

domination of people with intellectual disability. Even the self-advocacy movement, by emphasising capacity in its claims for political recognition, often does so in a way that marginalizes people with more profound intellectual disability. Such strategies rest on an assumption that there is some group of people who are truly incompetent, and whose exclusion from the political community is justified.

In Chapter 1, Simplican discusses the ambiguous figure of “the idiot” in the political theory of John Locke. She shows that confronted by his commitment to the principle of individual autonomy, on the one hand, and his anxiety about the capacity of all human beings, on the other, Locke formulated a domination capacity contract that excludes those who fall beneath a cognitive threshold. She argues that there is another type of capacity contract recoverable in Locke’s thinking, however, one that views incapacity as central to the human condition and bases democratic solidarity on shared vulnerability.

Chapter 2 examines how intellectual disability was constructed as a population health problem by medical professionals in the 19th and early-20th centuries. These professionals actively manufactured anxiety by linking “idiocy” with racial and moral inferiority in eugenic discourse “to garner public financial support and build legitimacy for their field” (p. 49).

Chapter 3 focuses on John Rawls’s “double disavowal of disability” (p. 72): His idealized conception of personhood excludes people with intellectual disability from full human status, and his depoliticization of disability disavows the role that compulsory cognitive capacity plays in defining personhood and the scope of politics in his theory. The chapter also critiques a number of revisionary responses to Rawls from Iris Marion Young, Martha Nussbaum, and others, arguing that implicit biases about cognitive capacity continue to stigmatize people with more profound intellectual disability in their works.

In the last two chapters Simplican turns to an ethnographic study of self-advocacy organizations. In Chapter 4, she rethinks the concept of political agency through a reworking of Hannah Arendt, for whom politics is performative, spontaneous, and unpredictable. Simplican argues that political empowerment is about actions and relationships rather than cognitive deliberation: “If eating dinner in public forges new relations and challenges entrenched ableist boundaries” (p. 100), perhaps it should count as political action. For many marginalized groups, appearing in public can be a political act, and certainly for people with disability who may threaten social order, norms, and conventions in their appearance and behavior.

The final chapters of both books conclude in remarkably similar ways: by stressing that we need to listen to the voices of people with intellectual disability and people with autism. Although an important sentiment, it was unsatisfying in both cases because both authors miss the

opportunity to tease out the political and personal complexities that surround self-representation.

A recurring theme in *The Politics of Autism* is the way in which social positioning is a major factor concerning whose voice is heard in autism politics: how wealth, education, class, ethnicity, and communicative competence largely determine the extent to which individuals are able to engage in self-advocacy. Given this, the discussion in the final chapter of the benefits of tax-reduced, special-needs trust funds (pp. 110–11), which surely only a privileged minority can set up and contribute to on behalf of family members with autism, strikes a discordant note.

In the final chapter of *The Capacity Contract*, Simplican suggests that “alliances, humor and dance” offer ways of expanding our democratic imagination to include those with intellectual disability. This appeal seems misplaced, given that the chapter begins with a sobering personal reflection on her brother’s life in an institution-like facility for people with disability.

Both books would have benefited from some acknowledgment of the limitations of the debates raised by the authors: Without societal resources directed to community living and social participation, and without community commitment, the voices of the vast majority of people with intellectual disability and people with autism will never be heard at all. This reflects a much broader “cultural turn” in contemporary disability studies that focuses on the performance of marginal identities. While yielding interesting and important work, this cultural model of disability needs to be recoupled with the transformative potential of the social model of disability or the normative force of a human rights model, both of which delineate clear social duties toward enabling the representation of marginalized groups. Overall, however, both authors navigate with and between these different approaches with skill and make significant inroads toward putting disability on the agenda of mainstream political science.

### **Unconditional Equality: Gandhi’s Religion of**

**Resistance.** By Ajay Skaria. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. 408p. \$105.00 cloth. \$30.00 paper.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592716004710

— Sandipto Dasgupta, *King’s College*

Amongst the increasing number of scholars who have been writing on M.K. Gandhi—the leader of India’s struggle for independence from British colonial domination—Ajay Skaria is already recognized as one of the most important and original voices. His long anticipated monograph further strengthens that reputation. One reason for both the importance and distinctiveness of his voice is deceptively easy to identify. Unlike most other scholars of Gandhi available to an international reading public, Skaria has both the ability and the will to study Gandhi’s writing in his

native Gujarati, along with his (already voluminous) writings in English. This labor doesn't go towards recovering an 'authentic' Gujarati version of Gandhi; rather, to offer a careful and exceptionally rigorous reading of his texts, uncovering the various "aporetic tensions" that mark them, within and between languages. It is not just a thorough exercise in textual analysis, however. Skaria is interested in offering a specific kind of reading aimed at disclosing and destabilizing Gandhi's thought—of a kind one might associate with Jacques Derrida. This characterization is not just the result of a reviewer's instinct to slot books into familiar boxes. Derrida (along with Heidegger, to a lesser extent) appear frequently in the book, both in chapter epigraphs as well as the text itself, as a partner in conversation with Gandhi—their "uncanny resonances" (p. 11) carefully noted.

Skaria's form of reading is housed within a problematic that Gandhi grapples with in his thought. Gandhi was not just opposed to the particular instance of British colonial domination in India. Rather, his critique was directed more broadly at the vision of politics that rule instantiated. The key term for Skaria throughout the text is sovereignty. Sovereignty here is not to be understood merely as the locus of political authority, whose transfer from British to Indian hands would fulfill the promise of the anti-colonial struggle. Sovereignty, as he clarifies early in the text, is not limited only to the State but "always exercised everyday by the self" (p. 8)—especially in practicing two of the most cherished goals of the Enlightenment: autonomy and reason (Kant appears frequently as the representative of such a practice). Skaria's critique includes—though is not exhausted by—the most common form in which the Enlightenment and its associated concepts have been an object of critique by postcolonial scholars: as a historically specific discourse that both colonized and justified the marginalization of non-Western worlds and selves. He however is interested in taking up a far more radical task (and I use the word radical here in the same way he does in the text, as going to the root). The practice of self constituted by the Enlightenment worldview, and the institutional forms it inevitably engenders, are inescapably linked to domination and marginalization. Within this framework the 'subaltern' can only escape subordination by becoming dominant herself. The stake therefore is to think "how might a subaltern politics not only refuse subordination, but do so by relinquishing autonomy and even sovereignty?" (p. 9).

Skaria does not claim to recover a coherent theory of such a politics from Gandhi's words. He reads Gandhi's texts as scrupulously struggling—even against itself—in search of a practice (identified as *satyagraha*) that can "destroy sovereign laws while itself remaining without sovereignty," and do so in a "non-sovereign manner" (p. 272). Each chapter of the book examines this search from varying points, building up to a slow crescendo.

What this reading searches for is a practice of 'absolute' or 'unconditional' equality, as the title of the book suggests. Skaria argues that at the heart of the Enlightenment ideal of equality lies 'measure.' One can only be offered a "general equality" amongst those that can "exercise and submit to a rational measure" (p. 7). Such a calculus inevitably excludes certain forms of beings—non-humans or the colonized (which were often associative categories in colonial discourse)—constituting a conditional relationship between plurality and equality. Gandhi's writing gestures towards an "equality of what seems uncomparable" (p. 211), between those who share precisely nothing: not reason, not even language (p. 272). One approaches such an equality through a distinctive practice of 'self-sacrifice,' one that 'surrenders' one's sovereignty over both the self and the other. It is a praxis that can potentially sustain a community that is not political in the usual sense—unmoored from any shared language or reason, and extended to not just all humanity but all beings.

At the heart of this vision lies religion, and one of Skaria's attempts in the book is to rethink religiosity in politics, beyond and against the "common sense" of "liberal secularism." Religion here is not a conscious surrender to a higher power of the divine—another variant of sovereignty—but a faith that seizes the *satyagrahi*. She cannot choose when to have faith, but pray and wait for it (p. 245). It is mysticism, rather than theology, with which he seeks to infuse political action. Figuring out the praxis of such a religious politics leads Skaria to propose a fascinating concept of 'machinity' whereby the *satyagrahi* undertakes vows—for fasting or renunciations, say—automatically, without thought, deliberation, or in adherence to maxims of reasons. The rationality of their own actions are thereby concealed from the *satyagrahi*'s themselves. Faith and prayer—received without sovereign agency—supplants knowledge.

Skaria acknowledges that a politics that eschews any measure for equality can easily end up preserving the "immeasurable inequalities" of the traditions it draws upon (p. 151). He draws our attention to the trope of 'the *thekana*' i.e., proper or rightful place in the social order that appears in Gandhi's thought—especially around questions of gender and caste—and one that he never "explicitly or systematically renounces" (p. 158). This dovetails with a well-known critique of Gandhi from the left. Skaria argues that while *thekana* was a necessary starting point for a move against the modern empire of reason, the search for unconditional equality alone always must bring *thekana* to its own ruination. While *thekana* rests on the proper economy of the gracious donor and the grateful receiver, Gandhi's texts gesture towards the concept of pure or aneconomic gifts, which relinquishes the sovereignty of both the donor and the receiver. Despite Gandhi's own inclination or intentions, the developments

of his vision “constantly undo and unsay his affirmation of the thekana” (p. 158).

Skaria, as he makes clear in the introduction itself, does not take upon the task of defending the concrete political interventions of Gandhi. The terms he sets for himself in the book are to explore the radical extent of Gandhi’s writings for another world against and beyond the modern political imaginary. There is no doubt that his reading is brilliantly original on those terms. Yet one could note—more as a provocation for further thinking on Gandhi rather than a straightforward criticism—a few passages in the book that unsettle those terms. Writing about thekana, Skaria notes parenthetically that Gandhi thought through this problem more in the case of caste than gender, “perhaps because . . . his thinking of caste comes to be powerfully questioned by his interlocutors and critics, above all by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, in a way that his thinking of gender is not” (p. 158). The suggestion here, that concrete political struggles and contestations challenge and shape Gandhi’s vision, is not taken up in full within the narrative of the book due to the terms chosen by the author. There were various mystics, in India and elsewhere, who had offered their own critiques of western modernity. What attracts our extensive attention to Gandhi is the momentous political role he played as the leader of a movement. That by itself does not give rise to an imperative to always and only read Gandhi through the concrete political struggles he was engaged in. But for future scholars of Gandhi for whom it should be impossible to ignore the immense contribution of this book, one could pose two questions that may arise in thinking with it. How do those struggles encroach (even if parenthetically), unsettle, and even constitute the text that Skaria explores? And more broadly, as we encounter a practice marked by silence and concealment, inhabit a community that shares “precisely nothing,” and wait for the “miracle” of reciprocation (the closest we come to solidarity?) that “arrives without slightest expectation,” what remains of the politics of the organizer of one of the largest mass movements in history?

### **Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard.**

By Jill Stauffer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 240p. \$55.00.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592716004722

— James Martel, *San Francisco State University*

*Ethical Loneliness* is one of those concepts that seems to be something that you’ve always known to be the case when you hear about it but in fact has never been thought—or at least clearly articulated—before. That is a tribute to the elegance of the concept and the clarity by which Jill Stauffer presents her arguments. Stauffer offers a profound way to think about ethics, not the ethics that we want to have, that is, some above-the-fray (and Kantian)

determination of good and evil in all situations, but something far more human (and Levinasian). Hers is an ethics based on the shared fact that the world is not safe and we do not have the assurances that we often turn to ethical systems for in the first place. As Stauffer points out, all ethical systems based on the idea of individual autonomy and autarky seem to offer us the possibility that we are actually in control of ourselves (and hence safe). Related ideas like “human rights” suggest that we deserve, and therefore will receive, some basic forms of protection. Since such rights have no actual basis in reality (as Arendt also points out), Stauffer asks how we can be with one another in the absence of such palliatives.

The condition of ethical loneliness arises when individuals are subjected to acts of violence and abuse and no one else wants to acknowledge what they have gone through. It’s not that these people don’t ever get a chance to tell their stories. But even when they do, Stauffer makes a critical distinction between listening and hearing. People will say that they sympathize; Truth and Reconciliation commissions will attempt to offer restitution by allowing victims a chance to engage with their victimizers; trials similarly appear to offer victims of trauma a way to tell their stories. But generally speaking, while these events involve a lot of listening, they do not result in people being heard. Stauffer argues that to really hear what these people have to say would be to shatter the sense of safety and control that those of us fortunate enough not to have suffered a major trauma (and especially a trauma that was inflicted by other human beings) subscribe to. Very few of us are willing to do that. But for Stauffer, when we refuse to hear what we are listening to, we disconnect ourselves, not only from the people telling these stories, but from our own condition as human beings, our own frailty and vulnerability.

The stories that Stauffer tells in this book are often terrible ones. She tells the story of Jean Améry, a Jewish man who was imprisoned and tortured during World War II and whose account of these torments and what followed forms the heart of Stauffer’s book. She also tells the story of Charity Kondile, a black South African woman whose son Sizwe was brutally murdered (actually barbecued) by white police officers, as well as that of Susan Brison, a French white woman, who was brutally raped and left for dead. These stories are awful but Stauffer tells them with respect and dignity. She says that these people “needed to have the wrongness of what befell them confirmed and denounced, not mainly by legal institutions or perpetrators but by the surrounding society in which they would have to live henceforth. They all needed help rebuilding a destroyed world” (p. 29). This, however, was a form of help that these people were generally denied, rendering these people ethically lonely.

The idea of ethical loneliness does not make demands. To think that it can is to remain within a moral system in which we have the power to decide and control what we