

Bringing Ourselves to Grief: Judith Butler and the Politics of Mourning

Political Theory
40(4) 409–436
© 2012 SAGE Publications
Reprints and permission: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>
DOI: 10.1177/0090591712444841
<http://ptx.sagepub.com>



David W. McIvor¹

Abstract

Within political theory there has been a recent surge of interest in the themes of loss, grief, and mourning. In this paper I address questions about the politics of mourning through a critical engagement of the work of Judith Butler. I argue that Butler's work remains tethered to an account of melancholic subjectivity derived from her early reading of Freud. These investments in melancholia compromise Butler's recent ethico-political interventions by obscuring the ambivalence of political engagements and the possibilities of achieving and sustaining non-dogmatic identities. To overcome this impasse I argue for an alternative framing of mourning by turning to the psychoanalytic theory of Melanie Klein. An account of mourning that leans upon Klein's work cashes in on the ethical and political promises that are immanent yet unrealized in Butler's recent work while providing a new orientation for mourning in, and for, democratic politics.

Keywords

Judith Butler, melancholia, mourning, Melanie Klein, psychoanalysis.

My City! Rich citizens of my city!
. . . I would still have you as my witnesses,
With what dry-eyed friends, under what laws
I make my way to my prison sealed like a tomb.

—Antigone

¹The Kettering Foundation, Dayton, OH, USA

Corresponding Author:

David McIvor, The Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Rd, Dayton, OH 45459
Email: david.mcivor78@gmail.com

I'm good at love; I'm good at hate.
It's in-between I freeze.

—Leonard Cohen

Within political theory over the past decade there has been a notable, if unsurprising, surge of interest in the themes of loss, grief, and mourning.¹ Following the horrific spectacle of September 11, 2001, in the wake of revelations about state-sponsored torture and prisoner abuse, and amidst two prolonged wars, intensifying class stratification, intransigent racial disparities, and increasing political polarization, there is no shortage of objects to lament. Yet there remains a valid uncertainty about the political relevance of mourning. Is mourning primarily a mode of political resistance, in the style of Antigone, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, or Cindy Sheehan?² Is it primarily a discourse of the state, which provides an official interpretation of public loss in order to support a particular version of civic identity?³ Is it, instead, a means of cultivating ethical dispositions towards human vulnerability that would make possible a less-violent politics?⁴ Or is it a public process of working through in which the meaning and significance of traumatic events or lamentable outcomes are contested and revised?⁵ What, in short, are the potential politics of mourning?

In this essay I address these questions by critically engaging the work of Judith Butler. Butler has repeatedly taken up the themes of mourning and melancholia, reaching back to her early reading of Freud in which she described subjectivity as structurally “melancholic.”⁶ This emphasis on melancholic subjectivity has cast a long shadow, reaching into her more recent reflections about “precarious life.” Although Butler frames this more recent work as an attempt to move away from the punitive scene of melancholic subjugation, I argue that Butler is still invested in an account of melancholia that is traceable to her original engagements with Freud. Butler’s melancholic investments compromise her ethico-political interventions by obscuring the ambivalence of political engagements and the possibilities of achieving and sustaining non-dogmatic identities. To overcome this impasse, I argue for an alternative framing of mourning as a resource for democratic politics, taking my bearing from the psychoanalytic theory of Melanie Klein. For Klein, mourning is a process not only of working through painful losses but also of accepting the ambivalence of self and others. I argue that an account of mourning that leans on Klein’s work cashes in on ethico-political promises immanent yet unrealized in Butler’s recent work while providing a new orientation for mourning in, and for, democratic politics.

For Butler, the politics of mourning has split into two dominant headings. The first heading extends Butler's early emphasis on subversive practices of resignification surrounding gender and kinship norms.⁷ Subjects formed on the basis of these norms could, for Butler, resist the disciplining effects of these prescriptions by emphasizing the norms' contingent and performative nature. The reliance of norms on repeated performances over time gives subjects an opportunity to redraft disciplinary prescriptions and open new pathways for political and cultural life.⁸ In her reading of *Antigone*, Butler sees a model for this disruptive resistance in the struggle over the kinds of loss that can be publically honored. Butler therefore codes mourning as a potential eruption of "unspeakable" losses into public life that would revise the frames by which grief is organized.⁹ For readers of Butler such as Elena Loizidou, resignification of the ideality of the norm becomes the most effective means of resisting the "totalizing" and "suffocating" effects of our cultural and political terrain.¹⁰ By connecting with voices of suffering, subjects can revise the norms that prescribe both *who* can be mourned and *how* those others can be mourned. Nevertheless, this mode of public mourning remains underdetermined in Butler's work. Critics such as Moya Lloyd have faulted Butler for a relative lack of attention to the historical and political conditions of subversion and resistance, arguing that, as a result, Butler's political theory is still "embryonic."¹¹

Alongside this emphasis on mourning as a practice of resignification, Butler has more recently described mourning in terms of an "identification with suffering itself" that cultivates ethical dispositions such as humility and generosity.¹² An acknowledgement of the universal susceptibility to suffering and the "disorientation" of grief puts the individual in a salutary "mode of unknowingness" that might make for a more welcoming form of life.¹³ As David Gutterman and Sara Rushing see it, this represents a move by Butler towards an "ethics of grief," through which a common vulnerability to loss enables individuals to develop humility towards their constitutive limitations.¹⁴ In the wake of this move, however, critics such as Bonnie Honig and George Shulman have faulted Butler for displacing politics with ethics, a displacement that compromises her earlier insights into the inevitably contested nature of public life and disavows the political conditions necessary for the acknowledgment of others and their suffering.¹⁵ At best, the turn towards an ethics of grief in Butler cultivates virtues in "preparation" for politics.¹⁶

Mourning, then, is a red thread that connects Butler's early work with her more recent interventions. While it could be argued that, for Butler, mourning is merely one mode of "dispossession," or of acknowledging the ek-static nature of subjectivity, the frequency with which Butler invokes mourning

gives her work an internal thematic continuity. Many of her critics have missed this continuity, seeing her more recent interventions in terms of a sharp “ethical turn” that forsakes the directly political concerns of her earlier writings. By focusing on the theme of mourning in this essay I show the interconnection between the various moments in Butler’s work, along with their common root in a theory of melancholic subjectivity. As a result I show that, in fact, some of Butler’s most important theoretical “turns” are the shifts *within* her account of mourning.

Despite these shifts, I argue that Butler’s approach to mourning—split between a view of mourning as a means of *subversion* and mourning as a means of *dispossession*—obscures the ambivalences within ethical and political commitments and communities and remains tethered to an account of subjectivity that cannot adequately imagine or pursue non-dogmatic forms of political identity. As a result I turn to Klein for an alternative account of mourning that better engages with these ambivalences and points towards political practices that exceed Butler’s melancholic investments.

The Inability to Mourn: Butler’s Investments in Melancholia

Butler’s interest in mourning and melancholia traces back to her influential theory of gender constructivism.¹⁷ In this work, Butler wrote about “aborted” or “foreclosed” mourning surrounding homosexual desire.¹⁸ Because this desire faced social stigma, homosexual losses could not be registered or acknowledged; the “absence of cultural conventions for avowing the loss of homosexual love” amounted to a “preemption of grief.”¹⁹ Drawing on Freud’s account of character formation through gender consolidation, Butler argued that a foundational repudiation of same-sex desire inaugurated the gendered subject. In this way, the child internalizes, as “an interior moral directive,” a prohibition resulting from social taboo.²⁰ By accepting this directive, the heretofore loose or anarchic desire of the young child is channeled according to the dictates of cultural prejudice, and the loss that occurs at this moment cannot thereafter be consciously acknowledged or mourned. The loss, denied as such, becomes unspeakable.

Butler leans upon the transition in Freud’s account of mourning as represented by the distance between “Mourning and Melancholia” and *The Ego and the Id*. Freud’s original account of mourning described a process of libidinal substitution where the ego, obeying the dictates of the reality principle, replaces the lost object with a suitable alternative.²¹ Later Freud shifted his view and came to see that melancholic incorporation of lost objects was a

fundamental determinant of the ego's character. Identification with others precedes the psyche's ability to mourn its losses: "introjection . . . is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects."²² In *Gender Trouble*, Butler interpreted this to mean that subjective life is inaugurated by an original experience of loss that predates and inaugurates the ego. This experience of loss cannot be experienced; it subsists at the unconscious level and haunts the subject formed as a result of its occurrence: "melancholy designates a failure to grieve in which loss is simply internalized and, in that sense, *refused*."²³ The implication is that all identity is troubled at its origin, haunted by an incompleteness or incoherence that can never be fully acknowledged.

Butler's first turn to Freud, then, produced a deconstructive account of identity whereby disavowed losses haunt the ego and trouble its supposedly coherent identity. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler deepened her Freud-inflected analysis of identification, inspired by what she perceived as inadequacies in both Althusser's theory of interpellation and Foucault's account of subjugation. Butler wanted to explain what she referred to as the "reflexive" nature of subjectivity—the ability of the subject to take itself as an object of reflection and judgment—along with what she calls our "passionate attachment" to the very discursive norms that bind us. As Butler puts it, "is this a guilty subject and, if so, how did it become guilty? Might the theory of interpellation require a theory of conscience?"²⁴ Butler argued that Freud's theories on superego development showed how unwilling passionate attachments to others require that the subject make an investment in its own subordination. Fundamental relationality leads to a passionate attachment to subordination itself. Or, at Butler puts it, "if there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to those by whom she or he is subordinated, then subordination proves central to the becoming of the subject."²⁵ The prohibitive voice of the other is internalized and interiorized, which gives subjectivity its "reflexive" nature, but which also makes subjectivity without subordination impossible.

At best, however, this reading is a mild contortion that obscures the ambiguities in Freud's account. It is true that, for Freud, attachment makes for subjection: socialization requires a level of de-individuation. Since we must receive care from our early attachments in order to survive, we treasure these attachments and aim to protect them by adapting ourselves to their demands and desires. But, according to Freud, we are not in love with these demands themselves. In effect the subject accepts these norms, works from within them, and fights back against them. The ego's subordination to norms is incomplete not because the demands are weak (due to their performative nature) but because they are *plural*. The ego counterbalances these demands

with those of the id, not by an exertion of sovereign control but through the hesitant negotiation of external and internal worlds replete with competing demands.²⁶ Between the superego, the id, and the external world the ego is a “poor creature” operating at an unstable “frontier.”²⁷

Ultimately, Freud provides two distinct accounts of the superego. In normal development the superego prohibits the child’s libidinal advances towards the parental dyad but also helps to sublimate this libido into productive love-relationships. This “mild” superego offers prohibitions alongside enticements. However, the superego can also transform into a “one-sided” and cruel agency of prohibition and control.²⁸ When the Oedipal anxieties cannot be adequately expressed and worked through, the fear of disappointment gives way to a dread of persecution, what Freud called castration-anxiety. As castration fantasies become castration fears the superego morphs from a mild force into an ever-vigilant monitor of deviant behavior. Since the aggression towards the loved object cannot be expressed, it turns back on itself, and becomes a masochistic force of self-beratement.²⁹ At this point prohibition, over enticement and “persuasion,” rises to the fore: “if we turn to melancholia . . . we find that the excessively strong superego . . . rages against the ego with merciless violence.”³⁰ The melancholic superego manifests itself through a “dictatorial ‘Thou shalt,’” becoming a sadistic, “super-moral” force that becomes “as cruel as only the id can be.”³¹ The ego, in the face of this onslaught, is weakened to the point that it develops a perverse need for, and satisfaction in, its illness. It holds on to the dictatorial and persecutory ‘Thou Shalt’ rather than return to the risky balancing act of equivocal ideals and ambivalent realities.

Butler elides the distinction Freud draws between the normal sense of guilt and the melancholic superego. Instead Butler sees Freud’s settled view of conscience as the “effect of an internalized prohibition” that “produces . . . a psychic habit of self-beratement, one that is consolidated over time as conscience.”³² Butler takes license for her reading from what she sees as Freud’s admission in *The Ego and the Id* that *all* subjective life is predicated on loss that cannot be acknowledged or avowed. Melancholia is not simply one possible psychological outcome, but that which “grounds the subject.”³³ As Butler reads Freud, “the ‘character of the ego’ appears to be . . . the archaeological remainder . . . of unresolved grief.”³⁴ The consolidation of the ego results from losses repressed and radically foreclosed. We come to consciousness on the basis of denied injury. Like an amnesiac waking up to the cold, foreign light of a hospital room, we know we have suffered a loss but we cannot recover this loss itself. Here is Butler:

The foreclosure of certain forms of love suggests that the melancholia that grounds the subject (and hence always threatens to unsettle and disrupt that ground) signals an incomplete and irresolvable grief. Unowned and incomplete, melancholia is the limit of the subject's sense of *pouvoir*, its sense of what it can accomplish and, in that sense, its power . . . Because the subject does not, cannot, *reflect* on that loss, that loss marks the limit of reflexivity, that which exceeds (and conditions) its circuitry.³⁵

The above passage reveals what can only be described as Butler's investments in melancholia, as an inescapable limit internal to the subject. She goes out of Freud's text to assert both a reflexive nature to subjectivity that absorbs, only to reflect back, social prohibitions and a melancholia underneath this subjectivity that loosens and troubles the prohibitive identifications that inaugurate conscious life.³⁶ In the process, Butler lets Freud's *The Ego and the Id* silently incorporate his "Mourning and Melancholia," which replaces the process of working through with endless melancholia. The plurivocal superego, the frontier ego, and Freud's differentiation between pathological and mundane guilt all go missing in Butler's account.

Bringing Ourselves to Grief, I: From Foreclosure to Prohibition

Butler's investments in melancholic subjectivity inspire two seemingly very different ethical-political responses in her recent work. The first move is an Antigone-inspired politics of disruption and repudiation that is sparked by the antagonistic struggle between foreclosed desire and social and cultural forces of prohibition. Antigone's insistent mourning updates and recasts Butler's early emphasis on performative resistance to cultural prohibitions surrounding kinship and desire.³⁷ This move is marked by a slight shift in emphasis from "foreclosed" to "prohibited" mourning.

Yet another shift occurs as Butler pairs this antagonistic politics with a seemingly antithetical emphasis on the cultivation of ethical attitudes of humility and generosity drawn from her reading of Levinas and Adorno. Here the emphasis is less on cultural prohibitions than it is on ethical dispositions cultivated through practices of acknowledgement and self-care. In Butler's hands, then, the work of mourning has a split orientation: it operates as an effective means of mobilizing rage against the material and discursive powers that be, while simultaneously involving an ethical responsiveness to the other and to "precarious life."

Butler's turn from foreclosed mourning to prohibited mourning enabled her to employ the themes of mourning and melancholia in writing about a variety of cultural refusals of mourning such as the AIDS crisis, the cultural and political climate in the United States following September 11, and U.S. practices of indefinite detention and torture.³⁸ In all of this work Butler drew attention to the paucity of available means for the public expression of certain losses and the inability of the marginalized to make their grief visible because their losses are prohibited by social stigma. As Butler argued, the losses from AIDS could not rise above the stigma attached to homosexual desire, just as the deaths of foreign civilians caught up in the global war on terror had difficulty breaking through the dominant administrative and media frames of the conflict. In these instances, melancholia is less an individual pathology than a political and cultural phenomenon. As Butler put it, "where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such [losses] might be named and mourned, then melancholia takes on cultural dimensions"³⁹ The prohibition of public mourning, in effect, doubles the trauma of loss.

To confront these cultural prohibitions, Butler draws attention to the discursive frames by which experience is organized. As she puts it, "a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that frame works . . . to preclude certain kinds of questions."⁴⁰ For instance, in describing the dominant response to September 11, Butler laments the fact that efforts to contextualize the terrorists' actions in a history of U.S. foreign intervention, or in global patterns of poverty and religiosity, were delegitimized as rationalizations for the attacks. Instead media coverage focused on the attackers' personal histories and on shadowy Al Qaeda "masterminds" like Osama bin Laden. On Butler's understanding, this was largely an effort to make sense of the events by situating them within a recognizable frame of subjective agency and charismatic leadership. As she puts it, "isolating the individuals involved absolves us of the necessity of coming up with a broader explanation for events."⁴¹ Moreover, public commemoration of these events are typified by a "monumental" style of mourning that short-circuits critical reflection on these losses.⁴² At these moments, critical modes of questioning are drowned out and overwhelmed by rituals of "spectacular public grief."⁴³

Recognition of the limited enframing of loss and the monumental performances of mourning that perpetuate denials inspire Butler to assert a disruptive politics of grief as the means of resignifying the "conditions of grievability."⁴⁴ Butler turns to Antigone, that perpetually troublesome figure of resistance, as a model for this eruptive politics. Antigone represents the possibility of refusing the hegemonic orders of the intelligible by which grief is apportioned out. She does so by revealing what Butler calls the "aberrant temporality of the norm," or its dependence on sustained performances that

are never guaranteed.⁴⁵ Creon's edict outlawing mourning rites for Polyneices functions only insofar as it is taken up and repeated by the Theban subjects. Antigone's insistent refusal to recognize Creon's law gives momentum to growing doubts within the city, first voiced in the play by Haemon and later echoed by the chorus of Theban elders. Ultimately, Antigone sparks a political conflagration by refusing the frame that organizes the city's grief.

For Butler, Antigone's predicament offers an allegory about similar crises in our time. As she puts it, "Antigone refuses to obey any law that refuses public recognition of her loss, and in this way prefigures the situation that those with publicly ungrievable losses—from AIDS, for instance—know too well."⁴⁶ By her actions Antigone hints at the possibility that subjects might resist and reconfigure the discursive norms that bind them. Her particular claims over the body of her fallen brother ultimately force a polis-wide recognition of the law's inherent instability. Antigone, in other words, *brings Thebes to grief*. She troubles the rigid distinctions of the polis over who can speak in public and over what losses should be mourned and how.

On the one hand, Antigone's claim is concrete and political. She insists on a proper burial for Polyneices, against the dictates of Creon. In this respect she "speaks in the name of politics and the law."⁴⁷ However, for Butler, Antigone's claims do not point to the "question of representation" but "somewhere else . . . to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed."⁴⁸ Antigone's politics consist in the way that she voices a limit that is "internal to normative construction itself."⁴⁹ The power of Antigone's claim is that it demonstrates an inherent instability within discursive subjugation.⁵⁰ The norm or prohibition that structures subjectivity never fully determines the subject because,

"The 'subject' created is not for that reason fixed in place: it becomes the occasion for a further making . . . a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject's incoherence."⁵¹

Hence, for Butler, Antigone's grief is not exemplary because it attempts to create more public space for the working through of traumatic loss or to slowly bend the norms and codes of speech. Instead Antigone is exemplary because she signals the "scandal" by "which the unspeakable . . . makes itself heard through borrowing and exploiting the very terms that are meant to enforce its silence."⁵² Antigone's speech acts are, as literal claims, irrelevant; instead what is significant is the way in which her speech leads to a "fatality [that] exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own

promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future.”⁵³ In other words, the socially instituted melancholia at Thebes becomes an occasion for Butler’s melancholic subjectivity to insinuate itself into Sophocles’ text.

However, Butler’s suturing between the praxis of incessant disruption and melancholic subjectivity is not without costs. In the particular case of Antigone, it serves to push her concrete claims, and her acts of mourning, outside of the polis (a replication, in effect, of Creon’s prohibition). Butler’s investments in melancholia elevate Antigone’s acts of grieving into a paradigmatic politics of disruption, yet in this elevation Antigone’s actual laments seem to lose the texture and ambivalence that comes from their location *within* codes of speech and public interaction. That these norms sought to exclude the rights of the claimant to speak is surely relevant to any reading of the play, but also relevant is Sophocles’ inversion of these norms and Antigone’s discursive *success* in undermining Creon’s claims for legitimacy and, even, in altering the Theban codes of speech surrounding grief. It is worth recalling that Antigone’s first recorded laments in the play are not directed at her brother but at the polis and her fellow *politai*: “My City! Rich citizens of my city! . . . I would still have you as my witnesses” (line 842). Even more important and remarkable is the transformative effect that Antigone’s efforts have on how the citizens of Thebes view the traditional codes surrounding lamentation and speech. Towards the end of the drama, when Eurydice learns of the death of her son Haemon, she retreats into the home in order—we soon discover—to commit suicide. In the wake of her departure, the leader of the chorus and the messenger begin to question the wisdom of domestic “repression” surrounding grief (1250). As the chorus leader puts it, “a silence so extreme is as dangerous as a flood of silly tears” (1248). The messenger concurs: “you are right: in an excess of silence, too, there may be trouble” (1256). The agon between Antigone and Creon is hardly an ideal speech situation, but it does appear to have yielded public reflection on the norms by which speech and action were organized at Thebes.

Butler’s allegiance to melancholic subjectivity serves to obscure this outcome. Despite Butler’s acknowledgment that Antigone is “trying to grieve, to grieve publicly,” she avers that these “loud proclamations of grief presuppose a domain of the ungrivable.”⁵⁴ Unsatisfied with a diagnosis of Thebes’ political melancholia, manifested by Creon’s dictatorial prohibition of discursive contestation surrounding the death of Eteocles and Polyneices, Butler insists on a register of unacknowledged and unspoken loss perpetually beyond our discursive grasp. The insistence on melancholia obscures the ambivalence of Antigone’s public mourning, seeing it less as a

representable claim within a concrete community than as an irruptive force that reveals the limits of representation, sovereignty, and the law.⁵⁵ Butler's insistence on reading Antigone's claim as an "impossible" form of mourning, then, still operates in the shadow of her early work on foreclosed grief and melancholic subjectivity. Yet this frame ultimately excludes the texture of Antigone's claims and their ambivalent success. As a result, mourning as a political practice becomes abstracted from the actual communities within which losses are described, contested, and enacted.⁵⁶

Bringing Ourselves to Grief, II: From Prohibition to Dispossession

Butler has added another register to her account of mourning in the course of what many of her critics have called her "ethical turn."⁵⁷ Inspired by Levinas and the late work of Foucault, Butler's shift could be described as a move from mourning as subversion to mourning as *dispossession*, or a change from the performative disruptions of the prescriptive norming of subjects and bodies through social stigma towards the productive cultivation of ethico-political dispositions such as generosity and humility. In making this move Butler consciously questioned her earlier acceptance of the "punitive scene" of melancholic subjectivity.⁵⁸ Her new emphasis was less on performative resignification of oppressive norms and more on how the acknowledgement of universal "precariousness" could shape a less violent and more generous politics. Yet Butler's investments in melancholia are not fully supplanted here; instead they reappear in a different form.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler reflected on the ethical possibilities emanating from our "impingement" by an outside world: our "constitutive sociality" and "exposure" to the claims of others.⁵⁹ For Butler this primal exposure can become the ground for a heightened sense of ethical responsibility. The challenge is to accept our "unwilled susceptibility" to others without attempting to overcome this susceptibility through the cultivation of an autonomous will.⁶⁰ Instead, ethical responsibility involves using our exposure to others, our very *lack* of an autonomous will, as a resource for becoming more responsive to their needs.

Butler draws upon Levinas in order to make these claims.⁶¹ For Levinas, responsibility begins not with an autonomous ego but, rather, through a pre-ontological relation that exists before anything resembling an ego. Levinas calls this the "original traumatism" that is the very condition of the subject; it takes the form of a primary and unwilled relation to the Other who appears, in Levinas' formulation, as a disembodied "face."⁶² This face is a reminder of

our original traumatism, and its insistent demand is that we refuse the violent foreclosure of our ego lest we give in to “an impulsive aggression grounded in the self-preservative aims of egoism.”⁶³ The face of the Other, for Levinas, issues a stark command: “You shall not kill.”⁶⁴ This demand accuses and persecutes the subject in ways that replicate the original impingements by others without which the ego could not appear. As Butler puts it, the Other’s face “addresses me in a way that is singular, irreducible, and irreplaceable.”⁶⁵ Only by staying open to the singular claim of the Other can the subject avoid the “unbridled cruelty” of a self that “seeks to separate itself from its constitutive sociality.”⁶⁶

An ethics of nonviolence, then, would consist in remaining open to the impingements and impressions of others. Butler ties this ethics of responsibility to the work of mourning; we are responsive to the extent that we “insist upon *not* resolving grief and staunching vulnerability too soon . . . but to take the very unbearability of exposure as the sign . . . of a common vulnerability.”⁶⁷ Mourning becomes a means of cultivating ethical dispositions towards the claims of others through the acknowledgment of social impingement and corporeal vulnerability. The acknowledgement of ego incoherence and object dependency prepares an “ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness to ourselves.”⁶⁸ Tarrying with grief marks a “slow process” through which “we develop a point of identification with suffering itself.”⁶⁹ Incessant mourning keeps open our relations to others, provides a constant reminder of our constitutive sociality, and undergirds a more generous and humble approach to shared lives together.

Following this second turn, we can see how mourning, for Butler, is a doubled practice of bringing ourselves/*ourselves* to grief. We bring ourselves to grief by protesting the foreclosures that make certain lives unlivable and certain losses unmournable. Through experiences of the “impossible,” such as the irruption of Antigone into the public sphere, we can discern the political frames by which grief is organized.⁷⁰ Once this structure is revealed, we can work to destabilize these norms and avow heretofore-unspeakable losses. We also bring ourselves to grief through recognition of the ek-static nature of subjectivity, that is, we bring *ourselves* to grief. The recognition of essential precariousness of life is a powerful means by which we can acknowledge and honor social and ethical inter-dependency. Through it we acknowledge, in Butler’s words, “that the ‘I,’ first comes into being as a ‘me’ through being acted upon by an other, and this primary impingement is already and from the start an ethical interpellation.”⁷¹ By bringing *ourselves* to grief, we resist the temptation towards violent foreclosures that a closed account of identity necessarily entails. An appreciation of subjective precariousness can in turn lead

us to reflect on objective “precarity”: the “politically induced condition in which certain populations . . . become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”⁷² Our lives and desires (even our deaths) are not present within us but are granted or given by socio-cultural powers over which we have little influence. Recognizing this, Butler hopes, will lead us to a presumptive generosity for those who are currently marginalized or persecuted.⁷³ Grief, along with a variety of other dispossessive experiences, such as anger or desire, sensitizes the subject to its own stubborn opacity, its internal “unknowingness,” and this becomes the basis for tenuous claims of commonality that can stitch together new communities and ways of life.⁷⁴

Insofar as these claims about precariousness and vulnerability, however, are pitched at the level of an abstract, universal humanism, they elide the concrete messiness of our actual, lived communities in which we (imperfectly) act, speak, love, and mourn. The difficulty with Butler’s ethics of responsibility in the thrall of Levinas is not that we can reasonably deny our impingement by the other’s “face” but that we are responsive to a plurality of faces, and that each of these faces has more than one face. The origin of ethics in a pre-ontological relation can only serve to obscure the multiple ambivalent relationships that comprise our ethical and political commitments, visions, responsibilities, and actions.

Butler herself seems nervous about the abstract nature of Levinas’ claims, which is why she turns to Adorno in order to reconnect an ethics of responsibility to a theorist indebted to a Weberian “ethic of responsibility.” For Adorno, responsibility required a critical investigation of both the social and material conditions of our time and the ideological discourses surrounding and justifying those conditions. Adorno formulated this as “an element not just of self-criticism, but of criticism of that *unyielding, inexorable something* that sets itself up in us.”⁷⁵ The pressure of this “inexorable something” puts into circulation a critical process of investigating “damaged life” that is the antipode to moral narcissism. For Butler, this resembles a tarrying with grief as a means of interrogating the limits of subjugation. She follows Adorno in seeing the “unyielding, inexorable something” as a means of recalling the subject to its own opacity or fallibility. Yet Adorno’s unyielding self-criticism reflects his melancholic faith that “life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live the good life.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the only responsible course for Adorno is to follow an absolute “negative prescription” of resistance “to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us.”⁷⁷ On this view, there are no benign or innocuous (let alone positive) actions or forms of life; even an occasional “visit to the cinema” becomes a “betrayal” of self-critical insights and an unforgiveable act of conformism to the deformed and violent world.⁷⁸

Butler's turn to Adorno, then, seems to overcome the a-historical abstractions of Levinas only to fall back into shadow of an unbearable superego. The dictatorial "Thou Shalt" that emerges from Butler's reading of Levinas and Adorno imitates a super-moral demand that, in its singularity and irreplaceability, replicates the cruel persecution of the melancholic superego. The merciless criticism of this "unyielding, inexorable something" leaves no room for the ego; it borders on a tyrannical power that, as Freud would have it, "often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death."⁷⁹

Butler's turn to Levinas and Adorno asserts an undeniable relationality, then, but in the process it reinscribes the severe superego that she had consciously sought to move beyond. Seemingly unsatisfied with a political vision limited to subversion and a theory of an essentially *reactive* subject, Butler turns to Levinas and Adorno for the cultivation of ethical dispositions in which mourning is refigured as a site of dispossession. Yet this move repeats the melancholic refrain. Under the thrall of the unforgiving superego figure derived from Levinas and Adorno, the political expression of mourning becomes a curious (if not paradoxical) enraged nonviolence, which Butler calls the "carefully crafted 'fuck you.'"⁸⁰ Butler presumes that acts of ek-static acknowledgement beneath the gaze of a revised superego will allow enraged claims to take on a nonviolent character, but it is difficult to accept this idea at face value. On the contrary, the deep anger of the political "fuck you"—no matter how carefully crafted—seems to inevitably drift towards violence that, far from remaining in touch with the ek-static nature of subjectivity, obliterates the ambivalence of both the targeted other and the social-political world composed of a plurality of multi-faceted others.⁸¹

There is an irony at play here. Butler's early work comprised in part an attempt to loosen the strictures of an overwhelming superego that prohibited mourning surrounding gender and kinship norms. She did this by arguing for an essential weakness of the melancholic superego tied to its dependence on the repetition of its norms by the subject. The performative nature of the superego makes possible the subversion of these dictatorial decrees. In turning from prohibited mourning to *claimed* mourning, however, Butler implicitly acknowledges the need for a superego-like figure to facilitate a less violent politics. However, this superego—the Levinasian face of the Other, Adorno's "unyielding, inexorable something"—is a melancholic specter that rages against the ego with impossible and contradictory demands.⁸²

Butler remains torn between two conflicting ethico-political impulses, and this tension cannot be resolved using the Freudian resources to which she remains loyal. However, what if there is an alternative to this split orientation between a moral and political narcissism that forgets its vulnerability and a fixated openness to the Other that forgoes responsibility to the competing

demands of plural others? I believe we can locate resources for this alternative within the work of Melanie Klein. For Klein, there is a crucial difference between a melancholic subject that denies internal and external conflicts while living in bondage to a sadistic superego, and what we might call a *mourning subject* that is enriched and strengthened through experiences of loss, grief, and working through.

The Plurivocal Superego and Melanie Klein's Mourning Subject

Not until the object is loved as a *whole* can its loss be felt as a whole.

—Melanie Klein

Butler's intellectual agon with psychoanalysis remains unresolved because she seemingly cannot fully quit the Freudian framework of melancholia because of its promise of inexhaustible resistance drawn from a picture of a subject inaugurated by unspeakable loss. As a result, her attempt to turn away from the "punitive scene" of melancholic inauguration falls back into a melancholic position in the thrall of a nearly unbearable guilt. However, given Butler's explicit concerns—exposing social melancholia, and thinking about ethical and political life on the basis of intersubjective vulnerability (the doubled task of "bringing ourselves/ourselves to grief")—her work on mourning would have been more convincing if she had started with Melanie Klein rather than Freud. Klein offers a comparably serious account of mourning that does not divorce us from the ambivalence that suffuses our political and ethical realities.

Klein's early work emphasized its connections to the Freudian corpus, but over time crucial differences emerged between their accounts of the superego, the task of mourning, and the development of the ego. According to Klein, Freud had over-emphasized the role of castration anxiety in the resolution of the Oedipus complex, and downplayed the role of reparative love. Beyond fear of the father's prohibitions, the child also experiences guilt regarding his own murderous rage. Aggression and fear form one part of an ambivalent relation to the other. As Klein sees it, "the Oedipus situation loses in power not only because the boy is afraid [of] a revengeful father, but also because he is driven by feelings of love and guilt to preserve his father as an internal and external figure."⁸³ The Oedipal struggle is not only a scene of violent aggression. The supposed clarity of the conflict is, rather, a confused muddle of aggression, love, fear, and desire that characterizes not only the

parent-child triad but all of our subsequent object relations. The typical superego, which for Klein arises at a much earlier point than for Freud, is made up of a “variety of figures built up from . . . experiences and phantasies.”⁸⁴ Yet even this plurivocal superego bears within itself the potential of melancholic persecution. The mundane guilt that results from interdependency (what Freud called *sozial Angst*) can shift into a cruel form of persecution. For Klein, these “anxieties of a psychotic nature” are unavoidable and must be worked through by the ego.⁸⁵

Klein’s modification of Freud’s account of the superego is tied to her reappraisal of his stage-model of psychic development. For Klein, psychic life is not characterized by evolving stages but by two alternating “positions”—the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive. The paranoid-schizoid position is characterized by a weak ego, unable to tolerate the co-presence of good and bad objects. The compromised ego creates “larger than life” people and emotions, “unmodified by their opposites.”⁸⁶ Even though both the good and bad objects have been introjected, the latter are constantly seen to threaten the former. The subject feels persecuted and attacked, and in turn musters its defenses to fight against these threats. These anxieties are generated by the infant’s early relation to the breast, which is either present or absent, and thus alternately perceived (and subsequently fantasized) as comforting or punitive. For Klein, however, the paranoid-schizoid position, and its characteristic psychic defenses, is not merely a temporary phenomenon but, rather, a continual temptation throughout our lives. The stresses and anxieties accompanying deeply felt losses especially draw us back to this position. From there, the lost object assumes an outsized character, and we feel compelled to defend it at all costs from internal and external threats. We thereby project the hatred that is mixed up in this object—and we have no attachments that do not involve hatred—into another object, or we absorb it into the ego and enter a period of self-loathing. Enslaved to the other and beset by persecutory phantasies, Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position corresponds to Freud’s description of the cruel superego inherent to melancholia. The weak ego turns violently against itself beneath the dictatorial other.

To arrest this cycle the subject must reintegrate whole, ambivalent objects into the psyche. This labor occurs within what Klein calls the depressive position. The depressive position, unlike clinical depression, is not characterized by complete libidinal disinvestment. Instead it marks a turning away from fantastical “part-objects” that have heretofore been idealized or demonized through defense mechanisms against overwhelming anxiety. By acknowledging the simultaneous presence of “good” and “bad” within objects of attachment the subject recognizes what Klein described as “the

poignant psychic reality.”⁸⁷ Subsequently the need for external objects resembling outsized villains and impregnable heroes withers away.⁸⁸ Conflicts that remain with these objects are not denied or pushed out of consciousness, but are confronted fully for the first time outside the Manichean picture of the paranoid-schizoid position. Thus, in contrast to the ordinary language understanding of “depression,” Klein portrays depressive attitudes as a measure of psychic growth and ego-complexity.

What makes the attainment of the depressive position possible is a process of mourning. Klein, in distinction to Freud’s earlier theory of mourning as replacement, takes mourning to be a broadened process of creating and keeping in circulation a rich internal world of ambivalent objects. As she puts it, [the subject’s] inner world, the one which he has built up from his earliest days onwards . . . [is] destroyed when the actual loss occurred. The rebuilding of this inner world characterizes the successful work of mourning.”⁸⁹ The work of mourning becomes, in Klein’s hands, the task of “ego-integration.” Ego integration implies a greater synthesis between internal and external worlds, and a repopulation of the psyche with whole, ambivalent objects bearing fantasies of both love and murder. The integrated ego is an enriched ego, capable of holding together the contradictory and conflictual elements of psychic life. By overcoming the melancholic scene of the paranoid-schizoid position, the milder superego appears and inspires engagements with others outside overpowering fantasies of persecutory dread and idealized love.

Yet the depressive position does not amount to a final transcendence of dread and the violent mechanisms by which we defend ourselves against the melancholic superego’s demanding face. The melancholic superego of the paranoid-schizoid position is pathological, but it is also mundane. For Klein, every infant’s first superego is outsized in its cruelty, and since the paranoid-schizoid position from which this superego is formed is a perpetual temptation throughout life we will all periodically feel the excessive criticism of this menacing face. The melancholic superego is but one possibility, however. If the conditions are right, persecutory angst can yield to a productive and open form of anxiety. This heralds the appearance of a milder superego: “there emerge beneficent and helpful imagos . . . which approximate more closely to the real objects; and [the] super-ego, from being a threatening, despotic force . . . begins to exert a milder and more persuasive rule.”⁹⁰ This second superego overcomes the “slavery” to which the ego had submitted when complying with the “cruel demands and admonitions” of the melancholic superego.⁹¹ Within the depressive position, we are able to come to terms with the ambivalence of our beloved objects. We mourn not (only) their actual death but their deaths as perfect and idealized forms. In sum, mourning

involves the acceptance of ambivalence through the integration of complex, multi-sided objects into the subject's identity.

Klein's theory of what we could call a "mourning subject" forms the kernel of a more capacious understanding of ethical and political life. Therefore, with Butler's move from mourning as the subversion of cultural prohibitions to mourning as a mode of cultivating ethical dispositions, she is well positioned to draw from Klein's account. Yet Butler's investment in an account of melancholic subjectivity overshadows her reading of Klein, in the few moments where Butler has discussed her work.⁹² Butler's turn to Klein post-dates her appropriation of (and strange allegiance to) Freud, and perhaps because of this she misses the key elements of Klein's work as it deviates from Freud's: the emphasis on early and continual object-relations, the lack of a narcissistic stage, and the distinction between persecutory and depressive anxiety. Butler interprets Klein as insisting on the primacy of the ego and its search for survival over and against a moral responsiveness to the other. She explains away Klein's language of guilt and reparation by suggesting that "for Klein, the question of survival precedes the question of morality; indeed, it would seem that guilt does not index a moral relation to the other, but an unbridled desire for self-preservation."⁹³ As such Butler leaves unexplored the dispositions that might follow from a Kleinian approach to the subject, even as she acknowledges that, "for Klein, as well as for Levinas, the meaning of responsibility does not settle an ambivalence through disavowal, but rather gives rise to a certain ethical practice, itself experimental, that seeks to preserve life better than it destroys it."⁹⁴ Instead Butler elides Klein's understanding of depressive identification by reading the internalization of the other that takes place in mourning as a "melancholic solution" that "constitutes a reflexive turn that constitutes the surviving subject's self-annihilating soliloquy."⁹⁵ Yet it is clearly Butler here who repeats the melancholic solution at the root of her own work: the singular, unshakable assumption that melancholia is the ground of subjectivity.

Because Butler is leery of the regnant social forces that structure and uphold identity, she emphasizes mourning as a "disidentificatory" practice, in the style of Antigone. Hence she initially conceives of mourning as a limit ethos that exposes, tests and resignifies identity claims that are too dogmatic or too much in denial over identity's contingent foundation. Seemingly unsatisfied with the limited nature of an Antigonean politics, Butler turned to claim mourning as a positive process of cultivating ethical dispositions such as generosity and humility, which could serve as resources for a nonviolent politics. However, the subject's identity is not secured by this process but, instead, perpetually deferred and decentered by unwilling susceptibility to

others. Hence this turn still rests on a claim of melancholic subjectivity reinforced now by a dictatorial, melancholic “Thou Shalt” that obscures the vexed and ambivalent nature of our interactions with, and responsibilities to, multi-faceted others.

For Klein, on the other hand, non-dogmatic identity results not from dis-identificatory refusals or a perpetual deferral of the self, but from positive identifications with ambivalent internal and external realities and objects. In the depressive position we experience loss but manage to internalize objects that make this loss bearable and continued life possible. The work of mourning succeeds not through *disintegration* but *integration* of the subject, which will not eliminate our grief over, or grievances with, others but will make these grievances more realistic and our efforts to address them more reparative.

Conclusion: From the Psychic to the Political Work of Mourning

Any account of the politics of mourning that leans upon the work of Klein should not lean *too heavily* upon her work. Doing so could obscure how the achievement of the depressive position requires a supportive context that honors, avows, and helps give a shape to the losses inherent to intersubjective life. Here is where Butler’s emphasis on cultural and political prohibitions proves its essential mettle. The mourning subject, as it were, requires a commitment to public mourning, to articulating and confronting the violence, trauma, and ambivalence of our common life together. Bringing about the mourning subject, then, is not solely a task for the analyst or the analysand, but a socio-political and cultural project. The mourning subject is, in Butler’s language, an iterable and intersubjective process: it is continually being established and dissolved, torn and restored, over the course of our lives. It requires the presence of reflective, sympathetic objects that make possible a working through of grief.

For Butler this involves public processes of avowing the lives and losses barred from recognition by the “reigning epistemes of cultural intelligibility”—a process of making public the silent losses of those dying of AIDS, or of speaking out for those caught in a netherworld of extrajudicial imprisonment.⁹⁶ These discursive and political tasks of mourning can reset the frames by which grief and grievance can be worked through. Butler’s orientation to mourning begins from the crucial recognition that what counts as a “grievable life” is itself a political question. If there is a paucity of public spaces for the engagement and working through of the contentious politics surrounding

grief and grievability, then practices of public mourning may merely serve to reinforce a cognitive and nationalistic dogmatism rather than providing an occasion to acknowledge corporeal vulnerability and ethico-political interconnection. The desire or need to mourn “unmournable” lives and losses, then, involves us in a struggle to alter the conditions of responsiveness and the dominant modes of response, hence the value of Butler’s mourning that perpetually asks after “what remains unspeakable.”⁹⁷

However, these struggles must be waged in the service of establishing spaces and practices for working through, which in turn support the enrichment of social and subjective life through the inclusion of dispossessive loss and grief within public life. Conversely, there are moments in Butler’s work where the emphasis on investigating what remains unspeakable slides into a valorization of the unspeakable itself. The traumatic kernel of Butler’s melancholic subjectivity insists dogmatically on an internal limit to the subject that cannot be discursively captured. As Butler puts it, the ethos of asking “about the convergence of social prohibition and melancholia” is done “not in order to produce speech that will fill the gap” but in order to turn social condemnation into disruptive performances of repudiation.⁹⁸ This evokes Lacan’s notion of the cruel passage that the psyche takes as it is channeled through the symbolic.⁹⁹ Yet just as Butler is critical of Lacan’s positing of a desire outside of history, so too should we remain skeptical of Butler’s melancholic limit outside of speech. Her investments in melancholia elide how speech itself is the means of expressing, holding, and working through the ambivalences that mark our conflicted relationships with others.

Distaste for dogmatic identity claims does not absolve theorists of mourning from the need to inhabit and practice a non-melancholic form of life. Clearly Butler herself has a sense for this, even if she remains conflicted.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, a Klein-inspired emphasis on non-dogmatic identity seems to redeem immanent promises in Butler’s account. An alternative account of mourning could maintain Butler’s accent on the relational nature of identity while overcoming her melancholic commitments and her split orientation towards grief. If the subject is no longer posited as melancholic, then an alternative view of political space and action opens up here under the aegis of mourning. Once we admit that the passage to speech is necessary for avowing and working through public losses, then we should attempt to locate the norms and spaces to integrate these losses into individual and collective identity. The politics of mourning would then be seen to arise from and remain connected to concrete claims for acknowledgement, justice, atonement, and reparation.

In the space remaining I would like to point in the direction that this work might go. For starters it would involve revising accounts of democratic theory and practice so that they might take seriously Antigone-like disruptive claims of grief and grievance while ultimately favoring a mode of politics that would cultivate and reinforce the dispositions of Klein's mourning subject. In part, this is done by re-situating these claims within a broadened concept of public discourse such that they can disrupt hasty prohibitions of grief while remaining committed to the possibility of articulating and working through these claims in public with multi-faceted others. These claims only originate from within concrete communities and modes of address, and more capacious or generous forms of civic identity must thereby originate through repeated acts of acknowledgement of, and identification with, these claims. Clearly this is easier said than done. Butler's judgment regarding the poverty of regnant public discourses of loss and grief is largely borne out. Too often public modes of mourning do not exceed what she calls the "dry grief of an endless political rage."¹⁰¹ Yet Antigone's discursive success provides a model for how claims of grief can address and even overcome this dry form of grief in order to form the effective basis of a revised civic identity.

Public contestation of the norms circumscribing life and loss is valuable not because it reveals an ineffable "limit" to subject formation but because it exposes our *limited* perspectives and life-experiences. Deliberation across differences can induce reflection on heretofore-inviolable articles of faith and dogmatic certainties.¹⁰² It can lead to an appreciation of the ambiguity and tragedy marking our lives with others while developing relatively open and public means of acting in the face of this instability and uncertainty. Reflexive comparisons regarding grief and loss can lead to the reexamination of deeply held norms and the evolution of unthinking doxa into more reflective judgments. Iterations of such processes in turn nurture a civic identity committed to honoring the dignity of political adversaries by acknowledging that disagreements and tensions cannot be wished away but only slowly and patiently worked through.

Klein's account of what I have called the "mourning subject" mirrors this idea of civic identity achieved through repeated deliberative engagements across difference. The depressive position marks the relinquishment of out-sized fantasies of demons and angels and the arrival of equivocal ideals and adversaries.¹⁰³ Just as public deliberations can induce a heightened appreciation of the other's ambiguity and depth, the depressive position marks the re-population of the inner "assembly" in the psyche through the acceptance of the simultaneity of love and hate in our objects of attachment. The mourning subject of the depressive position requires the repeated discovery of, as

one of Klein's analysts put it, the fact "that there is no happiness without tragedy."¹⁰⁴ Such moments of recognition short-circuit the abstractions and fantasies through which citizens often engage each other, and make possible deliberations and collective actions that can positively shape the conditions of our common life together.

On this formulation the work of mourning takes place within a variety of civic spaces and practices through which citizens establish, contest, and revise the frames by which public losses are memorialized. Here the theorist of the mourning subject has to engage in a conversation with a host of concrete publics through which grief and grievance are framed and filtered. Mourning in this light is conceived neither as subversion nor as dispossession; instead it is a means of speaking about loss in the name of establishing crosscutting relationships amidst social plurality and diversity. By emphasizing engagements across multiple, concrete publics we can overcome the abstractions and contradictions of Butler's politics of grief. This would cash in on the immanent promises of Antigone's (and Butler's) claims, which, when resituated within the discursive space of the polis, imply that the norms and frames of life and grief can be deliberately reworked and revised. Bringing ourselves to grief is a vital ethical and political charge, but to embed this charge in our political and cultural practices we must work through, instead of endlessly repeating, the scene of melancholic subjugation. In the process we would return the politics of mourning to its location within the precarious life of the polity.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the thoughtful criticism and constructive comments that helped move this manuscript towards completion. Special thanks are due to Peter Euben, Rom Coles, Ruth Grant, George Shulman, Bonnie Honig, Derek Barker, James Bourke, Ali Aslam, and Joel Alden Schlossser. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewers for *Political Theory*, and to Mary Dietz, whose incisive and considerate commentary proved especially helpful.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009); Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Honig, "Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership, and the Politics of Exception," *Political Theory* 37, no. 5 (2009): 5-43; Simon Stow, "Agonistic Homegoing: Frederick Douglas, Joseph Lowery, and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 4 (2011): 681-97. See also Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); Slavoj Zizek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 657-81.
2. Bonnie Honig, "Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism," *New Literary History* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2010); Marguerite Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Laura Knudson, "Cindy Sheehan and the Rhetoric of Motherhood: A Textual Analysis," *Peace and Change* 34, no. 2 (April 2009): 164-83.
3. Simon Stow, "Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2. (2010): 195-208; Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
4. Butler, *Precarious Life*; Butler, *Giving an Account*.
5. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Jürgen Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique*, no. 44 (1988): 40-50.
6. Stephen White has referred to this as Butler's "weak ontology." White, "As the World Turns: Ontology and Politics in Judith Butler," *Polity* 32, no. 2 (1999): 155-77.
7. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
8. Elena Loizidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
9. David S. Gutterman and Sara L. Rushing, "Sovereignty and Suffering: Towards an Ethics of Grief in a Post-9/11 World, in *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics*:

- Critical Encounters*, ed. Terrell Carver and Samuel A. Chambers (London: Routledge, 2008).
10. Lozidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics*, 155.
 11. Moya Lloyd, "Radical Democratic Activism and the Politics of Resignification," *Constellations* 14, no. 1 (2007): 129-46; Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). See also Lloyd, "Towards a Cultural Politics of Vulnerability," in *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics*.
 12. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 30.
 13. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 30.
 14. Gutterman and Rushing, "Sovereignty and Suffering," 129.
 15. Bonnie Honig, "Antigone's Two Laws"; George Shulman, "Acknowledgement and Disavowal as an Idiom for Theorizing Politics," *Theory and Event* 14, no. 1 (2011). See also Lloyd 2008 and Annika Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Both Lloyd and Thiem emphasize how, for Butler, "ethical" questions are always implicated in political conditions and realities. See also "Power, Politics, and Ethics: A Discussion Between Judith Butler and William Connolly," *Theory and Event* 4, no. 2 (2000). Nevertheless most readers of Butler have noted a seismic shift in her theory, which has morphed from an orientation towards resignification towards the cultivation of ethico-political dispositions of humility and generosity.
 16. Sara Rushing, "Preparing for Politics: Judith Butler's Ethical Dispositions," *Contemporary Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (2010): 284-303.
 17. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.
 18. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.
 19. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 147.
 20. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 81.
 21. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 239-58.
 22. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: Norton, 1989), 24.
 23. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 202.
 24. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 5.
 25. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 7.
 26. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 57-58.
 27. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 58.
 28. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 30. See also Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1989), 84.
 29. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 56.
 30. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 54.

31. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 56-57.
32. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 22.
33. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 23.
34. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 133.
35. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 23.
36. The performative slipperiness with which Butler treats Freud's texts sometimes leads to serious distortion. For instance, in two separate passages in *Psychic Life of Power* Butler re-translates Freud's "sozial Angst" as "dread of the community." By this sleight-of-hand Butler has transformed what Freud saw as a mundane feeling of anxiety immanent to social living into a Foucaultian dread of social regulation. Peer pressure becomes the panopticon.
37. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
38. Butler, *Precarious Life; Frames of War*.
39. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
40. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 4.
41. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 4. See also Raymond Geuss, "The Politics of Managing Decline," *Theoria* 108, no. 52 (2005): 1-12.
42. Thomas Dumm, "Giving Away, Giving Over: A Conversation with Judith Butler," *The Massachusetts Review*, June 2008.
43. Dumm, "Giving Away, Giving Over."
44. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 29.
45. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 29.
46. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 24.
47. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 5.
48. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 2.
49. Butler, *Frames of War*, 4.
50. Butler opposes the Lacanian reading of Antigone as a source of pure desire that resists its illegitimate channeling through the symbolic. However it is an open question whether or not this resistance is consistent and thorough. See Peter Burian, "Gender and the City: Antigone from Hegel to Butler and Back," In *When Worlds Elide*, ed. J. Peter Euben and Karen Bassi (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 255-99. See also Heather Love, "Dwelling in Ambivalence," *The Women's Review of Books* 22, no. 2 (2004).
51. Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 99.
52. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 79.
53. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 82. This passage is a subtle reworking and critique of Lacan's reading of Antigone. I am indebted to Bonnie Honig for this reminder.

54. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 80.
55. Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
56. Compare Moya Llyod, "Democratic Activism." Lloyd argues that Butler has perpetually understated the political and historical conditions necessary for successful acts of resignification or subversion.
57. Honig, "Antigone's Two Laws"; Shulman, "Acknowledgement and Disavowal."
58. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 15.
59. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 89.
60. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 91.
61. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 91.
62. Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution," in *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
63. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 92.
64. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8.
65. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 91.
66. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 77.
67. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 100.
68. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 42.
69. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 30.
70. Or interruptions of life represented by ACT UP "die-ins" during the early years of the AIDS crisis. Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17-32.
71. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 89.
72. Butler, *Frames of War*, 25.
73. A generosity extending even to so-called "enemy combatants" currently incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. See Butler, *Frames of War*, 55-62.
74. Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4 (2003): 12.
75. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 104.
76. Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schroder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 167.
77. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 168.
78. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 168.
79. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 55.
80. Butler, *Frames of War*, 182.
81. Butler, *Precarious Life*, xix. I am indebted to James Bourke for helping to put this angle of my critique into sharper relief.

82. Fred Alford, "Levinas and Political Theory," *Political Theory* 32, no. 2 (1999): 154. Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 37-38.
83. Melanie Klein, "The Oedipus Complex in Light of Early Anxieties," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1975), 418.
84. Melanie Klein, "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1975), 133.
85. Klein, "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique," 137.
86. Hanna Segal, *Melanie Klein: Key Figures in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 34.
87. Melanie Klein, "Some Theoretical Conclusions on the Emotional Life of the Infant," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1975), 73.
88. Klein, "Emotional Life of the Infant," 73.
89. Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-depressive States," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*.
90. Melanie Klein, "Development of Conscience in the Child," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 252.
91. Klein, "Development of Conscience in the Child," 252.
92. Judith Butler, "Moral Sadism and Doubting One's Love: Kleinian Reflections on Melancholia," in *Reading Melanie Klein*, ed. Lyndsey Stonebridge and John Phillips (London: Routledge, 1998), 179-89.
93. Butler, *Frames of War*, 45
94. Butler, *Frames of War*, 177.
95. Butler, "Moral Sadism and Doubting One's Love," 181.
96. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 24.
97. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 81.
98. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 81.
99. See Jacqueline Rose, "Negativity in the Work of Melanie Klein," in *Reading Melanie Klein*, 132.
100. For instance, in an interview published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Butler talked about her formative experiences growing up in a Jewish household. She describes a growing visceral discomfort with "identity policing," where the insistence on identifying who is "really Jewish" amounted to a form of "separatism." As she puts it, "I thought I can't live in a world in which identity is being policed in this way." However, in the same interview Butler admits that the ethical imperative to "speak out against state violence" is a way of "fulfill[ing] my obligation as a Jew." Even more interestingly, Butler cites certain rituals associated with Jewish identity, such as sitting shiva, which instilled

in her the sense of precarious life (which she identifies as a “Jewish value”). As Butler recalls, “sitting shiva . . . explicit grieving . . . was one of the most beautiful rituals of my youth . . . there were several moments when whole communities gathered in order to make sure that those who suffered terrible losses were taken up and brought back into the community and given a way to affirm life again.” Udi Aloni, “Judith Butler: As a Jew, I Was Taught It Was Ethically Imperative to Speak Up,” *Haaretz*, February 24, 2010.

101. Butler, *Precarious Life*, xix.
102. Many empirical studies have found that engagement with diverse views in deliberation can increase appreciation for reasons on all sides and higher tolerance of opponents. See for instance Jason Barabas, “How Deliberation Affects Policy Outcomes,” *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 4 (2004): 687-701; Cynthia Farrar, James S. Fishkin, Donald P. Green, Christian List, Robert C. Luskin, and Elizabeth Levy Paluck, “Disaggregating Deliberation’s Effects: An Experiment within a Deliberative Poll,” *British Journal of Political Science* 40 (2010): 333-47; Christopher F. Karpowitz and Jane Mansbridge, “Disagreement and Consensus: The Importance of Dynamic Updating in Public Deliberation,” in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, ed. J. Gastil and P. Levine (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 237-55. For a theoretical orientation to deliberation that can make room for an Antigone-style politics, see John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
103. This resembles William Connolly’s concept of “agonistic respect.” See Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
104. Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psychoanalysis of Children As Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-Year-Old Boy* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1961).

About the Author

David W. McIvor is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at The Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio. He received his PhD in Political Science from Duke University in May 2010.