



HEALTHY CONFLICT IN AN ERA OF INTRACTABILITY

Reply to Four Critical Responses

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ABSTRACT

The essay responds to four critical essays by Rosemary Kellison, Ebrahim Moosa, Joseph Winters, and Martin Kavka on the author's recent book, *Healthy Conflict in Contemporary American Society: From Enemy to Adversary* (2018). Parts 1 and 2 work in tandem to further develop my accounts of strategic empathy and agonistic political friendship. I defend these accounts against criticisms that my argument for moral imagination obligates oppressed people to empathize with their oppressors. I argue, further, that healthy conflict can be motivated by a kind of "secular" love. This enables my position to immanently critique and mediate the claims that one must either love (agapically) one's opponent in order to engage them in "healthy conflict," on one hand, or that one must vanquish, exclude, or "cancel" one's opponent, on the other. In Part 3, I demonstrate how my account mediates the challenge of an alleged standing opposition between moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique. I defend a methodologically pragmatist account of immanent prophetic criticism, resistance, and conflict transformation. Finally, I respond to one critic's vindication of a strong enemy/adversary opposition that takes up the case of white supremacist violence in the U.S. I argue that the time horizon for healthy conflict must be simultaneously immediate *and also* long-term, provided that such engagements remain socio-critically self-reflexive and seek to cultivate transformational responses.

KEYWORDS: *pragmatism, moral imagination, strategic empathy, prophetic criticism, agonistic political friendship, Frantz Fanon, Barbara Deming, Robert Brandom, Colin Kaepernick*

Healthy conflict is not a "thing." It is not a recipe, a methodology, or an algorithm. I borrowed the term from John Kelsay to characterize an approach to the conflicts that inevitably come with being in public and political relationships that are marked by deep differences across moral, cultural, and religious commitments, as well as differences across identities and communities.¹ I use the term to identify,

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¹ See Kelsay 2005, esp. 698.

track, and develop a set of family resemblances in approaches to conflict that span the thinking of recent pragmatist philosophers, agonistic democratic thinkers, religious activists, and peace studies practitioner-scholars. The aim of healthy conflict, I argue, is to reduce violence in all its forms, and to cultivate justice in its multiple varieties through democratic social practices.²

A hallmark of healthy conflict, and sine qua non of democratic social transformation as I develop it, is learning how to engage an opponent in conflict as an adversary whose claims and practices I intend to contest, rather than as an enemy I intend to destroy. An adversary is one whose commitments are dangerous, and indeed may be evil. But an adversary is one who nonetheless remains someone for whom I maintain basic respect, even as I strenuously contest her. The adversary's civil and human rights are to be recognized and protected. She is someone from whom I may even learn. This way of engaging my adversary stands in contrast to an approach that would position my opponent as an enemy to be vanquished, destroyed, demonized, or perpetually defeated. Developing the former capacities rather than the latter in US society—which has been conflict-ridden over matters of deep and likely irreconcilable religious and moral commitments—is no simple undertaking. In what follows, I respond to colleagues who have generously and charitably raised criticisms and objections to my arguments, and appealed for further elucidation.

1. Empathy for One's Oppressors and the Limits of Moral Imagination

Rosemary Kellison asks me to clarify how much empathy is required of the person who seeks to show respect for her adversary and cultivate her moral imagination. For example, would the concept of respect at the heart of healthy conflict obligate marginalized people to empathize with their oppressors? In the early chapters of my book, I develop moral imagination as a practice wherein respect for others entails cultivating empathetic understanding of those others. It is also a practice that can be performed more and less virtuously. As such, moral imagination requires developing the practical wisdom to know when, how, and to what extent to employ empathy, and the ways it can lead into solidary action. On this account, to empathize at the wrong time, to the wrong extent, with the wrong person or group would be vicious. It would harm or destroy the possibilities of developing the kind of just relationality that could facilitate democratic social transformation.

To this end, I argue that practices of moral imagination must be supplemented with self-reflexive vigilance against forms of structural and cultural violence so that an individual's moral imagination—especially of those who occupy positions of power and advantage—does not become implicated in such violence. One way of guarding against this danger is for such persons to engage in socio-theoretical

² I offer more detailed exposition and justification of this normative orientation in the book (Springs 2018), and more succinctly in Springs 2015.

analysis and critique. It might also occur through less theoretical means as well. For people who presume (however tacitly and unreflectively) the normativity of their perspective on, and experience of, the world for example, white normativity, andro-normativity, heteronormativity, homonormativity, settler-colonial-normativity, among various other possibilities virtuous moral imagining must be an exercise in which they sensitize themselves to perspectives, experiences, and ways of being that have heretofore been rendered invisible, marginalized, and/or subjugated. With this insight, I reconceptualize conflict as a means by which to illuminate, challenge, and—if constructively engaged—alter the causes and conditions of such subjugation. As I argue in the book, to conceptualize conflict in terms of moral imagination is to practice becoming a person capable and adept at self-reflexivity, vulnerable to the stories and perspectives of others. It is to become sensitive to their accounts, their instruction and leadership, regarding what must be done to sustainably transform the causes and conditions of their suffering and experience of injustice.

To Kellison's charitable and fine-grained exposition of my account I respond that relationships of conflict are not necessarily relationships of simple parity (2018, 269–70). In US contexts, the participants all share in the array of responsibilities of democratic citizenship. However, these responsibilities are not identical in every given circumstance. Practicing moral imagination virtuously admits of different roles and responsibilities in varying circumstances of conflict. This is a central reason that the examples I deploy do not indicate a greater responsibility on the part of the oppressed to engage in conflict in healthy ways. Indeed, as the above paragraph on moral imagination indicates, it is equally—if not more so—the responsibility of those with power and relative advantages to exercise moral imagination in combination with self-reflexivity.

I chose the examples I did in order to illuminate successful examples of healthy conflict and to examine what made those examples successful. Many of the exemplars I set forth are, or were, activists, leaders, and public figures who had become convinced, and sought to convince others, that anyone who would seek more just and peaceful social and political conditions must do so by just and peaceful means. These exemplars were usually struggling for their own liberation from unjust conditions. They have effected (and are effecting) some of the most transformative moments of democratic social transformation for justice and peace that the US has witnessed. Frequently they have carried out their work in the face of opposition by people in power striving to hold on to that power, in order to conserve a status quo that benefits them, and/or in the name of retrieving or maintaining some putative utopian vision of the past. This is all terribly abstract, however, so allow me to set Kellison's questions in the context of the tradition of democratic social transformation that I develop throughout the book.

Deeply influenced by the work of Mohandas Gandhi, who was compelled by his own commitment to respect the humanity of his opponents (a key feature of *satyagraha*), Martin Luther King, Jr. appealed to the compulsion of *agape*. For King, to fight racism and white supremacy was, in itself, to seek the good of one's

oppressors. Fighting racism and white supremacy promoted their dignity. And resisting one's oppressors in ways that might awaken them to the forms of oppression they suffered had the effect of assisting them in also liberating themselves. This was not to rescue or serve them. It was born of King's agape-driven recognition that the genuine liberation of both the oppressed and oppressor—while drastically different from each other at times—were bound up together. The forms of oppression that white and black people suffered from were not equivalent. However, liberation could not come from simply inverting the structures, processes, cultures, and unjust laws that had enslaved and then subjugated African Americans.

Gandhi argued for “the unity of means and ends” as the necessary logic of non-violent transformation (Springs 2018, 248–50). He claimed that a just and peaceful goal must be pursued by just and peaceful means. If it was not, then the violence and injustice of the means deployed would negate the putative justness and peacefulness of the end pursued. A seemingly nonviolent goal achieved by violent means in any form would be a mere semblance of nonviolence. It would multiply the sum total, and deepen the hold, of injustice in the situation.³ For King, this meant that the fight against white supremacy had to be a fight against all forms of violence. This required fighting against unjust laws, explicit racism, and violent suppression, of course. It meant fighting for the souls of black folks against cultural homicide and habits of self-abnegation promoted by cultural contexts saturated by white supremacy. But this entailed, simultaneously, fighting for the souls of white folks who suffered from the full panoply of sicknesses and blindnesses of white supremacy, whether they could recognize that or not (King 1958, 90–95). In doing so, King portrayed racism as nothing less than the evil and destructive laws, structures, cultures, actions, and sensibilities to be fought against actively and directly, but also non-violently.⁴

Many reject King's principled commitment to non-violent resistance, and his claims about the liberation of oppressed and oppressor being interconnected. They do so, in part, because they do not share his commitment to a Christian account of agapic love. Frantz Fanon provides one such a point of contrast that I take up in the book. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* came to deeply inform the writing and activism of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), and various strands of the Black Power movement (Carmichael 2007, 45–60, 77–100, 145–64). Fanon argued that what made two centuries of French settler-colonial occupation of Algeria so insidiously violent was the myriad ways in which it inclined the colonized psyche to assume the perspective of the settler-colonialist. The French settler's point of reference, he said, filtered even into the dreams, desires, and embodied experiences

³ I examine cases of this at length in at Springs 2018, 226–71.

⁴ “Agape . . . is understanding, creative, redemptive, good will to all men . . . to the point of loving the person who does an evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said ‘love your enemies.’ I'm very happy that he didn't say like your enemies, because it is pretty difficult to like some people. Like is sentimental, and it is pretty difficult to like someone bombing your homes, it is pretty difficult to like somebody threatening your children; it is difficult to like congressmen who spend all of their time trying to defeat civil rights. But Jesus says love them, and love is greater than like” (King 1986, 46–47).

of the colonized subject. To respond further to Kellison's question, here is an example in which fighting against the effects of white supremacy and settler-colonialism required interrogating, unlearning, and deprogramming the tendency to, in effect, empathize with one's oppressor. This refusal was a hallmark of a form of conflict that could set free the colonized psyche and body. The colonizer-enemy was so thoroughly internalized, Fanon argued, that setting the colonized free required countering the violence of settler-colonialism with an equal and opposite form of violence: violently confronting, driving out—and where necessary, killing—the settler colonialists (Fanon 2004; Carmichael 2007, 145–64).

In grappling with the challenges posed by the Black Power movement, King eventually came to recognize and incorporate many of Fanon's insights. Later in his life he argued that, at times, oppression of black people in the U.S. manifests in the forms of psychological and spiritual self-abnegation that he described as an effect of "cultural homicide" (King 1968, 44, 46–68). King came to recognize that overturning Jim Crow and racist laws left countless racist structures and sensibilities intact. Any movement for freedom that left these in place was, as King said, "waiting to be buried" (1968, 44). He, nonetheless, remained committed to undoing them nonviolently in virtue of his Christian commitment to agape-driven political engagement.

How would you incorporate these insights if you did not share King's religious commitments? The activist and writer Barbara Deming offered one answer to this question. Deming is another exemplar in the tradition of democratic social transformation out of which I develop the notion of healthy conflict. And while I do not treat her explicitly in the book, her work informs my arguments throughout, and most pointedly, in her engagement with Fanon.

Deming argued as follows. First, assume for the sake of argument that Fanon is right about the need for conflict as a jarring and cleansing encounter necessary for challenging and resisting the deep-seated colonization of consciousness, the body, and the soul. Now, each time you encounter the word "violence" in Fanon's writing substitute it with the words "radical and uncompromising action," that is, non-violent, direct action (Deming 1971, 196). If you do this, Fanon's diagnosis of the violence that colonialism and white supremacy perpetrate, and the rigor and strenuousness of one's response to it, does not change. Even the severity of the action required as an antidote might not change (that is, such actions involve nonviolently confronting and resisting one's oppressor). However, the results toward which you will tend will be categorically different. Violent confrontation justifies a violent response. Predictably, this gives rise to an ever-widening spiral of violent action and retaliation. Direct action and resistance that is nonviolent has the potential to subvert the spiral of violence, spur productive change, and create possibilities for a just and sustainable peace after the conflict.

Deming did not invoke love as the motivation, or the goal of engaging nonviolently—not, at least, in the sense of agape, or some other religious conceptualization (*ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, as in Gandhi's case⁵). She invoked a differently

⁵ See Gandhi 1946.

democratic approach. She called it *respect* for one's antagonist, and *nonviolent strategy* in pursuit of one's objective. This meant, most basically, confronting the person directly and forcefully, but also non-violently. She described this as a "form of battle" (Deming 1971, 195). Such a form of battle required resisting and combating non-violently one's opponent, while simultaneously refusing to destroy or categorically exclude that person or group. In the terms I set forth in the book, such an approach reorients a potential enemy as an adversary. Strategically, Deming argued, this combination would increase the possibility of living and moving forward toward a more sustainable, just, and peaceful common life together once the conflict has ended. Deming appealed to a kind of "secular" love motivated by pragmatic concerns of productively transforming the conflict at hand, and of also navigating the necessities of living together beyond it.⁶ She affirmed the unity of means and ends, and liberation of oppressed and oppressor as interrelated for pragmatic reasons. Yet her position mediated the claim for an antecedent, religious commitment to nonviolent action, on the one hand, and on the other, a reductionist political realism which portrayed such encounters as simply a struggle for power, or appealed to nonviolent direct action for only instrumental reasons—for example, because it would be more likely to succeed than violence.⁷

2. Strategic Empathy and Agonistic Political Friendship

With these features of healthy conflict in view, Ebrahim Moosa challenges me to apply my account to a particularly divisive conflict that has flared up in the contemporary US. How do the controversies sparked in recent years by National Football League (NFL) quarterback Colin Kaepernick fit with—or defy—the approach to healthy conflict that I develop?⁸ This case points to the limits of symbolic dissent and ritual protest, as well as to the challenges of integrating such dissent with potentially transformative social action. Can this be understood in terms of "healthy conflict"?

⁶ "This is the heart of my argument: We can put *more* pressure on the antagonist for whom we show human concern. It is precisely solicitude for his person in combination with a stubborn interference with his actions that can give us a very special degree of control (precisely in our acting both with love, if you will—in the sense that we respect his human rights—and truthfulness, in the sense that we act out fully our objections to his violating our rights). We put upon him two pressures—the pressure of our defiance of him and the pressure of our respect for his life—and it happens that in combination these two pressures are uniquely effective" (Deming 1971, 207).

⁷ Gene Sharp argued for the greater effectiveness of nonviolent (as opposed to violent) resistance on the basis of exhaustive and comparative examination of case studies (for a condensed version of his argument, see Sharp 1996). A more recent statistical study of the effectiveness of nonviolent civil resistance found that, across 100 cases during the twentieth century, nonviolent civil resistance achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with a 26 percent success rate for violent resistance campaigns. The nonviolent campaigns had a higher likelihood of leading to durable democracies rather than civil war (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

⁸ See Branch 2017 for a summary of the Kaepernick case.

In 2017, Kaepernick (at the time, the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers) began kneeling as an act of protest during the national anthem as it was ritually performed at the start of NFL football games in which he was playing. Kaepernick's action quickly became iconic and polarizing. It joins the ranks of John Carlos and Tommie Smith, the Olympic sprinters who presented black-power salutes—their shoes revoked and heads bowed, wearing both a black glove on their raised fists and badges for the Olympic Project for Human Rights—throughout the playing of the US national anthem from the gold and bronze medal podiums at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. Kaepernick's action also recalls world champion boxer Muhammad Ali who, in 1966—as a Muslim and African-American—conscientiously refused to be drafted to fight in Vietnam.⁹ Ali's refusal cost him his heavy-weight title, resulted in a three-year ban from boxing, and brought his career to a halt until his conviction for refusing to serve was unanimously overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1971. In effect, Kaepernick's intervention participates in a historically extended set of social practices of public criticism, dissent, and resistance by public figures laboring in what Ralph Ellison called “the unintellectualized areas of our experience” (Ellison 2003b, 674).¹⁰

Consider the various features that make Kaepernick's intervention strategically so effective. It sparks controversy, and thus generates the political and social tension it does, by intervening in a time and context in which average, everyday Americans—white Americans, especially—expect to be comfortably un-perturbed in their enjoyment of a widely shared leisure pastime. NFL football also happens to be a bastion for US civil religion-cum-nationalism with its rites of public patriotism. Kaepernick is on record as pointing out that “there's a lot of racism disguised as patriotism in this country.” The root of his protest, as Kaepernick described it, is a conscientious refusal to “stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. . . . There are [black and brown] bodies in the street and [police] getting paid leave and getting away with murder” (Wyche 2016). Publicly, Kaepernick's dissent elicited acts of hatred in counter-protest—for

⁹ Ali justified his refusal: “My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America. . . . And shoot them for what? . . . They never lynched me, they didn't put no dogs on me, they didn't rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. . . . Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail” (Calamur 2016).

¹⁰ It is important to note that Ellison did not portray the spaces of such criticism as anti- or non-intellectual. Clearly, the figures I mention above all articulated sophisticated reasons for their dissent and activism. Rather, Ellison warns professional social critics and public intellectuals to pay close attention to, and expect to learn from, such interventions. “Our peripheral vision had better be damned good,” he writes, “because while baseball, basketball, and football players cannot really tell us how to write our books, they *do* demonstrate where much of the significant action is taking place. Often they are themselves cultural heroes who are responsible for a powerful modification in American social attitudes. They tell us in nonliterary terms much about the nature of possibility. They tell us about the cost of success, and much about the nonpolitical aspects of racial and national identity, about the changing nature of social hierarchy, and about the role which individual skill and excellence can play in creating social change” (Ellison 2003b, 674).

example, people burning his team jersey and posting videos of them doing so on YouTube—as well as numerous death threats (Macguire 2016). He was, in effect, expelled from further employment by other NFL football teams, and ultimately settled the legal complaint he filed against the NFL for a confidential sum.

It is crucial to note that Kaepernick did not begin his dissent by kneeling during the national anthem. He started out remaining seated on the player's bench. One NFL recruit, a former Green Beret and veteran of multiple combat zones, Nate Boyer, responded by publishing an open letter to Kaepernick. The two later met to talk in person. In the letter and in person, Boyer sought to persuade him to approach his protest differently. He argued that kneeling during the national anthem, instead of sitting, would indicate reverence for meaningful and legitimate sacrifices, as it is the posture that a soldier or veteran takes at the foot of a fallen fellow-soldier's grave. At the same time, kneeling would continue to express Kaepernick's intended dissent against the persistent killing of black and brown people resulting from police brutality and the justice system's impunity in failing to hold them accountable. Kneeling would disrupt and hopefully awaken large segments of the general US population who seem not to notice, or presume by default that police are justified in whatever uses they make of deadly force.

Does Kaepernick have an *obligation* to accept Boyer's suggestion on the account I set forth—to, in effect, empathize with Boyer in approaching his act of dissent? I do not think so. Kaepernick could have engaged even more agonistically than he did—arguably, as say, Tommie Smith and John Carlos did in 1968 with bowed head and black-power salute, appealing to a basis in human rights. I think this would have represented an engagement in healthy conflict, though clearly tilting in a more explicitly agonistic direction. It certainly would have more acutely sparked awareness of the depth and severity of anger, sorrow, and justified rage in the face of arbitrary, state-sanctioned violence and oppression that continues to be perpetrated with impunity upon black and brown bodied people throughout the US today.

At the same time, a more agonistic intervention would have made it more difficult for Kaepernick (and his supporters) to find ad hoc points of connection on this issue, especially with people who are potentially sympathetic to his cause but naively unaware of the systemic nature and severity of forms of violence to which people of color are subject. Those ad hoc points of connection turn out to be crucial for possibilities of potential collaboration or coalition building. For example, such points of connection are instrumental in generating a “third party effect” in civil resistance. They open possibilities for attracting the widest possible attention and garnering sympathy for one's cause among people who may consider themselves uninvolved in the injustice and the conflicts related to it. Such awareness and sympathy can generate strong solidary support, and even erode support among an opponent's usual backers, potentially swaying them to alter their commitments or shift loyalties (Sharp 1973a, 109–15; Deming 1971, 211; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Galtung 1989). Strategically, such points of connection become

one basis for transformational dynamics of healthy conflict that I discuss in terms of political jiu jitsu (Springs 2018, 249–58).¹¹

On my account of healthy conflict, Kaepernick's response is a *strategic* use of empathetic understanding. It also marks a point at which strategic and principled conceptions of non-violent resistance (which are sometimes portrayed as antithetical) can be constructively integrated. On its face, Kaepernick might have easily dismissed Boyer's letter as an instance of white fragility.¹² On one hand, his response is strategic in that it holds open the possibility for—rather than foreclosing—points of connection for productive engagement in the midst of heated, seemingly (and perhaps genuinely) intractable conflict. At the same time, beyond the purely instrumental value of such points of connection for raising awareness and generating sympathy and support, they simultaneously contribute to the very possibility of mutual understanding, mutual recognition, and respect—the ethical substance of democratic social transformation, and democratic hope.

On my account, Kaepernick's intervention is an instance of the pursuit of what political philosopher Danielle Allen characterizes as “political friendship” in her book *Talking to Strangers* (2004). Allen glosses political friendship in terms provided by Ralph Ellison: “The way home we seek is that condition of man's [*sic*] being at home in the world, which is called love, and which we term democracy” (2004, 119; quoting Ellison 2003a, 154). She admits that such a notion will strike many readers as implausible. “How can modes of citizenship developed by the

¹¹ Drawing upon Gandhi's approach, Gene Sharp examines in detail “the art of winning over uncommitted third parties,” as well as sparking dissent among, and “winning the sympathy of [one's adversary's] allies and potential supporters.” He examines these dynamics in the cases of South African Apartheid, South Vietnam, and Montgomery, Alabama, among others (Sharp 1973b, 657–97). These are the “mechanics” of political jiu-jitsu by which, in effect, one might “bring an adversary to their senses, rather than to their knees,” or effect a “change of heart” (or “conversion,” of sorts) in one's opponent. Mark Shepard alleged long ago that conversion of one's adversary is a “myth” associated with Gandhi's account of non-violent direct action, though Gandhi, himself, believed it to be true (Shepard 1990). Such “conversion” is “mythical” (or, arguably, highly unlikely) only when it is construed as an instantaneous change of an opponent's commitments. Sharp, by contrast, portrays this (rightly) as a range of complex processes and tactics that need not necessarily disrupt the commitments of every specific opponent (and certainly not instantaneously). It may impact some among one's direct adversaries. Just as importantly, it may impact some among an adversary's potential supporters, allies, as well as third parties, and people in positions to effect changes in policy and law. These are no more “mythical” than are the range of specific cases by which Sharp explicates the specific dynamics through which activists do such things as sew doubts, shake commitments, divide loyalties, shift opinions, win sympathies, sway support, instigate defections with reference to a particular issue, action, or group. They thereby fight and counter the ways that the dehumanization and scapegoating of vulnerable groups is used by oppressors to justify their subjugation (Cortright 2006, 130–36).

¹² Boyer writes, “The only time I got to stand on the sideline for the anthem was during my one and only NFL preseason game, against the Denver Broncos. As I ran out of the tunnel with the American flag I could feel myself swelling with pride, and as I stood on the sideline with my hand on my heart as the anthem began, that swelling burst into tears. . . . That moment meant so much more to me than even playing in the game did, and to be honest, if I had noticed my teammate sitting on the bench, it would have really hurt me” (2016).

dominated at one particular moment of crisis yield techniques for all democratic citizens?" she asks (Allen 2004, 118). Allen pivots immediately to gloss her account of political friendship by quoting Hannah Arendt's more rugged conception of "respect" in *The Human Condition*—a concept that more explicitly admits of agonistic tensions: "a kind of 'friendship' without intimacy and without closeness" (emphasis added in Allen 2004, 119; quoting Arendt 1958, 243).

Ellison is a key figure in the tradition of democratic social transformation I develop in my book. What happens if we use the Ellisonian sensibility through which Allen, in effect, refracts Arendt's account of political friendship to understand the nature of the conflict in the Kaepernick case? Doing so illuminates ways that political friendship must come to terms with its interwovenness with agonistic features of public, political relationality. Recognition of these features of political friendship requires grappling with the inevitable occurrence of agonistic moments in conflict that would be healthy (rather than degenerative or destructive), and the transformational possibilities that open up as a result. This is at the heart of what my book sets out to accomplish.

In the Kaepernick case, there are multiple and conflicting resonances of the symbolic act of kneeling in the context of a national ritual. Such an act conveys both reverence for a debt of legitimate sacrifice that one cannot repay in kind (that is, piety) and *simultaneously* relentless, defiant dissent. The simultaneity of these resonances have enabled some people—in certain instances, military service people who claim to strenuously oppose Kaepernick's action in itself—to nonetheless speak up on behalf of his protest (Boyer 2018).¹³ They acknowledge that his intentions are respectful, and that his act of dissent is made in good faith. At moments, they have taken his part in response to contemptuous denunciation. This was the case, for example, when President Trump denounced Kaepernick's protest, and Republican congressperson Peter King equated kneeling during the anthem to giving the Nazi salute. On my reading, strategic empathy enabled Kaepernick's intervention to be improvisational and flexible, while still focusing justified rage upon white supremacy in a principled and prudent way. The Kaepernick-Boyer encounter is illustrative of several features of what Kelsay first described as healthy conflict, and which I have developed and applied: "listening carefully to others, interpreting them as reason-givers like oneself and one's near companions, arguing with them in the spirit of fellow seekers, and with the possibility of personal and social expansion" (Kelsay 2005, 698).

At the same time, opposition and dissent must continue, as persistent injustice stands at the heart of the conflict. Hopefully, it spreads as far as possible, however unpleasant such interventions are to the sensibilities of those offended by Kaepernick's dissent, such as those who refuse to acknowledge and come to terms

¹³ I treat a similar example in the final chapter of my book when I argue that the multiple and conflicting resonances of hijab worn by Muslim women in France enabled them to, at once, challenge the dogmatism of French *laïcité*, and embody a transformed understanding of French citizenship that would respect their religious practice on its own terms. See 307–10.

with the structures of violence in which large segments of our fellow citizens are enmeshed. Agonistic respect will seek points of connection and contact like those witnessed between Kaepernick and Boyer, but will relentlessly persist in its struggle for justice, nonetheless.

I can already hear Martin Kavka bristling at this example. “Is that it? Is that all this talk of agonistic dimensions of healthy conflict comes to? Is this not an easy test case?” Perhaps so. Moreover, with the sponsorship and branding of Kaepernick’s efforts by the athletic apparel multinational corporation, Nike, now everyone else can participate as well. Each of us can elect to purchase and wear a pair of Nike shoes in support, or purchase and burn a pair in protest. Either way, Nike wins.¹⁴ So let me try to ramp it up a little bit.

In a context as polarized politically and culturally as the contemporary US, we can view the Kaepernick-Boyer encounter as a desperately needed, exemplary moment of democratic friendship, however slender and tenuous the connection may be. However, as much as this exchange witnesses to a moment of political friendship in Arendt’s sense, we must still press on with our critique in an attempt to understand the root of this upsurge in white fragility, anxiety, and identity politics in response to a prophetic intervention like Kaepernick’s.

Taking a moment for self-reflexive, socio-theoretical analysis indicates that Kaepernick’s intervention remains symbolic politics and social criticism at a national level. What actually changes? It raises awareness; it spurs outrage. It generates tension where the elements of conflict had been repressed beneath an appearance of calm and apparent acquiescence (that is, “negative peace”). The intervention ignites debate. The prudential character of his intervention enables it to invite broader support, cultivate sympathy, and open possibilities for political friendship. These are all hallmarks of healthy conflict as I develop it. But how does it contribute to the actual transformation of the causes and conditions of injustice?

Recall that nationally visible civil rights movement leaders relied upon the work that local people and community organizers had been doing, in some cases, for decades to achieve their victories. Local leaders would freeze an issue, target it, dramatize the injustice, and precipitate conflict. King, Andrew Young, and other representatives of the national campaign would arrive and channel the situation strategically to the level of national visibility. Do we see a similar example now? Kaepernick’s case may be too easily disconnected from local politics, and it may be too easily coopted by national media news cycle, and/or routinized by the interests of corporate capitalism (for example, Nike). Consider, then, a case that relates to Kaepernick’s, but from the bottom up—the case of the police shooting of Laquan McDonald in Chicago.

The case of Laquan MacDonald resolved in late 2018 in the conviction of the Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke. This was the first conviction in decades of

¹⁴ Nike affixed the slogan “*Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything*” to Kaepernick’s image (Coulman 2018).

a police officer for killing while on duty (Agurino and Berman 2018). The murder of seventeen-year-old McDonald in 2014 was covered up by the Chicago Police Department, who paid his family a five-million-dollar settlement that kept secret the dash-cam video of the killing. Investigation by an independent civil rights journalist led to the release of the footage. It revealed that, contra the claims of police and doctored reports, McDonald was walking *away* from officers when Van Dyke stepped onto the scene and shot him sixteen times in ten seconds. When the dash-cam footage was finally released just before Thanksgiving in 2017, Chicago community organizers took to the streets. They expressed their rage openly and publicly by occupying and shutting down the high-end retail district along North Michigan Avenue on Black Friday. They have done so on occasions since, and have also occupied City Hall.

Chicago community organizers spoke openly and unapologetically of the community's rage about Laquan McDonald's murder, the circumstances of the cover-up surrounding it, and the deep historical and structural conditions that precipitated it. However, crucially—and strategically—they managed to quell the compulsion to react violently, and to transform that compulsion into unyielding, strategically nonviolent, direct action. This contrasted starkly with the city-wide rioting that erupted in Baltimore seven months earlier, when 144 vehicles and 15 buildings were burned, in the wake of the acquittal of police officers who had been charged with murder in the death of Freddie Gray (Lopez 2016).

A coalition of Chicago community organizer groups—led, in large part, by the group Assata's Daughters—demanded that the Mayor, Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department, and Cook County State's Attorney resign, and that a citizen review board for police be launched. The Monday following the release of the police dash-cam video, Mayor Rahm Emmanuel fired the Chicago Police Superintendent and initiated a Civil Police Accountability council. Organizers spurred the ouster of the State's Attorney for Cook County at the next opportunity. They prompted a federal investigation by the Department of Justice of abusive policing patterns, resulting in a consent decree.¹⁵ Van Dyke was tried and convicted. Concurrently, Mayor Emmanuel retracted his earlier declaration that he would seek a third term, announcing, instead, that he would not seek re-election.

In the terms I develop in my book, what followed Laquan McDonald's murder was well-organized, agonistic, strategically nonviolent conflict. It exemplifies healthy conflict in many ways. It is oriented toward correcting the same injustice (and articulating a positive vision of justice) which Colin Kaepernick—and the Black Lives Matter Movement more broadly—fights to raise to the level of mainstream, national awareness. Organizers staged nonviolent direct action to generate tension and dramatize the severity of the injustices at stake.¹⁶ They sought

¹⁵ The consent decree was rescinded by former Attorney General under the Trump Administration, Jeff Sessions (Sobol 2018)

¹⁶ An especially influential organization in this series of action is Assata's Daughters, a group that Colin Kaepernick raised \$25,000 to support. See Cox 2017.

concrete, strategic goals for negotiation, but also spurred institutional correction of the domination of local communities by law enforcement and city government. This direct action is unyielding, and the activists and residents across the Southside and Westside neighborhoods of Chicago persist in their outrage. They will persist so long as the city and the police operate arbitrarily, and with impunity.¹⁷

At the same time, the division between law enforcement and Chicago neighborhood folk runs deep, in some ways deeper than ever. Many of the patterns of abusive policing persist now. What could reconciliation look like in this context, to allude to one of Kellison's concerns? David Anderson Hooker and Sheila Bedi have published a plea for a truth and reconciliation commission-style initiative in Chicago (Bedi and Hooker 2018). Such a commission, they claim, should be led by the communities who have been, and are, most affected by these realities. This is one example of what reconciliation in the midst of persisting conflict would need to look like. The goal of such a commission is not necessarily to *accomplish* reconciliation; that is not necessarily what truth and reconciliation-style initiatives do.¹⁸ Rather, at their best, such initiatives bring to light both the historical and present systemic roots of the injustice. In doing so, they bring to the center the voices of the victims and marginalized, and amplify their agency in processes of response, repair, and recovery. Such commissions can uncover the extent and severity of the impunity of perpetrators as well as the violence against those who have been harmed. They may facilitate reparation, restitution, and apology. Finally, they can promote the kinds of community building and healing in the form of relationship repair with actual police officers that, as I am discovering in recent fieldwork, is emerging in ad hoc, piecemeal fashion—however halting and partial—among local neighborhood restorative justice initiatives across the city of Chicago (Springs n.d.). This is to say that the concept of “reconciliation” that I deployed in my book (largely as a placeholder for the work of my forthcoming book project) requires a broad array of tools, processes, and conceptions of relationship building, including—but far from exhausted by—the kinds of depolarization that community organizers engage in at the conclusion of a campaign.

3. The Case for the More Familiar Word, When it Will do

Joseph Winters's exceedingly close reading of my book makes me wish I had written more clearly. Still, I think there are passages in the book that evince greater agreement between us than his reading suggests. In effect, Winters worries that I have turned the distinction between moral imagination and socio-theoretical

¹⁷ Ryan Lugalía-Hollon and Daniel Cooper document these conditions in rigorous detail throughout their recent study, *The War on Neighborhoods: Policing, Prison, and Punishment in a Divided City* (2018).

¹⁸ For an examination of truth and reconciliation commissions that is as thorough as it is sobering about the internal conflicts, compromises, and partialities of what they can, and have, accomplished, see Verdeja 2009.

critique into a dichotomy—the one wholly different than the other, each able to do something that the other cannot. I welcome his effort to challenge and to mediate any such dichotomy. However, I do not take myself to have posited these in dichotomous terms. As with most pragmatic approaches, I treat it as a *distinction* that is not determined by fixed essences, but rather, as differentiated by subtleties of use and context. As Hilary Putnam points out, one way an ordinary distinction differs from a dichotomy (or dualism) is that a distinction admits of a range of different applications. As such, from time to time, one should not be surprised to find oneself in circumstances of use in which the distinction in question does not apply (a point I return to below) (2002, 11).

The opposition between Cornel West and Richard Rorty on moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique might appear dichotomous in my account because each thinker often talked in dichotomous ways about these forms of analysis.¹⁹ For cautionary reasons, and in virtue of his own account of social hope, Rorty tipped towards the claim that literary imagination and romance were really all that were necessary for democratic social transformation. He appeared to claim that critical theory simply brought too many self-subverting temptations, especially for the post-60s cultural and academic left. As such, it inhibited the broad-based coalition building of democratic social transformation. Of course, at moments, Rorty also admitted—often in the footnotes—that when pragmatically done, theory was still a much-needed auxiliary to romance, and that, at his best, Cornel West is an exemplar of this. At moments, West seemed to insist that socio-theoretical critique could accomplish things that no other form of analysis or criticism, including pragmatism, could.

I argue that it is possible to work situationally with this opposition, as a distinction, rather than a dichotomy, when I write:

If critique enables us to imagine new possibilities and see in new ways, illuminates possible modes of action, inspires hope amid savage realities, then so much the better [as these are all things in which it is consistent with the purposes of moral imagination]. We still must ask why it is not preferable to speak of the ideals of social democracy and economic justice, rather than in the terms of socio-theoretical critique and power analysis. Why, that is, should we not prefer the more familiar word *when it will do?* (Springs 2018, 80).

In other words, when the literary, poetic, observational, testimonial modes of criticism and analysis characteristic of moral imagination adequately fulfill those purposes for which one often reaches for socio-theoretical tools, then social critics and activists have good reasons to prefer them. At the same time, I continue, “Seeing social theory as an instrument that can challenge and enrich the vision of moral imagination . . . invests the theoretical task with new meaning. Specifically, it repositions it as a practice-oriented task to be supplemented with the literary and artistic inspiration and moral imaginings that are crucial to recognizing others as

¹⁹ I documented this extended exchange at Springs 2018, 41–61.

like, and relationally bound up with, oneself” (Springs 2018, 156). What we have here is not a dichotomy.

To put it differently, if, as Winters suggests, an essay or short story by James Baldwin or Audre Lorde’s poetry will suffice to illuminate and convey the causes and conditions, presence and operations of inequalities, marginalization, and domination, then *all the better*. Baldwin’s essays and short stories may reach out far more expansively and incisively than, say, Robin DiAngelo’s use of Bourdieu’s habitus and field to delineate the nature and character of white fragility.²⁰ Indeed, Baldwin is a mixed example of inspired moral imagination that can cut with an incisiveness that many socio-theoretical insights intend to—so much so that in *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu deploys examples from Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* to vividly convey key points about “habitus” and “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 2000, 170–71; citing Baldwin 1993, 26).

Or, consider my exposition of how the everyday making explicit of social practices can avoid devolving into the logic-chopping, immanent critique of professional philosophers, and can withstand the conceptual pull of Jurgen Habermas’s (and Robert Brandom’s earlier) I-We (as opposed to I-Thou) account of social normativity. Here one exemplar to which I point is Sojourner Truth and her testimony in her address “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Springs 2018, 184–87). Truth’s role in my argument is not to merely illustrate pragmatist philosophical insights. On my account, her intervention, rather, demonstrates lived, embodied practices of immanent accountability. It models the colloquial language and workaday giving and asking for reasons by which a lone objector can hold a group’s consensus accountable and correct it. Her speech is the original act of everyday exposition, criticism of, and transformation of discursive norms. I bring the insights of Brandom and William Connolly to further redescribe and explicate an I-Thou approach to social normativity (and practices of accountability) of which Truth is a virtuous exemplar.

As I stage this encounter, it is Truth’s testimony that bears solidity and weight already, and thereby holds the philosophical exposition accountable to the lived practices of giving and asking for reasons of which they purport to make explicit. But the philosophical point of Chapter 5 is that in conscripting and repurposing a putative master’s linguistic and discursive tools (religious, cultural, and social, for instance)—in subverting and repurposing them for objectives unintended by the original tool-makers—the innovatively appropriated “slave’s tools” enable the dismantling of the slavery of the slave. In so far as they succeed, they enable the dismantling of the very possibility of mastery by a master. In this, the liberation cuts (albeit differently) in both directions. And this turns out to

²⁰ I borrow the notion of “white fragility” from Robin DiAngelo, who understands it as a “state in which even a minimum of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (2018, 103).

be crucial, for as we saw in Gandhi, King, and Deming, the liberation of each is bound up with that of the other. Here again we see radical divergence from Frantz Fanon's prescription, and Jean-Paul Sartre's infamous gloss on it: "Killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free" (Sartre 2004, lv). Whether you annihilate the oppressor by killing him, or exclude and cut him off from communication and engagement as one who is an enemy that is beyond repair, the problematic result is largely the same. For this approach denies the key insight of nonviolence—and central to my account of healthy conflict—that the liberation of oppressed and oppressor are bound up together, though again, each in different ways.

Another reason I consider it so important to articulate a middle way through the West/Rorty debate is that it displays how West has evolved in his social criticism and activism for democratic social transformation in recent years. I am grateful for Winters's meticulous exposition of the ways I move dialectically between these two elements (moral imagination and theoretical critique) ultimately in order to portray these as integrated in West's more recent social criticism and activism of recent years. At the same time, I would like to push this point further, and maybe push back a little bit as well.²¹

I indicate that West, in his more recent public criticism, has evolved so that his most exemplary moments of public philosophy and prophetic social criticism mediate moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique. The second purpose of the chapter is point-by-point to unpack the arguments West made against Obama administration policies toward Wall Street finance banks, drone warfare, as well as the administration's silence surrounding the new Jim Crow and the myriad injustices suffered by poor people of all colors, but black and brown folks especially. I work through the arguments in order to demonstrate that, when considered in their substance, West's arguments hold. The third and least significant purpose of the chapter was to point out that these substantial and devastating criticisms suffer from moments of rhetorical intemperance—that *rhetorically* certain excessive moments in West's social criticism muted or distracted from the full power and incisiveness of the arguments.

Why do I think pointing out this excess is so important? My purpose is to demonstrate that West's mediation of moral imagination and socio-theoretical critique occur in a moment when vast segments of US society became rhetorically enchanted with highly public—and seemingly virtuous—instances of moral

²¹ For the sake of space, I will set aside Winters's concerns about my account of the development of Foucault's work for another time—except to point out that the reading by Rorty and Nancy Fraser (and many others) that his work is normatively aimless is one I resist. If there are resources for that to be found in other portions of Foucault's corpus, then again, I welcome the expansion on that point. My concern is the ethical content of Foucault's claims, not the minutiae of the stages regarding how his corpus unfolded.

imagination. These were, specifically, the responses by President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder to the killing of Trayvon Martin (among others).²² Their responses—which purported to assuage concerns about systemic racism with reassuring, racially exceptionalist overtones—left the new Jim Crow and the true depths of the poverty, degradation, and subjection to arbitrary abuses of force that minorities and poor people of all colors are suffering unaddressed. West rightly refused to relent when so many of his fellow-social critics and fellow-activists did an about-face.

4. White Supremacy and Healthy Conflict

Martin Kavka expresses concern that my account of healthy conflict means “going high” in the cases where deep, even agonistic division persists (that is, “when they go low”). If this requires that one refuse to call the smear and slander of the media as so-called “fake news” just that—smear, slander, and bullying that shades into (and suborns) conspiracy theory rhetoric and action (so that accusations of “fake news” gives rise to claims about “fake bombs” and “false flag conspiracies” [Ohlheise and Selk 2018])—then no, healthy conflict is not “going high when they go low.”

Of course, I argue in the book that calling a lie a lie (or calling “bullshit,” in the technical sense of that term²³)—when doing so is just and prudent—is merely a first step. Far more important is assessing, illuminating, and responding to how the lying functions. What are its effects? How does it presuppose, participate in, and perpetuate injustice? How does it contribute to misleading narratives, and strategically generate confusion, within which straightforward fact checking (and publicizing the results) is an insufficient response? Persistent lying, misleading truths, misguiding narratives, and political bullshitting all collude to create a context that is hostile to mere fact-checking (though I argue that fact-checking remains indispensable, if not sufficient by itself) (Kessler et al. 2019).

Yet none of this means—and here I differ with Kavka—that calling a “lie” a lie (or a “recurrent liar” a recurrent liar), or exposing “racist rhetoric” as racist

²² Trayvon Martin was an African American teenager who was fatally shot on February 26, 2012 in Sanford, Florida. Martin. He was seventeen and unarmed. The case sparked outrage among African American and justice-minded citizens of all colors across the U.S. Protestors staged demonstrations from Baltimore to Los Angeles. On July 13, 2013, a six-woman jury (five white women, one African American) acquitted Martin’s killer, George Zimmerman, of both second-degree murder and manslaughter. Protests erupted around the US in response, and racial tensions mounted. Perhaps most famously, this moment prompted a writer and community organizer from Oakland (CA), Alicia Garza, to pen an open letter that would spark—in collaboration with activists and community organizers Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi—the Black Lives Matter movement.

²³ I explicate and apply Harry Frankfurt’s *On Bullshit* (2005) to contemporary political discourse (Springs 2018, 258–64).

rhetoric,²⁴ must turn that person into my enemy. I think we must level that assertion, but in doing so still refuse to demonize or scapegoat persons or see them as beyond the possibility of correction or even reconciliation. I can still seek the person's good, and hold out hope for the possibility (however slim, in some cases) of de-polarizing with that person or people in the aftermath of our conflict. Or, in some instances, healthy conflict *requires* that I go on resisting the ideas and actions of that person indefinitely (for example, the unrepentant white supremacist, and so forth). I engage in this resistance not only with the long-view of transformation in mind, but also with the present in mind, using every legal, just, and democratic means available.

Kavka suggests that preserving the category of "enemy" enables one to defend oneself and one's property against another who identifies himself as one's enemy and sets about to attack or destroy one. For Martin Luther King, Jr., the question of using force in self-defense of one's person and property was misplaced. "The question was not whether one should use his gun when [one's] home was attacked, but whether it was tactically wise to use a gun while participating in an organized demonstration," he wrote (King 1968, 27). King's caution is all the more important when one introduces the presence or possibility of violent conflict in an organized demonstration into a situation in which one's adversary has mastered the art of spinning a set of circumstances into their own victimhood. Here an example would be Trump's response to the "Unite the Right" rally that took place in Charlottesville, VA on May 13, 2017. There, self-professed neo-Nazis and white supremacists along with counter protesters (anti-Nazi protestors) clashed with one another. In his response he claimed that there was "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides" (Merica 2017). The claim implies a false equivalency—that the neo-Nazis were equally victims of hatred as well. In the Charlottesville case it appears that the presence of armed, anti-fascist militia (Antifa) may have aided in protecting the anti-Nazi nonviolent protestors. This is certainly what Cornel West indicated when he stated, "If it hadn't been for the anti-fascists protecting us from the neo-fascists, we would have been crushed like cockroaches" (Hermann et al. 2017). And yet, the armed Antifa presence also gave fodder to the narrative that there was violence "on many sides." That anti-fascist threat of violence is still a threat of violence. And this became a talking point by which to vilify the anti-Nazi protestors, and seemingly justify the narrative of (false) equivalency.

²⁴ "While some observers have explained Trump's success as a result of economic anxiety, the data demonstrate that anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, and sexism are much more strongly related to support for Trump. Trump's much-discussed vote advantage with non-college-educated whites is misleading; when accounting for racism and sexism, the education gap among whites in the 2016 election returns to the typical levels of previous elections since 2000. Trump did not do especially well with non-college-educated whites, compared to other Republicans. He did especially well with white people who express sexist views about women and who deny racism exists. Even more alarmingly, there is a clear correlation between Trump campaign events and incidents of prejudiced violence" (Williams and Gelfand 2019). See also Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018.

Many of the neo-Nazis who committed violence in Charlottesville—who went there intending to incite violence and commit violent acts—have since been exposed and prosecuted. The conflict in Charlottesville brought real, organized, white supremacist elements into the light of day. This has generated a motivating tension, and even urgency, for those compelled to resist and fight white supremacy in the long term and in the present (Moynihan and Winston 2018). But again, if we hate their hatred (but not the person who hates), is it feasible to hope for transformation of a white supremacist? Is there some hope for a state of affairs in which conflict is transformed in a way such that white nationalism is rooted out and named, drawn into the light of day, frozen, targeted, and resisted directly and nonviolently? Is there a hope that the persons who hold to that ideology might come to recognize the sickness to which they have been beholden, and change?

What Deming, King, and Gandhi would agree on is that in fighting against the neo-Nazis and white supremacists—that is, resisting, countering, holding them accountable to laws and democratic norms, and doing so nonviolently—we are treating them with respect. Viewed through the lens of conflict transformation, one harsh reality that Trump-inspired conflict has confronted us with is that racist hatred does not diminish when it is ignored or neglected in mainstream politics. Just the opposite happens, in fact. It camouflages itself on the margins of society and in private social media groups, chatrooms, and “dark internet” sites. Under these circumstances we have come to witness white supremacist forces grow, consolidate, innovate, adapt, and re-assert themselves. This is a stark and sobering reminder that one can never stop resisting while also striving to preemptively inoculate people against hatred of that kind. Though underfunded and little researched, the plodding successes reported by hate recovery groups (for example, Life After Hate) suggest that success occurs in opposing the ideology of white supremacy and actions of white supremacists, but not demonizing the person who has been a part of that group. According to the cofounder of Life After Hate, “There’s nothing more powerful . . . than receiving compassion from someone who you don’t feel you deserve it from, someone from a community that you had dehumanized” (Westervelt 2018). In no way do I advocate molly-coddling white supremacists. Nor am I suggesting that the people they target ought to lovingly forgive them. They must be engaged and resisted by every just and legal means available, and with *both* short- *and* long-term horizons in view. In other words, the “slow time-frame” that Kavka ascribes to my account, while indispensable, is only half the picture of the account I set forth in my book. Healthy conflict entails that such groups (and injustices generally) be named, critiqued, resisted actively, directly, nonviolently, and persistently in the present as well. In some cases, the only hope for bringing an adversary to his senses may be through enforcement of just laws and retributive justice.²⁵ And yet, this is precisely the

²⁵ This point is conceded even by Desmond Tutu, one of the primary advocates of restorative justice. See Tutu 2009.

point at which my account of healthy conflict requires socio-theoretical reflexivity as well. It counsels a transformative approach rather than an approach that strives for simple resolution to such conflicts through counter means that might be either directly or structurally violent. Retributive justice in the US can swiftly become just this.

For example, study after study of the US retributive justice system demonstrates that there are few systems and institutions more successful at stigmatizing, demonizing, and categorically excluding than the US system of retributive justice and incarceration. The majority of people who pass through the US penal system leave more dehumanized, desperate, and harmed than they were before they went in. This is one reason that rates of re-arrest and re-incarceration in the US are persistently high (Alper et al. 2018). Is it any wonder, then, that organized white supremacist groups thrive throughout the entirety of the US prison system—in *every* state—and that prisons serve as breeding grounds for concentration and radicalization of white supremacy? (Anti-Defamation League 2016). In effect, the very design of the prison system achieves results diametrically opposite of those it purports to serve (Reiman and Leighton 2017). Categorically excluding and scapegoating people (including white supremacists) through the immediacy of retributive punishment (as it exists in the US justice system) leaves little option for strategic forms of engagement that might prove transformational. Moreover, the Trump-era has offered further illustration of the lesson that, to force hatred to the margins (in attempted resolution, or outright exclusion)—or to meet it in kind with counter-hatred—is to ensure its return in a more concentrated form, even if it appears under a different guise. My account of healthy conflict counsels efforts that might be transformational even with self-declared enemies who appear to be most intransigent, and apparently most beyond the possibilities of engagement and repair.

5. Conclusion: Making Peace with a Demon?

Moosa says that someone will have to move toward the center. Is this like trying to make friends with a demon, he asks? A deal with the Devil? Metaphorically, I think so, and in the wrong way—a way that is misguided by premature conflict resolution rather than the kind of conflict transformation that I argue is at the heart of healthy conflict. To address this, I want to come back to the way I develop the enemy/adversary distinction in the book.²⁶

Toward the end of the book, I argue that this distinction can admit of an insidious modulation. What may *appear* as agonistically respectful engagement with an adversary may be, in fact, an engagement with an enemy. The appearance is deceptive and makes this reality sometimes difficult to discern accurately. In this regard, healthy conflict requires persistent striving for situationally specific practical wisdom in discerning an opponent whose actions take on the appearance,

²⁶ See especially Springs 2018, 226–71.

or semblance, of democracy, when, in fact, they are anything but democratic. An example would be any effort to frame the political field of contest such that one's opponent is in a permanent and intentionally insurmountable disadvantage, or in effect, disenfranchised. In such cases one aims to win and maintain political power by whatever legal means possible—or by whatever means one can get away with under the putative auspices of legality.

I state the obvious that this is much of what we see going on in contemporary American society. It is present in gerrymandering congressional districts to install a permanent majority (and thus, in effect, making a political party unaccountable), voter suppression measures of all sorts, obstructing the nomination process for the Supreme Court seat for which Justice Merrick Garland was nominated, and forcing through the appointment of Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Such actions forsake the democratic norms of reciprocity and forbearance. They forsake the possibility—the reality—that a party in power at one point must expect to be the party out of power at some other point in time, a situation which requires a relation of mutual recognition and some degree of mutual respect and reciprocity. Instead, the effort has become one of so commandeering the political structures (districting, judicial appointments, election laws, and the mechanics of voting procedures, etc.) to create a putative political adversary that, in effect, is permanently out of power. This, according to the argument I lay out in my book, is actually treating another as an enemy to be dominated through political means (Springs 2018, 213–25, 311–20). It is to scapegoat and smear that opponent in the process of justifying nihilistic power politics, saying, in effect, “They would do the same to us if they were in power, and surely will do so if they ever return to power.” Such actions denude the norms of democracy.²⁷ Of course, for a long time now the practices of democracy have become increasingly beholden to the external goods of wealth and power, with votes going to the highest bidder.

How does one find a way out of this situation? I do not have a single magical answer to this question, nor does my book. I have set forth a set of terms, arguments, and offered numerous examples of constructive responses from a tradition of democratic criticism and social transformation by which to diagnose unhealthy conflict and indicate ways of making it healthy. I explicate cases of community organizing and social justice activism in which seemingly intractable conflict has been productively transformed—in more, than less, healthy ways—in the past and present. I demonstrate and critically explicate the array of tools, tactics, and strategies that constitute healthy conflict, arguing that these increase the chances of engaging conflicts transformatively and the likelihood of moving toward a more just, common life together (though conflicts will inevitably continue). Even with these grounds for democratic hope in view, amid a persisting time of seemingly

²⁷ For an account of comparable international cases and how they illuminate contemporary US dynamics, see Levistky and Ziblatt 2019.

intractable divisiveness I end on a downbeat note of democratic hope, with a quote from Walt Whitman that also ends the book:

Judging from the main portions of the history of the world, so far, justice is always in jeopardy, peace walks amid hourly pitfalls, and of slavery, misery, meanness, the craft of tyrants and the credulity of the populace, in some of their protean forms, no voice can at any time say, They are not. The clouds break a little, and the sun shines out—but soon and certain the lowering darkness falls again, as if to last forever. Yet is there an immortal courage and prophecy in every sane soul that cannot, must not, under any circumstances, capitulate. Vive, the attack—the perennial assault! Vive, the unpopular cause—the spirit that audaciously aims—the never-abandon'd efforts, pursued the same amid opposing proofs and precedents (Whitman 2010, 29).²⁸

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²⁸ I presented an earlier version of this paper to the Pragmatism and Empiricism Group at the 2018 American Academy of Religion annual conference in Denver, CO. I am grateful to all who participated in that discussion, and especially for criticisms, questions, and editorial feedback from Atalia Omer, Josh Lupo, and Mahmoud Youness.

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