Ethics and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed. Lee A. McBride III, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, 144 pp. $39.95 pbk. ISBN: 978-1350102279

Lee McBride's Ethics *and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed* comes across as a close reading of the times. In an age of large-scale racial protests (primarily due to the death of George Floyd being caught on video), lukewarm opposition to such dissidence has taken form in rhetoric questioning the methods and motivations of activists. Often this hostility toward how people protest serves as an indirect way of condemning the causes for which activists are protesting. In this monograph, McBride engages in a project of merging insurrectionists ethics. These ethics seek to liberate oppressed groups from their subjugated positions and critical pragmatism (a means of identifying roadblocks to liberation and possibilities for repair). From questioning contemporary moral philosophy to the need to acknowledge the intersectional complexities of identity to contemplating the kinds of mindsets impeding social justice, McBride's work is a tour de force, helping us to understand some of the values and actions among the oppressed that are often not lauded, yet crucial in liberation.

McBride does not have to start from scratch to articulate the kind of ethics needed for the liberation of the oppressed. The philosopher navigates the reader through an intellectual lineage beginning with the first African American Rhodes Scholar, Alain Locke, whose critical pragmatism merged with philosopher Leonard Harris's insurrectionists ethics eventually sets the stage for the liberatory thinking that McBride is so carefully trying to fashion.

The author paints contemporary moral philosophy as an area where many of its professionals lack a self-awareness. Perhaps the most compelling aspect jumping from the pages in the first chapter is that McBride directly points out many of the problems that, not just moral philosophy but academic philosophy overall, has while making itself appealing to the public. In giving primacy to a priori knowledge, "moral philosophy distances itself from the complex thick, context-dependent concepts of lived experience. It conceals the anomalies, deviations, particularities of context; it waves of epistemic limitations of human finitude and provincialism" (17). Further problematizing academic moral philosophy's public relations issues are those in the pro-

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fession eschewing the empirical knowledge that areas such as the social sciences tend to underscore, such as implicit bias and how these findings complicate the human capacity to be impartial and disinterested. McBride rightfully and justifiably clarifies that the onus of educating the public lies in academic, moral philosophy stepping down from its ivory tower and further engaging with other disciplines.

Chapter 3 presents an interesting challenge for both the field of academic philosophy and laymen alike. For the academy, McBride notes, "Philosophers seem well-suited clearly articulate and critically assess the descriptions of oppressed groups that contribute to those groups remaining disempowered, timid" (74). Are these the same philosophers in the academy who view moral philosophy through a lens of ideal theory and have a hard time engaging the public in philosophical endeavors? While philosophers are more than fit for critically analyzing descriptions of oppressed groups, the new language, and frameworks that can come from the analysis would be for naught if the moral academic philosophy does not make itself more accessible to the public/layman.

McBride asserts that descriptions have the power to liberate as well as devalue. Through stereotypes and enculturation, descriptions of oppressed groups provide a disempowering self-conception; however, with new descriptions, these groups can take on insurrectionist traits, such as indignation and irreverence in the face of societal injustice. What is not clear in this articulation of new descriptions for the liberation of oppressed groups is how does this process happen? Or better yet, how long does it take for a people to undo all the possible rumblings of self-hatred, self-doubt—an inferiority complex garnered from centuries of being marginalized? While McBride emphasizes the power of descriptions in forming one's views of oneself, it would have been fitting to detail a little more of the psychological impacts of a marginalized group indoctrinated by the larger hegemonic order to revile themselves and their kind. Another way of putting it, allusions to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* may have put this impact in the resistance language that McBride is trying to construct in this work.

One point that deserves special attention is in Chapter 4, where McBride offers a rebuttal to those who come from a perspective of peace and love (e.g., Cornel West) in oppressed groups' strivings for liberation and equality. McBride articulates that insurrectionists character traits, such as indignation, can serve as an impetus for social justice; however, this can be seen to be in direct opposition to the peace and love approach. Those who condemn the role of anger and frustration in bringing about

change seems analogous to Martin Luther King's description of the white moderate in his *Letter From A Birmingham Jail*, "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."[1] In other words, like in the times of King, those not being oppressed, those sitting on the sidelines in a fight for justice, are telling those who are oppressed the "correct" ways in which they should go about pursuing justice.

Nowhere is the condescending attitude toward the oppressed addressed more than in McBride's rebuttal to the philosopher Martha Nussbaum's argument about the uselessness of the emotion of anger for those experiencing mistreatment. McBride rightfully asserts that anger can be seen as a virtue (expressed by Aristotle as well) that serves as an impetus to uproot unjust policies and practices.

In Chapter 4, McBride addresses a dynamic in the fight for social justice, particularly racial justice—the oppressed having empathy toward the oppressor. McBride addresses the philosopher Shannon Sullivan's conception of racist whites as sensitive souls who should not be made to feel guilty for their racist beliefs. Any kind of insurrectionist character traits that challenge them and possibly make them feel guilty is strongly discouraged by Sullivan. While the author justifiably points out that there is something amiss about the dynamic of oppressed groups essentially walking on eggshells for a collective (institutions and white individuals) consciously and unconsciously practicing racism and subjugating non-whites, the questions raised by McBride in terms of the attitudes the oppressed should have toward the oppressor come across as arguments from ignorance. For example, the author asks, "But how does one change a white supremacist in any real sense without guilt or shame?" as if there are no other feelings or forms of persuasion one could convey to a white supremacist to get them to change their ways, such as fear (fear of physical retaliation).

Lastly, Chapter 5 delves into the use of race to counteract race-based oppression. In a critique of Leonard Harris's view of racial groupings as more of a natural phenomenon, the author sets Harris straight distinguishing between "race" and ethnicity": "For instance, if we investigate black people in Colombia, Haiti, and the United States, we find people with differing languages and differing cultures (not to mention geographic locations), even though they may share some phenotypic fea-

tures and a lineage tracing back to Africa" (p. 96). This chapter deals with a lot of the complexities of racial identity, especially as McBride calls for communities of resistance to move away from racial distinctiveness and separatism to help understand the intersection of identities.

Ethics and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed is a well-argued monograph for these racial powder-keg times. McBride's challenging of various philosophers' thinking on race and what it means to be oppressed is a breath of fresh air and shows that philosophy still has much to contribute to everyday people.

Endnotes

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Paul Rief, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

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