Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings: *Violence and Political Theory.* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020. Pp. viii, 229.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670521000425

The relation between violence and politics is a long-standing and familiar topic in political theory and yet, aside from a few notable exceptions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it had not until recently received the attention it merits. One reason for this relative dearth of research was the hold that certain conceptions of constitutionalism and of the liberal state had exercised over political theory, conceptions that have identified politics with the nonviolent pursuit of interests within the supposedly pacified sphere of the modern state.

Over the past two decades, this view has come under considerable pressure, as a result of several related political and theoretical developments. These include, first, the interest in the constitutional problem of the state of exception, the relationship between politics and war, filtered through the lens of the Global War on Terror and the United States' global network of secret interrogation and torture camps; second, the growing literature on punishment, imprisonment, and policing, especially but not exclusively in the United States, and the increasing attention to racialized punishment and forms of state violence; and third, the belated awareness by political theorists of the body and questions of embodiment, including forms of violence waged against bodies, topics long debated in several academic fields but marginal in the discourse of political theory as a whole. These developments created the conditions for a number of innovative and important avenues of research.

Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings are among the pioneers of this work. Beginning in 2007, they have written groundbreaking articles that examine the conventional justifications of violence in political theory with regard to state violence and revolutionary violence; debates about the ontology and historicity of violence; the naming of violence; and the problems of nonviolence. These articles have now been reworked into two books: *Can Violence Ever Be Justified* (Polity, 2019) and *Violence and Political Theory* (Polity, 2020). The first deals with the normative question of how to justify violence: it examines several justificatory arguments and their complications in view of historical cases and hypothetical scenarios. The second, under discussion here, offers a wide-ranging treatment of the relationship between politics and violence across the history of political and social thought.

The main argument of the book is that the conceptual relationship between violence and politics is "inherently unstable and full of tensions" (1) and that any attempt to define that relationship eventually encounters obstacles and slippages that can be stabilized only through figurative language (5–6). The claim is that political theories of violence tend to lose the phenomenon of violence as they attempt to subsume it under logics of security, revolution, justice, sovereignty, and so on. The resulting "slippery" relation between politics and violence (and between violence and nonviolence) means that there are no simple

criteria to determine what counts and does not count as political violence (187). Rather, the key to the meaning of political violence is to be found in the power relations between those who wage violence and those who are subject to it.

The authors defend this "expansive" conception of political violence (188) by demonstrating the breadth of theorizing on violence in the history of political thought. The bulk of the book consists of succinct digests of key theorists of violence. The authors cast a wide net, including not only "canonical" authors such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and Carl von Clausewitz but also prominent theorists of violence of the twentieth century, from Max Weber, Georges Sorel, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and Frantz Fanon to Mohandas Gandhi, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and even Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben. In addition to this ample coverage, the authors include chapters on anarchist (Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Leo Tolstoy) and feminist (Jane Addams, Sarah Ruddick, Jean Elshtain) theorists, and in the concluding chapter, they discuss Elaine Scarry's work.

This broad selection of authors is one of the strong points of this book. To my knowledge, there is no comparable text in the English language that approximates the breadth of coverage that the authors achieve. Moreover, by going beyond the usual suspects, this book maps a much more expansive terrain: violence is here not simply a feature of states and an instrument that is employed by or against the state. Nor does it exhaust itself in its conventional political forms, such as security, war, revolution, terrorism, and punishment. By virtue of their selection of theorists, Frazer and Hutchings address topics that are frequently omitted from debates in political theory and political science, such as the anarchist ambivalence about violence, symbolic and epistemic violence, and above all the gendered dimensions of violence. It is on this last topic that the book really shines, for it not only deals with the gendered aspects of violence in the chapter devoted to feminist authors but emphasizes gender as an axis of analysis throughout.

Frazer and Hutchings group the twenty-six theorists into eight thematic chapters that deal with broad topics such as revolutionary violence (chapter 1), state violence (chapter 2), the critique of violence (chapter 3), historical and transcendental violence (chapter 4), anarchist violence and pacifism (chapter 5), violence and humanism (chapter 6), feminist politicizations of violence (chapter 7), and the limits of violence (chapter 8). Some of these groupings work well; others are less compelling.

One could quibble also with the selection of theorists, for instance, the decision to focus, aside from Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially since the book does not offer a historical argument that motivates this selection. One could further split hairs about the way the theorists are clustered into individual chapters, some of which seem a bit contrived. And one could also nitpick about the treatments of individual authors. Yet in view of the remarkable coverage of theorists in what remains a slim volume of under 250 pages, these would all be petty criticisms.

In fact, some of the discussions are marvelous, managing to synthesize an enormous amount of material and cover an astonishing ground in a few brief pages.

To me, the real question is what audience this book seeks to reach. There is an obvious trade-off between breadth and depth. Because the book covers so many different theorists, and each author is accorded their own chapter section, the individual discussions are brief (about 4–8 pages per theorist). While the analyses of individual authors are well done and some show tremendous insight, for a scholarly audience, I would have liked to see these insights developed in a more sustained way and elaborated over the course of the book. The brief individual sections leave too many discontinuous and subsequently orphaned threads of thought that fray the analytical and argumentative fabric of the book.

The other effect of the extensive range of theorists covered is that the category of violence becomes more and more elusive (even if this is by design). Each of the chapters develops a separate argument about violence as it pertains to the theorists under discussion. Yet the connections between the chapters remain tenuous. Even though the authors are at pains to establish links, the heterogeneity of contexts and problems that motivate different theorists of violence ultimately makes itself felt in a kind of dispersion. This dispersion is grist for the authors' mill, since they emphasize the feminist insight that political violence operates in a continuum and cannot be reduced to an instrument. And yet, the book performs the very problem that the authors identify—that the phenomenon of violence tends to slip away from the theorist—such that even the metaphor of a continuum meets its limits.

–Yves Winter
McGill University, Canada

Arthur Bradley: *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. xii, 288.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670521000565

Polities have specific strategies to deal with opposition. Arthur Bradley offers a new reading of the term "erasure" in the field of what is broadly called political theology (198). His compelling book *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure* sets out to revise standard interpretations of the power of the sovereign. This new perspective does not ascribe to the sovereign the