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Ethics of Relationality, Practices of Nonviolence

– A Reading of Butler's Ethics

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to examine Judith Butler's approach to the problem of ethics, and the ways in which she attempts to reformulate notions of morality and responsibility based on an understanding of the subject as inherently bound to others within a context of normative structures that exceed its own influence. For Butler, this bond implies that the subject's constitution is structured within what she calls a "scene of address," where it emerges into a social field by being appealed to by others, and replying to that appeal by giving an account of itself. By setting out to examine the way in which she puts two influential thinkers—namely Foucault and Levinas—to work, I will examine her notion of scenes of address more closely, and try to show how it enables her to pose the problems of ethics and morality in novel ways. I will argue that her ethics should be understood as one of relationality, since it moves away from the self-sufficient, autonomous subject as the outset for ethics, towards an understanding our very being as dependent on the being of others. This, I propose, puts it in contrast with many established ways of thinking about ethics, both within the Western philosophical tradition, and in views of ethics more generally. Thus, I hope to show that Butler's ethics constitutes a valuable resource with regard to the question of ethical responsibility. Finally, I will propose that it carries significant implications that point towards ethical nonviolence, and that these are of increasing importance to us today.

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Introduction

*Giving an Account of Oneself*¹ constitutes one of Judith Butler's most ambitious and cohesive attempts to approach the problem of moral philosophy. A central question, for Butler, is how discussions of ethical response and responsibility might be approached from the perspective of contemporary socio-theoretical notions of subject formation. She indicates that she holds many common formulations of ethics to be based on an understanding of the subject as autonomous, self-sufficient and self-reflective. Within such discourse, it is the intentional acts of a deliberating subject that underlies considerations of ethics and responsibility. The subject is understood as being at all times fully aware of and able to account for its own acts, and the intentions that underlie them. Thus, ethics and responsibility is based on this accountability, and on the degree to which the acts of the subject correspond to certain ethical norms.

Such an understanding of the subject does not, of course, conform with perspectives that hold it to be governed by forces that exceed its influence, since this would imply that there are limits to the subject's self-knowledge, and thus also limits to the extent to which it can be held accountable for its actions. While this might lead one to conclude that such a concept of the subject renders the possibility for thinking about ethics and responsibility obsolete, this is precisely the kind of argument that Butler wants to counter. Against those who argue that a critical view on subjectivation—where the subject is understood as not having a complete understanding of or agency in its own constitution—undermines the possibility for responsibility, Butler wants to show that acknowledging the limits of our self-coherence and narrativizability can form the foundation for a productive reconsideration of ethics and responsibility. In fact, she argues that ethics *must* be based on the subject's inability to fully account for itself and its deeds, if it is to lead to nonviolent outcomes.

But there is more to Butler's effort, since she sees another crucial problem with the self-transparent, autonomous subject. If this notion grounds our thinking about responsibility, she argues, there is a risk that we limit the scope of the question to the self-reflexivity of the subject. Responsibility becomes, then, a matter of the subject's relation to itself, of how the "I" should treat others in order to behave ethically or to be an ethical being. The question starts out from the perspective of the "I," and never fully leaves this perspective: "I" ask myself how "I" should shape my behavior so that "I" will be ethical in my own view. Such

¹ Judith Butler. *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Hereafter cited as *GA*.

ways of posing the problem of responsibility fail to take into account the mechanisms that underlie our very ability to become subjects that reflect on our own responsibility, instead directing the question back towards the subject as a discrete entity, trapping it in self-reflection and even narcissism. For Butler, it is urgent that we turn the question of responsibility around, centering it instead on our relationality with others, a relationality without which no "I" would ever, in her view, be possible.

Crucial, for Butler's endeavor, is her notion of the "scene of address," which could be understood as a conceptualization of this relationality which we are, by necessity, implicated in as ethical subjects. No "I" is possible, for Butler, without a structure within which it is appealed to by an other—an appeal that prompts it to account for itself—and it is this structure that she calls the scene of address. These scenes are themselves governed by norms that exceed the influence of any individual, and so it becomes crucial for Butler—in considering the mechanisms of subjectivation and what implications they might have for ethics—to ask not only how we might understand the norms themselves, but also how we can think about the role and position of this other, whose appeal conditions the emergence of the "I."

The purpose of this essay, then, is to examine how Butler understands subject formation as always taking place within these "scenes of address," and how she proceeds to formulate a view on responsibility that is based on this notion of subjectivation. This paves the way for my own argument, namely, that Butler's ethics should be understood as an ethics of relationality, and that it harbors valuable tools that point towards practices of nonviolence.

I will begin, in the first part, with a quick overview of how Butler arrives at the "scenes of address," proceeding with a discussion of what the meaning of this concept is, and what implications it carries. In my view, it constitutes a valuable tool for her in attempting to navigate between, on the one hand, a notion of the subject as always existing in relation to norms that govern its recognizability—effectively deciding who will be rendered intelligible as a subject—and on the other, an understanding of every subject as inextricably bound up with others in relations of dependence, broadly understood.

In her endeavor, Butler leans heavily on Foucault's understanding of the subject as always finding itself in relations with "regimes of truth" that govern its constitution. In the second part, I will therefore examine the Foucauldian notion of subjectivation that Butler invokes, in order to consider how the subject is constituted in relation to frameworks of normativity, and how this prompts it to engage in a certain type of self-reflection and work upon itself.

Foucault also becomes important for Butler since he provides an opening for critique within this seemingly rigid framework—a point from where the subject may adopt a critical perspective on the norms that condition it. I will try to elucidate how "regimes of truth" are not, for Foucault, simply repressive, dominating structures that encapsulate the subject within a preordained position from which it cannot escape, but are the very mechanisms that grant it the possibility of ever emerging as recognizable and intelligible. This "non-repressive" view of norms is important for Butler's project, but she finds Foucault to overlook the question of the subject's relationality, and points out that it is not only my own self-recognition, but also my being or not being recognized by others, that is simultaneously made possible and compromised through my relation to regimes of truth. Thus, in the third part, I will approach those elements of Levinas's work that Butler picks up, focusing on his understanding of the relation between the "I" and the Other. More specifically, the Levinasian concept of the "face" of the Other is important for Butler's consideration of the subject's relationality—the fact that no "I" can exist apart from others.

In the fourth part, I will elaborate how Butler develops her views on subjectivation in order to point towards a perspective on ethics and responsibility that starts out from the subject's inherent relationality with others within a context of normative social frameworks, and how this is partly informed by her reading of Foucault and Levinas. Here, I will develop my proposal that Butler's ethics should be understood as one of relationality and concern for others, and that it has at least two important implications for ethical philosophy. On the one hand, she offers ways of thinking about subjectivation that move beyond individualistic notions of the subject as self-sufficient, opening up for the acceptance and affirmation of our ambiguity and opacity. In my view, this situates her ethics against the violence that is—sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly—inherent in many prevalent notions of ethics and morality. On the other hand, she provides the means for raising the question of responsibility anew, grounding it in the subject's dependence on others, and thus providing an alternative way to think about responsibility from those that start out with an autonomous, self-centered "I." She attempts to move away from such an understanding of responsibility, I suggest, by placing our responsibility for the lives of others at the heart of our very condition as relational and interdependent beings, and thus she indicates how we might approach a thinking about responsibility that moves us towards practices of nonviolence.

The scholarship on Butler's ethics has, despite its quite limited extent, been valuable for me in understanding the ways in which Butler might be, and has been, read. An important contribution that seems pertinent to mention is Annika Thiem's *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility*². Thiem elaborates on the limits that Butler points out in posing the question of responsibility from the perspective of a deliberating, accountable subject. Thiem also underscores, notably, the necessity of combining any alternative perspective with a critique of the social practices and institutions that condition any encounter, or address, between subjects. Another noteworthy engagement with Butler comes from Elena Loizidou, who turns to the ways that Butler conceptualizes ethics, law, and politics, and the "agonistic relation" that Loizidou locates between them in Butler's work.³ As a critical legal theorist, Loizidou focuses on the implications of Butler's thinking in the field of law and politics in a specifically British context, and thus her work carries no significant connection to my purpose here. Finally, it seems important to mention an article by Carolyn Culbertson, "The ethics of relationality: Judith Butler and social critique"⁴. Culbertson's interpretation of Butler's ethics has inspired my own suggestion to call it an ethics of relationality, and has provided me with important insights, especially with regard to Butler's other engagements with ethical philosophy, besides those in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Culbertson reads Butler as providing an alternative to two common positions on ethics, both of which regard ethical norms to be fundamentally constitutive of our very selves. One of these, she claims, holds this to imply that we cannot even approach an understanding of these norms, and the other, that we can never escape our subjection to them. For Culbertson, Butler's great contribution is that she provides a way to escape this deadlock.

However, since none of these studies engage in Butler's work in the same way that I will attempt here, I will not be invoking them as secondary sources. Instead, I will address Butler (and one might rightly argue, as she probably would, that such an address constitutes a kind of appeal) by allowing myself to be guided by her reading of two important and influential scholars on ethics—namely Foucault and Levinas—in dialogue with whom she develops her own views on ethics. While they are not the only theorists she invokes, they both occupy a central role not only because of their great influence, but because of how much their

² Annika Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

³ Elena Loizidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

⁴ Carolyn Culbertson, "The ethics of relationality: Judith Butler and social critique", *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol 46, no 3 (2013): 449-463.

perspectives differ. As I see it, the primacy of the Other in Levinas acts, for Butler, as a kind of counterweight to the Foucauldian perspective, where the question is always that of the subject's ability to recognize itself. In this sense, they form two disparate positions that Butler navigates between without fully subscribing to either of them, and I see this vacillation as central to her ethics and thus as important for my purpose. For this reason, and in an attempt to limit the scope of the essay, I will focus on her reading of Foucault and Levinas.

The "I" and the Scenes of Address

Drawing on Adorno's lectures on ethics in *Problems of Moral Philosophy*⁵, Butler claims that there is no way to think about the question of morality without imagining an "I" that attempts to position itself in relation to such questions and possible answers to them. Moral inquiry gains its relevance in relation to the actions of an "I," and these actions in turn gain their ethical validity in relation to moral questioning, meaning whether or not they conform with prevailing ideas of morality. But while it is necessary to relate any thinking about ethics to a subject that acts, Adorno cautions against any understanding of the subject that puts it apart from the normative conditions within which it emerges. Such norms cannot be understood simply as internal to the "I"—as a kind of personal aspect of it—but are by definition social, and therefore go beyond the influence of the "I" itself. Butler agrees with this, but points out that this "matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks" should also be understood as a fundamental condition for the very emergence and function of the "I."⁶ Not only, then, is the subject forced to take up some kind of relation to norms, but the norms must in fact already be in place in order for it to be able to enter into and become coherent within an ontological field. In this sense, they form a governing structure for subjectivation, restricting the very access to intelligibility and recognizability, effectively deciding who will and who will not be able to emerge as a subject. Such an understanding of norms, Butler points out, does not mean that every "I" can be viewed as the causal effect or instrumental manifestation of such norms. Rather, it only means that no "I" can ever come to emerge without in some sense coming into contact with norms. In other words, the subject is implicated in the sociality that conditions its emergence. In attempting to account for itself—for its life, its deeds or desires—the "I" will therefore find that it also has to account for its own position within a social framework, and thus essentially for the circumstances within which it emerges. In Butler's words, the "I" will then have to "become a social theorist."⁷

In giving its account, it will become obvious that such conditions are impossible to narrate from an exclusively first-person perspective—the "I" cannot account for itself without also accounting for the relations that it has to norms. It is important for Butler to maintain that this does not mean that we cannot think about a morally accountable "I," or that we cannot

⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁶ *GA*, 7.

⁷ *GA*, 8.

imagine an ethics that starts out from the perspective of the subject. Rather, we must understand that ethics is itself based in the conditions of the subject. Since there can be no moral inquiry without a subject, and the subject is in a sense inescapably deprived of itself since it is conditioned by norms that exceed it, the inability of the subject to fully account for itself by itself constitutes a condition for the very possibility of ethics.

How, then, shall we understand the mechanisms by which ethical reflexivity emerges in the subject, and what possible perspectives on ethical responsibility might come from such an attempt? According to Butler, Nietzsche's influential account of the emergence of ethical reflexivity, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*⁸, locates the inauguration of the reflexive subject in a very specific moment, when an established authority requires of it that it give an account of its own actions in relation to some form of suffering, to position itself within a chain of events in order to prove whether or not it had something to do with that suffering (usually, of course, the aim is to prove its own innocence). In other words, the subject begins to reflect on its own actions—and is prompted to take responsibility for them—only when it is faced with the risk of being punished for having caused an injury.⁹ Butler wants to broaden this understanding of how reflexivity emerges in the subject, since for her, accounts are also requested and given in other interlocutory situations, and can be driven by other incentives than fear. I might, for instance, wish to account for myself after being asked to do so, without having the threat of punishment hanging over me. My account might be fueled by the desire to know or understand others. But whatever the motivation, Butler agrees with Nietzsche that an account is always given in situations of relationality, meaning to another that prompts me, in some way, to provide my account. Thus, in giving its account the subject is always implicated in a relation with the other, to and before whom the account is given. This structure of relationality, Butler terms the "scenes of address."

As I have already suggested, the notion of "scenes of address" occupies a central role in Butler's endeavor to examine what might be made of ethical response and responsibility. By framing the problem of ethics in this way, Butler is able to approach questions of how a subject that is conditioned—and thus to some extent determined—by norms that exceed it, can nevertheless take on a critical perspective towards those norms. It is not, for her, a

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

⁹ Whether or not Butler's reading of Nietzsche does him justice is no doubt disputable. However, since the purpose of this essay is to show how Butler elaborates her views on ethics and responsibility, and not to provide a comparative reading of Nietzsche and Butler, this will not be discussed here.

question of diminishing the potential for responsible and responsive beings by way of a theory of the subject as having no agency whatsoever, but rather of relocating the question of responsibility in order to take into account the complex mechanisms behind our constitution as subjects. In doing this, it becomes necessary for Butler to consider the scenes of address where we are, in some way or another, prompted by others to give our account.

Moreover, centering on these scenes that we can never escape, in which we are inevitably bound up to the extent that we are at all, enables Butler to approach questions of the subject's relationality with others. We cannot be responsive to others without already finding ourselves in relations with them, within a scene where we are addressed and thus prompted to respond. Problems of responsibility will always inevitably appear to us in such interlocutory situations, or, rather, responsibility will only become a problem in relation to the appeal of others. Responsibility, she claims, is never simply an issue that I have with myself, and therefore, no inquiry into questions of responsibility that isolates the subject from the social workings of its constitution will be productive.

At stake for Butler, in raising the question of ethics by starting out from scenes of address, is, on the one hand, the subject's ability to inquire into the mechanisms that govern its appearance and intelligibility, and on the other, the possibility for rethinking responsibility on the basis of the subject's relationality. I will discuss the first of these efforts next, by focusing on how Butler approaches Foucault's work on subjectivation and truth.

Butler and Foucault: Norms of Recognition and Intelligibility

As has already been suggested, Foucault's work on subjectivation is of considerable importance for Butler's project. His attempts to examine how the subject comes to emerge by establishing a relationship with truth, and what this truth-telling means in terms of subjectivation, are influential for her consideration of what it means to give an account of oneself. Before developing more thoroughly how she utilizes Foucault, however, it seems relevant to situate the aspects of his thinking that she puts to work within his overall project. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*¹⁰, Foucault describes a shift of focus with regard to his efforts to examine the phenomenon of sexuality. He stresses that what he wants to understand is not so much the advancement of systems of knowledge within which sexuality is described or studied, nor the ways in which sexual practices are and have been governed or regulated. This is no doubt important, but at the time they constituted "tools," in Foucault's words, that he had already acquired in his previous work.¹¹ His examinations of the history of medicine and psychiatry enabled him to inquire into the ways in which science and knowledge of sexuality was shaped and developed, in the same way that his studies of the evolution of the prison—and of punitive practices more generally—provided the means for understanding how regulations of sexual practices had evolved. The focus, in *The Use of Pleasure*, and in what Foucault intended to publish as volumes three and four of *The History of Sexuality* (of which only volume three, entitled *The Care of the Self*, has been published) became, rather, the ways in which individuals not only recognized themselves as subjects of sexuality, but also examined and shaped their conduct in relation to prescriptive codes, so as to transform themselves into subjects of sexuality.

Butler makes a point of this, in relation to the Nietzschean view of subject formation, by stating that it is characteristic of the later Foucault to try to move away from an understanding of the subject's relation and subjection to norms as motivated by repression and fear of punishment. According to Butler, Foucault directed his attention, towards the end of his life, less on finding the discursive "causes" for the subject, and more on examining what specific modes of subjectivity are engendered by prescriptive codes of conduct—provided by what he calls "regimes of truth"—that are historically conditioned.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1985). Hereafter cited as *UP*, with page numbers referring to the English translation.

¹¹ *UP*, 26,

For Foucault, the subject always has a relation to these regimes of truth, and so the process of self-forming and self-elaboration—through which the subject emerges by negotiating its relation to regimes of truth—becomes important for him. He argues that subjectivation is not only a question of the shaping of conduct in accordance with prescriptions provided by regimes of truth. Rather, and in a wider sense, I emerge as a subject through a kind of work upon myself, in which I not only examine or reflect upon myself, but subsequently also transform and ameliorate myself so that, in the end, I will be able to answer for who "I" am in relation to specific codes of conduct. How such a transformation might happen, as Butler points out, is to some extent an open question for Foucault, since he holds there to be multiple ways in which the subject can "form [itself] as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code."¹² He exemplifies this by pointing to codes of sexual restraint and marital loyalty. Even within the limited scope established by such codes—that might, for example, say that intercourse shall only take place between marital partners and have the purpose of procreation—there will be a variety of ways in which a couple can shape their behavior and still conform to the codes. There are always, in Foucault's words, a multitude of "ways to 'be faithful.'"¹³

Conducting oneself in a moral way is thus a process that can take many forms. While the relationship between the moral act and the framework of laws, rules or values is inevitable, Foucault stresses that moral conduct cannot be reduced to its congruence with any specific juridical, religious or moral directives. It is a question, also, of the subject creating itself—performing work upon itself—in a manner that involves a certain amount of creativity or inventiveness. The constraint of norms is what brings the subject to engage in a kind of self-crafting, it is what prepares the way for a mode of work upon the self in relation to regimes of truth. Thus, as Butler notes, subjectivation cannot, in Foucault's view, be understood as a self-forming practice that simply "creates" a certain subjectivity under the restraints of norms or precepts. Instead, it involves a complex set of practices that he divides up into four aspects of self-crafting.

Firstly, the subject delimits or targets a specific part of itself in relation to which the moral conduct in question will take place. With regard to sexuality, faithfulness can thus be practiced by focusing on shaping one's behavior in adherence to directives and prohibitions. But "being faithful" might also consist in directing a fierce struggle on the element of one's

¹² *UP*, 26.

¹³ *UP*, 26.

desires, of intensely suppressing these desires and taking pride in accomplishing such self-mastery. Moreover, the emphasis may also be placed on the relation to one's partner, and of the constitution of that relationship as a "faithful" bond. Secondly, self-crafting involves the subject, for Foucault, in establishing a relation to a specific code and situating itself in a position of having to adhere to that code. Thus, one's reasons for compliance may be based on the association one subject feels with a certain circle of people within which such compliance is accepted, or even demanded. One states one's membership by complying with the prescription and practicing that compliance by oneself. But one may also feel the need for conforming to precepts because this positions one as part of a tradition that is upheld by this conformity. Obedience can also be motivated by an appeal to manifest oneself as a model for others, or by the desire to attain a certain level of virtue or brilliance in relation to a particular criterion or criteria.

But there may also, Foucault claims, be a number of different ways in which the subject develops itself, or performs "*ethical work*" upon itself, in relation to rules of practice.¹⁴ Sexual rigor might thus be accomplished by adapting to and continually measuring one's behavior in relation to a system of codes, in ways that enable the establishment of the extent to which one is faithful. This might take the shape of an immediate abandonment of all pleasures, or of an extended battle against one's desires. It might also be exhibited by an even more meticulous mapping of desires, aimed at unveiling them in every form, however concealed or obscure. Finally, Foucault talks about the fundamental goals for the ethical subject, the fact that it is not only a question of the ethical value of the act in its singularity, but also of the place it occupies within a set of conducts and behaviors of the subject. The ethical act is thus determined by the position it takes up within a continuity of ethical acts, and the extent to which it forms part of a progressing pattern. It is a question, then, of the degree of fulfillment of an ethical mode of being that the singular act constitutes. Here too, Foucault makes a number of distinctions: the behavior in question may be valued on the basis of its being part in an entirety of self-mastery, or of the extent to which it distinguishes the individual subject from the moral deprivation of its context. Moreover, it may be aimed at producing a harmony of the soul, an immunity towards the temptations of desires, or a purging of the subject that will secure its reward in the afterlife.

¹⁴ *UP*, 27.

Whatever distinguishes an ethical practice, however, Foucault's point is that the relation to regimes of truth inevitably involves the subject in a process of self-reflexivity, where it puts itself and its behavior into question in relation to the terms of recognition offered by regimes of truth. What is important here is that the subject is not completely and helplessly governed by regimes of truth, but that these provide a kind of horizon of possibility for it.

This is why the subject cannot, for Foucault, be viewed as a simple "effect" of norms. But since the context provided by prevailing regimes of truth is always that in relation to which my very recognition happens—and this recognition is itself possible because I am prompted to reflect on myself in relation to the limits of recognition set up by regimes of truth—a great deal is at stake for the subject that engages in self-reflection and work upon itself. Such mechanisms of subjectivation are not, therefore, to be understood as a radically free. The regimes of truth limit the scope of recognition itself, formulating the conditions for emergence, and thereby for who will have access to recognition at all—that is, who will be able to become a recognizable subject. They present the subject of recognition with certain norms that will enable it to emerge as recognizable to itself and others, they "set the stage," in a sense, for the subjects's emergence, by limiting the ways in which recognition may occur. Thus, Foucault sees the very being of the subject as conditioned from the outset by regimes of truth, since they provide the limits to what will constitute a valid mode of being at all.

However, the fact that the subject can shape itself according to prescripts in a number of different ways, also means that Foucault sees an opening for calling the legitimacy of regimes of truth into question. In *What is Critique?*¹⁵ he discusses resistance to authority—to mechanisms of power that operate by relying on regimes of truth—in precisely this way. Critique, he claims, means that the subject takes a stance against truth because of the effects of power it perceives, in a form of "voluntary insubordination" that entails "the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call [...] the politics of truth."¹⁶ This does not mean, of course, that the opening for different kinds of self-crafting provided by regimes of truth is absolute. I cannot completely ignore the norms that regulate my access to reflexivity or recognition. What little agency I have is still played out within a restricted space, and this restriction is in fact the condition for my very ability to emerge as a subject. My being a recognizable "I" is dependent on the answer I give to the question of who "I" will be in

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997), 41-81. Hereafter cited as *WC*.

¹⁶ *WC*, 47.

relation to prevailing norms. It is never, for Foucault, a question of simply calling out specific social practices or limits to recognizability from a detached perspective, of pointing to limits and exclusions from a "safe" position. Any critical stance I take towards regimes of truth that govern my emergence as an intelligible "I," will to a certain extent imply a critique directed at myself. I am always bound up with and dependent on the norms I question, so asking about who will be recognizable, what the criteria for recognition are, what is left out, will always entail jeopardizing my own recognizability. Such a risk puts the subject's status within an ontological field of recognition on the line.

It becomes obvious, then, that the possibility for critique is bound up with the subject's self-reflection, since what is essentially being negotiated is my ability to tell the truth about myself, or, in Butler's words, to give an account of myself. Importantly, Foucault argues that critique is always formulated in relation to something that is not of itself, it points towards an alterity that is beyond a present, that exceeds that which is currently available—and this move, he claims, makes it "akin to virtue."¹⁷ At the same time, as has been shown, critique entails that the subject put itself into question, risking its very own recognizability. In fact, for Foucault it is precisely in the moments of rupture—when recognition repeatedly fails and the subject cannot find place for itself within the frameworks of regimes of truth—that their legitimacy is put into question through the operation of critique. For him, as Butler points out, it is inevitably a question of the "I's" self-recognition being put at risk. The subject's struggle with norms is always stimulated by its own desire to be recognized for itself, to find a living place in relation to regimes of truth (although that relation can of course, as we have seen, also involve critique). However, Butler argues that Foucault does *not* raise the question of the "you," or of who and where this other is and what its role is in relation to the terms of recognition offered by regimes of truth. Could a perspective on the other, for instance, be said to constitute a frame of reference for the ability of the "I" to recognize itself? And is it not possible that an opening for critique might be found not only in the moments of rupture for the subject's self-recognition, but also when its ability to recognize or be recognized by others is put to the test? Might not, Butler asks, norms be subjected to critique because the "I" finds there to be no room for recognition of or by a "you"? In what follows, I will try to elaborate how Butler finds Foucault to lack ways of conceptualizing the relation to others, and then proceed to follow her reading of Levinas.

¹⁷ WC, 43.

Butler and Levinas: The Question of the Other

Butler admits that Foucault would perhaps object to any effort to focus on the relation between "self" and "other" in order to understand the mechanisms of subjectivation, and argue that it is impossible to understand this relationality aside from the normative frameworks provided by regimes of truth. Limiting our consideration of subjectivation to the encounter and exchange between the subject and an other, will thus prevent us from being able to examine properly the mechanisms that govern the emergence of and exchange between subjects. But if we accept Foucault's claim that norms act to demarcate the place within which the subject will be able to appear—and the subject encounters these demarcations through reflecting on its own place within them—is it not reasonable, Butler asks, to also ask how we come into contact with this normativity through our encounter with and reflection on others? In other words: are not the moments of encounter between the subject and others also critical moments—perhaps even *the* moments—when we enter into the sphere of norms and are prompted to reflect on ourselves in relation to these norms?

For Butler, this question not only prompts us to inquire into the character of those norms that govern recognizability—that fundamentally decide my very being as an ethical subject—but also necessitates a further investigation into the nature of my relation to this other, whose recognition of me is put on the line. The urgency of this latter inquiry becomes apparent if we consider how the recognizability or intelligibility that is governed by norms is always one that belongs to someone other than me. This other may be real or imagined, but it is nonetheless always a question of my being or not being recognized in some form of relationality with others. Asking the question of the other has, in Butler's view, consequences for ethical philosophy, since it disrupts the predominant first-person perspective of traditional conceptions of ethics. Ethics becomes, then, not only a matter of asking "How should I treat you?" but also of raising the question of this "you"—of who "you" are, from where "you" are speaking, and what type of critique of norms might be formulated from such an outset.

Levinas's work on self-formation is important for Butler, as I have already suggested, precisely because of how radically it differs from that of Foucault. In stark contrast to Foucault's subject—which is prompted to reflect on itself and its behavior and to perform work on itself by way of its encounter with regimes of truth—subjectivity arises for Levinas through the impingement upon us by the Other. The "I" is prompted to emerge *after* the impact of the Other, as a kind of reply to that impact. There is no question, therefore, that the

Other occupies a primary position in Levinas's thinking. In "Substitution"¹⁸, he even talks about this relation in terms of "accusation" and "persecution", but Butler points out that this should not necessarily be understood as having negative or violent implications. What is important is that this relation to the Other is characterized, for Levinas, by a fundamental unfreedom, the "I" is "driven" by the impact of the Other and finds its understanding of itself emerging through this very experience of being driven. Since the "I" emerges as a subject through its being affected by the Other, and so in a sense belatedly, it is essential for Levinas that we understand that the subject itself has absolutely no power over this primary relationality. As Butler puts it, it is "not because I am treated *badly*, but because I am treated *unilaterally*", that Levinas uses terms like "persecution" and "accusation".¹⁹ The "I" is formed in absolute passivity, radically in the hands of the Other and exposed to the Other's acts, and so is fundamentally given over and subjected to the relation with the Other. The idea that the self is a free end in itself is one that Levinas urges us to depart from, since, for him, we emerge into a context that we have had no part in creating. The "I" is never, for Levinas, formed in a process of conscious, active self-constitution—it cannot be understood as a result of its own acts—but rather comes to be through a kind of absolute openness, "an unlimited susceptibility", towards the Other.²⁰ Subjectivity cannot be understood as beginning "within" us, we do not enter into subjectivity by virtue of our freedom. This unfreedom is essential for Levinas, since what he points to is the fundamental and strictly involuntary character of the mechanisms of subjectivation.

But it does not, for Levinas, suffice to say that we have no agency in our own formation as subjects, and that the "I" emerges by way of forces that are external to it. In fact, this is an oversimplification, since we cannot think about the emerging subject as a distinct entity with an "inside" and an "outside," precisely because it has not yet emerged and therefore cannot be conceptualized in terms of interiority and exteriority. Levinas holds it as crucial that before we can talk about a subject that engages in free acts and decisions—before the "I" can emerge as an "I"—there has to be an "*outside of being*" in place, what he calls a "preontological" sphere.²¹ This is a complex concept that escapes definition, since it is itself what gives meaning to any kind of ontological positioning. It is not possible, then, to pinpoint it within

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution", in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Hereafter cited as *S*.

¹⁹ *GA*, 89.

²⁰ *S*, 93.

²¹ *S*, 93-94.

systems of spatio-temporality. It prefigures the phenomenal world, being itself a condition for any aspect of such a world, be it a "self," an "object" or an "other." Any effort to represent this "scene before being" using conventional descriptive language will, therefore, inevitably fail.

In order to better understand the concept of the preontological, it might be useful to note what is at stake for Levinas in introducing the notion of subjectivity as having its origins in a domain that precedes ontology. In *Face to Face with Levinas*²², he explains that part of his project is to move towards an ethical understanding of the interhuman realm that differs from the ontological one. The Western philosophical tradition is characterized, for him, by its fundamental inheritance from Ancient Greece, a way of thinking and speaking that relies on and is articulated through terms such as *morphe*, *ousia*, *nous*, *logos* etc. Within this tradition, Levinas argues, the concept of truth has always been equated with that which is present and can be accommodated and integrated into a totality of being. But he sees philosophy as also having other origins and foundations, and one of these he identifies as stemming from a Judeo-Christian tradition. This branch engages in the question of interhuman relations not from an ontological point of view, but employs an ethical and biblical approach that starts out from "a theme of justice and concern for the other as other, as a theme of love and desire".²³ It is a move away from the totalizing tendencies of ontology and the idea of "the infinite being of the world as presence".²⁴ Levinas claims to go further beyond metaphysics than Heidegger, since Heidegger continues to think of being as coming-into-presence. Thus, he never fully escapes the "hegemony of presence" within metaphysics that he himself so firmly resisted.²⁵ Levinas sees in the ethical relation to the other an opportunity for freeing philosophy from the totality of presence, moving instead towards the absolute alterity of the other. Philosophy, unlike science, has the potential for self-reflection and self-critique—for reevaluating what it has elaborated, unsaying what it has said—and this is a capacity that he imagines might come from the preontological relationality between self and other. He wants to provide an alternative to the old metaphysical idea that unity, unification and totality are the highest goals, by showing that the relationship between self and other "is *better* as difference than as unity: sociality is better than fusion".²⁶

²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986). Hereafter cited as *FF*.

²³ *FF*, 20.

²⁴ *FF*, 20.

²⁵ *FF*, 20.

²⁶ *FF*, 22.

The concept of a preontological sphere thus becomes a way for Levinas to approach such an alternative perspective on interhuman relations. But more importantly for my purposes here, it enables him to formulate a view of responsibility that becomes useful for Butler. For Levinas, as we have seen, my susceptibility towards the Other should be understood as a fundamental feature of my "self"—the acts of the Other upon me is what, from the start, inaugurates a me as a "me." But it is also, for Levinas, through this complete and unchosen openness towards the Other that I gain responsibility for her/him. The grounds for my responsibility lie, then, not in what can be traced to my actions, deeds or intentions—from what we might call my "freedom"—but rather from what could be said to come from others, namely my primary, preontological susceptibility towards the impingement of the Other. The idea that I am only ever responsible for my "self"—the actions and deeds that can be traced to some kind of intentionality on my part—overstates my own importance by placing me as the single cause for any possible effects on others. Instead, Levinas claims that it is because I am first *acted upon* by another that I am responsible. Through my ability to be acted upon—itsself a condition for my formation as an "I"—I am bound up in relations of responsibility.

So only by having the Other act upon me, or impinge on me, do I come to understand myself as an "I." In this way, the Other is not fully separate from me, since part of what "I" am is essentially this dependence upon the Other for my existence. I move from the preontological sphere into the realm of ontology through my being persecuted by the Other, and this is what grounds my fundamental responsibility towards her/him. Levinas talks about this in terms of "substitution", since the "I" is, in a sense, beset by the Other from the outset: it comes to be by being the object of the Other's action, it is absorbed from the start by an alterity that takes up its place, and so it can discern itself only as this "being already moved" by the Other.²⁷

Butler points out that the Levinasian understanding of the self's relation with the Other consists in a kind of primary ethical appeal. Levinas often discusses this in terms of the "face" of the Other, as a kind of figure for how this appeal is made. In *Precarious Life*²⁸, Butler makes use of this concept in order to try to understand the mechanisms behind how moral demands are made and what it means for others to make such demands upon us. The face of the Other is for Levinas that which fundamentally implicates us in relations of responsibility, it is what signals to me the fact that I am fundamentally unable to reject my relation to the

²⁷ *S*, 93-94.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

Other, that I can never decide to disengage myself since it is essentially through this relation that I am. It should not be understood as facing me, but as appearing above me: "It is the other before death, looking through and exposing death."²⁹ But it is also a call from the Other, urging me not to leave her/him alone—essentially not to let her/him die alone—since to do so would imply that I had something to do with that death. My encounter with the face puts me in the place of the Other, or rather, it discloses my occupation of the Other's place. Thus, the relationality with the face challenges, according to Levinas, the Spinozian *conatus essendi*, the "right to existence" as the fundamental principle of intelligibility. Instead, the ethical claim of the face and the ethical relation to the Other is derived from the understanding that no self can survive on its own, that no "I" can "find meaning in its own being-in-the-world, within an ontology of sameness".³⁰ The *droit vitale*, the self's natural and unconditional right to exist—privileged as it is, according to Levinas, within an ontological framework where intelligibility is understood as disclosure of presence—is put into question by this framework, since the ethical perspective essentially values the Other more highly than me, places the Other's right to exist above my own. In my encounter with the face in all its vulnerability, the relation between self and Other is asymmetrical—and so by encountering and "receiving" the face, I am effectively putting my ontological right to existence into question.

For Levinas, this alternative understanding of subjectivity—what he calls "ethical subjectivity"—provides a means for moving away from the ontological reduction of the subject into sameness, since such an ethical approach to subjectivity starts out from a surrender to the Other, a yielding to the call to responsibility for the Other, and thus a kind of renunciation of one's own liberty. Levinas calls for such a reconsideration of subjectivity not only because of the consequences it may have for ethics, but more importantly, because he claims that the subject cannot be understood in any other way. No matter how much I may contest it and proclaim my own freedom and autonomy, my responsibility for the Other will always precede any such autonomy. The self's response to the Other always comes after a demand has been made by the Other, even if this response is a declaration of the self's autonomy. For Levinas, we can never escape the Other, she/he is always present in our existence and keeps us in a constantly attentive mode. "Even though we are ontologically free to refuse the other", he writes, "we remain forever accused, with a bad conscience".³¹

²⁹ *FF*, 24.

³⁰ *FF*, 24.

³¹ *FF*, 28.

The primacy of the Other, the view of the subject as inherently relational, and the understanding of responsibility as grounded in this fundamental condition of the subject, are all important notions that Butler picks up from Levinas in order to inform her own views on ethics and responsibility. As I have suggested, Levinas enables Butler to pursue questions of what role the relationality of the subject might play in a reconsideration of ethics and responsibility. In what follows, I will attempt to elaborate how she does this, and where her attempts to navigate between Foucault and Levinas lead her.

Ethics of Relationality, Practices of Nonviolence

As I have argued, the scenes of address constitute, for Butler, the fundamental structure within which we come to be as subjects. It is within this structure, which is conditioned and governed by a multitude of norms—at times in conflict with one another—that we emerge as recognizable beings *in response* to the appeal of others. This means that subjectivation must, for Butler, be understood as conditioned, on the one hand, by normative frameworks that establish who will have access to intelligibility, and on the other hand, by our being appealed to by others—called and singled out and thus prompted to emerge.

In attempting to understand the frameworks of norms, Foucault's work on subjectivation becomes essential for Butler, since it provides the means for understanding the mechanisms behind how subjects are formed in relation to norms that, being social in character, exceed it and are beyond its influence. Thus, he offers her a way to approach the problem of the subject's ability to tell the truth about, or give an account of, itself, under the circumstances of this normativity. But if we conclude, with Foucault's help, that the subject is to a certain extent opaque to itself, we must in Butler's view see that the reason for this opacity is not only that it is conditioned by norms, but that its emergence is dependent on the primary impact of others within scenes of address, where it is prompted to appear and account for itself. Thus, in order to emerge as intelligible beings, we have already to be in relations with and to be appealed to by others. It is this aspect of Levinas's thinking that becomes important for Butler in her attempt to expand the Foucauldian view on subject formation. Levinas's idea that we are, in a sense, inaugurated *by* others, helps her to elaborate her claim that the subject can never fully understand the workings behind its own constitution, or even behind its very being, and that it will never therefore be able to account for itself exhaustively and definitively.

Since the norms that condition the emergence of the "I" do not belong to the "I," every attempt by it to account for itself will, to a certain extent, involve it in efforts to move "beyond" itself. Since such efforts are bound to fail—and will in a sense necessarily have to fail in order for any account to be possible—it is urgent for Butler that we approach ways to think about responsibility and accountability by starting out from the subject's *unaccountability*. This might, she proposes, help to move us away from models of ethics and morality that depend on the subject as self-sufficient, autonomous, and at all times fully able to account for itself, its actions and its deeds. Indeed, if we are constituted in relation to norms

in ways that we can never fully account for, then it would seem that any requirement to provide a coherent account would be a requirement of the impossible. Thus, requiring of the subject that it fully account for itself in the name of ethics, constitutes what Butler calls a form of "ethical violence." It is violent not only in requesting the impossible, but also since it demands that the subject performs violence upon itself, attempting to transform itself and its account so that the two will conjoin in perfect harmony. Butler wants to ask how we might instead permit the ambiguity, inconsistency and incoherency to remain, allowing the subject to stay opaque and even to affirm this opacity as a fundamental condition for our being.

Moreover, the Levinasian notion of the "I's" primary susceptibility, impressionability and vulnerability, provides a way for her to understand how we might elaborate a view on responsibility that does not overstate the role of the subject, but starts out from our inescapable relations to others. With such an approach, the question of responsibility will not be bound up with the moral sensibility of the subject, of the "I" internalizing certain codes of conduct and turning its rage towards itself (to speak with Nietzsche) in order to adhere to the codes. Butler's problem with such notions of responsibility is not that they are irrelevant, but that they imply that responsibility depends solely on the subject that deliberates upon its own actions and behavior. This in turn positions the subject as the unquestionable locus of responsibility and, furthermore, as the fundamental *sine qua non* of its own being. Thus, the subject's reaction to the call to responsibility is characterized by bad conscience, which returns it to itself, isolates it from its relationality and closes it off in its own perspective. Assuming responsibility, then, implies that the subject is relocated as the center of events, in a move that cannot be understood as anything other than narcissist. In such a move, Butler claims, the possibility for responsibility is effectively limited, since the primacy of the subject's relationality with others—and the ethical responsiveness that might be enabled by way of this relation—is concealed.

Butler's reading of Levinas, a reading that in many ways could be said to go far beyond Levinas himself, points instead towards an understanding of responsibility that downplays the centrality of the "I," that displaces my struggle for self-preservation and the elevation of my standpoint and perspective as my fundamental motives. Realizing that I have, essentially, others to thank for my very being—and that no matter how much I may desire to do so, I cannot escape this predicament—might suggest that we consider responsibility to be the acceptance of this primary unfreedom as an indication of our "common vulnerability, [...]"

physicality and risk.”³² By displacing the self-sufficient, autonomous subject as the center of responsibility, such a reconceptualization could, Butler argues, undermine the use of self-defense as justification for excessive violence. If responsibility is no longer thought of as stemming from the agency, reflexivity and decisiveness of the subject, but rather from the shared bond of our very existence, it becomes difficult to defend harsh retribution on moral grounds. While not arguing against self-defense as such, Butler’s problem with any claim to self-defense is that it is inexhaustible: there is no clear limit to how far the retaliation must extend in order to balance out that which is being retaliated. ”Violence”, she writes, ”is neither a just punishment we suffer nor a just revenge for what we suffer.”³³ Rather, it is what shows us, above all, that none of us can fully escape our vulnerability, that we can never break free from the bond that simultaneously enables us to emerge and confronts us with the fragility of life. In a sense, this bond forms our ”horizon of choice,” the one for which we are not responsible, but under which we must take responsibility.³⁴

Butler thus argues for what I propose to call an ethics of relationality, since it is based on the fact that no ”I” can survive without a context where it is to some extent recognized and addressed by others. For her, responsibility is not something that I assume following conscious deliberation and evaluation because I regard the actions of others to be applicable to what I wish to be responsible for. Rather, responsibility is what I am implicated in through the very mechanisms by which I emerge as an ”I.” Concern for the lives of others, then, is not something we deliberately choose. We are, in our constitution as subjects, ”undone” by others, our very selves escape us the moment we come to be, indicating that they never fully belong to us to begin with.³⁵ Our responsibility for the lives of others is therefore a condition we can never circumvent, an involvement we can never will away. It is a fundamental consequence of our very being as embodied subjects, one that, in my view, carries a powerful message of nonviolence and concern for life. As Butler herself puts it, ”[to] be embodied is to be exposed to unwanted or unanticipated modes of address, and surely ’violent attack’ is one kind of ’address’”.³⁶ Her ethics of relationality, then, urges, if not forces us, to linger in our condition, and to engage with that simple and perhaps even banal fact that nevertheless seems urgent to continue to return to: that life is profoundly vulnerable, that none of us can ever survive on

³² *GA*, 100.

³³ *GA*, 101.

³⁴ *GA*, 101.

³⁵ *GA*, 136.

³⁶ Judith Butler and Thomas Dumm, ”Giving Away, Giving Over: A Conversation with Judith Butler”, *The Massachusetts Review*, vol 49, no 1/2 (2008): 95-105.

our own, and that we are therefore inescapably bound to one another in relations of dependency.

Moreover, I would like to suggest that we find, in Butler's ethics, an attempt to move away from those models of ethics that center on the subject's ability to narrate its deeds, to give a full account of what it has done—and essentially of itself—in order to establish its ethical weight. Such views can be found in many traditional formulations of ethics, from Kant's categorical imperative—where the subject weighs its own acts in relation to what it might wish others to do—to Nietzsche's ethical subject that is inaugurated in response to accusations and threats of violence. But they are also prevalent within contemporary juridical frameworks and in discourse on mental health. In general, being able to provide a coherent account of oneself is very often viewed as a sign of virtue or innocence. Thus, when an account is not understood as coherent—or, indeed, when it is not understood at all—this is often taken as a grounds for suspicion. An account that fails to assimilate to prevalent notions of subjectivity might thus be labeled as problematic or even dangerous. This is a tendency that seems immensely important to think about, and in my view Butler provides important tools for doing so. Her understanding of the subject as inherently ambiguous and in no way self-sufficient, helps us to raise questions about what is at stake in demanding full and coherent accounts of others. How, for instance, is any such coherency achieved, and what are the conditions for it? Which accounts are recognized as coherent, and which are not? And what are the terms by which accounts are deemed coherent or incoherent? Butler's thinking shows us that any demand for full coherency and accountability is inherently violent, since it forces the subject to adapt to a model of subjectivity that disregards the difficulty of giving one's account, of appearing as self-identical, self-sufficient and transparent to oneself. Asking others to always appear to us as consistent and coherent, and of ourselves that we, for our part, do the same, means that we effectively ignore the ways in which we all have to enter into scenes of address in order to be able to appear as recognizable and intelligible both to ourselves and to others. While this does not mean that we should give up our attempts to account for ourselves or to receive the accounts of others—such attempts are no doubt necessary—Butler urges us to give up any pursuit of fulfillment and certainty. Such an approach to accountability, I propose, has the potential to interrupt forms of ethical violence in ways that might move us towards practices of nonviolence. "Life", she writes, "might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it", and so we must allow the question of "what" or "who" we are to continue to be asked. This is not simply

a question of affirming a multiplicity of accounts, or to attempt to broaden the scope for what counts as coherent, or, indeed, as "normal." While such aspirations may have honorable intentions, they still fail to take into account the fact that no one will ever be able to appear in complete coherency. Butler asks instead how we might attempt to depart from any violent demand for coherency and self-identity, and instead to linger in our curiosity, remaining open to the ambiguity at the heart of our being, while at the same time staying humble before the fact that no account will ever be definitive. This would perhaps suggest that our recognition of others should not be understood as founded on knowledge, proximity or familiarity, but rather on the limits to our ability to fully recognize or understand even ourselves, let alone others.³⁷

Thus, while Butler sets out to explicate a perspective on ethics, her endeavor is by no means apolitical. Her continual involvement with public matters indicate that her pursuit of a reconsideration of ethics carries deep political and social implications. In my view, she prepares the way for nonviolent forms of ethical inquiry, where the subject is understood as inherently ambiguous and unnarrativizable, and where this is recognized as the very foundation for our responsibility for each other. To question prevalent notions of responsibility seems to me to be acutely important in our times, when the ability to mourn the damage to or complete destruction of lives—and thus to extend care and protection to them—appears to be distributed in increasingly asymmetrical ways. When, for example, we consider how extensive cuts in social welfare coincide with increasingly stringent measures to prevent immigration to Europe and the United States by those who suffer most from the unequal global distribution of wealth, Butler's attempts to prompt us to think about what (or who) we consider ourselves to be responsible for, appear increasingly urgent.

³⁷ *GA*, 43.

Summary

I have tried to show how Butler elaborates her views on subjectivation in order to point towards a conception of ethics and responsibility that sets out from the subject's immanent relationality with others within a context of normative social frameworks. Following her readings of Foucault and Levinas, I proposed that her understanding of subjectivation vacillates between an understanding of the subject as always being implicated in relations to social norms that go beyond the influence of any individual, and at the same time, as inescapably and primarily bound up in relations with others. By way of this argument, Butler arrives at a critique of the requirement, inherent in many common views on ethics and responsibility, of the subject to account for itself as a deliberating and cohesive being. We are, as a consequence both of our relations to others and to frameworks of normativity—none of which we can fully comprehend or control—unable to account for who we are and what drives us to act in certain ways. We find ourselves at all times within scenes where we are addressed and moved in ways which we cannot anticipate. Thus, when we are required to account for what we have done, "who" we are, or where we stand in relation to others and their acts—and when these requirements leave no room for uncertainty, ambiguity or contradiction—this means that we are, in a sense, forced to perform violence upon ourselves.

In an attempt to move away from such violence, Butler proposes that we construe responsibility as based on our inescapable bond with others. Therefore, I have tried to argue that we should think of her ethics as one of relationality, and one that grounds our responsibility for the lives of others in our fundamental interdependency as embodied beings. If we understand ourselves as having an inherent responsibility for others, and consequentially proceed to affirm our obligations to them in order to "let them live," in all their ambiguity and inconsistency, then we might find ourselves with important means for moving away from self-centered, individualistic notions of subjectivity. By encouraging us to depart from violent demands for coherent narratives, by relieving the subject of having at all times to appear in complete unity and consistency, Butler's ethics might, I suggest, help us to move towards practices of nonviolence.

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