations King was leading. They implored their fellow citizens instead to work nondisruptively and cooperatively (as they put it, more genuinely "peacefully") with local leaders and lawmakers. The clergy argued that, while the actions of the demonstrators were "technically peaceful," their disruptiveness was prone to incite violence and even hatred. Above all, the clergy called for order and obedience to the laws.

The clergy's superficial concern for order and the appearance of nonviolence in police actions camouflaged the ways in which that nonviolence served to "preserve the evil system of segregation."[45] In effect, they called for incremental adjustments to a system that structurally excluded and humiliated people of color. As King said of the Birmingham police in his letter from jail, the unjust ends toward which they devoted their restraint contaminated the very nonviolent means for which the moderate clergy commended them. What presented itself as explicit nonviolence served intrinsically unjust and dehumanizing ends. The restrained tactics of police obscured and seemingly vindicated their efforts to defend the racist status quo. The sum total of direct, acute violence was reduced, but only alongside the maintenance of violence that suffused the predominant socio-political-economic structures.

King accounted for this insidious discrepancy in terms of a means–ends relationship. It was, he countered, an attempt "to use moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice."[46] This contradicted the necessary logic of nonviolent direct action. King derived this logic from Gandhi, who had insisted on the unity of means and ends in nonviolent action.[47] A nonviolent end must be pursued by nonviolent means. Otherwise, the nonviolent end in question becomes subverted by the violent means by which activists pursue it.

But the unity of means and ends, King recognized, meant that the converse is true as well. Attempting to achieve an objective that is in any way violent through nonviolent means contaminates the putative nonviolence

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[45] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
[46] Ibid.
[47] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chapter XVI.

of the means. This was evident of the tactics of the Birmingham police. The fact that some of their actions appeared nonviolent, cloaked – and was sometimes used to justify – the fact that police restraint served to preserve intrinsically unjust (and structurally violent) conditions. In this case, one form of violence (direct violence) was reduced, but with the effect of reinforcing and camouflaging another – arguably more insidious – form of violence (structural violence): socio-legal structures that foster inequality, exclude, and humiliate people of color. Using the multidimensional lens of "healthy conflict," we can recognize this as an instance in which cultural violence served to justify structural violence. Such analysis casts a different light on the significance of nonviolent action in that context.

For instance, in some cases, Birmingham Police Commissioner Bull Connor had ordered his officers to forcefully remove civil rights protesters by beating them back with the spray from fire hoses and savaging them with police dogs. From the vantage point of strategic nonviolence, these tactics were preferable to the seemingly nonviolent methods that some Birmingham police employed, and for which the moderate Birmingham clergy publicly commended them. Connor's responses to protesters, by contrast, drew the attention – and indeed, the outrage – of bystanders near and far. Alarming scenes of police abuse of nonviolent marchers in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park were repeatedly broadcast on national television, and internationally in Europe and Russia. These images generated broad sympathy for the civil rights protesters. Many who came to sympathize with the protesters' cause as a result had been unaware of the severity of the conditions in Birmingham (and throughout the US). These broad-based sympathies turned out to be pivotal in attracting widespread support and even generating political pressure. Both were instrumental in the US Congress's landmark civil rights legislation the following year.

Such analysis uncovers an array of strategies and tools not otherwise prevalent among activists committed to nonviolent conflict. For one, it presents a powerful example of what Gene Sharp has called "political jiu-jitsu."[48] Jiu-jitsu literally means "soft art." The central premise of this Japanese martial art is to redirect, and redeploy, the force exerted by one's opponent in a way that is counter to his or her intentions. One avoids confronting one's opponent with an independent and opposing force of one's own. *Political* jiu-jitsu is a technique of strategic nonviolence. It

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[48] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part Two: The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Manchester, NH: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973), 109–115.

attempts to cause the coercive force and direct violence of one's opponent to rebound in ways that undermine their efforts. This throws the opponent "off balance" politically, "causing his repression to rebound against his position, and weakening his power."[49] In the Birmingham example, this occurred most effectively through television images of nonviolent civil rights protesters under attack from police dogs and pummeled by the spray of high-pressure fire hoses. Such coercive force may have contained the protesters in that location. But it also elicited powerful sympathy and widespread support for their cause. It eroded the legitimacy of the police and local political authorities.

Of course, Sharp's account of political jiu-jitsu presupposes that one's opponent uses coercive force. What happens when that opponent is shrewd enough to employ nonviolent means to sustain a structurally violent arrangement? As we have seen, events of this sort unfolded in the context of the Birmingham civil rights campaign of 1963. There, some Birmingham police tactics essentially functioned as an insidious reversal of Sharp's jiu-jitsu technique. As the Birmingham clergy pointed out in their open letter to the community, police deployed forms of crowd control that were not explicitly violent. Moreover, the effectiveness of their actions was amplified by white, moderate clergy's calls for cooperation with police – and their denunciation of outside intervention by Martin King and his fellow activists. This added a layer of cultural violence, as the clergy deployed their own cultural capital, influence, and moral standing in support of the police, and against people they considered to be outside agitators. The white moderate clergy advocated for the moral high ground exemplified, they claimed, by the nonviolent tactics of the police.

King challenged this insidious dynamic when he questioned both the "nonviolent" restraint of the police and the clergy's support for the police in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Both groups presumed that they, not the disruptive, intrusive civil rights protesters, occupied the moral high ground. Many civil rights protesters, like King himself, went to jail because they refused to obey unjust laws. King thus exposed the apparent nonviolence of police as being in fact complicit in deeper forms of structural violence, and thus actually perpetuating injustice.

As I argued above, the intervention of the moderate Birmingham clergy presented an instance of moral and cultural justification of structural violence. Their defense of the nonviolent Birmingham police tactics and

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[49] Ibid., 110.

their call for incremental reforms of Jim Crow segregation were forms of cultural violence. The Birmingham civil rights activists could not simply let the moderate clergy claim the moral high ground in justifying the status quo. The situation required new strategies of response. The movement's organizers had to intervene in ways that would, in effect, expose the clergy's statement as an instance of cultural violence, and then work to change their views.

Just as the moderate clergy who took aim at Martin King and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) intrusion in Birmingham were white, so were their congregations. White churches may not have had formal rules banning African American Christians from participating in their worship services. However, the customary practice was to keep services segregated. Black people could worship at black churches. If the segregationist practices of these Christian congregations were exposed, the moral standing of the ministers who supported the police and undermined the civil rights protesters could be disputed. This is precisely what SCLC activists set out to do.

During Easter week of 1963, the SCLC activists sent small groups – sometimes integrated groups of white and black Christians – to attempt to enter and worship in several Christian congregations in Birmingham. Ushers, lay people, and many of the church pastors denied them admittance. Where they were admitted, many white congregants immediately left in protest. The civil rights activists presented formal letters explaining their motives – namely, to seek reconciliation with their "separated brothers and sisters."[50] If denied admission to a church, the activists knelt in prayer on the steps. Some disruptively knocked on the closed front door, pleading for admittance to worship while the service was in session. The media broadly publicized the results. These actions came to be known as "church testings," "kneel-ins," or "pray-ins."[51]

These efforts aimed to bring to light the hypocrisy and mendacity of ministerial officials, Christian lay people, and congregations who publicly called for calm and cooperation with the legal authorities. The activists targeted clergy who commended police restraint, denounced civil rights protesters as outside meddlers, and implored local black people to refuse to cooperate with the activists' efforts at disruption and confrontation. These clergy used their influence and visibility as Christian ministers to

[50] Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, 77.
[51] Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 129; Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, chap 4.

defend and sustain unjust laws and structural forms of violence, though they gave lip service to the ideal of gradual progress toward racial equality. In kneel-ins and church testings, civil rights protesters confronted them and their congregants publicly and nonviolently. Their interventions brought latent cultural violence and hypocrisy to the surface. In so doing, they challenged the religious influence of the ministers by showing them to be something other than the morally upstanding community leaders committed to reconciliation and Christian love that they claimed to be.

At the same time, church testings occasionally precipitated opportunities for reconciliation. Some of the ministers of tested churches conceded. This was the case with Rev. Earl Stallings, pastor of Birmingham's First Baptist Church and one of the signers of the open letter that prompted King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." On Easter Sunday of 1963, Stallings welcomed into his church a small cadre of black Christians seeking to worship alongside their white brothers and sisters. Although some seventy white congregants immediately left in protest, Stallings did not object. In fact, as a photograph later appearing in the newspaper showed, he shook the hand of SCLC member Andrew Young at the conclusion of the service and welcomed the black protesters into the church.[52]

One might describe this result as an instance of strategic moral and cultural jiu-jitsu. The Birmingham civil rights protesters confronted one of the ministers who had most visibly denounced them as outside agitators intent on inciting violence and hate through tactics that were only "technically peaceful." That minister now appeared – for the entire city to see – welcoming those very protesters into his church to worship with him and his congregation. Moreover, the congregation itself, though it had no *formal* segregationist policies – indeed, "white moderate" in its orientation – was exposed as harboring a large contingent of deeply segregationist members and a structurally segregationist orientation. On one hand, they claimed to espouse the reconciling love of Jesus. At the same time, they refused to worship with their fellow Christians who were black.

The testing of Rev. Stallings and the First Baptist Church of Birmingham exemplified the kind of integration that the civil rights protesters sought for the entire city of Birmingham, and across the United States. With the nonviolent – yet thoroughly confrontational and adversarial – direct action of church testings, the SCLC activists brought to light and challenged cultural violence. In particular, their interventions redirected the

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[52] Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, 75–77.

impact of the white moderate clergy's cultural influence. The putative moral authority of the white moderate ministers rebounded in ways that undermined their efforts to legitimize and justify the structurally violent status quo in the name of tranquility and negative peace in their open letter. Through this cultural jiu-jitsu, SCLC activists rechanneled the force of that cultural influence to serve genuinely just ends. It even achieved a moment of public reconciliation with an opponent in the case of Rev. Stallings.

It is important to note that this moment of reconciliation did not involve negotiated settlement or merely mutually tolerable compromise. It was, rather, the culmination of a complex strategy by which activists engaged a potential enemy as an adversary to be lovingly confronted and repositioned. Reconciliation emerged from having, in effect, brought Reverend Stallings "to his senses, rather than to his knees." And one of the most prized and important rhetorical interventions in US political and religious history records this event. For, in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King commended Stallings by name for welcoming Andrew Young and his fellow activists, and for desegregating his congregation.

Violence that Works on the Soul

At the same time, the events in Birmingham forced upon King an acute realization. Segregationist laws and white supremacist culture had come to layer themselves deeply in the souls of even well-intentioned white folk. Ironically, King declared, the Ku Klux Klanner and avowed white supremacist posed less formidable obstacles to the civil rights movement than did white moderates. At least one knew precisely where the Klansmen and white supremacists stood. White moderates suffered from a moral ambivalence blemished by the segregationist and white supremacist culture in which they lived. They verbally espoused the desegregationist objectives of the civil rights movement, on one hand. But they simultaneously called for gradual adjustment of segregationist laws, and incremental change. White moderates thought that disrupting surface-level tranquility through nonviolent protest and agitation was a wrong-headed strategy. As King put it, the white moderate is one who

is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable

for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season."[53]

Segregationist laws and culture are unjust, King recognized, because they "distort the soul and damage the personality" of *all* the people affected by them. Most obviously, those subjugated by segregationist laws have forced upon them daily experiences of inferiority. This subjects people of color to sources of authority that are not reciprocally accountable to them. A moral and spiritual temptation that faces people in such circumstances is, over time, to absorb and internalize the experience of inferiority and humiliation as a sense of inadequacy that is, as a matter of fact, false. King warned that relationships and personalities distorted by segregationist structures and cultures can produce habits of self-abnegation and an abiding sense of "nobodiness" among African Americans. These effects upon the souls of black folk, he said, must be relentlessly rooted out as lies and firmly opposed.[54]

At the same time, the white moderate – and all those who benefit from segregationist structures and cultures – suffered a sickness of soul as well. These arrangements convey to them the false and soul-contorting self-perception that they are superior, or at least "ok" or "normal" vis-à-vis their black and brown fellows. Such claims of superiority may manifest explicitly (as with the Klansman or avowed white supremacist). But they may remain tacit as well, manifesting in subtle ways beneath the level of self-awareness and self-reflection. Most likely, the range of social and political advantages – or an abiding sense of being "normal" – for the beneficiaries of white supremacist culture remain un-reflected upon. But these effects of violence are, nonetheless, written upon the souls and hearts of those who benefit from domination. Violence that works upon the souls of white folk must be named and persistently resisted, much

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[53] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." It is important to note that King's conception of "negative peace" is the early appearance of the term that would come to find widespread use through peace studies. The term did not originate with King, however. In fact, Jane Addams, an activist and early trailblazer in the field of social work, had conceptualized the term and written of the deficiencies of "negative peace" (as the absence of war), and of the necessity of "positive ideals of peace" in her book of 1902, *Newer Ideals of Peace*. See Berenice Carroll and Clinton Fink, "Introduction to the Illinois Edition," in *Newer Ideals of Peace* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), xvii–xviii.

[54] King describes these as a form of "cultural homicide." King, "Where Do We Go from Here?" in *I Have a Dream*, 169–179.

as black folk fought against the experiences of subordination and self-abnegation thrust upon them.

Of course, King's understanding of agapic love meant that, in the fight for justice, one must respect and love even one's enemy. One ought to pursue his or her well-being. In effect, doing so turned a would-be enemy into an adversary. To pursue his opponent's well-being through love-driven nonviolence meant that the struggle for justice should promote the liberation of King's opponents from the blinding, spiritual sickness of white supremacy, in the hope of opening possibilities for reconciliation. Agapic love impelled King to call for loving the person who participates in evil (i.e., loving one's enemy), while simultaneously hating and fighting against the evil in which that person participates.[55]

King exemplifies a highly rarified and strategic conception of conflict as a means to constructive change. His use of conflict was intentional and precisely targeted.[56] But situations will often differ from those faced by King. Conflict erupts unpredictably and often moves in ways that do not lend themselves to King's organized approach. For this reason, conflict transformation insists on tying situational analysis to a reconceptualization of conflict at the structural level. Conflict transformation seeks to enable participants to deal with various types of conflicts. Crucial here is the notion that conflict is not a problem to be addressed, but a phenomenon built into social and political life.

Conflict transformation embeds its account of the strategic and situational conflict exemplified by King within a new conception of structural conflict. It promotes building capacities to reframe and creatively engage conflict that emerges unpredictably to make it unfold in a direction that fosters justice and reduces violence. Here conflict transformation reconceptualizes conflict as intrinsic to human relationships, social processes, and institutions, with all their contradictions and incongruities. In this view, where there is relationship, there will be conflict. Instead of asking, "Will there be conflict?" the operative questions are: "What kind of conflict will it be? To what ends might it be engaged? What does naturally erupting conflict illuminate about the underlying conditions of the relational and historical contexts in which the episodes occur? What does it

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[55] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

[56] See, for instance, King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," in *I Have a Dream*, 132–134. "Our most powerful nonviolent weapon is, as would be expected, also our most demanding, that is organization. To produce change, people must be organized to work together in units of power" (133).

take to cultivate capacities for engaging conflict transformatively when it emerges?"[57]

While it does not necessarily begin with King's Christian commitment to agapic love, a conflict transformation approach can accommodate this tradition-specific orientation because it conceives of conflict as, most basically, a feature of human relationality.[58] Because relationship is a central concept around which the other insights in the complex orbit, it becomes crucial to provide a robust account of the relational dimensions in a given instance of conflict. Rethinking its relational patterns and narratives – which may encompass thick but potentially compatible or overlapping conceptions of love, compassion, or respect – is a vital step in transforming the elements of the conflict in question.[59]

King's example provides several identifying marks of healthy conflict. It is (1) oriented by the pursuit of justice; (2) marked by a practical, goal-oriented sensibility about the dimensions of power inscribed in conflict; and (3) motivated by respect for the humanity of one's opponents (thus grounding hope for eventual reconciliation), even when their actions must be denounced and resisted because they produce, or sustain, evil conditions. The marks of "health" include efforts to instigate conflict (to generate tension) in order to force into the light of day the irreconcilability

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[57] For two key statements about this starting point for the model, see Johan Galtung, "Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation: The First Law of Thermodynamics Revisited," in Rupesinghe, ed., *Conflict Transformation*; and John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997).

[58] Conflict transformation construes "relationship" loosely enough to accommodate any number of more tradition-specific conceptions. For this reason, it is consistent with (though not identical to) Gandhi's commitment to "ahimsa" – meaning literally "noninjury," but which Gandhi came to construe as a positive state of love. Arguably, the role of relationship in conflict transformation could similarly accommodate Connolly's conception of "agonistic respect." See Thomas Kilgore, "The Influence of Gandhi on Martin Luther King, Jr.," in John Hick and Lamont Hempel, eds., *Gandhi's Significance for Today* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 236–243.

[59] For a detailed account of the orientating role of relationship in conflict transformation, see Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, esp. 31–40. For an example of a conflict transformation lens applied to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, see Atalia Omer, *When Peace Is Not Enough: How the Israeli Peace Camp Thinks about Religion, Nationalism, and Justice* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

of the oppositions at stake, and the unjust, and thus ultimately intolerable, character of the status quo. Healthy conflict, moreover, manifests a strategic sense about when and how negotiation, compromise, or noncompliance and defiance – conceived as instruments in a range of equipment – should be deployed, and when they should not.[60] And it remains acutely aware of the unity of means and ends in nonviolent social change.

At the structural level, conflict transformation would identify conflict as healthy in so far as its engagement might illuminate, reframe, and alter aspects of relational patterns that manifest any form of violence or injustice. Its aim is to critically assess the structural and cultural dimensions of the relational contexts and histories in which those patterns are inscribed. The model opts for the trope of transformation (rather than resolution) because it expects the conflict to resurge – particularly regarding matters that the involved parties identify as nonnegotiable or that prove to be intractable in practice – though resurgence is likely to evolve and manifest differently over time.

One way conflict transformation attempts to reframe the elements of "sudden" conflict involves treating situational aspects of conflict as a window into systemic causes. Returning to the example of civil rights, it seems important that King came to recognize that overcoming racism could not simply be a matter of abolishing discriminatory laws and passing new, nondiscriminatory ones. Certainly, it entailed this. But those surface-level circumstances of legal change afforded opportunities to shed light on the deeper transformations that were necessary – transformations in which King found himself implicated. King gradually came to realize that many of the movement's greatest successes would ultimately founder if they did not lead to further transformation of unjust structures, especially those perpetuating inequalities related to race and class. By the time of his death, he saw these as matters requiring attention to foreign as well as domestic affairs, and thus began to

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[60] Exemplified in the writing and work of King, and by Mahatma Gandhi before him, this pivotal insight about negotiation and compromise in transformative justice has been distilled in the writings of Gene Sharp. See esp. Gene Sharp, "The Dangers of Negotiations," in *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston, MA: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2010), 9–10. Sharp argues that, in a context where power is imbalanced, partial concessions and compromise agreements generally benefit the group in power. For an account of the effects of such "partial or temporary concessions" by authorities in power, see Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 325.

connect civil rights to a critique of poverty and US imperialism around the world.[61]

From King to Colbert

To indicate what the above approach to healthy conflict might look like in our current context, I now want to draw together the various strands of healthy conflict I have been sketching. Conflict transformationists press us to go beyond the mere analysis of democratic deliberation. We are not to ask whether conflict will arise, or think about how to avoid or even contain and resolve it when necessary. Instead, we should ask, "How can people develop capacities for engaging one another creatively, constructively, and in ways that transform the elements of the conflict in the interests of justice?" and "What resources are available for this?" Just as importantly, the conflict transformation frame suggests we measure the viability of democratic practices less by their power to resolve conflict once and for all, and more by their usefulness in illuminating unjust conditions, spurring the pursuit of justice, and reducing structural violence.

How does my effort to sketch an expanded conception of healthy conflict fare when summarized with reference to Kelsay's sketch of it above? What, for instance, are we to make of the prospect of directing conflict toward "the possibility of personal and social expansion" in an era marked by the refusal of patient and conversational exchange, where disputing parties refuse to listen to one another or rebuff norms of reciprocity? What would it mean to think about healthy conflict in relation to, for example, the Tea Party movement that emerged following the election of Barack Obama?

A number of social critics and public intellectuals have struggled to understand and respond to the Tea Party.[62] Stanley Fish's analysis, in

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[61] King's later thought about the necessity of systemic analysis and structural transformation of oppressive conditions is perhaps most succinctly articulated in his 1967 address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, "Where Do We Go from Here?" 169–179.

[62] A sample would include Mark Lilla, "The Tea Party Jacobins," *New York Review of Books*, May 27, 2010; J. M. Bernstein, "The Very Angry Tea Party," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010; Stanley Fish, "Antaeus and the Tea Party," *New York Times*, September 27, 2010; and David Bromwich, "Why Has Obama Never Recognized the Tea Party?" *The Huffington Post*, August 2, 2011. For comprehensive background on the emergence of the Tea Party movement, see Jane Mayer, "Covert Operations," *The New Yorker*, August 30, 2010.

particular, approximates the approach for which I have argued in this chapter. Pointing to the success of Tea Party efforts in altering political discourse in the midterm elections of 2010, Fish argued that critics' dismissal of the Tea Party as incoherent only fueled its effectiveness. Such criticisms proved self-defeating because they conformed to a received framing of public discourse in which measured rationalism is juxtaposed with the gut. Fish countered this by appealing to the Greek myth of Antaeus. He wrote:

> The Greek mythological figure Antaeus won victory after victory because his opponents repeatedly threw him to the ground, not realizing that it was the earth (in the figure of his mother, Gaia) that nourished him and gave him renewed strength. The Tea Party's strength comes from the down-to-earth rhetoric it responds to and proclaims, and whenever high-brow critics heap the dirt of scorn and derision upon the party, its powers increase … That won't work. Better, perhaps, to take a cue from Hercules, who figured out the source of Antaeus's strength and defeated him by embracing him in a bear hug, lifting him up high, and preventing him from touching the ground. Don't sling mud down in the dust where your opponents thrive. Instead, engage them as if you thought that the concerns they express (if not their forms of expression) are worthy of serious consideration, as indeed they are. Lift them up to the level of reasons and evidence and see how they fare in the rarified air of rational debate where they just might suffer the fate of Antaeus.[63]

Here Fish makes an unexpected move, at least from the vantage point of many accounts of deliberative democracy. He proposes seriously considering, rather than dismissing, the concerns that drive the Tea Party. Nevertheless, his positive proposal – "lift[ing their concerns] up to the level of reasons and evidence and … rational debate" – reverts to a conventional deliberative response. I think such a strategy is likely to be ineffective precisely because it reinstates the dichotomous framing of public discourse that the Tea Party used to its advantage. That framing pins the ideals of rational debate, measured reason-exchange, and evidence to the very forms of engagement that many who claim the Tea Party mantle suspect or altogether reject. After all, they pit their own appeals to visceral populism and "down-to-earth rhetoric" against precisely such "elitist approaches." Thus, Fish's suggestion to seriously engage voices that, from a standard deliberative democratic point of view, invite dismissal is consistent with my account of healthy conflict. Yet his prescriptive proposal, to draw public discourse fully within the ambit of measured,

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[63] Fish, "Antaeus and the Tea Party."

evidence-based debate, falls short of the model of healthy conflict on offer here. Healthy conflict, as I have sketched it above, opens the door to – in fact, impels the use of – the full breadth of rhetorical modes of engagement in situations that defy the basic parameters of deliberative exchange. It thus avoids the liabilities of pressing Tea Party–style interlocutors back into the very modes of debate that many of them distrust and reject. This move may appear paradoxical at first, for it suggests that productive democratic engagement requires not only attending to but using the visceral registers of democratic populism. But it may afford opportunities to harness their potentialities for creativity and innovative engagement. From the perspective of conflict transformation, the ideas that motivate this move fit together as follows.

Wherever there is human relationship, there will be conflict. Because conflict is an intrinsic feature of human sociality, it is unavoidable. It is thus, likewise, a phenomenon intrinsic to social and political relationships. Healthy conflict acknowledges that some oppositions may be irremediable. It recognizes, as well, that the passionate and visceral registers cannot simply be reduced to terms of reasoned debate, especially about issues perceived as fundamentally important. In aiming at conflict transformation, healthy conflict attempts to identify some issue, circumstance, or mode of engagement that might permit a creative approach and constructive response to the elements of that conflict. In the contemporary US context that I described above, the reason–gut dichotomy invites just such strategic rethinking. This dualism has proven influential (rhetorically and politically) and intransigent. It presents a framing that perpetuates the conflict in question. Hence, as I have argued, navigating the obstacles it presents to "interpreting one's opponents as reason-givers like oneself" requires acknowledging and creatively grappling with the visceral registers of "the gut," rather than dismissing them or subordinating them to more "logical" registers.

In the expanded sense of reason-giving that I have cobbled together in the preceding sections, then, a particular citizen's logical inconsistencies, or even outright refusal of dialogue, ought not to occasion charges of conversation-stopping irrationalism or of simple discursive viciousness. Rather, such behaviors invite closer examination – perhaps through different lenses – of how a citizen's motivating concerns, orienting commitments, relational patterns, and objectives take the place of "logical consistency" in the case in question. Reframing of this sort presents one (albeit small) example of transforming the elements of conflict. It avoids the de facto disqualification of modes of expression that some would term nonsensical.

At the same time, this expansive conception of engagement does not absolve the parties in a conflict of the duty to assess the substance of one another's commitments, with particular attention to the dimensions of justice and power. In fact, identifying the aim of justice as a mark of healthy conflict means that one cannot downplay the fact that many conflicts – and likely the most intransigent ones – will involve disputes about the nature and basis of justice. This means that any struggle for justice must be accompanied by efforts to establish and promote a particular account of that ideal.[64] Again, the primary question becomes how to deal innovatively with the elements of a conflict over the very meaning of social and political norms.

With regard to the reason–gut dichotomy, a conception of healthy conflict might consider that the unyielding assertion of the visceral registers may, in fact, be a means of challenging and disrupting tacit exclusionary differences of power in the structures and organization of "public discourse" and "public life" themselves – what conflict transformation scholars describe as "relational context." Marshalling and unleashing such "visceral force" may have the effect of disrupting a relational context in which "the force of the better reason" holds sway hegemonically. Of course, disrupting public discourse may itself be an intentional tactic, to the extent that deliberative incoherence and rage may serve the program of one group more than others. The operative questions are: To what ends does a particular appeal to the gut aim? What will be its effects? Is it surreptitious or forthright? Does it involve intentional manipulation? If so, by whom? And, of course, how shall citizens recognize and contend with this appeal? With these questions, we rejoin not only Connolly, but perhaps even more instructively, Stephen Colbert. Connolly proposes a strategy of

expos[ing] the tactics of those who do not themselves call attention to them; you introduce counterstrategies of cultural-corporeal infusion attached to a more generous vision of public life; and you publicize, as you proceed, how these counterstrategies themselves impinge upon the affectively rich, nonconscious layers of life. The way in which Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart mimic and exaggerate the orchestration of image, voice, music, sound, and rhythm by media stars such as Bill O'Reilly provides one starting point. They do not simply expose factual misstatements – an inadequate response to influences exerted in part upon affective states situated below the refined intellect. Instead, they fight fire with fire, reenacting media strategies of inculcation by parodying them.[65]

[64] I detailed examples of such processes in Chapter 6.
[65] William E. Connolly, "Experience and Experiment," *Daedelus* (Summer 2006): 67–75.

Tempting though it might be, I am not proposing a model of engagement that sets as its standard the comic artistry of Stephen Colbert (and the room full of writers who composed his material). However, to say that *The Colbert Report* was nothing more than entertainment altogether misses its incisiveness. While it cannot displace the difficult on-the-ground work of combating injustice and pursuing peace in its positive dimensions, such performances nonetheless illuminate the value – even the indispensability – of atypical modes of engagement. They may unsettle prevailing oppositions and expectations, upend entrenched rhetorical dualisms, deliver criticism through mimetic irony, mockery, and lampoon. Such comic artistry engages opponents in ways that are foreign to their experience. Perhaps most importantly, it does not simply meet force with counter-force by "calling bullshit" on a misleading opponent. Rather, in an approach aptly characterized as "cultural jiu-jitsu," it both redirects and transposes the specious rhetoric of one's opponent. Or to put the point differently, as Stephen Colbert said of Stephen Colbert, it "embod[ies] the bullshit until hopefully you can smell it."[66]

Instances of "preposterous comedy" afford what Ralph Ellison described as "indispensable agency" that opens up "redeeming perspectives on our rampant incongruities."[67] Ellison claimed that the key difference between an artist (of whatever sort) and a skillful trickster or con man is their respective moral intentions. This observation parallels Aristotle's claim that the difference between the sophist and the rhetorician lay in their respective *prohairesis* (roughly, "moral purpose" or "commitment").[68] By these lights, to construe Stephen Colbert as a

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[66] Neil Strauss Interview with Stephen Colbert, "Stephen Colbert on Deconstructing the News, Religion and the Colbert Nation," *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2009. The fuller exchange reads: "[Strauss] Tell me about the difference between the way you and Jon Stewart deconstruct the news. [Colbert] Jon deconstructs the news in a really brilliant comedic style. I take the sausage backwards, and I restuff the sausage. We deconstruct, but then we don't show anybody our deconstruction. We reconstruct – we falsely construct the hypocrisy. And I embody the bullshit until hopefully you can smell it."

[67] Ralph Ellison, "An Extravagance of Laughter," in John F. Callahan, ed., *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 658. In my judgment, Ellison's point is consistent with Montaigne's account of "tolerance." See Creppel, *Toleration and Identity*, 65–90; and Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 37–40.

[68] Danielle Allen makes this point in "A Multilingual America?" *Soundings* 87, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2004), esp. 272 and 279n22. Jeffrey Stout's response to Allen's important exposition of Ellison on this point appears in the same

rhetorician of comic artistry in Ellison's sense would locate the most salient ethical and critical value of his "preposterous comedy" precisely in its "embody[ing] the bullshit until hopefully you can smell it." Here the relevant sense of "bullshit" is the one elucidated by the philosopher, Harry Frankfurt.

A "bullshitter" is concerned neither to intentionally deceive nor to get things even proximally correct. That would presuppose some acknowledgement and concern for a range of descriptions that more or less "get things right" in the first place. The bullshitter has no such concern. In fact, the bullshitter's claims may, on occasion, actually turn out to be correct. The key point, Frankfurt argues, is that the bullshitter is indifferent one way or the other. His or her primary purpose is to befuddle an audience about whatever he or she is really up to. The bullshitter aims to captivate and influence his or her audience with impressiveness and aplomb, advancing his or her agenda, whatever that may be. Perhaps it is some variation of bolstering his or her self-importance or authority by casting the impression that he or she knows what he or she is talking about, seeming to get the better of an argument, or consolidating support from his or her audience with ostensibly knowledgeable bombast.[69] The result, in fact, is a discursive circumstance in which relation to reality is nearly irrelevant.

How, then, does one combat bullshit in a political context that has become inundated with it? Straightforward fact checking, while indispensable, has proven ineffective by itself. Highbrow dissection of bullshit as such, and pundit-generated theories of bullshit in blogs and op-eds, seem merely to feed the media echo chamber.[70] These options take themselves far too seriously to effectively stem the rising tide of bullshit.

Colbert's comic artistry on *The Colbert Report*, by contrast, did not merely illuminate the rampant incongruities for his audience members. The key to his effectiveness was not that he simply parodied certain elements of cultural and political conflict. The pivotal point is that he sought

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issue. Stout, "Responses to Five Critical Papers on *Democracy and Tradition*," *Soundings* 87, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2004): 369–402.

[69] Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117–133.

[70] See, for example, Matthew Yglesias, "The Bullshitter-in-Chief," *Vox*, May 30, 2017, www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/5/30/15631710/trump-bullshit. For succinct refutation, see David Leonhardt, "Lies vs. B.S.," *New York Times*, May 31, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/opinion/lies-vs-bs.html.

to enable his audience to, in effect, "smell the bullshit." He inhabited a role from which he spun an alternative discursive frame. Inhabiting this role allowed Colbert to alter the discourse by reframing it – producing what conflict transformation calls "reframing enactments," which open possibilities of speaking provocatively and in ways that might transpose perspective.

Transposing perspective means more than finding a hearing among those who otherwise would not listen, though it might entail doing so. At moments, the transposition of perspective unsettles even presumed allies and subverts presupposed familiarity. Transposing perspective involves more than just listening to those for whom there would otherwise be no hope for dialogue. It also resists allegedly ironclad dichotomies by confusing apparently clear oppositions. The inhabited role, admittedly fictional at some moments, also cuts in upon daily life at others, yet without offering any simple synthesis.[71] Claims that are logically incoherent or invalid, empirically false, or in conflict with the self-interests of those who make them are reconceptualized through rhetoric. In bringing spin and manipulation to light, the performance refocuses attention on the questions: What aims and objectives are at stake? What are the motivations of particular agents? What is the character and basis of the account of justice which undergirds their efforts? How might one initiate counter-narratives and strengthen efforts to aim at justice? In Colbert's case, strategic comic interventions accomplished these tasks by targeting – even utilizing – the humorous intensities of the gut.

Looking It Up in Your Gut

I walked to the campus on the morning of President Obama's commencement address. As in previous weeks, crowds assembled at the front entryway, waving the many signs I had come to expect. Counter-protesters had gathered as well. One person with a bullhorn repeatedly chanted: "Abortion on demand, and without apology / without this basic

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[71] Perhaps the most pivotal example of this was Stephen Colbert's formulation of a Political Action Campaign, and Super PAC, in the wake of the *Citizens United* v. *FEC* ruling. See, for instance, David Carr, "Comic's PAC Is More than a Gag," *New York Times*, August 21, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/08/22/business/media/stephen-colberts-pac-is-more-than-a-gag.html. For a sustained exposition of such examples, see Sophia A. McClennen, *America According to Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

right, women cannot be free." As I passed the Performing Arts Center, a woman was praying on her knees surrounded by a ring of police, themselves surrounded by a ring of camera-clad media. She was one among many that day who were arrested for trespassing while praying on the campus grounds as an act of civil disobedience.

President Obama was in peak rhetorical form. He built all the right bridges. He spoke of how his work as a community organizer led him to collaborate with Chicago's Cardinal Bernardin and local Catholic parishes. He recounted his own journey to becoming a Christian. He anchored the speech in the claim that, though the divisions ran deep on this issue, surely everyone could agree that abortion is a heart-wrenching decision with deep moral and spiritual dimensions, and that it is desirable to reduce the total number of abortions, along with the number of unwanted pregnancies. "When we open up our hearts and our minds to those who may not think precisely like we do or believe precisely what we believe – that's when we discover at least the possibility of common ground," he held forth. "That's when we begin to say, 'Maybe we won't agree on abortion, but we can still agree that this heart-wrenching decision for any woman is not made casually, it has both moral and spiritual dimensions.' "[72]

The news networks were present in full force. Several of them broadcast the commencement ceremony live and without commercial interruption. Faculty had been told to anticipate hecklers, and indeed, several in attendance shouted at Obama at different points with "Abortion is murder! Stop killing our children!" One of them was disruptive enough to ignite among a large portion of the crowd a response of Obama's 2008 campaign slogan "Yes we can!" That was overtaken by the collective mantra from the graduating class, "We are ND!" The media got many elements of the spectacle of intolerance they anticipated. But the event was not simply reduced to the circus promised by Randall Terry. These interventions also brought to the surface the nature of the conflict, forcing it into the consciousness of those in attendance.

As one who supported the president's invitation and honorary degree, I was inclined to find persuasive his account of a civil and patient search for common ground in light of heated opposition. In fact, I found the opening moments of his speech elating. It was perhaps eight or ten minutes into Obama's address that I first noticed what began as a scratching

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[72] The full text appears as an appendix to Herbst, *Rude Democracy*, 68–100, 149–159.

irritation of background noise – initially, barely noticeable, as subtle as the chirping of crickets. Gradually the sound pushed itself forward into my awareness and rose to full pitch, grabbing hold of my attention. The sounds morphed into a high-pitched chorus – loud, incessant, rhythmic. It was the sounds of babies crying. There was no identifiable direction the sounds were coming from. They seemed to come from all sides, as I strained to track them. The sounds were distracting, irritating, chilling. The sound of crying inserted itself viscerally into Obama's measured rhetoric, elegant case for tolerance, and search for common ground regarding the controversies that framed the day.[73]

Outside, a few hundred meters away, as many as two thousand people had gathered – priests, faculty, students, many of whom had boycotted their own commencement, and their families. The priests held mass, speakers spoke, and the people prayed together. Some in attendance there would later reflect on the spectacle of the preceding weeks, and the protesters at the gates in particular. They were outsiders, some suggested. They detracted from the propriety and respectfulness of the student-led opposition to the position represented by President Obama. They had relied on disruption, shock, and pageantry. They had abandoned the best weapon at the disposal of those who opposed abortion: arguments.

I was not entirely certain of this. Clearly, there had been no argument to counter President Obama's from the commencement platform, no formal exchange of reasons. However, what had been wedged into the event (and into the preceding weeks) was visceral disruption and dissonance. The effect of this insurgent intervention had been to unexpectedly alter the deliberative frame of those moments, a reframing to which I was uncertain how to respond at the time.

Coming to recognize and contend with this protest as a form of visceral engagement was only a starting point, of course. To recognize it as engagement is not to *replace* practices of tracking inferences and holding one another accountable to their implications. It is, rather, to conceive of those practices more expansively as a necessary step in crafting an account of healthy conflict sufficiently capacious for a moment in which conflict seems to be intractable. The aim is to engage in conflict

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[73] For an example, see "President Obama: Notre Dame Commencement," YouTube video, 15:00, posted by "The Obama White House," May 18, 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwJPOfIQKwA.

transformatively, rather than simply to tolerate decisive differences. Such engagement is indispensable to creatively traversing the oppositions that frustrate contemporary public life and discourse, and tempt us to respond with blanket condemnation, dismissal, despair, or shoulder-shrugging refusal. This difficult but invaluable task, I have argued, depends crucially on the insights of conflict transformation.

The "crying babies" episode was not a prophetic intervention. It resists easy categorization, for it defied standard modes of argumentation. Nonetheless, it suggests an important lesson for healthy conflict. It calls one to humility about one's normative commitments. Commitments and claims are always potentially revisable, however nonnegotiable one may take them to be at some point. Some evidence or experience can come upon one that calls one up short. Whatever the stance one might take on an issue, the flexibility of the norms to which one commits oneself means that they are at least adjustable. And this bears upon how we ought to treat those we oppose on some issue or set of issues in contemporary public life – that is, as adversaries to be contested with creatively, expansively, and respectfully if, nonetheless, agonistically. This entails a refusal to demonize those we contest, and a commitment to engage in some way, even when attempting to "bring one's adversary to her senses, rather than to her knees" through nonviolent direct action.

Of course, a further lesson in the effectiveness of Tea Party interventions was that they were never merely cathartic, emotivist, and self-expressive. They aimed at concrete political change. Their hallmark eruptions of outrage and resistance were but a few threads of a thicker, tightly woven cord. A different thread interwoven into that cord was their ability to transpose their outrage into local organizing efforts, and eventually into electoral politics. Their local organizing was not merely oppositional. They did not only march and rally in street protests to generate tension and create spectacle around the issues that enraged them; nor did they merely inundate political town halls to shame, prod, and in many cases successfully unseat, elected officials (though the movement engaged in all of the above, and to considerable effect).

Tea Party activists at different levels turned their efforts to political strategy and engaging in the "nuts and bolts" of local, state, and even national elections. The so-called Tea Party revolt precipitated conflict and disruption to its own ends. It commandeered the focus and framing of public political discourse (as did Occupy Wall Street, at its best). It engaged in political disruption and obstructionism to policy.

It provoked and unleashed anti-Obama sentiment, prejudice, and fear. But it pieced together a broad enough political vision and coalition that could provide a basis for electing candidates (a move that OWS refused to make).[74]

The remnants of the Tea Party revolt have remained fragmentary and internally differentiated between grassroots activists of different stripes and political and financial elites. Their residual influence has waxed and waned for nearly ten years. But it generated enough political momentum and spectacle over the issues around which it coalesced to fabricate both a congressional caucus (The Freedom Caucus, est. 2015), and perhaps more broadly, to fuel the forms of populism that helped propel candidate Donald J. Trump to the US Presidency.[75]

The Tea Party movement fails the normative test of conflict transformation outlined above.[76] Their revolt coalesced around a hyper-libertarian conception of "freedom from constraint" and abstract individuality of the kind that I challenged as inconsistent with healthy conflict in Chapter 6. This manifest as hostility to government taxation and all forms of redistribution. It resulted in denigration (scapegoating, really) of any fellow citizens they deemed to be "freeloaders." And while Tea Party organizers persistently disavowed being racist, they consistently applied their attributions of freeloading disproportionately to the poor, minorities, and so-called "illegal immigrants." Moreover, chauvinistic

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[74] My assessment in this and the following paragraph has been influenced by reflections on these matters by Danielle Allen and Theda Skocpol. See, in particular, Allen, "Don't Blame the Electoral College. Here's How Democrats Can Take Back Politics," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dont-blame-the-electoral-college-heres-how-democrats-can-take-back-politics/2016/11/15/aeaf56a4-aa8c-11e6-a31b-4b6397e625d0_story.html (accessed August 8, 2017); and Skocpol, "Why the Upcoming Presidential Election Is One of the Most Important in US History: An Interview with Theda Skocpol," *Open Democracy*, May 18, 2012, www.opendemocracy.net/theda-skocpol/why-upcoming-presidential-election-is-one-of-most-important-in-us-history-interview-wi (accessed August 8, 2017).

[75] I am not suggesting that the Tea Party revolt, and its Republican beneficiaries, have been able to govern in any productive way. Beyond electing its preferred representatives, the movement's successes in politics have been primarily obstructionist. Helpful in this regard is E. J. Dionne, Norman Ornstein, and Thomas Mann, *One Nation after Trump* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

[76] That is, does the movement or action reduce violence in all its forms while simultaneously promoting justice in its multiple varieties?

nationalism at the heart of the Tea Party narrative fueled stark anti-Muslim racism as well.[77]

However inadvertently, the Tea Party revolt deployed a number of key insights from conflict transformation to its own unjust and polarizing ends. It demonstrates how conflict can be used to promote change that is destructive. This is a live risk in conflict transformation. It is the reason that conflict transformation efforts can never be divorced from an explicit normative orientation that conceptualized and pursues the reduction of violence in all its forms, and the promotion of justice in its multiple varieties. Nonetheless, the Tea Party stands as an instructive (if cautionary) example for any attempt to engage the productive potentials of conflict transformation for purposes of political and social change. For any such effort that would be actually transformational – that would genuinely serve the interests of justice and equality – must take seriously the challenge of transposing the expansive and nondeliberative political engagement in public life into sustainable organizing and constructive electoral politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that conceiving of practices of giving and asking for reason as widely and flexibly – as charitably – as possible is crucial to a model of healthy conflict. This is especially pressing in an era marked by persistent religious and moral oppositions. Such discursive flexibility requires paying careful attention to forms of engagement that are not explicitly verbal. It requires attending to modes of perception, reflection, and even wisdom that may not be plainly cognitive – or at least defy any easy dichotomy between the cognitive and the visceral. It forces attention to the complex ways that agents and institutions interact.

Practices of giving and asking for reasons never take forms of abstract reflection and deliberation purely and simply. They are intrinsically situated and embodied. Yet, however informal and ad hoc the "lived" contexts of discursive exchange may be, these spaces are not normatively neutral. Pursuing healthy conflict requires sensitivity to the sometimes-subtle

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[77] Skocpol and Williamson document these attitudes meticulously in *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68–82.

features of such normativity. Conflicts are situated in particular relational and institutional histories. They are inscribed with disparities in power (institutional, symbolic, and so forth). These disparities may manifest as differences in material resources, cultural savvy, adeptness in the discursive moves understood to constitute the exchange of reasons, or perhaps as forthright marginalization or exclusion. Disparities in status might be earned or imposed. They might manifest themselves explicitly or operate tacitly. In any case, they stand to be critically assessed, and when necessary, challenged and altered.

Insofar as ethicists explicate normative commitments, they must also examine contexts. Focusing upon how all this is "lived" (in the sense of "lived religion"[78] and an analogous sense of "lived politics") impels attention to the ways that these contexts form their participants (and those hindered or excluded from participation). At the same time, healthy conflict means that relationships are never merely "face to face." Just as important are the "relational spaces" and "relational histories" that encompass them. Engagement with these complex relational dynamics requires acknowledging the strenuous and frequently contestatory character of a pluralism in which oppositional identities do not merely coexist, but interact, sometimes stridently. Healthy conflict strives to find opportunities for productive innovation in the – at times, persistently contentious – engagement of agents with each other in the processes of seeking justice and reducing violence in all its forms.

With the foregoing framework in mind, the following chapter contextualizes reactions to the expanding presence of Muslims in Europe and the United States in recent decades. I propose to illuminate and critically examine the subtler modes of chauvinism these responses have generated and then to explore the impact of these dynamics on processes by which American and European Muslims are shaped and formed as citizens and as ordinary actors in these respective contexts. I focus my inquiry by asking what difference the approach to healthy conflict I have developed makes in addressing Islamophobia. What would a strenuous pluralism look like in these contexts?

I take up these cases of religious intolerance to show more specifically how insights from conflict transformation might be integrated with

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[78] I use the term "lived religion" with Robert Orsi's exposition in mind, an account I take to be largely consistent with the approach to normative ethical analysis I describe in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. See Robert Orsi, "Introduction to the 2nd Edition" of *The Madonna of 115th Street* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

the complex combination of pragmatist approaches to democratic social transformation and agonistic models of engaging conflict in democratic practice that I have laced together in the preceding chapters. With a robust conception of healthy conflict in place, I show how these categories can illuminate the forms of structural and cultural violence that theoretical critique aims to interrogate, yet in a way that opens those analyses to practical and constructive – indeed, transformative – intervention. This is consistent with the pragmatist resources of moral imagination, prophetic hope, expressive freedom, agonistic respect, and healthy conflict that I have laced together with agonist interests and purposes. Constructively reframing conflict that is not simply resolvable requires, in part, attending to the visceral registers and reframing conflict transformation in terms of agonistic respect. I turn next to practices and categories of conflict transformation, and thus to the broader field of peace studies.

Islamophobia, American Style

*Tolerance as American Exceptionalism,
and the Prospects for a Strenuous Pluralism*

Numerous responses to the increasing presence of Muslims throughout Europe and the United States identify Islam as a challenge to Western conceptions of human rights and secular law. Some argue that behind these reactions is a tendency to reify the identity of an internally alien and putatively inassimilable "Other" and then to scapegoat that other through various forms of Islamophobia.[1] However, the fact that the moniker "Islamophobia" is typically ascribed to vocally xenophobic voices complicates the task of understanding and adequately responding to such reactions. It is deceptively straightforward to portray as Islamophobic, and on that basis to marginalize, acutely violent extremists (e.g., Anders Breivik in Norway and Wade Page in Oak Creek, Wisconsin) and unapologetically anti-Islamic activist groups or public figures (e.g., Pamela Geller, Michelle Bachman, Bill Maher, Newt Gingrich, Donald Trump, France's National Front Party, or the legacy of Pim Fortuyn and politics of Geert Wilders in Holland). Isolating and branding pronounced instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric, activism, and terrorism as "Islamophobic" risks obscuring subtler forms of anti-Muslim chauvinism that engender exclusion, inequality, and humiliation. What happens when attitudes and actions that approximate "Islamophobia" occur more subtly as exclusion and humiliation within the very vocabularies and norms that have been devised to protect against the effects of Islamophobia in mainstream

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[1] See, for example, Hilal Elver, "The United States: From Melting Pot to Islamophobia," in *The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 153–185.

European and North American societies (e.g., tolerance, religious plural-ism, and distinctively "civic" forms of nationalism)?[2]

In this chapter, I take up these questions as a test case for the model of healthy conflict I have developed throughout the previous chapters. I argue that diagnosing anti-Muslim attitudes and activism as "Islamophobia" in European and US contexts may actually perpetuate subtler varieties of the very stigmatization and exclusion that this moniker aims to oppose. My purpose is to draw into relief – to make explicit and subject to criti-cal analysis – certain features of normative public discourse in these two socio-political contexts broadly perceived to be peaceful, prosperous, and liberal-democratic. The features I focus upon function under the auspices of tolerant and nonexclusionary forms of "civic nationalism" that, in effect, fuel the conflict in question.

This investigation targets specific arguments and enabling institu-tional frameworks pertaining to immigration and citizenship. Even more important for my purposes, it requires assessing the often-implicit, shared symbolic self-conceptions and cultural practices through which these institutions legitimate themselves. In what ways does each context con-ceive and portray itself as pluralist and religiously tolerant in public dis-course about religious identities, practices, and freedoms? In what ways are those self-conceptions correct? What is the nature of their discrepan-cies? How might one approach such discrepancies in a way that models healthy conflict?

In both Europe and the US, I argue, the language of Islamophobia obscures more mundane structural manifestations and cultural legiti-mations of religiously rooted inequality, exclusion, and humiliation. It shrouds the complicity of various actors, institutions, and the overall socio-political context in the very anti-Muslim trends that they reject. In both contexts, discourse about Islamophobia camouflages deeper layers of different versions of nationalism that perpetuate the patterns of conflict. I hope to demonstrate that this dynamic trivializes the chal-lenge presented by different religious identifications. It limits any genu-inely constructive engagement with the challenge of religiously identified

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[2] I conduct a parallel study, motivated by the questions raised above, about the role of human rights and religious freedom jurisprudence in the European Court of Human Rights' adjudication of the so-called headscarf controversy in France. See my article, "Tentacles of the Leviathan? Nationalism, Islamophobia, and the Insufficiency-yet-Indispensability of Human Rights for Religious Freedom in Contemporary Europe," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 4 (December 2016): 903–936.

conflict and identity oppositions, and truncates possibilities for healthy conflict.

The French Muslim Schoolgirl Menace and the Limits of the "Phobia" Lens

In a widely influential analysis of the French Muslim headscarf controversy of 2003–04, French anthropologist Emmanuel Terray deploys the psychoanalytical concept of "phobia" to illuminate what he describes as the "political hysteria" that erupted. His diagnosis runs as follows:

When a community fails to find within itself the means or energy to deal with a problem that challenges, if not its existence, then at least its way of being and self-image, it may be tempted to adopt a peculiar defensive ploy. It will substitute a fictional problem, which can be mediated purely through words and symbols, for the real one that it finds insurmountable. In grappling with the former, the community can convince itself that it has successfully confronted the latter. It experiences a sense of relief and thus feels itself able to carry on as before.[3]

The community in question is the French Republic. The fictive problem is young Muslim women who wear their headscarves in public schools. The challenges that actually threaten the collective French self-conception are, first, the failure of France's five-million-plus Muslim population to integrate into French society (e.g., its ghettoization, persistent poverty, and high unemployment), and, second, a problem that is taken to be entailed in the rapidly growing French Muslim population – slowdown of progress toward gender equality in French society since the 1970s. Terray continues:

Politicians, journalists and intellectuals from every point of the compass have come together to assert their common celebration of Republican values against the Muslim schoolgirl menace. Such instances of fusion and unanimity are rare – and, in themselves, provide some temporary relief. The opponents of the headscarf can pride themselves on their valiant stand for the values of free expression and national cohesion against the "obscure forces" on the prowl. In short, the process has brought a measure of national satisfaction which it would be wrong to scorn. True, such satisfaction will exact a price, but only the sceptics will notice. And even they will have to admire the way that, in the name of liberty and integration, it has been necessary to pass a bill whose most obvious effects will be to ban and to exclude.[4]

[3] Emmanuel Terray, "Headscarf Hysteria: Review of Bernard Stasi, *Laïcité et République. Rapport de la commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République* (La Documentation française: Paris 2004)," *New Left Review* 26 (March/April 2004): 116–127 (here 118).

[4] Terray, "Headscarf Hysteria," 127.

Terray offers a powerful description of psycho-social and political processes that marginalize out-groups. Deploying "phobia" in a Freudian sense, he diagnoses a process of ritualized cleansing by scapegoating a particular segment of the French Muslim population. This ritual provides a sense of normalcy and completeness (however temporary – much as someone with a phobia of bodily filth experiences a moment of relief after each obsessive-compulsive act of handwashing).[5] The French populace projects upon the scapegoated group angst actually rooted in problems of gender inequality, persistent poverty, and failed integration. The most conspicuous representatives of that group become symbolically identified as causes of widespread anxiety. Legal sanction of that conspicuous subset (i.e., banning their visible participation in the symbolic practice – the hijab, niqab, or burqa) – provides a sense of unity and relief, however fleeting.

Is such an analysis sufficiently sensitive to the socio-political and institutional context and histories as these bear upon religious identities, pluralism, and conflict? In so far as Terray assesses reactions to the "Muslim schoolgirl menace" as surface-level symptoms of pervasive societal ills, his diagnosis of a widespread "Islamophobia" risks approaching the conflict reductionistically. This may conceal more than it illuminates.

For instance, Terray's analysis obscures attention to France's long colonialist history vis-à-vis the Muslim populations it is absorbing (e.g., its self-described civilizing mission as a colonial occupier, its role as beneficiary of the labor of colonized people, and so forth). It fails to attend to the character of nationalism, and the conception of secularism entailed therein, at the heart of the French marginalization of Islam. It obscures the ways that anti-Muslim dynamics devolve into racism.[6] The moniker

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[5] Ibid.

[6] For trenchant exposition of the contemporary French context along these vectors, see Joan Scott, *Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. 45–75. As one example, Scott recounts in detail the French colonialist efforts to "civilize" Algerian Muslims into the values of French secularism – while plundering their material resources – over nearly a century and a half of colonial occupation. She further recounts how Muslim migration to France in the 1970s occurred largely (from the French perspective) to give the country access to cheap, temporary labor by Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerians, who (contra French expectations) have settled their families and stayed permanently (67–75). She makes the case that ethno-cultural dimensions have developed into pervasive forms of racism toward Muslims in France. Differences of culture, religion, ethnicity have become reified and are taken to be "innate, indelible, unchangeable" (45).

of "Islamophobia" draws attention away from the deep, complex roots of the presenting episode of the so-called headscarf controversy. This is particularly detrimental because Terray's diagnosis helps determine what will be recognized as feasible responses. An analytically inadequate diagnosis sets the stage for a prescription that may contribute to the conflict it aims to mediate.

What difference might it make to apply lenses of structural and cultural violence to this case? Such an approach, I suggest, will better facilitate the promotion of healthy conflict. In the section that follows, I demonstrate how these lenses reveal forms of ethno-religious nationalism that suffuse accounts that forward the unique durability of US religious tolerance (in contrast with European nationalism) as a means of overcoming Islamophobia.

From Symptoms to Structure and Culture

As we saw in previous chapters, the analytical distinction between direct and structural violence seeks greater precision in articulating how different forms of violence are symbiotically related. These distinctions illuminate how one form of violence (say, direct violence) might be reduced in ways that actually exacerbate another form of violence (structural violence).[7] Structural violence reaches beyond the explicit violation of rights. It manifests in processes that deny dignity and erode self-worth and self-respect (i.e., various forms of "humiliation"). An example of structural violence is suffering stigmatization for one's religious identity in the form of identifiable experiences of social inferiority or social death, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, powerlessness, and the

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[7] Sociologist Peter Uvin points to several general patterns by which structural violence typically results in acute (direct and personal) violence: (1) the structurally subjugated will use direct violence to challenge and overturn the structures that oppress them; (2) those who benefit from the system will use direct violence to protect their status; (3) competition for resources leads to direct violence between oppressed groups; (4) rather than generate efforts to change the structures, structural violence solidifies group identities and ignites scapegoating of other, allegedly inferior groups. See Peter Uvin, "Global Dreams and Local Anger: From Structural to Acute Violence in a Globalizing World," in Mary Ann Tetreault, Robert A. Denemark, Kenneth P. Thomas, and Kurt Burch, eds., *Rethinking Global Political Economy: Emerging Essays, Unfolding Odysseys* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 147–163.

psychological effects of marginalization.[8] Cultural violence refers to the various means by which both structural and direct forms of violence are justified and propagated. It consists of symbolic practices, modes of institutional operation, complexes of practices and beliefs, and ideologies that camouflage forms of direct violence, or make them seem necessary. Likewise, these make operations of structural violence seem natural, normal, invisible, and thus to feel right, or at least not wrong.

How does such an analysis improve upon the concept of Islamophobia? One limitation of using "Islamophobia" as an analytical lens is that it pathologizes forms of prejudice and intolerance, rendering them irrational. One effect of this may be to designate it as altogether impervious to the giving and taking of reasons. Islamophobia is sometimes caricatured as a "fear of the unknown." More nuanced accounts allow for legitimate apprehension, which may then be aggravated and projected. In such cases putatively irrational fear does not simply emerge as the reflex response to a perceived threat. Rather, what may begin as proportionate apprehension is intensified and manipulated by parties who have some stake in perpetuating fear of a group or entity.[9] The account I have just sketched contrasts somewhat with Terray's diagnosis of Islamophobia in the French case above. For Terray, Islamophobia operates as a complex

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[8] While the limits of space prohibit a more thorough exposition of this tri-focal analytical lens for identifying the complex interrelation of various forms of violence, elsewhere I trace the genealogy of these concepts and demonstrate how they are used by scholars and activists as wide-ranging as Paul Farmer, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Michelle Alexander, Atalia Omer, Jean Zaru, Peter Uvin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cornel West. See Jason A. Springs, "Structural and Cultural Violence in Religion and Peacebuilding," in Atalia Omer, Scott Appleby, and David Little, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 146–181.

[9] For example, Resa Aslan (speaking in public intellectual mode) encapsulated the position in response to the Oak Creek Sikh Temple shooting: "Islamophobia has become so mainstream in this country that Americans have been trained to expect violence against Muslims – not excuse it, but expect it. And that's happened because you have an Islamophobia industry in this country devoted to making Americans think there's an enemy within." Quoted in Samuel G. Freedman, "If the Sikh Temple Had Been a Mosque," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2012. See also, inter alia, Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* (London: Pluto, 2012). As I discuss at length below, Martha Nussbaum takes a nuanced version of this approach in her book *The New Religious Intolerance* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2012), especially chap. 1.

psycho-social process of symbolic projection and scapegoating – a social hysteria that becomes pervasive and diffuse.

Characterizations of Islamophobia as a social pathology or a purely politicized phenomenon (or some mixture of the two) present important points needing closer analysis. Indeed, these views coincide at points with the kind of analysis one might attempt through the lens of "cultural violence" I described above. Cultural violence analysis is concerned to illuminate the ways that various cultural practices and formations – media, political rhetoric and objectives, commercial motivations – may generate and sustain chauvinistic and xenophobic perceptions, passions, and actions by making them appear natural. Yet if the analysis of cultural violence stops at this point, then it remains insufficiently trenchant. It risks offering curative alternatives that treat only the symptoms of the problem.

Recent discourse on Islamophobia in European and US contexts often portrays it as a visceral response to current events, particularly the widespread resurgence of militant religion. Here the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the US provide the primary reference point. Some accounts reach as far back as the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa ordering the death of Salman Rushdie for defaming Islam in *The Satanic Verses* (1989).[10] This orientation positions these trends in a relatively recent frame of reference. As an analytic, this focus on Islamophobia in Europe and the US normalizes inattention to the complex roots of nationalism and risks a sanitation of analysis.[11] In the terms of conflict transformation, it fails to grapple with the deeper relational history of the oppositions in question. It neglects the complex and subtle root system that has sustained more recent and persistent episodes of anti-Muslim prejudice and violence.

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[10] Other events to which generalized anti-Islamic anxieties are indexed include the July 2005 terrorist bombings of the London Underground, the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh in Holland, the Danish cartoon (2005–2006) and "Innocence of Muslims" (2012) controversies, the 2009 Fort Hood (TX) shootings, the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, the 2015 terrorist massacres in San Bernardino (CA) and Paris (including the one at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*), and the 2016 attack in Brussels.

[11] Edward Said meticulously demonstrates how the construction of various conceptions of Islam as threatening Western liberal-democratic societies commenced decades before the attacks of September 11. See Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House, 2008).

Consider, for example, the incisive analysis of Islamophobia as expressed in political cartoons since 9/11 in the text *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy*. The authors, Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, examine Islamophobia as an analytical trope precisely because it points to "the latent sensibilities of … cartoonists (and, by extension, society), who must craft their responses quickly in order to remain current." The authors continue, "The term 'Islamophobia' hopes to suggest just this latency. Its invisible normality makes the antagonism toward Islam and Muslims that is inherent in so much of American mainstream culture difficult to engage, let alone counter."[12]

An analysis so framed is tailored to context and thus slightly resembles analysis framed by "cultural violence." In this vein it asks: How is it that political cartoons reflect unrecognized anti-Muslim sensibilities in the wake of 9/11? How have these cartoons reinforced attitudinal norms? How have these norms elided the context of events that vindicate and exacerbate these sensibilities? And, how do these processes merge to reinforce social patterns that produce inequality, exclusion, and humiliation for Muslims (i.e., structural violence against Muslims)?

Gottschalk and Greenberg consider the 2005–06 Danish cartoon controversy. In this instance, an editor of the Dutch newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* commissioned and published sketches of the Prophet Muhammad that incited outrage among numerous Muslim groups. This eventually led to deadly riots in Damascus, Beirut, Tehran, Kabul, Lahore, and Benghazi. Their brief account helps demystify what the twenty-four-hour news cycle and international media presented as "Muslim rage" in response to fundamental Western commitments to free speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press.[13] Indeed, closer inspection of these events

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[12] Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 7.

[13] For portrayal of this event in popular media, see (among many others): Stefan Theil, "The End of Tolerance: Farewell, Multiculturalism. A Cartoon Backlash Is Pushing Europe to Insist Upon Its Values," *Newsweek*, March 6, 2006; Paul Marshall, "The Mohammed Cartoons; Western Governments Have Nothing to Apologize For," *The Weekly Standard* 11, no. 21 (February 13, 2006); "Muslim Cartoon Fury Claims Lives," *BBC News*, February 6, 2006; "Danish Embassy in Tehran Attacked," *The Guardian*, February 6, 2006; "Protestors Burn Consulate over Cartoon," CNN, February 5, 2006, www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/02/05/cartoon.protests; "Danish Embassy in Beirut Torched," *BBC News*, February 5, 2006; "Death Toll from Afghan Cartoon Protests Rises," *MSNBC*, February 8, 2006, www.nbcnews.com/id/10705393.

reveals that the widespread outrage over the cartoons erupted only long after the paper's editors rebuffed efforts by the Danish Muslims who first filed the complaint to mediate directly with the editors. Likewise, Danish political officials refused several proposals to meet with ten ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries and the Palestinian representative stationed in Copenhagen. They ignored letters from the Arab League and an intergovernmental organization, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation.

Complaints from these Muslim groups made no mention of an alleged "absolute Koranic ban" upon portrayals of the Prophet. The concerns they raised focused on the intentions behind the cartoons to provoke and defame a minority group already disadvantaged and vulnerable within Danish society. They pointed out that publication of the cartoons coincided with, and in many ways reinforced, numerous other instances of anti-Muslim prejudice and violence. These concerns were met by Danish officials with pro forma invocations of the nonnegotiability of free speech in Danish society.[14] Only several months later were the cartoons sent to scholars at al-Azhar University in Cairo and the secretary general of the Arab League in Lebanon, denunciation by whom drew international attention and ignited widespread anger.

As Gottschalk and Greenberg have it, the Islamophobia-inflected coverage is evident in the fact that most popular media accounts focused on the six cities in which deadly violence erupted largely to the exclusion of many other protests in which thousands of Muslims demonstrated peacefully. We learn from their account, moreover, that the editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, the right-leaning daily, had commissioned and committed to publish whatever cartoons were submitted. Yet only three years earlier, he had refused to publish cartoons satirizing the resurrection of Jesus out of concern that it would "provoke an outcry."[15]

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[14] Several Danish imams organized the Committee for the Defense of the Honor of the Prophet, and penned a letter to the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen stating that "Danish press and public representations should not be allowed to abuse Islam in the name of democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights." Rasmussen responded by stating that "Danish society is based upon respect for free speech, religious toleration, and all religions are treated equitably. Free speech is the basis of our democracy. Free speech is far-reaching, and the Danish government has no influence on what the press writes." For a detailed survey of these events, see Jytte Klausen, *The Cartoons that Shook the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 185–200.

[15] Gottschalk and Greenberg, *Islamophobia*, 1–3.

As an intervention in rhetorical impact, this sort of analysis is indispensable. It contextualizes the events and in so doing illuminates voices of moderation attributable to the majority of Muslims but ignored by the popular media.[16] The authors highlight both the hypocrisy of many Danish responses to these events and the inflammatory motivations that precipitated them in the first place.[17]

And yet, on its own, this analysis remains chiefly concerned with recent events. The frame of reference remains 9/11-centric. While it aims to demonstrate how fear of Muslims is amplified in popular media outlets, attending to the Islamophobia in this context overlooks broader historical, social, and political structures that underpin these episodes' popular presentation. The concepts of structural and cultural violence, by contrast, force attention on how these episodes are embedded in deeper dynamics of the extended relational context – dynamics such as orientalism, colonial histories, and nationalism.

When assessed through these lenses, for instance, responding to the Danish cartoon controversy within the frame of "civilizational discourse" (i.e., in terms of clashing civilizations[18]) actually presents an instance of cultural violence. Such an account positions the episode as a collision between irreconcilable civilizational values: Western freedom of speech and expression versus traditional Islam's compulsion to squelch all forms of blasphemy against the Prophet.[19] As should be evident, positioning the episode in this frame obscures the structural conditions in which the

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[16] Ibid., 6.

[17] It is worth pointing out that the satirical approach of the Danish cartoons actually is suggestive of destructive conflict in its aim to outrage and defame through aggressive and relentless mockery. Their parodies of Islamic figures aimed to excoriate and, arguably, to humiliate a target that was already marginalized and vulnerable in that context. This contrasts starkly with Stephen Colbert's use of satire and irony in Chapter 8. Colbert's strategy is potentially transformative of seemingly intransigent oppositions in virtue of avoiding resentment or eliciting revenge, but rather, by satirically engaging "the humorous intensities of the gut."

[18] For the original accounts of this position, see Samuel Huntington," The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), 22–49; and Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, 47–60.

[19] For a textbook account of this framework – one explicitly indebted to Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis – see Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Let Us Have a Voltaire," *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 27–33.

episode occurred. Danish Muslims, like European Muslims more broadly, are already a largely marginalized minority community. They suffer forms of political and social exclusion, and high economic inequality. As Muslims in this context, they suffer stigmatization and humiliation.[20] These were the terms in which Muslim representatives cast their initial efforts to mediate the controversy. Danish officials in effect dismissed efforts to mediate the controversy in these structural terms by appealing to the nonnegotiability of free speech and freedom of the press. In short, this oriented the controversy in terms of a "clash of civilizations" discourse, which in turn camouflaged the forms of structural violence – exclusion, inequality, and humiliation – that framed the circumstances. As I argue below, Danish officials' refusal to address them in fact exacerbated these conditions that promote resentment and radicalization.[21]

Revisiting the French Headscarf Controversy: Civic Nationalism and Violence

Scholars of nationalism distinguish between its ethnic and civic forms. Membership in a nation or group based upon the ethnicity or religion into which someone is born is characterized as ethnic or religious nationalism. By contrast, civic nationalism bases membership in the national group on one's status as a citizen and legally recognized participant in the civic life of the society.[22]

France purports to practice a form of civic nationalism. Religious belief and practice are matters of personal choice that ought to be kept in the private sphere. They understand religious identities to be "communalist" in character, that is, markers for allegiance that contrast to a more basic and encompassing identity of French citizenship.[23] These dimensions of

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[20] For exhaustive documentation, see Jocelyn Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[21] Similar patterns emerged surrounding the earlier Theo Van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali film *Submission*, and later around the Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris. See Medhi Hasan, "As a Muslim, I'm Fed Up with the Hypocrisy of the Free Speech Fundamentalists," *New Statesman*, January 13, 2015, www.newstatesman.com/mehdi-hasan/2015/01/muslim-i-m-fed-hypocrisy-free-speech-fundamentalists.

[22] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 5–9.

[23] Robert O'Brien, *The Stasi Report: The Report of the Committee of Reflections on the Application of the Principle of Secularity in the Republic* (Buffalo,

French civic nationalism reflect distinctively French interpretations of the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which are understood to unify French society. French civic nationalism aims to protect against forms of discrimination that it considers likely to emerge from strongly held and devoutly practiced religious affiliations. And yet, this nationalism becomes deeply prejudicial toward religious forms that resist assimilation to French cultural norms. So conceptualized, French civic nationalism presents itself in conceptions of gender equality, commitments to pluralism, and freedom of conscience, all vindicated in terms of human rights. Yet these terms are deployed in ways that render them vehicles for marginalization. This makes the self-absolving civic–ethnic distinction difficult to sustain. Political theorist Bernard Yack captures the point, writing that while "designed to protect us from the dangers of ethnocentric politics, the civic/ethnic distinction itself reflects a considerable dose of ethnocentrism, as if the political identities of *French* and *American* were not also culturally inherited artifacts, no matter how much they develop and change as they pass from generation to generation."[24]

Islamophobia American Style?

The French case poses a particularly illuminating point of comparison to the situation of Islam in the US. Assessments of Islamophobia in US contexts, construed as a response to drastic events such as 9/11, claim that the American legacy of religious tolerance enables the United States to overcome episodes of Islamophobia in ways for which European countries are not equipped. Are there grounds for thinking that the United States is structurally better than Europe in this regard?

France's antipathy to religious identities that resist domestication and assimilation to French national identity is fairly distinct. Laws outlawing hijab (2004), niqab and burqa (2010)[25] are justified in terms of protecting gender equality, shielding young women from pressure, and preserving public order in response to symbolic "permanent guerilla warfare"

NY: William S. Hein, 2005), 14–60; Patrick Weil, *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–2.

[24] Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation," in Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 103–118 (here 105). Yack expands the implications of these criticisms in *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[25] The hijab is a scarf that covers a woman's head and neck; the niqab is a veil that covers the face; the burqa is a veil that covers head, face, and body.

engaged in by politically minded Muslims who seek to challenge the constitutionally basic principle of *laïcité*.[26] And yet, to their credit, these laws make clear where the French government, and French ethno-religious nationalism, stands.

By contrast, much scholarship devoted to understanding and countering Islamophobia in the United States has been particularly inattentive to the ways that civic nationalism may shade into forms of chauvinistic nationalism. One frequent response invokes the general tolerance of US society as a matrix within which all the initially fear-inspiring "out groups" across US history have slowly but surely integrated, so that it eventually becomes difficult to recall that they were ever "out groups" at all.

Several recent studies illustrate this tendency. Interfaith activist Eboo Patel devotes his book *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* to countering the anti-Muslim activism that erupted in 2010 in response to plans to build a community center (Cordoba House) owned and operated by a Muslim American developer, which would house a Muslim prayer space, three blocks from the World Trade Center in New York City ("Ground Zero"). Reaction to this development by fringe anti-Muslim crusaders such as Pamela Gellner and her organization "Stop the Islamicization of America" was amplified by national news media outlets and political elites as a national controversy. At the height of the controversy, Patel expressed bewilderment at the claim that Ground Zero is "sacred ground." The "sacred ground" of the 9/11 terror attacks is no more, and no less, sacred, he says, than the rest of American soil – "from sea to shining sea."[27] Patel devotes the book to substantiating his basic claim that "in America the forces of inclusion always defeat the forces of intolerance."[28]

To be fair, this line comes from a passage in which Patel admits (with consternation) to "pushing sunshine" while appearing on a CNN broadcast hosted by Christianne Amanpour. And yet, the triumphalist account of religious tolerance in America that this remark encapsulates is consistent with the narrative framing of the book set forth in the introduction:

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[26] O'Brien, *The Stasi Report*, 16–17, 42.
[27] Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2011), xxvii.
[28] Ibid., 67.

The American achievement, while far from perfect, is still remarkable. As Barack Obama said in his inaugural address, "Our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth." What is even more astonishing is our refusal to stand still, to be content with past progress or favorable comparisons to other nations. We constantly seek to improve this pluralist, participatory, patchwork democracy.[29]

Comparably, in *American Grace*, Putnam and Campbell validate a similar narrative (a pivotal source upon which Patel draws heavily to substantiate his account). They conclude that, just as there were "bumps in the road along the way, as evidenced by outbreaks of anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, anti-Mormonism, and any number of other anti-isms," nevertheless, "the national sentiment moved from grudging acceptance of other faiths to a way station of tacit approval to an outright embrace of religious differences as ecumenism took hold in the mid- to late twentieth century."[30]

In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha Nussbaum examines the so-called Ground Zero Mosque episode of 2010 at length to demonstrate why such an event is anomalous in the history of US religious pluralism. "A nation is a narrative," she explains. "A story of what has brought people together and what keeps them together, a story of shared sufferings, joys, and hopes. The story is always dynamic and can be retold in ways that foster inclusion – or, if fear gets the upper hand, exclusion."[31] Nussbaum then explains how the US can overcome its temptation to fear Muslims in ways impossible in European contexts:

European nations tend to conceive of nationhood and national belonging in ethno-religious and cultural-linguistic terms. Thus new immigrant groups, and religious minorities, have difficulty being seen as full and equal members of the nation. All these nations are the heirs of romanticism, with its ideas of blood, soil, and natural belonging. All have or had some type of religious establishment. (One may include the nonstandard case of French laïcité, which is the establishment of nonreligion) … As we've seen, there is another option, realized in a wide range of nations around the world: to define belonging in terms of political ideals, in which immigrants can fully share, despite not sharing the ethnicity, religion, or customs of the majority. Such nations have a far easier time seeing how people who adopt minority

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[29] Ibid., xiv.
[30] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 549–550.
[31] Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance*, 96.

ways of dressing, speaking, and worshipping can nonetheless be fully equal citizens. And they are likely to ponder far more quickly the next step: what is it to create fully equal rights of conscience when majorities arrange things in their own interest.[32]

Here Nussbaum's comparison of the reception of Muslims in contemporary US and European contexts falls along the lines of civic versus ethnoreligious forms of nationalism.

On this account, America's civic nationalism is based on the affirmation of political ideals. In principle, it is equally available to immigrants and nonimmigrant nationals alike. As Nussbaum has it, this fact has been the secret to America's success in expanding religious tolerance. The narratives of religious tolerance in the US offered by Patel, Putnam and Campbell, and Nussbaum share the basic premise that America has achieved something unique in its approach to the inclusion, tolerance, and even celebration of religious difference. This uniqueness is especially apparent in contrast to those of so many European countries, which are said to rely on shared language, ethnicity, and religious identity as bases for national inclusion.

Examining such accounts through the lens of cultural violence brings to light other features they share. It asks if and how telling the story of religious conflict in the US as a slow march toward increasingly inclusive tolerance presupposes and perpetuates forms of national exceptionalism that slip into a variation of religious nationalism. These lenses prompt inquiry into how the stories that a society tells about itself obscure structural forms of religious intolerance and deeper orientalist dispositions that remain unquestioned or even unrecognized. But what exactly does Nussbaum's comparison of "cultural-linguistic" and "civic" forms of nationalism bring to light?

The category of cultural violence helps illuminate the danger that the national story of religious diversity will become a self-aggrandizing legend about the de facto religiously tolerant historical trajectory and character of a society (in this case, the US). If that happens, then religious tolerance has become a feature of that people's self-legitimating myth. Such a myth presents an instance of "cultural violence" in so far as it camouflages, normalizes, or promotes social and political structures that (however inadvertently) exclude or humiliate some members of the society. Here the distinctive religious "melting pot" tolerance of

[32] Ibid., 94–95.

the US comes to be an essential feature of its "exceptionalist" national self-conception.

Analysis through the lens of cultural violence thus questions whether, and to what degree, the self-absolving effects of drawing so clear a partition between ethno-cultural and religious nationalisms, on the one hand, and "civic nationalism," on the other, might take on the function of religious nationalism obscured under "civic" guise. Statistically, US citizens take pride in what they understand to be the religiously diverse character of the United States. And yet, this broadly shared self-conception of the character of American society facilitates religiously intolerant attitudes. It facilitates forgetfulness regarding pre-9/11 currents of suspicion and antipathy toward Muslims dating back several decades, and the more extensive histories behind these trends.[33] Moreover, what is perceived to be an overarching welcoming and inclusive ethos toward "religious others" obscures the real experiences of symbolic exclusion, profiling, surveillance, suspicion, and even unconscious bias.

In *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, sociologist Robert Wuthnow draws upon extensive survey data (1999–2005) that identified conflicting – even contradictory – perceptions of religious diversity and tolerance as features of US national identity. Americans widely report that they are proud of America's capacity to accommodate religious diversity. While 85 percent agreed that religious diversity has been good for America, 20–23 percent of respondents endorsed policies to restrict the rights of minority religious groups (Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims) to meet and worship altogether. About 38 percent of Americans expressed support for initiatives that would make it more difficult for Muslims to settle in the United States, and 47 percent and 57 percent (respectively) associated the words "fanatical" and "close minded" with

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[33] See Said, *Covering Islam*. Said's seminal study traces these currents to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dynamics of Western colonialism and later in Cold War geopolitics. Said's analysis is comparable to the historically distant colonialist dynamics that Joan Scott traces through contemporary French anti-Muslim chauvinism in *Politics of the Veil*. There are numerous developments prior to more recent (yet still well pre-dating 9/11) sources of anti-Muslim sentiments in the US identified with events such as the Arab Oil Embargos of 1967 and 1973 (responding to US involvement in Israel's Six-Day and Yom Kippur wars, respectively), the later oil embargo of 1979, the Iranian Revolution and subsequent US embassy hostage crisis (1979–1981), the suicide bombing of US and French military barracks in Beirut by Islamic Jihadis in 1983, and US involvement in the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988).

Islam. Two-thirds of respondents favored the US government's "keeping a close watch on all foreigners in the United States."[34] A representative 60 percent of the public approved of the US government's collecting information specifically about Muslim religious groups.[35]

Since 2005, statistical surveys have yielded results roughly consistent with those of the Religion and Diversity Survey. They indicate a fairly broad public perception of Islam as tending to promote violence. In 2014, negative attitudes and perceptions of Islam actually reached one of their highest points since 2002. Sixty-two percent of Americans stated they were "very concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism around the world," 53 percent "very concerned about the possibility of rising Islamic extremism in the U.S.," and 50 percent affirmed the view that "Islam is more likely [than other religions] to encourage violence among its followers" (while 39 percent say it is not more likely to do so).[36] As of 2016, 57 percent of Americans think that the values of Islam stand at odds with American values (while 40 percent disagree).[37] These perceptions of the prevalence of Muslim extremism, and the incompatibility of Islamic values and the American way of life, provide further evidence of cultural violence.

For our purposes, the value of Wuthnow's analysis is how it operates, in effect, through a lens of cultural violence. It illuminates what many people believe to be the case about religious tolerance in the United States, and at the same time, illuminates their stated preference for repressive legislation and policies toward different religious identity groups (especially Muslims). Equally significant is the widely reflected understanding of the US as a "Christian nation" founded on Christian principles and strong because of its faith in God, that it continues to be a basically Christian society today, and that its democratic form of government derives from Christianity.[38] I suggest this reflects less a pervasive

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[34] Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, chap. 7.

[35] Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation,'" 161.

[36] Pew Research Center, September 2014, "Growing Public Concern about Rise of Islamic Extremism at Home and Abroad," esp. 1–2, www.people-press.org/2014/09/10/growing-concern-about-rise-of-islamic-extremism-at-home-and-abroad/ (accessed July 19, 2016).

[37] Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, E. J. Dionne, Jr., William A. Galston, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, *How Immigration and Concerns about Cultural Changes are Shaping the 2016 Election: Finding from the 2016 PRRI/Brookings Immigration Survey* (PRRI/Brookings, 2016), 2.

[38] All these statements were affirmed by a majority of Wuthnow's interviewees. See Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation,'" 161.

condition of "Islamophobia" than a set of developments in which a symbolically articulated (exceptionalist) self-conception presents itself as intrinsically tolerant. This presentation thinly veils what are, in fact, chauvinistic attitudes embedded within what functions as a form of civil religion-cum-religious nationalism.

When compared to the far more explicit religious- and ethno-nationalist dynamics displayed toward Muslims in European policy (discriminatory in their own right), the more repressed forms of ethno-religious nationalism in the United States are, comparably, more difficult to discern and overcome. The basic self-conceptual framework of the "religiously tolerant" (speaking of the United States) remains both unchanged and unquestioned. The antecedent frames are not illuminated, but ignored.

This analysis prompts the further question: What does the comparatively extensive attention devoted to the Cordoba House episode – through sensationalism in the media, and by political figures like Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, and Barack Obama, but also a sustained focus upon this episode by activists (e.g., Patel) and scholars (e.g., Nussbaum) – mean, while little attention was paid to the thirty-six other concurrent cases of Muslim prayer spaces and mosques across the United States that were encountering varying degrees of public opposition?[39]

Nussbaum is emphatic that one finds in the United States nothing even remotely approaching the prohibition of Muslim religious dress in public, as is found in France, or Switzerland's nation-wide ban of Muslim minarets.[40] Prima facie, this is true. And yet, the power of cultural norms may function with exclusionary force that approximates formal legal prohibitions (e.g., headscarf bans) precisely because such norms are less conspicuous. Examples in the United States are decentralized, not legally encoded. But they nonetheless exert powerful pressures, perhaps for Muslims citizens to be inconspicuous, chilling dissent or protest even in response to the truncation of civil rights or subjection to quasi-legal treatment (e.g., profiling and surveillance). What happens when we deploy lenses of structural and cultural violence to these dynamics?

[39] Opposition to Muslim communities happened concurrently in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Controversies over Mosques and Islamic Centers across the U.S." (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2012).

[40] Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance*, 13.

If we examine in greater detail efforts to impede or derail the construction of mosques and Islamic community centers, a finer-grained picture comes into view. This picture challenges any self-congratulatory conceptions of the US as a bastion of progressively expanding religious tolerance. In fact, obstruction to mosque construction in the United States only occasionally takes the guise of vocal anti-Muslim xenophobia. When it does, it is renounced as hateful and intolerant or challenged legally as formal discrimination. Instead, obstruction and opposition tend to be ad hoc, bureaucratic, and procedural. It occurs under the auspices of ensuring that zoning regulation technicalities are enforced, concerns over increased traffic, parking restrictions, noise,[41] impact of reduced property values, and objections to negative aesthetic impact that a minaret and/or dome will have on the immediate surroundings.[42]

These modes of obstruction are decentralized, regionally inflected, and ad hoc. As such, they contrast with the national legal prohibitions that one finds in France and Switzerland. Many of these efforts to obstruct mosque construction have been successfully challenged and overcome in court.[43] And yet, at the same time, many have succeeded in discouraging, derailing, or at least altering initiatives to build Islamic community centers and mosques around the United States.[44] In some cases, this has been

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[41] This happened, for instance, at the Islamic Center of the South Bay in Lomita, California, and Al-Nur Islamic Center in Ontario, California.

[42] For instance, at the Mercy Foundation, Inc. in Florence, KY, and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Walkersville, MD. In fact, the US Justice Department opened twenty-eight investigations of efforts to obstruct mosque and Islamic center construction in the decade following September 11, 2001. See Sharon Otterman, "A Planned Mosque Inches Along, but Critics Remain," *New York Times*, September 7, 2012.

[43] Robert J. Lopez, "Federal Lawsuit over Proposed Lomita Islamic Center Settled," *L.A. Times*, February 4, 2013. "The Islamic Center of the South Bay had sought to build a two-story mosque on the property to replace several aging structures that had been used for prayer and community services. But the City Council voted 4–0 to deny the application, citing concerns by neighbors regarding increased traffic on the site at Walnut Street near Pacific Coast Highway. The vote came despite a city study that concluded the project would improve traffic flow to adjacent streets. The denial prompted a lawsuit by the Los Angeles Office of the Council on American–Islamic Relations and a civil rights law firm, which alleged that the city had discriminated against the Islamic Center." Subsequent investigation and a law suit by the US Justice Department resulted in settlement with the city.

[44] For instance, the Muslim Educational Cultural Center of America (MECCA) in Willowbrook, IL. The DuPage County Development Committee voted

effected informally: Muslim communities and developers have been dis-
suaded from exercising their formal rights by the prospects of protracted
legal quagmires and local antagonisms.[45]

 In short, structural and cultural violence lenses caution that what may
appear to be the clear explanation for conflict may itself be implicated in
the social structures and cultural narratives prevalent in the socio-political
context. Such explanations risk offering a merely cosmetic treatment
of a condition that actually infuses the structural features of a society,
and is all the more difficult to detect in virtue of legitimating narratives
(e.g., "that in America the forces of inclusion always defeat the forces of
intolerance"[46]). In so far as many particular episodes of conflict such as
the Ground Zero mosque run their course and die down, an American
exceptionalist narrative reasserts the overarching trajectory of American

down a proposed sixty-nine-foot dome and a seventy-nine-foot minaret, as
well as revised proposals for structures of fifty and sixty feet, respectively.
"Representatives from MECCA, however, complained that neighbors who
objected to the mosque proposal last year were using the debate on the dome
and minaret to continue their opposition to the mosque as a whole. MECCA
planning consultant Joe Abel, who also is the retired director of the county's
development department, insisted that the likelihood of neighbors being able
to see the dome and minaret was low." Bob Goldsborough, "DuPage Board
Rejects Dome and Minaret for Mosque near Willowbrook," *Chicago Tribune*,
March 13, 2012.

[45] For instance, the Hampshire Mosque in Amherst, MA, and the Islamic
Center of Williamson County, TN. "The plan to derail a proposed mosque
in Brentwood, TN was simple but effective. Through e-mails, blogs and word
of mouth, opponents told friends and neighbors they were suspicious of the
mosque and feared its leaders had ties to terrorist organizations. They encour-
aged citizens to write letters to the city commission expressing their concerns,
including worries about traffic and flooding. It worked. On Wednesday night,
the mosque's organizers admitted defeat. They withdrew their application to
rezone 14 acres on Wilson Pike for a house of worship. Community opposition
and the $450,000 cost of building a turn lane made the project untenable …
To allay neighbors' fears, the Islamic Center agreed to a series of restrictions
on the site. The mosque would have been relatively small, with a prayer hall
for about 325 people and a fellowship hall and kitchen for meals and gather-
ings. The mosque would not have had outside loudspeakers to broadcast a
call to prayer and few outside lights. 'We started this in very good faith,' [the
project's spokesperson] said. 'We had a neighborhood meeting, and we thought
this would be a friendly thing. Instead of that, it turned out to be a very angry
thing.'" Bob Smietana, "Brentwood Mosque Not Alone in Defeat: Plans for
Places of Worship Face Growing Resistance," *The Tennessean*, May 23, 2010.

[46] Patel, *Sacred Ground*, 67.

religious tolerance, reinforcing the abnormal character of any particular incident. The danger is that any actual treatment of religious intolerance in US society remains at the surface level and fails to descend to the difficult work of addressing the root system – structural and cultural – of the nature and basis of religious intolerance in the United States. Lyn Neal and John Corrigan have sharpened what is at stake. "American religious history," they write,

> often reads something like a Garrison Keillor story where the religion is nice, its practitioners are upstanding, and the nation is above average. The dominance and celebratory nature of this narrative obscures important elements in the history of the United States. It prevents us from seeing the reality and persistence of religious intolerance in the nation's past and present. Even as religious diversity has been a consistent feature of American religious life, so too has religious intolerance … Failure to see and thus grapple with the persistent reality of religious intolerance in the United States … creates an inability to recognize how religious intolerance is disseminated and replicated … It then becomes easy to write off intolerant acts or events as aberrant and random, rather than as constituent parts of a larger historical trajectory. Equally troubling, it fuels apathy about the protection of religious rights.[47]

Examining religious intolerance in America with an eye toward healthy conflict problematizes the celebratory narrative of which Corrigan and Neal write here. The typical responses to individual episodes of religious intolerance can be recognized as degenerative and "unproductive." Instead, promoting healthy conflict requires taking these instances as opportunities to study the recurring patterns in such cases: an instance of conflict erupts, is fixed upon and sensationalized as a controversy or threat in the twenty-four-hour news cycle, and is exacerbated by extremist voices, who are then countered by others calling for tolerance of the identities in question.

One variation on this pattern runs as follows. Responding to a specific episode of controversy or conflict involving Muslims, interlocutors near one end of the ideological spectrum vilify Islam as intrinsically intolerant of non-Islamic identities, and of "American freedom" in particular. This inspires reaction from their ideological opponents, who are quick to absolve Islam of the charge of precipitating the conflict. The former

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[47] John Corrigan and Lynn Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8. Corrigan and Neal offer an extensive documentary history that counters the exceptionalist account of the US as a distinctively religiously tolerant society.

introduce a contrast between Muslims and non-Muslims that is clearly invidious; the latter, often in response to the former, attempt to altogether disassociate the conflict from religious identities. In a well-intended effort to mitigate the conflict, this strategy ultimately flattens or reduces the contrasting identities involved.[48] In so doing, this pattern of engagement forestalls the possibility of healthy, or at least potentially productive, conflict.

Contemporary US politics is rife with examples reflecting this pattern. In the throes of the "Ground Zero mosque" controversy, among many similarly minded public commentators, Newt Gingrich declared that "America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization."[49] This assertion was countered publicly, in effect, by Barack Obama's absolution of Islam from the events of 9/11. President Obama began by asserting that "Ground Zero is, indeed, hallowed ground." But at the same time, he continued, "This is America. And our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are … Al Qaeda's cause is not Islam – it's a gross distortion of Islam. These are not religious leaders – they're terrorists who murder innocent men and women and children."[50] Further examples of this sentiment might be President Obama's disassociation of Islam from the beheading of press and aid workers by soldiers associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS),[51] or George W. Bush's declaration

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[48] I draw the modes of comparison integral to this pattern of conflict from Kelsay, "Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, Contemporary Islam," which I explicated in Chapter 6.

[49] Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance*, 209–213.

[50] *Washington Post* Editor, "Obama's Remarks about Ground Zero Mosque: The Transcript," August 13, 2010, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2010/08/obamas-remarks-about-ground-ze.html. On the day following these remarks, Obama clarified that he had not commented (and would not comment) on whether or not it would be advisable or wise to build a Muslim prayer space near Ground Zero. In fact, a CNN public opinion poll conducted in August 2010 found that the majority of Americans opposed the placement of a multifaith community center (containing a Muslim prayer space) near Ground Zero in spite of America's tradition of religious pluralism and protection of religious freedom. Sixty-eight percent of respondents opposed the plan to "build a mosque two blocks from the site in New York City where the World Trade Center used to stand." CNN, Opinion Research Poll, August 6–10, 2010.

[51] Several years later, Obama similarly sought to distance Islam from the beheading of press and aid workers by soldiers associated with the Islamic State in

that "Islam is peace" in the days immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

It is crucial to discern interlocking patterns of invidious and moderating characterizations of religious opposition, as is evident here between Gingrich and Obama. How do invidious comparisons inspire – and perhaps operate symbiotically with – counter-assessments that tend to flatten detailed differences? Indeed, understanding of such differences is crucial to facilitate productive conflict. Thus, such contrasting characterizations actually perpetuate the patterns of unproductive conflict.[52]

For example, the fact that the Park 51 project (the "Ground Zero Mosque") was not immediately derailed amid widespread, highly vocal, even frenzied anti-Muslim opposition does not indicate that that conflict was navigated productively. In this case, the original proposal for a fifteen-story Islamic community center and prayer space was eventually scrapped and reconceived. At first, it was scaled back to be a three-story museum of Islamic art that would include a prayer space. Later, in 2015, the Muslim developer of the project, Sharif El-Gamal, decided to devote the space entirely to a high-rise condominium facility.[53] The proposal to build a museum, while seemingly a compromise, left the relational patterns and root systems of conflict unrecognized and unaddressed. Hence, similar events are likely to recur, and the effects of the conflict to persist, unless they are made explicit – a necessary precondition for understanding, challenging, and, as far as possible, redirecting them.

From a conflict transformation perspective, the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy was a lost opportunity. The conflict that erupted was explicit, heated, at times intimidating, and protracted. Yet by bringing latent prejudices to the surface, it provided a window into relational patterns that are typically obscured. These patterns recur in large part because of holes in the stories that the US populace tells itself

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Iraq and Syria: "Now let's make two things clear: ISIL is not Islamic. No religion condones the killing of innocents, and the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim." Barack Obama, "Transcript of Obama's Remarks on the Fight against ISIS," *New York Times*, September 10, 2014.

[52] Kelsay, "Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, and Contemporary Islam," 698.

[53] Sharon Otterman, "Developer Scales Back Plans for Muslim Center Near Ground Zero," *New York Times*, April 29, 2014; Oshrat Carmiel, "Luxe Condos at 'Ground Zero Mosque' Site Aim High on Pricing," *Bloomberg Pursuits*, September 25, 2015, www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-25/45-park-place-pricing-ground-zero-mosque-condos-aim-above-market-rate.

about its religiously tolerant identity and natural tendency to absorb religious difference. This "exceptionalist" self-conception was clearly exacerbated by the 9/11-centric experience of itself as a victimized society (e.g., "Ground Zero" as "hallowed ground") – another self-conception that needs to be situated against its deeper historical background. Perhaps most importantly, this occasion presents an opportunity to probe, challenge, and alter the ways that prevailing conceptions of American religious tolerance dysfunctionally assimilate religious difference.

Beyond the Myth of the American Religious Free Market: From Lazy to Strenuous Pluralism

Structural and cultural violence lenses prompt analysts to ask – how do conceptions of tolerance in the US assimilate difference? To what degree might melting pot multiculturalism work insofar as it silences many meaningful differences and suppresses conflicts that may persist? What are the presuppositions of conditions under which such tolerance will emerge and oppositions be overcome?

One central presupposition of the US exceptionalist narrative portrays US public life as an "open market" of religious identities. Values of tolerance and mutual respect for religious diversity facilitate free choice of religious affiliation. In the metaphor of America's religious free market, this translates to "low brand loyalty" on the "demand side," which necessitates competition and innovation on the supply side.[54] In other words, separation of church and state functions as a "constitutionally mandated free market for religion."[55]

The lack of formal state institutionalization means that religious institutions must compete for membership. This creates conditions of a "religious free market." Market dynamics require that religious communities diversify and innovate if they are to survive and grow. On this account, the laissez-faire cultural market's "invisible hand" coordinates their

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[54] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 148.

[55] This account is especially evident in John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin, 2009). It surfaces with far more subtlety in Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, and is preceded by such studies as Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

survival (or demise).[56] Thus, US culture progressively comes to include, tolerate, and eventually absorb oppositional religious "Otherness."

And yet, much as "free market" economics asserts the virtues of the market's invisible hand only inasmuch as it obscures countless ulterior influences, so the cultural market of religious identities is freighted with histories and symbolically charged modes of civil religion that make participation in the cultural market for religion less than purely equitable. If it is indeed the case that the distinctive mode of "civic nationalism" that Nussbaum ascribes to the United States is (as I have argued) actually quite religiously inflected, then the socio-political framework in which the putative "cultural market for religion" plays out in American society is not as "free" as this feature of American exceptionalism would indicate. In fact, this context is quite normatively charged, and in ways that reflect the so-called "Judeo-Christian" national character. Indeed, as some have suggested, even America's secularism is "Judeo-Christian secularism."[57]

Characterizing US society as reflecting a "religious free market" invites the temptation of "lazy pluralism." It is to suggest a celebratory self-conception according to which religious identities, institutions, and practices coexist and intermingle. It is to attribute their integration over time to neoliberal market competition and the "survival and flourishing of the fittest." This narrative becomes dangerous when it interweaves with a civic-nationalist hegemony. Recurring patterns of religious intolerance, and warnings about the dangers of such an account of pluralism, encounter assertions and studies aiming to demonstrate that these are actually anomalous episodes in a robust US culture of religious tolerance. On this view, given enough time and interreligious exposure, education, and dialogue, contact between members of different religious traditions in the melting pot of the United States will naturally overcome intolerance. The suggestion that "inter-religious mixing, mingling, and marrying [have] kept America's religious melting pot from boiling over"[58] presupposes that members of different religious communities already share many background commitments in common.

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[56] In his classic text, *The Wealth of Nations* (Book 4, chap. 2), Adam Smith identified an "invisible hand" as the market force that brings equilibrium between supply and demand, and naturally promotes ends that are collectively desirable. If every person pursues his or her self-interest individually, this will produce an overall effect that promotes what is the collective interest of the society.

[57] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 37–45.

[58] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 548.

For example, in the days immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, President George W. Bush juxtaposed "American values" and "the American way of life" with marginal factions in Islam that are uniquely "militant," those frequently referred to as "fanatical Muslims" or "Islamic jihadists." Bush was quick to point out that it is easy to be both a good Muslim and a good American. Extremist Islamic factions, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, or terrorist Islamic groups, such as Al Qaeda, he claimed, have hijacked a religion that is essentially peaceful. At its core, Bush asserted, *true* Islam is a religion of peace. Violent struggle in the name of Islam is a contortion of that tradition.[59]

As a matter of historical record, the latter claim is not correct. Islam contains a "just war" tradition of argument that is comparable to the "just war" tradition in Christianity. Debate about when it is permissible or necessary to employ force and coercion, or enter into violent conflict, has been central to mainstream currents in both religious traditions. Resorting to war or violent conflict interweaves with the peaceful features of both traditions. At the same time, even Al Qaeda employs "just war" reasoning based on the Islamic tradition.[60] Particular people and groups perpetrate violence in the name of Islam just as others do based on reasoning and symbol systems derived from Christianity.

One rhetorical effect of Bush's claims about the true essence of Islam is to expand the canopy of US religious pluralism from the Judeo-Christian parameters that governed it throughout most of the twentieth century to encompass the even broader category of "Abrahamic faiths" or "religions of The Book." These designations refer to the fact that the Torah, the Christian Old Testament, and the Koran each identify Abraham as their founding patriarch. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share basic values when interpreted within a framework of Western ethical monotheism: respect for the basic sanctity of life, grounded in its creation by a benevolent and loving Creator who mandates respect between people in the form of "the golden rule," and instructs toleration of difference in the name of neighborly love. Since "the American way of life" purports to be grounded in these values,

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[59] In an address to the Islamic Center in Washington on September 17, 2001, George W. Bush declared that "these acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith … The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace."

[60] For a meticulous account of this, see John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

"good Islam" fits comfortably under its canopy. True Islam – the argument runs – should have no difficulty affirming the general values of ethical monotheism, or participating in the rites and symbols of US civic life that facilitate the mixing and intermingling of religions. Conversely, US citizens should have no difficulty affirming their good Muslim fellow citizens. However, as numerous scholars have demonstrated, the distinction between "good" and "bad" Muslim is far from self-evident or benign. It produces a *hyper-visibility* – at least for the purpose of sorting good from bad – that facilitates suspicion, profiling, and sometimes, surveillance.[61]

As statistics suggest, the US population generally lacks familiarity with Islam, and even with Muslim and Arab Americans.[62] Studies show that support for curtailing Muslims' rights – limiting their freedom of religious expression, preventing Muslims from immigrating to the US, and favoring religious profiling and other emergency measures (directed especially toward Muslim citizens) – is correlated with a self-reported lack of knowledge about Islam and unfamiliarity with Muslim people. In light of this fact, it seems reasonable to assume that the explicit, sometimes fervent, antipathy toward Islam across the US would soften if people would learn more about the history and character of Islam, and get to know their Muslim neighbors. Programs that promote these objectives in the name of tolerance, respect, and even celebrating diversity might contribute to building a sustainable and just peace.[63] This can be no foregone

[61] For the deep background of the dichotomy, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); for a powerful exposition of that dichotomy's effects in the post-9/11 US, see Nadine Naber, "Introduction: Arab Americans and U.S. Racial Formations," in *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, ed. Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 1–45.

[62] "Fifty-five percent say they lack a good, basic understanding of the teachings and beliefs of Islam. Half say they do not personally know anyone who is a Muslim. At the same time, familiarity with Islam has grown by 18 points since 2002, and personally knowing a Muslim is up by 8 points since [2001]." ABC News/Washington Post Poll, "Views of Islam," Wednesday, September 8, 2010.

[63] For constructive efforts along these lines, see Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001), 685–704; Abu-Nimer, "The Miracles of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue: Are You a Believer?" and Marc Gopin, "The Use of the Word and Its Limits: A Critical Evaluation of Religious Dialogue as Peacemaking," in David Smock, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: Unites States Institute of Peace, 2002), 15–32, 33–46.

conclusion, of course. The effects of any such education depend upon the aims and content of the programs in question. Promoting even basic literacy regarding a world-historical and cultural phenomenon as vast and internally variable as "Islam" inevitably involves selective presentation.

Similarly, interacting and living together with particular Muslims in one's near proximity is no sure path to reducing antipathy toward Islam or Muslims, per se. The social contact theory of prejudice reduction can just as easily produce the perception that "not *all* Muslims are 'bad' Muslims." It might produce even more self-absolving reasoning that says, in effect, "I am not prejudiced against Muslims; after all, some of my best friends (or near neighbors) are Muslims," while leaving expansive biases (explicit and unconscious) intact.

As we saw in my discussion of the virtues of moral imagination in Chapter 2, any better getting to know a neighbor (or, in this case, a neighbor's religion) is liable to keep the basic oppositions in place if that engagement is not rigorously dialogical and multi-directional in nature. Such engagement should inspire critical introspection, and self-reflexivity, for mutual learning to occur. This is likely to expose one's own flaws and culpability, and must be accompanied by an intentional effort to adjust one's attitudes and prejudices.

In summarizing his own analysis of a tepid approach to the challenges of religious diversity – what I call the "lazy pluralism" promoted by the narrative of the American "free market" of religious tolerance – Robert Wuthnow highlights several dangers. In quite sobering terms, he writes:

On one hand, we say casually that we are tolerant and have respect for people whose religious traditions happen to be different from our own. On the other hand, we continue to speak as if the nation is (or should be) a Christian nation, founded on Christian principles, and characterized by public references to the trappings of this tradition. This kind of schizophrenia encourages behavior that no well-meaning people would want if they stopped to think about it. It allows the most open-minded among us to get by without taking religion seriously at all. It permits religious hate crimes to occur without much public attention or outcry. The members of new minority religions experience little in the way of genuine understanding. The church-going majority seldom hear anything to shake up their comforting convictions. The situation is rife with misunderstanding and, as such, holds little to prevent outbreaks of religious conflict and bigotry. It is little wonder that many Americans retreat into their private worlds whenever spirituality is mentioned. It is just easier to do that than to confront the hard questions about religious truth and our national identity.[64]

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[64] This paragraph follows the analysis conducted in Wuthnow's *America and the Challenge of Religious Diversity*, 6–7. For full results of the "Religion and Diversity Survey," see: www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/DIVERSTY.asp.

Wuthnow's warning here is not against self-contradictory beliefs or inconsistent characterizations of American society per se. He is not simply opposing abstracted cognitive dissonance reflected in the ways that many American Christians herald religious pluralism as a great achievement of the US, while at the same time harboring intolerant attitudes (or unconscious biases) toward religious minority groups, supporting exclusionary policies, and voting en masse for politicians who campaign and govern in markedly ethno-nationalist terms.[65] His analysis compels

[65] Anti-Muslim rhetoric and campaign promises characterized Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Similarly, efforts to enact anti-Muslim policies characterized the first year of his presidential administration. See Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, "'I Think Islam Hates Us': A Timeline of Trump's Comments about Islam and Muslims," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/?utm_term=.d010e95d11f0. White evangelical Christians (26 percent of the US electorate) voted en masse for Trump (a record 81 percent), while 60 percent of white Catholics voted for him. Pew Research Center surveyed white evangelical lay people regarding which issues were "very important" to them in deciding how to cast their votes: Terrorism (89 percent) and the economy (87 percent) ranked higher than Supreme Court appointments (70 percent) and abortion (52 percent). The results contrasted distinctly with the results from evangelical religious leaders, for whom Supreme Court appointments and abortion topped the list. Indeed, white evangelicals who are avid churchgoers were most likely to approve of Trump's job performance through the first 100 days of his presidency (at that point Trump's approval rating was 39 percent among the general population; by contrast, 64 percent of white evangelical Christians strongly approved of his performance, and 78 percent approved overall). Most white evangelical Christians (74 percent) report sustained support for Trump's ban on immigration from seven Muslim majority countries. Roughly the same percentage remained concerned about the likelihood of religious extremist acts committed in the name of Islam around the world, and in the US. See Gregory A. Smith, "Most White Evangelicals Approve of Trump Travel Prohibition and Express Concerns about Extremism," Pew Research Center, February 27, 2017, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/most-white-evangelicals-approve-of-trump-travel-prohibition-and-express-concerns-about-extremism. See also Gregory A. Smith, "Among White Evangelicals, Regular Churchgoers Are the Most Supportive of Trump," Pew Research Center, April 26, 2017, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump; and Myrian Renaud, "Myths Debunked: Why Did White Evangelical Christians Vote for Trump?" The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion, January 19, 2017, https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/myths-debunked-why-did-white-evangelical-christians-vote-trump (accessed July 6, 2017).

us to identify specific dysfunctional behaviors and protracted relational patterns related to (or perhaps exacerbated by) the self-deceiving, contradictory self-conceptions of American religious identities. I made the case above that those contradictions become vitiating, and indeed especially dangerous, when woven into – and re-enforced by – self-congratulatory and triumphalist forms of US (exceptionalist) religious nationalism. Such narratives camouflage and justify countless structural and cultural forms of religious intolerance, and tacit and unconscious biases. They promote a languid approach to dealing with the persistent challenges of religious diversity on the presupposition that, with time, such conflicts will – perhaps slowly, but nevertheless, surely – work themselves out with a generous dose of "American grace."

If we reflect on widespread hostility to Islam in the US over the last half century in light of concerns about structural and cultural violence, a different story emerges. Analysis through these lenses indicates that successful conflict transformation in contemporary US contexts of religious intolerance requires far more than campaigning for tolerant coexistence. It requires more than encouraging fellow citizens to improve their general literacy about Islam, or to better get to know their Muslim neighbors. It requires more than engaging in interreligious dialogue with fellow religious moderates and pluralistically inclined coreligionists. Indeed, these efforts may in fact perpetuate many of the dysfunctions and forms of violence of which Corrigan and Neal warn above.

Healthy conflict recognizes that the kind of relationship-building necessary to overcome recurrent patterns of anti-Muslim racism that pervade US society will be difficult. They will require many of the same rigors of self-inventory and change that are necessary to cultivate ally-ship across racial lines in a society that manifests a deep history of white supremacy (past and present, explicit and structural). This means recognizing and seeking to understand (to the extent that one can) the vulnerability that others suffer. It requires, as Gandhi said, "turning the searchlight inward" – self-reflexivity regarding how one may be (however unintentionally or naively) a beneficiary of the vulnerability and exclusion that a marginalized group endures. It requires incisive reflection of the kind I described in Part I, integrating social theory and moral imagination, to uncover the habits, self-conceptions, and relational patterns (and the deep histories that embed each of these) that constitute the elements of conflict and ensuing marginalization of groups. As I have argued regarding anti-Muslim racism, this requires interrogating how ethno-religious nationalist self-conceptions that present themselves as benignly "civic"

nationalism underwrite and perpetuate anti-Muslim racism throughout the US. And, of course, it requires the search for solidarity in fighting against forms of injustice, scapegoating, and unjust laws and policies. But this requires the hard work of cultivating relationships of mutual recognition, respect, and reciprocal accountability. It requires awareness that any such relationships will be crucibles of meaningful conflict in the future as well. It requires dealing soberly with the possibility that efforts to sustain strenuous religious pluralism will always be partial. At times, they may fail. In any case, eventual achievement of religious tolerance can be no foregone conclusion.

The relationship-building I describe here contrasts starkly with the "inter-religious mixing, mingling, and marrying [that have, putatively] kept America's religious melting pot from boiling over."[66] By attending to structural and cultural violence, we can uncover and resist hidden forms of violence and exclusion that the "melting pot" narrative occludes. Such attention forces us to actively participate in a strenuous pluralism.

Recognition of these dangers provides a vital first step in the processes of conflict transformation. It brings to the surface latent and indistinct elements of deeper and more pervasive modes of intolerance – repressed conflict and structural and cultural violence – that perpetuate degenerative conflict. It helps illuminate the difficulty of dislodging the stories a society tells itself about itself and that keep majority groups fixed into behavioral patterns that are prone to degenerative forms of conflict. Once these difficulties and relational patterns are made explicit, and their role in perpetuating destructive conflict is analyzed, it becomes possible to think and act differently, in ways that foster new and healthier forms of relationship, including healthier forms of conflict. These will likely not eliminate the oppositions of conflicts in question. But they will make it possible to engage such oppositions in ways that promote more constructive and more just responses.

Reimagining Religious Intolerance: Strenuous Pluralism and Identity Innovation

The relation of structural violence to cultural and direct forms of violence affords a complex conception of individual agency and institutional context. Here the individual is a responsible actor acting intentionally. At the same time, individual agency is interwoven with socio-political structures

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[66] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 548.

and cultural contexts. This means that the actor may be implicated in perpetuating forms of violence unconsciously. The cultural dimensions of agency mean that formation of consciousness, perception, and understanding is a product of cultural processes of acculturation and cultural training. These deeply shape basic modes of perception and understanding. And yet, the individual-agential dimension remains in play. It is possible to adopt explicit attitudes and perceptions, and to evaluate, challenge, and alter them. On this account, forms of resistance are a real possibility in and through the structures within which an agent or group lives and moves. Structures, after all, can also be assessed and changed.

Appeals to exceptional individual examples as evidence that explicit forms of exclusion have been overcome often serve to preserve dynamics of structural and cultural violence. The lenses of structural and cultural violence help to expose such claims – demonstrations that some members of the designated group have normalized or even "risen above" adverse circumstances – as an ingredient essential to maintaining forms of humiliation, exclusion, and scapegoating. The exception is enlisted as proof that the structures are not in themselves exclusionary and humiliating. This is then taken to justify leaving them in place.

In the French case, for instance, Muslim residents and citizens of France can demonstrate that they are "the good kind of Muslim" by demonstrating that they are "bad" or "indifferent" practitioners of Islam. They do this by electing not to practice Islam, or by practicing sporadically and without dedication or passion, thereby demonstrating that their Muslim identity is sufficiently subordinate to their participation in the national culture. This is not simply a segregation of religious practice and identity into nonpublic spaces of personal life. It is, rather, what some have called the "laicization of behavior."[67]

The "laicization of behavior" operates bi-directionally. It operates among French Muslim citizens to prove that they can become authentically French, even though they are Muslim. Yet it also serves as a metric state actors use to determine which Muslims are insufficiently assimilated and which are "suspicious" and thus candidates for profiling. Such metrics are also used by immigration officers to determine whether immigrants applying for citizenship have demonstrated "sufficient assimilation," and

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[67] John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 193–196; Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 82–85.

thus, whether their applications are refused.[68] This analysis displays some of the many ways in which a socio-political institutional context actually shapes and forms individual selves.

   Of course, the institutional context's impact in shaping and forming individual selves does not leave the individual purely passive. While the "laicization of behavior" might be embraced, it might also be resisted or contested. Embracing institutional prescription can render certain institutional benefits (for instance, citizenship), but it may place individuals at risk of the psychological, spiritual, and emotional effects of structural violence. It may lead to an individual or group's internalization of the dominant metrics and then promote self-conceptualization and self-measurement in those terms, even as the individual or group strives to demonstrate how thoroughly they have assimilated to the identity, requirements, and expectations of the cultural-institutional context.

   One encounters an example in the story of Muhammad Boyeuri – the young Dutch Muslim who, after having embraced a form of radical jihadi Muslim identity, murdered the Dutch film maker and provocateur, Theo Van Gogh. As a second generation Dutch Moroccan, initially Boyeuri invested tremendous effort in assimilating to Dutch society. As Ian Buruma relates his story, Boyeuri can be described as exemplifying a common pattern among second-generation European Muslim immigrants of *over*-performing in his effort to assimilate to Dutch culture in response to the felt need to outperform his native Dutch contemporaries for recognition and professional employment.[69] The need to over-assimilate emerged from his starting from a position of social disadvantage in virtue of being Dutch Muslim. By Buruma's account, the zeal with which Boyeuri sought to assimilate, together with his persistent failure to find full acceptance by mainstream Dutch society, resulted in frustration and resentment. Both were pivotal in his eventual turn to radical Islam. Both were precursors to his explicitly stated hatred of Dutch society and his murder of a figure he claimed to exemplify the excesses of that society: the anti-Muslim film maker and provocateur Theo Van Gogh, whose television short, *Submission: Part 1* (2004, written by Dutch MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali) Boyeuri claimed to be emblematic of the anti-Muslim defamation pervasive in that society.

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[68] Bowen offers numerous examples in both directions in *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*. See also Katrin Bennhold, "A Veil Closes France's Door to Citizenship," *New York Times*, July 19, 2008.

[69] Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam, and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

In the United States, comparable dynamics take forms arguably less conspicuous than this. But in the experience of many Muslim Americans, these dynamics occur just as profoundly. Especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, Muslim and Arab Americans have been subject to frequent profiling, suspicious treatment, detention, discrimination, and random acts of violence.[70] There are crucial differences to be considered when comparing European and US contexts in terms of how individuals are shaped by their interactions with institutions. The majority of Muslims in the European Union (roughly 5 percent of the EU's 425 million residents) are socioeconomically marginalized and mostly immigrants. Muslims in the United States, by contrast, tend to

[70] Some compare this treatment with that of Japanese Americans during World War II. Facing suspicion much like that confronting Muslim Americans today, Japanese Americans, more than half of whom were US citizens, were relocated and interned in "war relocation camps." This constituted a much more direct and visible form of marginalization of a group whose identity was perceived to overlap with that of the external enemy. Members of that group were thus considered a potential threat to the safety and well-being of the nation, and subjected to discrimination for the duration of the war. As of 2012, Gallup Poll surveys indicated that the only religious identification that US voters found more objectionable than Islam (four in ten would refuse to vote for a self-identified Muslim presidential candidate) is atheism (4.3 in 10 would refuse to vote for a self-identified atheist). Jeffrey M. Jones, "Atheists, Muslims See Most Bias as Presidential Candidates," Gallup, June 21, 2012. The month of Ramadan in 2012 witnessed an outbreak of violence against Muslim Americans and Arab Americans in the US (seven mosques attacked, one Muslim cemetery desecrated) that had not been seen since the months immediately following September 11, 2001, or the weeks following the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, when many initially supposed that Muslim terrorists were responsible for the attack. Yasmin Amer and Moni Basu, "Spate of Attacks Near Ramadan Trouble U.S. Muslims," CNN, August 22, 2012, www.cnn.com/2012/08/18/us/ramadan-violence. For extensive documentation of profiling and surveillance of American Muslims – and commentary on the persistent ineffectiveness of those tactics in finding potential Muslim radicals and terrorists among the groups they surveil – see Hilal Elver, "Racializing Islam before and after 9/11: From Melting Pot to Islamophobia," *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 157–174; Adam Goldman and Matt Apuzzo, "NYPD: Muslim Spying Led to No Leads, Terror Cases," Associated Press, August 21, 2012, www.ap.org/Content/AP-In-The-News/2012/NYPD-Muslim-spying-led-to-no-leads-terror-cases; and Goldman and Apuzzo, "With CIA Help, NYPD Moves Covertly in Muslim Areas," Associated Press, August 23, 2011, www.ap.org/Content/AP-In-The-News/2011/With-CIA-help-NYPD-moves-covertly-in-Muslim-areas.

have more education and higher income than the general non-Muslim population.[71]

Despite this demographical difference, in a series of studies on the formation and experiences of Muslim Americans in the United States since 9/11, Sunaina Maira, Sally Howell, and Amaney Jamal found that within Muslim American communities in Houston and Detroit, American Muslims experience "disciplinary inclusion." This refers to "a citizenship style in which every act of recognition, every assertion of identity and belonging entails (and is made against) a simultaneous message of Otherness and stigmatized difference."[72] The authors take this deeply ambivalent inclusion and discipline to suggest that American multicultural pluralism affords certain important protections but does so, in part, in lieu of certain required "identity concessions." The concessions required often entail much the opposite of the tolerance and straightforward inclusion celebrated in standard accounts of American religious pluralism. In fact, they typically occasion experiences of marginalization, humiliation, suppressed differences, and chilled dissent that the lenses of structural and cultural violence (or comparable analytical lenses) are able to illuminate.

In the same volume, Jen'nan Ghazal Read captures an example of this conflicted experience in her comparative study of two communities in central Texas – one Muslim Arab American, and the other Christian Arab American. Christian Arabs, she found, find far more space in which to distance themselves from negative identity associations. They could "use their religious and racial identities (Christian and white) as a bridge to the American mainstream." Muslim Arab Americans, by contrast, found their religion and racial identities (i.e., "darker phenotype") barriers precisely to such participation.[73] Both possibilities of inclusion and

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[71] Jocelyne Cesari sorts through these important differences on a country-by-country basis in her article "Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison between Europe and the United States," in John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds., *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 21–27.

[72] Andrew Shyrock, "On Discipline and Inclusion," in Katherine Pratt Ewing, ed., *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States since 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage, 2008), 202. In the same volume, see especially Sunaina Maira, "Citizenship, Dissent, Empire: South Asian Muslim Immigrant Youth," 15–46 and Sally Howell and Amaney Jamal, "Detroit Exceptionalism and the Limits of Political Incorporation," 47–79.

[73] Jen'nan Ghazal Read, "Multiple Identities among Arab Americans," in *Being and Belonging*, 124–125.

marginalization, Read concludes, depend on the deep background of religious, ethnic, and racial hierarchies that fill out the relational and institutional contexts in the contemporary United States. The experiences of humiliation and isolation reported by many Muslim Americans – and the association of these experiences with instances of religious and political radicalization – make cases such as that of Muhammad Boyueri pressingly relevant to US contexts.[74] They suggest that American nationalism is far more a mixture of "ethno-religious" ("Judeo-Christian" and white) than the civic nationalist self-conception of American religious pluralism is able to detect.

French Islam, Healthy Conflict, and Strenuous Pluralism

How does the model of healthy conflict I have constructed enable us to think differently about the complex processes of identity negotiation to which strenuous pluralism is attuned? The French headscarf controversy is once more instructive for the US. The French response to Islam manifest in that controversy is confrontational and unapologetically adversarial. Of course, the French ban on Muslim religious and cultural practices is (as I argued above) patently unjust and structurally violent. But the explicit nature of the conflict can highlight the relational patterns in that cultural and historical context, as I attempted to do in the opening segment of this chapter. Such conscious attention can facilitate creative, constructive resistance of the sort the healthy conflict approach fosters. It might motivate forms of identity innovation that reflect the dynamics of expressive freedom I articulated in Chapter 5.

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[74] Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Is Trying to Counter ISIS' Efforts to Lure Alienated Young Muslims," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2014. "American law enforcement and intelligence officials say more than 100 Americans have gone to Syria, or tried to so far. That number of Americans seeking to join militants, while still small, was never seen during the two major wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 … When Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson showed up recently at the Noor Islamic Cultural Center [in Dublin, OH] to offer a sympathetic ear and federal assistance, he faced a litany of grievances from a group of mostly Muslim leaders and advocates. They complained of humiliating border inspections by brusque federal agents, F.B.I. sting operations that wrongly targeted Muslim citizens as terrorists and a foreign policy that leaves President Bashar al-Assad of Syria in place as a magnet for extremists."

The laws banning public displays of religious identity such as headscarves effectively create exactly the phenomenon they aim to combat. They first reify the alleged meaning and significance of the symbol. In so doing, they alienate and humiliate many Muslim people. Arguably, one way to foster solidarity among a population (in this case, a largely immigrant, economically disadvantaged, and vulnerable population to begin with) is to identify that population as an "out group," and treat them accordingly in custom and law. And indeed, in response to the French headscarf ban, Muslim groups experienced more inner cohesion. The law generated solidarity among Muslims, and Muslim women in particular. Such solidarity was taken to confirm their opposition to integration, and their communalist intentions. Thus Muslim groups became further identified as an especially hazardous breeding ground for the French government's most emphatic concern: politicized Islam.

In opposition to the law, Muslim groups organized an array of protests and demonstrations in the weeks leading up to the enactment of the law "on secularism." These protests, however, never took place – or rather, they did not take place as public actions simply opposing the ban on headscarves. In the days leading up to the law's enactment in late August 2004, a group identified as the "Islamic Army in Iraq" took two French journalists in Iraq hostage. They demanded that France reverse its headscarf ban in exchange for the journalists' release. French Muslim communities were uniform and outspoken in their rejection of these efforts. In fact, they transformed their scheduled protests against the headscarf law into demonstrations of solidarity with France. Throughout the country, Muslim women in headscarves publicly declared: "We will not allow our headscarves to be soiled with blood."[75]

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[75] Roman Leick, "No Blood on Our Headscarf," *Der Spiegel* (2004), translated from the German by Christopher Sultan, and reprinted in *The New York Times*, September 6, 2004. "The Muslim faithful and clerics came together to pray at the Great Mosque of Paris, built in 1924 in honor of Muslim colonial troops who had perished for France in World War II. The service was also attended by Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin and Paris' socialist mayor, Bertrand Delanoe. The rector of the mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, also chairman of the French Council of the Muslim Faith, solemnly declared the 'solidarity of Muslims with the entire French nation, to which we fully and completely belong' … Solidarity rallies with active Muslim participation were held throughout the country, in Marseilles, Montpelier, Lille, La Rochelle, Besançon and Lyon. Veiled Muslim women proclaimed: 'We will not allow our headscarves to be soiled with blood.' "

It is important to examine the nuances of this event. The demonstrations were not simply a plea for the French state to accommodate Muslim headscarf practices. Nor was this assimilationist behavior on the part of the protesting Muslim women. In fact, the women persisted in their opposition to the law and to the portrayal of the veil as a symbol of communalist opposition and the subordination of women. And yet, in this "counter-accommodationist" capacity, hijab became a cause and occasion for solidarity with French national culture and the state. Hijab became a mode of resistance to the very forms of violent extremism and terrorism that French legal and political authorities associate with headscarf-wearing itself. In these circumstances, the wearing of hijab was, at once, defiance *and* solidarity, in tandem with the protesters' insistence of their full belonging to French national culture.

This example illuminates the pliability of the symbolic practice, and the ways this practice can make possible identity innovation and negotiation. It suggests the capacity of the orienting norms of the practice to be deployed in ways that defy an either/or positioning: either acquiescing to the declared (if not mandated) norms of the French nation-state, or categorically opposing hijab practices to the culture of *laïcité*. The impact is multi-directional. On one hand, it innovatively inflects Muslim identities with an insistence upon inclusion in French national culture on their own terms. Conversely, by highlighting religious particularity, such resistant solidarity broadens others' perceptions of what it can look like, and mean, to be French.

But note that these instances of engagement are confrontational and oppositional. The protesting Muslim women do not ask merely to be accommodated. Nor do they aim at tolerant coexistence. They seek, rather, to alter the normative orientation of French public life in accord with a wider and more complex account of participation and justice. In each of these regards, the intervention of the French Muslim women exemplifies the traits of healthy conflict. Just as importantly, this case offers an example of what a strenuous pluralism looks like. On this account, religious pluralism is difficult. It requires confronting persistent tensions and identity oppositions that may not be easily resolvable, and then searching for creative ways to navigate them. Yet the result need not be endless feuding.

Conclusion

As we have seen, US citizens typically conceive of their society as having a more inclusive and elastic conception of tolerance than those of European nations. Nationalist currents of US civil religion avow the

principles of multicultural coexistence and noninterference. Yet presuppositions about American tolerance perpetuate an exceptionalist national myth that cloaks and seeks to exonerate far deeper and more pervasive forms of violence.

The greater challenge for those who want to reduce structural and cultural violence is to recognize the practices that perpetuate exclusion, inequality, and humiliation, even among those who advocate tolerance and defend diversity. This requires showing that those of us who promote tolerance sometimes unwittingly benefit from – and are sometimes even complicit in – the processes that perpetuate violence. Always remaining self-critical, so that we do not add arrogance to the list of wrongs, analysts, researchers, and critics are called to take on these formidable and controversial tasks as they strive to confront the problems facing all of us in the public arena.

Conclusion

Strenuous Pluralism and Healthy Conflict

The central conviction of this book is that where there is living relationship, there will be conflict. For any given conflict, the operative question is: will it degenerate into violence? Or can the inevitable conflict, and the elements that precipitate it, be engaged and reframed transformatively? In other words, can conflict be engaged in ways that constructively promote increasingly just conditions, and over time, further expand mutual recognition, reciprocal accountability, and eventually – if ever so gradually – respect and trust? If so, how? The model that I have developed throughout this book identifies "healthy conflict" as a complex of factors and practices. It draws from the American pragmatist tradition of democratic social transformation, from agonistic models of democracy, and from conflict transformation in peace studies.

An approach to healthy conflict works to overcome the misrecognition of oppositional others by cultivating the virtues of empathetic moral imagination. We saw this approach worked out in the contest between Richard Rorty and Elaine Scarry throughout Chapters 1 and 2. There I examined the power that moral imagination might exert, and its limitations, in the various strengths and weaknesses of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the pre– and post–Civil War United States. Stowe's intervention has continued to influence readers' imaginations and stir controversy even to this day. Healthy conflict, I argued, must cultivate virtues of moral imagination in order to overcome the persistent temptation to demonize and scapegoat one's opponents. It will fight the urge to position them as intrinsically evil and beyond the possibility of constructive engagement – that is, as nothing more than an enemy to be

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vanquished, however much their actions and ideals must be uniformly resisted and actively opposed.

On its own, moral imagination proves to be woefully inadequate, for literary and moral imaginings are subject to blind spots and deficiencies, misappropriation and misapplication (i.e., to cultural violence). Healthy conflict requires exposing and interrogating the root causes and conditions that give rise to violence in all its forms (direct, structural, and cultural), and foster harmful and degenerative forms of conflict. Doing so requires addressing the structural and cultural conditions underpinning present circumstances of conflict. It entails attending to the deep – and sometimes repressed – histories and relational patterns out of which degenerative conflict erupts, and which cause it to persist and recur. On this score, I located an exemplary approach to democratic social transformation in the "prophetic pragmatism" developed by Cornel West. West, we saw, not only draws upon the best of the black prophetic tradition. He also illuminates – indeed, I argued, in many ways he embodies – the hybridity and flexibility of that tradition of criticism, analysis, and active, on-the-ground resistance. Such an approach permits the integration of an inclusive body of resources and exemplary approaches to engagement and change. It enables one to cultivate the widest possible array of allies and co-laborers for justice – people of "all colors and creeds," as West is wont to say.

Of course, prophetic criticism takes many forms. Not all of them are good. And in an era marked by frequently shrill, religiously justified accusations and denunciations, "being prophetic" risks becoming a façade for what is actually degenerative and unhealthy conflict. The model of healthy conflict I have cobbled together in these pages strives to take seriously the indispensability of prophetic criticism, and the deep democratic tradition from which it emerges in its late modern manifestations. At the same time, it must distinguish between true and false prophetic interventions. The risks in this are quite real. They force one to articulate explicitly, and remain acutely self-reflexive about, the conception of "prophetic engagement" necessary for healthy forms of conflict. For under the auspices of "being prophetic," many today – religiously identified actors, especially – intervene stridently and hatefully in public life.

I argued that the work of the Jewish philosopher, rabbi, and prophetic critic Abraham Joshua Heschel affords prophetic pragmatism an especially incisive example of prophetic action and criticism. Heschel's model helps us see that the madding din of contemporary public life is not overwrought by propheticism. Rather, it suffers a dearth of prophetic criticism

in its true and virtuous forms. Prophetic critics are merely mortal, of course, and the virtues of prophetic engagement are especially difficult forms of excellence to achieve and sustain. This is especially true in public life that is under constant observation and sensationalized scrutiny by the twenty-four-hour news cycle and blogo- and pundit-spheres. This is all the more reason to see true prophetic social criticism as requiring the careful cultivation of practical wisdom, and as dependent upon the journey, experience, character, and commitment of any would-be prophet.

The model of healthy conflict developed here promotes active engagement of one's adversaries in ways that work immanently within the concrete realities of the context in question. It seeks to make explicit and scrutinize the normative presuppositions present in that system and context, innovating by means of the flexibility those normative constraints afford, and thereby gradually altering them. Thus, as we saw, healthy conflict pursues a self-correcting vision of justice. This vision persistently expands its scope, seeking to include an increasingly expansive understanding of those persons deserving of justice. With this goal in mind, it critically refines and revises the practices of deliberation and engagement by asking questions such as, "Have political and social arrangements facilitated the cultivation of possibilities for novel performances of received practices? Have they fostered the capacities of communities and individuals to engage in, critically reflect upon and thereby revise, resist, expand or alter those practices? Have those practices been expanded to recognize a broader range of practitioners and encompass increasingly diverse understandings and transformation of the practice itself?" Crucial to healthy conflict is the recognition that justice requires fostering the participation and amplifying the voices of people when it comes to decisions and public practices that affect their lives.

My engagement with Robert Brandom and Michel Foucault demonstrated how the democratic practices of mutual recognition and reciprocal accountability evince a kind of normative flexibility. The flexibility of norms allows for innovating with, expanding, and thus enriching received practices and understandings. Here the normative conceptions central to jazz became a illustrative example of "expressive freedom." Participating in the practice can enrich and expand the very norms that constitute the practice itself. Gradually more proficient – perhaps eventually excellent – practitioners innovate (by virtue of the flexibility of the practice's normative constraints) in ways that are both original, and which may transform the practice, and indeed, what it means to be an excellent practitioner. In applying this understanding of "expressive freedom" to social

and political contexts we found that Muslim Americans, feminist and womanist activists, African Americans have offered crucial examples of the transformation of conditions of oppression and domination under which they have been made to suffer (and confront still in many ways). What might it look like for white folk of all kinds to learn from and follow these examples? What might it look like for those who benefit from conditions of domination to creatively engage the legacies they have been handed in order to innovate out of, or away from (i.e., to participate in the dismantling of) the white supremacist mastery of which they are beneficiaries and often naive perpetuators, and at worst, active defenders? Much as Harriet Beecher Stowe conveyed in her day, at stake in the answer to this question are the very souls of white folk. For the answer to this question determines whether we will seek to fight for a society characterized by justice, characterized by institutions that do not humiliate and dehumanize, do not destroy the lives of our fellow citizens of color and of poor and working people of all colors. The answer to this question determines whether one will actively avoid implicating oneself, however inadvertently, in injustice, inequality, and continued domination of one's fellows. On this point, any model of healthy conflict that would be adequate to our riven days must address the intersections of race, gender, sexual identities, and class, as much as religious identities and commitments.

The religion in public life debates to which many ethicists and political philosophers devoted decades of thought did much to break a stranglehold that marginalized religion in public life. Unleashing religion in contemporary politics, some thought, would de-escalate and decompress the deep-seated resentment that some religiously minded people felt about being told to keep their religious beliefs to themselves when it came to matters of politics and basic justice. And yet, while considerable headway has ensued from these debates, the more vocal, intransigent, and intolerant the religious voice, the more likely that voice will still meet with calls for restraint. On this point, I explored the terms of agonistic democracy for resources that might help us think productively about forms of religious intolerance that are not easily amenable to compromise, fallibilism, or even epistemic humility. Chantal Mouffe, I argued, identified a deep and important insight in her claim that conflict is unavoidable in democratic political relationships. Moreover, she recognized that the great strength of democratic practices is less an alleged capacity to produce consensus or achieve tolerant tranquility (which often comes at the expense of suppressing conflict over issues that are most pressing, meaningful,

and nonnegotiable), than its ability to facilitate conflict that does not become destructive. This view, we saw, calls into question the standard accounts of consensus-driven and conflict resolution–based democratic practice. Philosophically, Mouffe draws upon Wittgenstein to show that democratic practices admit of considerable interpretive flexibility, and are contestable. But in doing so, she avoids slipping into Nietzschean nihilism. For there are identifiable limits as to what counts as democratic practice. Democracy, for example, cannot be engaged in a way that produces domination, not, at least without becoming something other than "democracy" (or becoming "democracy" only in name).

Of course, Mouffe's agonistic model raised pointed questions. Will any party to an agonistic encounter be satisfied with promoting hegemony or cultural and legal success – or even merely winning a political contest – without moving on to inflict further damage upon the defeated competitor? There can be no ultimate guarantee that an agonistic competitor will not seek to establish political dominance. However, this would implicate that actor in the form of domination that stands beyond the range of agonistic respect, and outside the parameters of agonistic democracy altogether. Indeed, agonistic approaches to democracy invite the temptation to altogether vanquish one's opponent after defeating him or her in a particular contest.

At the same time, agonistic respect motivates the recognition that, in a shared democratic enterprise (albeit one characterized at times by vehement and persistent opposition), any participant who may prevail at a particular moment should expect to find himself or herself out of power at some future point. At such a point they, too, will depend upon the fair and just treatment by their victorious opponent. In theory, this should discourage a "winner takes all without regard for the future of one's relationship with one's opponent" approach to political contest. In theory, it should necessitate reciprocity, fairness, and justness in the practices of mutual recognition.

And yet, this theoretical value orientation provides no guarantees that a victorious actor or group will not push for the utter defeat, or continued suppression, of a vanquished political opponent. Thus, the realities of agonism must interweave with, and depend upon, liberal-democratic institutions. Norms embodied in institutions – which adjudicate basic rights and nonnegotiable legal protections through judicial processes and review – protect against agonistic conquest of one contender or group by another. Still, the agonistic view reminds us that even liberal-democratic institutions provide no uncontested protection. Judicial processes and the

protection by rights and laws are, themselves, subject to the contest of power and interpretation as well. As I have articulated in the foregoing chapters, a model of healthy conflict recognizes that reliable and resilient liberal-democratic institutions – those that might protect basic rights and review unjust laws – must be fought for.

These are the real risks attendant to democratic enterprise. Practically, pursuing depolarization after agonistic conflict, or practices and rituals of reconciliation, serves the vital purpose of limiting the excessive tendencies of agonism. Agonistic contestants will have to go on living together after any contest. This makes the pursuit of healthy relationships – even forms of political friendship – doubly important. But healthy conflict, as I have formulated it here, recognizes that political friendship is possible only when one faces up to the realities and persistence of conflict. The elements of conflict do not go away or simply resolve once the conflict moves on, even once it has evolved into different forms.

To count as healthy, conflict must be engaged in ways that bring its latent and repressed roots to the surface and into view. It does this by generating creative tension and dramatizing and resisting injustice through nonviolent confrontation and reframing enactments. This is the point at which central insights from agonistic democracy intersect with conflict transformation in peace studies. Conflict transformation recognizes conflict as "healthy" in so far as – once made explicit and dramatized – the conflict can be engaged in ways that expose whatever unjust causes and conditions may precipitate it. As I discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, healthy conflict serves as a vehicle for critically assessing and struggling against those causes and conditions in ways that reduce violence in all its forms (direct, but also structural and cultural), and which facilitate the positive pursuit of justice in its multiple varieties (social, distributive, retributive, restorative, and so forth). Thus, conflict transformation lenses are multi-focal. Conflict transformation intentionally repositions conflict to the center of its approach at the situational, structural, and cultural levels, and thereby cultivates constructive dynamics, as opposed to degenerative forms of conflict.

Healthy conflict seeks to overcome the dysfunctional communication that often lies at the heart of intransigent conflict by fostering new approaches to the wide and sometimes challenging array of forms of public speech and protest in which public conflict manifests. It encourages charitable and expansive incorporation of these forms of engagement into public debate, a task that demands sensitive understanding and creative response. Thus it seeks to creatively engage the nondeliberative registers of public life. With the assistance of William Connolly and Stephen

Colbert, in Chapter 8 I grappled with the "reason–gut" dichotomy that inserts a fault line into much contemporary public discourse. The challenge is to open oneself to grappling with the deeper motivations and commitments of one's adversary, creatively engaging them in ways that might unsettle and mediate the seeming deadlock between straightforward appeals to "the facts" and "truthiness."

Finally, an approach to healthy conflict recognizes that relationships are never merely "face to face." It is equally concerned with "relational spaces" and "relational histories." Engagement of this relational variety requires and affirms the strenuous and frequently contestatory character of a pluralism in which oppositional identities cannot merely coexist. Rather, ideally, they creatively and productively innovate in their (sometimes persistently contentious) engagement with each other in the ongoing process of seeking justice and reducing violence in all its forms.

The myth of American exceptionalism will not rescue us, especially not in its form of "why can't we all just get along" tolerance. I have argued that such an account of exceptionalism is a mirage of American multicultural nationalism. The judgments and claims that we make implicate us in moral commitments, often strong ones that do not admit straightforward compromise, nor "living and letting live." There is no nonpartisan position (nonpartisanship is a partisan position itself), nor straightforward, pure coexistence – not, at least, in so far as meaningful relationship exists between people or groups. The value of genuine pluralism is also the source of its challenge. It requires strenuous and persistent engagement.

The rage and resentment that erupted in the Tea Party revolt following the election of Barack Obama brought countless forms of latent racism, classism, and ethno-nationalism into the light of day. These were neither novel nor isolated eruptions, of course. They were acute symptoms of deeper structural and cultural forms of violence that have undergirded American life for decades. Indeed, these date back to the founding of the country, in what James Madison called "America's 'original sin' " – chattel slavery (though the genocide of indigenous populations is equally original).[1] Both subtle and conspicuous forms of racism, classism, and ethno-religious nationalism that were brought to the surface by the Tea Party revolt were, to many, a cause for frustration, indignation, and justified anger. These gave the lie to any naive perception that horrendous

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[1] The full depth and origins of this rage are helpfully illuminated by Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

forms of racist oppression had been dispensed with by the victories of the civil rights movement.

The ethno-religious nationalism of the 2016 presidential campaign that I explored in Chapter 9, and the ensuing presidential administration of Donald Trump, challenges even modest forms of the claim that our society has made great and irrevocable strides against racism and various forms of chauvinism. However, the danger of such an upsurge of explicit white supremacy and direct violence is that it distracts attention from the structural and cultural forms of racism, sexism, and chauvinism toward religious minorities that persist more subtly and systemically. Ethno-religious nationalism and its white supremacist ethos are not limited to avowed, violent white nationalists of the kind that descended upon Charlottesville, VA, to contest the removal of the Robert E. Lee Confederate war memorial on August 12, 2017. Ethno-religious nationalism finds more subtle and even unconscious manifestations among various types of people of the kind that Martin King referred to as "white moderates" – any who prioritize "order over justice." Such subtle ethno-religious nationalism manifests, for example, among the vast swath of white evangelical Christian and white Catholic supporters of a presidential candidate who exploited (often quite explicitly) white supremacist and ethno-nationalist sentiments and themes. Indeed, who refused to disavow the explicit endorsement by David Duke and other so-called alt-right figures. Understandably, white evangelicals and white Catholics may think of themselves as comfortably unrelated to the Neo-Nazis and Klanspeople who fight to rescue Confederate war memorials and "white heritage." Nonetheless, well-meaning religious people persist in their support and job approval of a President who refused to denounce explicit white supremacist violence even in its most hateful, concentrated, and unabashed forms, and then declared equivalence between the Neo-Nazis and counter-protestors as "hatred on many sides."[2]

From the perspective of conflict transformation, this upsurge of explicit racism brings with it an opportunity. It brings latent and deep-seated

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[2] Only forty-eight hours after the outbreak of violence (and the murder of counter-protestor, Heather Heyer, by a white nationalist) – after much public pressure – did Trump explicitly denounce the white nationalist and white supremacist activists. See Glenn Thrush, "New Outcry as Trump Rebukes Charlottesville Racists 2 Days Later," *New York Times*, August 14, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/us/politics/trump-charlottesville-protest.html; and Farah Stockman, "Who Were the Counter-protestors?," *New York Times*, August 14, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/us/who-were-the-counterprotesters-in-charlottesville.html.

elements of conflict to the surface, where they can be confronted and countered. Suppressed attitudes and dispositions, unconscious biases, white supremacist, sexist, classist, anti-Semitic, transphobic, homophobic, and Islamophobic forces that had maintained less conspicuous profiles, or cultivated themselves quietly, are brought into the light of day. This allows us to precipitate corrective tension and productive conflict that is healthy but unyielding in order to transform unjust conditions.

Of course, by no means have explicit forms of bigotry newly arrived with the strongman of Donald Trump and his administration. They have been with us all along. The relational patterns, forms of structural and cultural violence of which they are symptoms reach back more recently to Richard Nixon's wars on crime and drugs, the Southern strategy to regain and consolidate white conservative dominance following the civil rights movement, Ronald Reagan's relaunching of the war on drugs, the explosion of US hyper-incarceration and the New Jim Crow with the policies of Reagan, among other dynamics. These deeper relational patterns – antecedents to specific episodes of contemporary hatred – have fed the eruption of similar occurrences of violence all along the way, even when less pronounced, explained away, or altogether ignored. Creating tension and crisis packed conditions where there was the illusion of peaceable tranquility – though, in fact, there was both explicit and latent racism, bigotry, and injustice aplenty – becomes a pivotal first step to conflict transformation and constructive change.

In the wake of the election of the first black president in the US, Tea Partiers took to the streets with signs and guns, and in some cases, adopted many of the tools of Saul Alinsky-style organizing that they appropriated from the community organizer president. The Ayn Rand-inspired account of liberty as "freedom from constraint" brought people to the streets in an avalanche of political engagement. What for a sizable majority of voting citizens was unthinkable – the election of Donald Trump – has spurred a counter-invigoration of resistance through organizing and civic activism. Like the John Doe clubs of Frank Capra's classic morality tale *Meet John Doe* (1941), community-organizing chapters have materialized across the country.[3] Numerous marches, demonstrations, and public actions remain to be translated into sustained grassroots-organizing groups with the hope of actual legislative change.

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[3] The Indivisible movement has established nearly 6,000 local activist groups that have been confirmed. These span all 435 congressional districts in the country. For this and broader developments in community-organizing and civic activism

The post-Trump election rise in political awareness and activism suggests that democracy in America is deeply embattled and at grave risk. But there are also indicators that it may recover its strength and resilience. Time will tell whether these developments can be sustained in citizen-driven and community-led organizing and participatory democracy, and become successful electoral politics. The risks are very real, and the most vulnerable people in the US are already suffering greatly and subject to increased mistreatment. As Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein warned just a few years ago now, things are even worse than they look.[4] Indeed, it is possible that conditions will worsen further before getting better. Yet, even here, the democratic tradition and its prized virtues of hope and courage hold out possibilities of genuine democratic vistas that open themselves, if only fellow citizens will enter the fray, cultivate the virtues of democratic citizenship, and persist:

Judging from the main portions of the history of the world, so far, justice is always in jeopardy, peace walks amid hourly pitfalls, and of slavery, misery, meanness, the craft of tyrants and the credulity of the populace, in some of their protean forms, no voice can at any time say, They are not. The clouds break a little, and the sun shines out – but soon and certain the lowering darkness falls again, as if to last forever. Yet is there an immortal courage and prophecy in every sane soul that cannot, must not, under any circumstances, capitulate. Vive, the attack – the perennial assault! Vive, the unpopular cause – the spirit that audaciously aims – the never-abandon'd efforts, pursued the same amid opposing proofs and precedents."[5]

since the 2016 election, see Peter Dreier, "The Anti-Trump Movement: The Profusion of Citizen Organizing as Defense – and Offense," *The American Prospect*, April 4, 2017. http://prospect.org/article/anti-trump-movement-recover-resist-reform-0 (accessed August 15, 2017).

[4] Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), esp. chap 7.

[5] Walt Whitman, in *Democratic Vistas*, edited by Ed Folsom (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 29.

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