






Some ethical misgivings which need to be voiced out.

## Denying the ungrieved, and the unborn, a life, and even a mention

Judith Butler writes on the defense of voiceless human bodies... but the most voiceless of voiceless human bodies are left unmentioned in her ethics of resistance.

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In her essay [on whether one can lead a good life in an unjust society](#), speaks, and also does not speak, of beings who are not named, who are barely considered human, who are placed beyond the pale of our sympathies and alliances—for instance the slave, the oppressed woman, the Jew in the concentration camp.... or the unborn fetus. Because we are all caught, in the last analysis, she seems to say, in the position of the unborn, implicated in networks of life and of dependency which compromise our personal autonomy:

*After all, the life I am living, though clearly this life and not some other, is already connected with broader networks of life, and if it were not connected with such networks I could not actually live. So my own life depends on a life that is not mine, not just the life of the Other, but a broader social and economic organization of life. So my own living, my survival, depends on this broader sense of life, one that includes organic life, living and sustaining environments, and social networks that affirm and support interdepend- ency They constitute who I am, which means that I cede some part of my distinctively human life in order to live, in order to be human at all.*

This universal interdependency leads, I think, to a serious questioning of the simplistic pro-choice reasoning, "We give birth, we decide". Butler does not name unborn humans among her "bodies" or "beings" which are refused a recognition of humanity, but the application of her arguments to the "pro-life" movement can easily be effected. Because...

*Even the utterance of the name can come as the most extraordinary form of recognition, especially when one has become nameless or when one's name has been replaced by a number, or when one is not addressed at all.*

There remains the issue that Butler doesn't actually mention unborn fetuses among those beings who are dispossessed of their humanity. Note that she does favor speaking of "bodies" rather than "subjects" or "persons"—and she demands an active resistance on the part of those bodies (—but perhaps only of those who can stage a demonstration on the public square?) beyond the mere protest or refusal that Adorno identifies with a critical attitude:

*What Adorno might be said to rule out at such moments is the idea of popular resistance, of forms of critique that take shape as bodies amass on the street to articulate their opposition to contemporary regimes of power. But also resistance is understood as a 'no- saying' to the part of the self that wants to go along with (mitzuspielen) the status quo. There is both the idea of resistance as a form of critique that only the elect few can undertake and the idea of resistance as a resistance to a part of the self that seeks to join with what is wrong, an internal check against complicity. These claims limit the idea of resistance in ways that I myself would not finally be able to accept. For me, both claims prompt further questions: what part of the self is being refused, and what part is being empowered through resistance? If I refuse that part of myself that is complicitous with the bad life, have I then made myself pure? Have I intervened to change the structure of that social world from which I withhold myself, or have I isolated myself? Have I joined with others in a movement of resistance, and a struggle for social transformation?*

Who you join forces with, and whom you declare alien to your alliances and sympathies, up to the point of refusing even to name them is (perhaps) always the key question.

An unquestioned acceptance of a "pro-choice" stance (and a rather vague one, as the limits of choice are conveniently left unaddressed) is currently the shibboleth of so-called "progressives" or (in the American sense) "liberals". A concomitant resistance to even mention the unborn is part and parcel of the deal—the official parties of the Spanish Left, PSOE, IU, and a number of radical-nationalists, share an aversion to the very naming of the "ungrieved" that generously matches Butler's doublethink on this issue.

But,  
  
*if resistance is to enact the principles of democracy for which it struggles, then resistance has to be plural and it has to be embodied. It will also entail the gathering of the ungrievable in public space, marking their existence and their demand for liveable lives, the demand to lead a life prior to death, simply put.*

This appearance in the public space should not be understood (merely) in the literal sense of demonstrations of subjects occupying the public squares. But as a matter of fact [aborted fetuses can also be displayed on the public space](#)—maybe Butler would appreciate the idea, and the act.

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