

Book Review

To Shape a New World, Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry (eds). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 449.

To Shape a New World, edited by Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, is a gift. It's a gift to teachers who feel that there is so much more to Martin Luther King, Jr. than his dream but have been puzzled by how to incorporate him in their classrooms. Due to syllabi constraints, pedagogical rules, and canonical exclusionary practices—particularly in philosophy—teachers who are able to teach King's work often find that the only way of doing so is to put him in conversation with Socrates. This conversation about civil disobedience creates a spot for King's 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' alongside Plato's 'Crito'. However, the course often goes on without any mention of King and his other theoretical contributions. This volume is a solution to that problem. It gives us reasons to incorporate King in philosophy and political theory courses in ways that go beyond the civil disobedience debate. More importantly, it makes us question how in the world we could have ignored King's philosophical thought as much as we have in any course focused on examining our political and social world.

This volume is also a gift for those who have been disappointed by the use of King in political theory and academic philosophy. When King is mentioned (particularly in analytic philosophy) he is a premise to our arguments. That is to say, his work is incorporated as tangential to the core/heart of the philosophical enterprise at hand. Rarely are his arguments critically engaged. For this reason, it is easy to see how King's life and work have been co-opted and sanitized. His words are seen as proverbs, not political arguments. His life is viewed as a one-dimensional example of non-radical politics. Both views ignore context and content. This volume, on the other hand, gives us King's political arguments and his myriad contributions on a variety of themes. And it does so by bypassing the uplifting or saintly narrative route often taken by many scholars.

Another group for whom this volume is a gift are activists. The myth in political thought is that there are two spheres: the theoretical and the practical. The theorists theorize, often from the ivory tower, while activists (armed with theories from the theorists) protest in the streets. Activists are supposed to put in practice what they read from theorists. While activists' actions may contribute to social progress, the ideas and insights that guide

them are often attributed to theorists. King is often painted as an example of theory meeting practice but the theory is often accredited to those who have influenced him (for example, Gandhi, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Walter Rauschenbusch). *To Shape a New World* presents King as a serious political thinker rather than just a well-read activist. In doing so, it shows that King, like other activists before and after him, often engaged with these theorists, criticized them, and theorized the world for himself.

Shelby and Terry have gathered prominent political philosophers and theorists to bring such a gift to the world. Recognizing the lack of serious study and criticism of King in political thought, the editors believe that King has much to contribute to questions of justice, and political morality, judgment, and practice. While many have reduced King and the civil rights movement's contribution to those of a tactical and rhetorical movement, and while others have seen King's thought as not fitting in with our post-segregation times, Shelby's and Terry's aim in the volume is to show King as 'an important and challenging thinker whose ideas remain relevant and have surprising implications for public political debate' (p. 7). I think they have succeeded. The volume's contributors engage in close readings of King to explore several themes and the seriousness with which they engage King should not be overlooked. They go deep in content and into King's expansive archive to bring us illuminating and well-researched chapters that not only position King as the architect of political theory that he was, but also (as a consequence) enrich the political and philosophical canon.

The first part of the volume focuses on the philosophical tradition in which King is operating. Gooding Williams claims that King's arguments about dignity, time, and agency in his earlier work are directed at the Du Bois and Washington Debate. Paul C. Taylor reads King within the moral perfectionist tradition (alongside Emerson, Lebron, and Cavell) and sees his emphasis on transformation and striving as evidence. Bernard Boxill charts King's revolutionary roots and claims they were not republican but that King and his movement had 'psychological roots' in the soil of slavery. King is known as a spokesman of nonviolence who was heavily influenced by Gandhi. But Karuna Mantena argues that King also made original contributions to nonviolent politics.

One might originally read this first part as part of the problem with how we view black political thought in the West. That is, we often view it as contributing nothing to what we already knew or we see its relevance only to the extent that we also see the relevance of the anglophone tradition within which the black thinker is operating. However—though not as explicitly as Mantena—contributors argue that King was not only operating within certain intellectual traditions and thus simply following roadmaps laid out by predominately white thinkers before him. They argue that King was also thinking deeply, criticizing, and formulating and revising his own views within these traditions, and these activities are relevant on their own terms.

Part two focuses on King's ideals of nondomination, love, dignity, and colour-blindness. Danielle Allen claims that integration for King is not a mathematical fantasy—since African-Americans are only a small percentage of the population. Instead, she argues that for King, integration is lived out through nondomination and King gives us the social requirements for non-domination. Derrick Darby is careful not to give us a comprehensive theory of King's account of dignity (because there is none). However, he does lay out dignity's features and argues that King's criticism of racial injustice, particularly concerning the right to vote, is where we find his arguments for the value of dignity. Ronald Sundstrom turns our attention to the suspicion that King's work is colour-blind. Sundstrom argues that King supported colour-conscious politics rather than colour-blind practical politics. Though the latter was his hope and ideal, King believed that achieving it requires colour-conscious means.

Justice is the theme of the third part of the volume. Tommie Shelby aims to get a closer view of King's economic position by looking at how he understood the problems of the ghetto and solutions to it. Though Shelby claims that King's economic position was not socialist, he argues that it was radical nonetheless. Lawrie Balfour continues on the theme of economic justice by exploring King's use of such terms as 'unpaid debt', 'insufficient funds', and 'promissory note'. She argues that King used this economic language to bring attention to the United States' history of unmet obligations. Given these obligations, she asks how, for King, we might respond. While some might think that King was concerned only about blacks, Balfour shows that King's argument for the abolition of poverty and reparative policies is a universal idea that targets historic injustice not only for blacks but also the white poor, domestic and global. Lionel McPherson ends this part by putting King and Obama in tension, arguing that King's vision of nonviolence is superior to Obama's pragmatic militarism. McPherson also examines the cost of political violence, priorities and war, and what he considers a misrepresentation of King as an absolute pacifist.

In the last part of the volume, contributors discuss King and conscience by exploring conscientious citizenship, black power, and hope and despair. Michelle Moody-Adams gives an account of conscientious citizenship as 'a way of living that seeks to give substance to the idea that justice is indivisible, aspiring to an ideal ... of a world that would allow reconciliation between the former oppressed and their former oppressors' (p. 270). She then lays out three moral principles which, for King, are required to live out conscientious citizenship. She also points out that conscientious citizenship is an absolute duty that helps produce moral transformation for its citizens. Interestingly, Moody-Adams gives attention to King's response to Stokely Carmichael's criticism of the civil rights movement by taking up the point of moral transformation—a point I found to be quite enlightening and a tenable response to a powerful objection.

Continuing with Moody-Adams' attention to the debate between King and Stokely, Brandon Terry looks closer at the debate between members of the Black Power movement and King. He argues that King did not dismiss their criticisms but critically engaged with them. The engagement had an impact on King's thought and practice and it serves as a present-day model for critical engagement. Cornel West ends the book by discussing King's struggle with personal, political and philosophical nihilism. He offers insights from King's life on what to do when the threat comes our way. Answers include what he refers to as 'being a hope', bearing a cross with courage, and having spiritual integrity. Though this is uplifting, West makes no promise that these actions will guarantee progress.

I now briefly turn to two chapters not mentioned above—explaining their arguments in more detail while offering a few comments along the way. The chapters explore King and gender justice and his stance on anger, respectively. I explore these chapters for two reasons. First, the chapters do an exemplary job of showcasing the ways in which King's political philosophy is explored in this volume. One uses political theory methodology while the other uses analytic philosophy. Second, and more importantly, the chapters are examples of other work in this volume that shatters assumptions we may have had of King. They also challenge us to think of King and his thought in different ways.

Shatema Threadcraft and Brandon Terry, in 'Gender Trouble', explore King's thoughts on gender justice—paying close attention to his views on the family, masculinity, and gender roles. They look closely at what King says as well as how he says it and what he doesn't say. King is not presented as a saint and it's here that we see how contributors in the volume approach King—respecting him as a thinker by showing what was problematic about some of his ideas as well as showing his contributions.

Given the well-known problems with King's views on gender, scholars have taken two stances. *Qualified acceptance* critiques King's views on gender but keeps the other 'unproblematic' parts of his work for feminist thought. Feminist thinkers who have taken such a stance include bell hooks and Septima Clark. *Respectful rejection* encourages us to turn away from King as a source for feminist thought. Those who adopt this approach encourage us to look at emancipatory feminist figures such as Ella J. Baker instead. Acknowledging the faults of both, Threadcraft and Terry attempt to take a different stance. They refer to it as the 'think with King against King' stance. This stance includes a reinterpretation and a revision of his work. It also includes subversion, reconstruction, and retrieval of aspects of his thought. Through this interpretative approach they 'challenge King's sociological premises ... reconstruct his social ontology ... and re-thematize his political-philosophical arguments' (p. 210).

Before arguing their stance, Threadcraft and Terry look at what King did get right, but what so many scholars have overlooked. They argue that in

King's critique of black protest masculinity, he redefines manhood. Black protest masculinity saw violence as a dignified stance. Such a stance had been taken up by black figures such as Frederick Douglass and Robert F. Williams. However, on King's view, nonviolence and love were routes to manhood. King tackled the conflation of masculinity with violence by inverting masculine associations in the form of militaristic language and dissociating manhood from violence and courage. Here the writers show us King's contribution to the rising field of masculinity studies as well as any field concerned with questions related to dignity and its requirements.

While I would like to be convinced that King is redefining manhood in emancipatory ways through inversion with militaristic language, I wonder to what extent King is simply appealing to a biblical script instead of rewriting a gendered one. Could it be that King's inverted militaristic language is Bible talk and not gender talk—an appeal to militaristic and patriarchal language of the Christian Bible? For example, King uses 'enemies' throughout his work and one famous use of 'enemies' is in Psalms 23. Admonitions to be a Christian soldier first appeared in the famous Gospel hymn using the phrase. In St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he instructs them to put on the full armour of God. King is aware of this tradition and sees his movement living it out. The virtues of that tradition, as it appears in the New Testament, do not cohere with violence. This inspires a different reading of King's inversion—a reading that sees King as describing his movement's battle against racial justice as a continuation of the battle that Christians are instructed to wage on the earth. The inversion is not directed at objections surrounding masculinity, even if it can be interpreted as such and even if it is directed towards men of the movement. Rather, we can read King as describing and defending the necessary traits of a Christian soldier in the battle for human rights. And he is using the language that all soldiers will understand. Those who have these traits will succeed. Those who think violence is a necessary trait are mistaken. Adherents to black political violence are mistaken. The civil rights movement is not.

According to Threadcraft and Terry, King also dissociates manhood from violence and courage. One of the ways in which he does this is by showing how the stance of violence is an imitation of white supremacy. Quoting King at length they write, 'One of the greatest paradoxes of the Black Power movement is that it talks unceasingly about not imitating the values of white society ... but in advocating violence it is imitating the worst, the most brutal and the most uncivilized value of American life' (p. 217). In fighting white supremacy with violence, you imitate that which you are fighting against. The contrast here is clear.

However, one of my constant worries with redefinitions of masculinity (in King's case and others) is the nature of the implicit contrast it immediately sets up to femininity. Is the redefinition playing on the fears of appearing womanly and thus engaging in gendered dissociation? Are those who take on

this project willing to praise the same traits in women that they praise in men? Unless the redefinitions are articulated in ways that defend and lift up its feminine counterpart explicitly, I am less inclined to celebrate the liberatory feature of the dissociation project.

5 After criticizing King's views on inclusion and agency of women—which are evidence of King's misogyny—the writers suggest that we 'think with King against King'. I see several ways we can do this and the effectiveness of the writers' suggestion will depend on this distinction. For example, we can read various seemingly contradictory ideas as either genuinely or merely ap-
10 parently contradictory.

But there can also be apparently contradictory ideas that are not contra-
15 dictory at all. The ideas may seem contradictory, but a closer look reveals them to be consistent in their grounding. Thinking with X against X can be done in the genuine case, but is harder to do in the apparent case. And it is harder to do because the ideas are not actually contradictory when looked at as a whole. Another possible way of doing this is by looking at the writer's thoughts as contradictory but evolutionary. It is only their earlier thoughts that contradict the later ones. They are contradictory because the writer has developed his thought along the way.

20 Where does King fall? At times in the essay, it feels as if King's ideas were merely apparently contradictory but consistent. At other times, it appears that his ideas were evolving. I will leave it up to theorists to decide if I am correct. My point here is that this stance will not work for all figures. Its success will depend on other conditions. I am not fully convinced that it has
25 worked in the case of King.

Martha Nussbaum's 'From Anger to Love' is an extended and more elaborate account of King's views on anger that she first addressed in her 2016
30 book *Anger and Forgiveness*. As she admits, 'I did not provide a separate textual analysis of King's specific attitudes.... It is time to perform that further task' (p. 106). Nussbaum points out that King was less specific than Gandhi on these issues. While she compares both figures, she is also careful to highlight ways in which King offered creative insights. In this way, she depicts King as a contributor rather than a borrowing strategist. Given that King was not always explicit on his views about anger and does not come to mind in
35 most people's imaginations as a person who was angry, combing through the archive to obtain his account is a noble feat and a needed contribution. I will briefly focus my comments on what I refer to as the conceptual point, the hate/anger connection, and the pure exemplar problem.

40 Nussbaum begins the chapter by laying out her view on anger. She argues, like Aristotle, that anger *conceptually* involves a desire for payback in addition to protest. Given this, Nussbaum argues for transition-anger over this garden-variety form—for the former does not involve payback but, rather, other attitudes such as love and generosity. Nussbaum finds in King a similar stance and uses textual analysis to illustrate his view more clearly.

Her conceptual point is echoed throughout the essay and seems to be an important anchor point. Although not uttered explicitly, it seems for her to indicate a difference in her analysis, taxonomy, and conclusive recommendation from her analysis of other thinkers, particularly defenders of political anger. Instead of redeeming anger simpliciter, she points out its nature and suggests that we transition to an anger that has the protest but not the pay-back part. She calls this transition-anger. Rejecting the oft-defended instrumental uses of anger in protest, she suggests that as long as anger involves payback it will not achieve reconciliation but will remain backward-looking. If we think this stance can actually do what we want it to do, that is, 'somehow [it will] nullify or atone for the injury, then we are mistaken' (p. 108).

I wonder about the power of her conceptual point. One worry is that it is so controversial and therefore may interfere with the less controversial conclusion. For example, a reader's focus may be more on the disagreement over what anger conceptually involves than on the motivation and nature of her recommendation. Another worry is that it is possible to disagree with her conceptual point and yet still accept the conclusion. If this is possible, then I wonder how much power the conceptual point actually has in the argument. For example, I might think that anger does not conceptually involve payback. Instead I could think that two types do: payback and pain-passing anger. However, I could still accept transition-anger as a worthy alternative.

Let's now turn our attention to what I call the hate/anger connection. Nussbaum writes, 'If King thinks that love of the relevant sort is not an emotion, does he think the same of hate? He does not say. But if it is will and not emotion, it would likely be closely linked to, and supported by, the negative emotional attitudes that interest us' (p. 114). I'm not sure why this would be the case. An explanation of what 'negative' means would be helpful. Does it mean negative evaluation, behaviour, or feeling? It seems behaviour is the worry and so she continues with a focus on violence and striking back. Violence is the retributive act. And King did not wish violence, thus not anger. But in King's words it seems that he is talking about distinct types of anger. When he mentions anger, it is never just anger. It is anger plus discontent, despair, restlessness and 'resentment and latent frustrations'.

More importantly, I'm afraid of this linking of anger and negatives behaviors and attitudes, particularly because it can be misleading. An example of such linking occurs again when she asks, 'what is the new attitude with which King proposes to replace anger and hate?' (p. 122). It seems that where a person sees one, he will see the other. And therefore, if he has reason to criticize hate, then he has reason to do the same to anger. Such linking is false and Nussbaum does not endorse it explicitly. But connecting them in this way can be misleading. Putting them in the same room with each other all the time only perpetuates the stereotype of their connection.

And now to what I refer to as the pure exemplar problem. I have a basic Kantian worry about exemplars. I am aware of the limitations as well as the usefulness of moral exemplars and I think we should be careful with how we

use them. But I also have a worry about the racial dimension of the methodology. The constant appeal to black and brown people responding to white colonial or racist powers seems to be the paradigmatic example of loving and non-angry responses to moral injury. We cannot erase history. The facts are the facts. And it is the case that King and Gandhi responded to domination with emotions and attitudes that were admirable and even virtuous. But I wonder about the constant focus on their purity and the implications this has for modelling in general and norms of resistance in particular.

One might object by noting that King and Gandhi are relevant examples to mention given that they are both recent and familiar to us, and that their attitudes contributed to them achieving their positive political goals. However, history extends much further than these figures. There are other options. I am concerned about what can be inferred through their use (Cherry 2017). I'm afraid that most people who are the target of Nussbaum's argument (political resisters) are also racialized minorities who have been told by society to respond to racial oppression with positive dispositions like love and generosity. The lack of diverse examples (and not simply the argument) may make them resistant to conclusions like Nussbaum's.

I am only offering a cautionary tale and am in no way making judgments about the intentions of the writer. But I think this worry should be addressed when we talk about and use King as an exemplar in our arguments against anger and for love. Continual oppression and societal norms as they relate to emotions have created a context of distrust on the part of oppressed groups. Adding arguments on top of this context without addressing the history, the suspicion, and what's at stake when we argue for love (with black and brown people as our favourite examples) can create more problems than it solves.

This volume is guaranteed to change how we think about, read, and teach King's political thought. Despite the small criticisms and cautionary tale that I have briefly articulated, it is so important for political discourse to include King as a producer of original, insightful thought. We should be honoured to have such a volume to help move us in a new direction.

References

Cherry, Myisha 2017, 'Forgiveness, Exemplars, and the Oppressed', in Kathryn Norlock (ed.), *The Moral Psychology of Forgiveness* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield)

Nussbaum, Martha 2016, *Anger and Forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press)

University of California, Riverside
myisha.cherry@ucr.edu

MYISHA CHERRY

doi:10.1093/mind/fzz033