

While accepting Butler and Cavarero's relational ontology, however, questions still remain about the ethical and political demands that are made when violence is unleashed not only on ontologically related selves but also on bodies in their spatio-temporal ipseity. In a manner reminiscent of Michel Serres' writings on skin in *The Five Senses*, Butler takes the body to be 'the threshold of the person, the site of passage and porosity, the evidence of an openness to alterity that is definitional of the body itself'. Yet even if the individualised body provides an insufficient account of personhood, it is still a necessary condition of any person's life. At moments when it is physically threatened, there is rarely space for the articulation of critique: by the time the knee is pressing down upon the trachea in the name of this or that phantasmatic threat, relationality has already fractured beyond repair. While Butler is surely right to argue, with Cavarero, that 'there is no sustaining of singularity outside the context of constitutive sociality and ecology', the act of extinguishing a body's claim to life is one with

singular as well as social consequences. What form can non-violence's 'open-ended struggle with violence and its countervailing forces' take in these moments of immediate existential danger?

It is clear that responding to this question cannot entail relapsing into the atomistic individualism that underpins justificatory discourses of 'self-defence'. The presumption that the subject stands autonomously is, as Butler and Cavarero both note, a masculinist fiction. Yet they as well as Frazer and Hutchings are clear that non-violence does not entail submission – quite the opposite, in fact. Are we left where we began, at Lorde's crossroads, facing down 'an articulated power that is not on our terms'? Perhaps. But non-violence is not a panacea; it cannot transcend the crises violence brings about, whether ethical, political, or existential. Instead, it begins to build a world where such crises might never come to pass; a world it is necessary to work towards, because – as Jericho Brown tells us in his 2014 collection *The New Testament* – 'nothing we erect is our own'.

Alister Wedderburn

Abstract egalitarianism

Katrina Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). 432pp., £28.00 hb., 978 0 69116 308 6

In 1952, a young American philosopher named John Rawls arrived in Oxford on a Fulbright scholarship. Fresh from military service in the Pacific that had diverted his earlier ambitions of becoming an Episcopalian priest, he was redirecting his prodigious energies towards questions philosophical and political, spending his time discussing logic and language with analytic philosophers and talking politics with the anxiously anti-Stalinist revisionist wing of the British Labour Party. The ideas he first discussed in post-war Oxford remained on his mind, surfacing occasionally in eagerly circulated, unpublished papers until in 1971, the same year that the collapse of the Bretton-Woods system heralded the advent of a new economic order, the book he had been writing was finally published. It was called *A Theory of Justice*, and, in the following years and decades, the doctrine of 'liberal egalitarianism', expounded in five hundred pages of densely

argued prose, would come to set the terms of debate in Anglophone political philosophy. It determined the kind of questions that could be asked and the forms that acceptable answers might take. Political philosophy, by and large, would take place under the long shadow cast by Rawls' book. Katerina Forrester's *In The Shadow of Justice* is the most comprehensive and impressive attempt to historicise liberal egalitarianism, defamiliarising its near-hegemonic conclusions and denaturalising its assumptions, and thereby asking what might emerge from out of its shadow.

Forrester's book is an intellectual history of liberal egalitarianism, but it does not dwell on the various streams of influence that went into Rawl's book, instead examining in detail its legacy, and the ways that the evolution of the doctrine overlapped with the political and philosophical developments of the late twentieth century.

Though a work of political philosophy, Forrester spends less time pouring over the minutiae of Rawls' texts and focuses instead on examining the successes and failures of this particular political philosophy as it made (or failed to make) contact with political reality. She is clear that there is still much in Rawls that can be drawn on today. By separating what is living from what is dead in Rawls' philosophy, it might 'be put to radical ends and admit a more demanding egalitarianism than he might himself have advocated'.

In terms of philosophy, Rawls' book arrived in the right place at the right time. In the wake of concentration camps and the atom bomb, a generation of British and American philosophers had grown dissatisfied with the reigning non-cognitivism that reduced the study of ethics to the study of the logic of ethical language; they were seeking instead a framework for substantial moral and political theorising. Bernard Williams, a philosopher who would later come to have grave doubts about Rawls' project, spoke for many when he declared in an early review that *A Theory of Justice* was 'not merely a great achievement of intelligence and moral reflection ... but also notably heartening'. Heartening in that it gave a generation of Anglo-American philosophers a new faith in the ability of philosophy not only to pose axiological questions but also to attempt to answer them, in order to find some moral grounds for the politics of a world emerging from the ashes.

If it was in part this metaphilosophical ambition, the reconceptualisation of what political philosophy was and what it might do, that inspired Rawls' contemporaries, its moral vision and conceptual clarity accounted for its continued influence. Liberal egalitarianism, the doctrine expounded in *A Theory of Justice*, offered an unapologetically moral account of the 'basic structure' of a just society (roughly the set of interrelated institutions that would ensure 'justice as fairness'), offering to marry the demands of liberty and of equality in a revived version of the social contract tradition. Conceptually, the theory begins with the 'original position', a kind of thought experiment where individuals are tasked with deciding on the basic structure of a society from behind a 'veil of ignorance', deprived of any knowledge of who exactly they would be in this society – whether they would be rich or poor, white or black, male or female. The device is intended on the one hand to ensure liberty (for surely

nobody would consent in advance to a system that would infringe on their freedoms) and equality (for surely we would not set up an unequal system if we might find ourselves at the bottom of this system when the veil is lifted). Liberal egalitarianism, in its grand ambition, begins in abstraction: behind a veil, outside of history.

The major question an intellectual history of liberal egalitarianism must ask is why a theory concerned with the basic structure of a just society, and with the equitable distribution of resources, becomes intellectually dominant not in the post-war era that at least paid lip service to these ideals, but in the era of rampant market-driven ideology that succeeded it, dismissing its ideals as fantasy. In other words, why did liberal egalitarianism achieve its near total ascendancy only after the rise of neoliberal politics made a liberal philosophy with a distributive, market-correcting stance seem an appealing and moral corrective?

One answer, suggested by Raymond Geuss, is that liberal egalitarianism is simply a legitimating ideology. Liberal egalitarianism was a 'compensatory fantasy' for left-liberals who had lost political power but continued to hold on to an idealisation of post-war social democracy – a sophisticated, elegant normative system through which to view and appraise the world from the comfort of a Harvard study, rather than a tool to change it. Its untimeliness thus reveals a deeply flawed attitude to the relation between politics and philosophy, theory and praxis: liberal egalitarianism can serve as a compensatory fantasy only because liberal egalitarians (Rawls himself, first and foremost, but also his followers: T.M. Scanlon, Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Michael Walzer) never had a genuine ambition of using the theory to inspire social change.

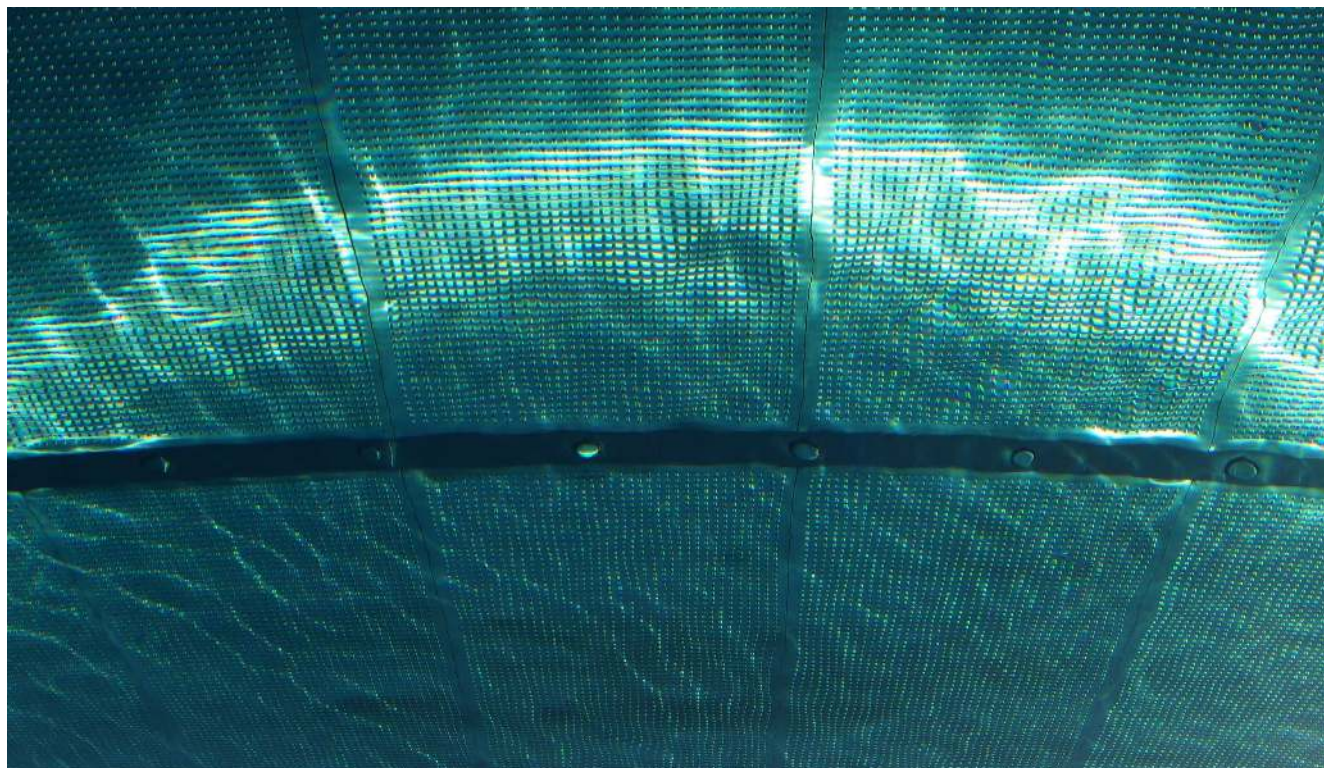
Forrester's book provides a more historically detailed, more even-handed development of this historicist critique of liberal egalitarianism. For Forrester, to tell the story of the untimeliness of liberal egalitarianism in the twentieth century is to tell a 'ghost story' – to trace the way in which Rawls' theory was 'haunted by the ghosts of postwar liberalism', its attempts to speak to contemporary political issues compromised by ideas drawn from its own historical conditions of possibility, long since passed, ideas which 'exerted a destabilising pull on the present'. Forrester demonstrates that the problem was not, as Geuss seems to suggest, that liberal egalitarians

were simply uninterested in political reality. She points out that Rawls and his successors were at times hyper-attuned to what came to be called the ‘public affairs’ of the day, almost as if to forestall objections of irrelevance and detachment. *In the Shadow of Justice* is structured around some of these philosophical responses to political events: the chapter entitled ‘Obligations’ shows how the civil rights movement and student protests against Vietnam prompted Rawls to integrate an account of civil disobedience into *A Theory of Justice*; ‘Going Global’ examines how liberal egalitarians responded to new postcolonial questions of global justice by attempting to expand the notion of ‘basic structure’ to the planetary level; ‘The Problem of the Future’ how, in response to the growing awareness of climate change, Rawlsian philosophers sought to extend the notion of ‘person’ so central to Rawls’ liberal contract theory so as to include future generations.

Many of these adjustments to the theory were ingenious – one thing the reader never doubts is the intellectual sophistication of Rawls and his followers – but one of Forrester’s most remarkable observations is that, even in the original 1971 text, attempts to ‘apply’ liberal egalitarianism to the problems of the day relied, knowingly or not, on an institutional order that was *already* hope-

lessly idealised, hopelessly distant, or both. Take Rawls’ fundamental belief in consensus, in the idea that ‘deep down, social life rested on the possibility of consensus and ethical agreement’. Forrester contends that the elegant abstractions of the basic structure, and the preference for ‘ideal theory’, made it impossible for Rawls to realise that one of its most fundamental premises ‘idealised a moment from the mid-century American past when liberalism was triumphant against right and left’, a moment that had already passed by the time of the book’s publication, and from which we are distantly estranged today.

The capacious, flexible and abstract nature of Rawls’ theory allowed it to absorb the impact of just about any political shocks, both the sharp shocks of war and civil disorder and the slow, triumphal march of free-market fundamentalism. This was due in part to the broad and fundamental nature of the theory – empirical claims and disagreements about strategy could be shrugged off as ‘merely incidental’ problems, whilst the really basic claims were abstract, or vague, enough to remain largely unchallenged – and because, after half a decade of institutional dominance, liberal egalitarianism appeared to have neutralised its major theoretical opponents. Forrester convincingly argues that the eventual hegemony of



liberal egalitarianism lay just as much in domesticating alternative political ideas as political events, in co-opting, incorporating and subsuming any radical alternatives.

The 'mirror-like' nature of liberal egalitarianism allowed for a kind of reflection or translation of Marxist, feminist and anti-colonial arguments into the language of liberal egalitarianism, 'domesticating' and thus stifling their original critiques. By a strange paradox of exclusion, these alternatives do not themselves get much space in Forrester's book. In telling the story of liberal egalitarianism, Forrester's narrative proceeds for the most part in its shadow, with little means for taking up those neglected alternatives that remain in the dark. This is to a large extent unavoidable – the book covers a remarkable range of sources and philosophical ideas as it is – and does not reflect a lack of interest in these alternatives, but it is unclear whether this exclusion demonstrates Forrester's main contention or simply re-enacts it. Rather, the book is a kind of preparatory work, a genealogy that ties together Rawls, his times and his legacy in a way that makes very clear the need for a post-Rawlsian political philosophy. This is one reason why Forrester characterises the project of historicising liberal egalitarianism as an attempt to imagine a time before Rawls so totally reconceived the language, scope and ambitions of Anglophone political philosophy, when 'it was less certain what political philosophy was and what it could do', so that we too might think anew about what political philosophy is,

and what it might do.

The final question then, is what political philosophy might look like. For Forrester, the fundamental problem with liberal egalitarianism was not its abstractions or idealisations, but that these abstractions were systematically depoliticising: consensus replaces conflict, arguments take the place of struggle, and like philosophy, politics appears to be little more than a matter of giving and receiving reasons. This depoliticising was possible because of Rawls' choice, from the veil of ignorance up, to ignore the 'normative relevance of arguments about how inequalities came about and, with them, non-institutional claims about individual entitlements, initial endowments, and the ownership of resources'. Such an approach must repoliticise political philosophy: it is not enough to apply ready-made normative theories to 'public affairs', especially not theories grounded in the idealisations of a vanished age. Instead it would confront the messy, decidedly un-ideal relations of power and domination that shape the world as it presents itself to us today. A new political philosophy inspired by the formerly 'domesticated' alternatives would mean more than providing new answers to Rawls' questions. It would have to fundamentally reconceive of the relation between political philosophy and history, and between politics and philosophy itself, emerging from under the shadow of justice radicalised by its renewed contact with historical reality.

Jonathan Egid

Interwoven solidarities

Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah, eds, *Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversations on Collective Action and Radical Thought* (London: Verso, 2020). 240 pp., £17.99 pb., 978 1 78873 776 0

In striving towards revolutionary feminisms against a backdrop of world-changing events, the need for collective solidarity has never been more important. Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah's book begins with this striking statement of clarity, first in the powerful and careful introduction written by the editors, and then in a sensitive unpacking across conversations with Avtar Brah, Gail Lewis, Vron Ware, Himani Bannerji, Gary Kinsman, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Silvia Federici, Ruth

Wilson Gilmore, Avery F. Gordon and Angela Y. Davis. This point is contextualised further by Bhandar and Ziadah on the opening page:

The feminisms we explore in this book are rooted in various political contexts and situated within a variety of political traditions. In fact, they are too diverse to easily name under a single heading ... All of the individuals interviewed here, along with ourselves, may not agree on every detail – but we share the belief that freedom