

## Exchange-Value Citizenship?

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Most writers in political philosophy and theory (PPT) use ideal types that appear unanchored by history and space, but that can have definite material effects, and not just in textbooks or curricula. The *New York Times* jags between Amitai Etzioni-Bill Clinton, Robert Nozick-Newt Gingrich, and a third term called *entitlement*, a caesura that separates the "rights and responsibilities" couplet of citizenship as chanted by PPT. This term provides an economic and ideological alibi for denying welfare, restricting immigration, and buying middle-class white electoral support. Communitarianism has been adopted by "welfare reformers," and liberalism circles politics all the time. In this sense, PPT is similar to neoclassical economics, which also takes ideal types as its points of departure. Both manage to transform ivory-tower speculations into policy inputs and outcomes. Theoreticism can be remarkably practical when you look at its uptake!

At the same time, it gets us into trouble. For ideal types have a standard history that inexorably repeats. An actually existing problem or structure is analyzed by an agent, who provides a theoretical construct to explain its origins and operation. The theory then gets disarticulated from the material coordinates that it was developed to explain. It becomes a device that accounts for generally occurring phenomena, which otherwise may have been subjected to the local inspection and critique that characterized the creation of the ideal type now hauled in to deal with them (Sacks 1972a, 1972b, 1995).

Bonnie Honig has offered a timely call for us to rethink the liberal-communitarian debate in terms of how xenophobia and xenophilia are logocentrically interdependent, tied to one another by an unblinking nationalism. I welcome her critique, not least because, along with congressional politics and my personal experience with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, it has helped me to rethink my endorsement of citizenship as a comparatively open technology available to political radicals (Miller 1993) and to consider it in terms of a new international division of cultural labor, or NICL (Miller 1998). In a restricted but increasingly global NICL, how citizenship is theorized and actualized matter enormously for working people. Can their participatory rights be asserted in terms of: (1) where they live, were born, or work; (2) the temporary or permanent domicile of their employer; (3) the cultural impact of a foreign

multinational on daily life; or (4) the precepts of independent international organizations? I shall restrict myself here to commenting on Honig's excellent essay in ways that focus on how ideal types can trip us up, even as we seek to acknowledge the specificity of theoretical devices.

As Honig points out, immigrants do two things for America. First, they provide the opportunity for critique. The "good" arrival is industrious and able to double-declutch between the maintenance of cuisine and family and the acquisition of manner and language, showing up the "decadence" of the local underclass and ensuring a renewal of manifest destiny via an active endorsement of what is only ever an implied social contract for people born here. She shows how the notion that migrants are ideal citizens militates against first peoples and descendants of slaves. (I wonder how many contemplate this as they wait outside the Javits building in downtown Manhattan to see an immigration officer who is located just a few feet from New York City's burial ground for African slaves?) The second thing immigrants do is to threaten homegrown workers. Even if migrants are "good," they may "take" the jobs of locals by accepting depressed wages. And if migrants are "bad," they become a "drain" on taxpayers. So in this sense, those who welcome immigration as a renewal of American modernity ironically meet up with those who oppose it. As Honig puts it, "their voluntarist embrace of America reaffirms but also endangers 'our' way of life." Xenophobia and xenophilia merge in the ugly site of the nation.

Honig's key example of regressive national renewal through migration in a new world is *Strictly Ballroom*, a film which allegedly shows that "Australian masculinity" needs a "supplement," an injection of migrant maleness and femininity that values family as an end in itself rather than an instrument of material gain. Possibly. But the film's promotion, criticism, and reception suggest that it has to do with outsider success and a confirmation of continental European rather than Asian or British Australianness (O'Regan 1996; Reid 1993). And the historic nature of Australian masculinity—much obscured and much maligned, with good reason—is in part a demographic phenomenon. Until this century, men far outnumbered women in postinvasion Australia, with the proportion of married people exceptionally low. This was the case because of the country's unique immigration pattern, combined with the devastating global depression of 1890 and World War I mortality. The ratio of men to women was slightly over two to one in 1840, and it only fell to just under one to one in 1980 (Carmichael 1992, 107, 109, 120–21). If I may borrow economic terminology, there is a masculinist overhang from this. It makes for a deficit in equality and everyday cultural normativity that is regularly worked through in film and television. Second, the type of masculinity being valorized in *Strictly Ballroom* is one of transcendence

through romantic love, where the male form is on display in a nonviolent manner—the film's a musical. Psychoanalysis and PPT are less relevant to understanding the text than are population history and genre conventions.

Putting that to one side, Honig's essay made me ask why democratic theory, juxtaposed with questions of nationalism, should be the starting point for a discussion of citizenship. Hers is a recognizable and elegant American-leftist PPT approach: myths of democracy are good, myths of nationalism are bad. Is that right? Thomas Streeter's (1996) history of U.S. media policy offers an alternative direction (cheeky to suggest PPT might learn from media and cultural studies—oh well). Streeter assaults the twin shibboleths of the Right and the liberal Left. Where the Right claims markets in broadcasting as naturally occurring means of establishing equilibriums that make for optimal social benefit, leftist liberals claim the spectrum as an extant public good that has been handed over to capital. Each side assumes their "good object" existed in a state of nature, waiting to be polluted by (respectively) regulation or capital. But those objects were created by government drawing property lines and policing conduct within them.

Just as Streeter calls for a radical redrafting of our conceptual media map to acknowledge the formative role of government, I think we might benefit from chucking out the foundational stories of citizenship, starting with the social contract, the mythic solution to Louis Althusser's (1997, 225, 125) threefold "problem of origins": (1) which came first, the state legitimized by public will, or the public itself? (2) how could there be a public without a state? and (3) when did the citizen *become* a citizen? Or, in Robert Michels's (1915, 236) formulation, what is "the nature of the act by which a people is a people"?

As Jacques Derrida (1987, 200) suggests:

The American people did not exist as the American people before having signed the Declaration of Independence. And it is in signing that they conferred upon themselves the right to call themselves the American people and the right to sign. It did not exist before the signature. Thus, the scriptor does not exist before the signature. The signature itself, which imposes the law, is in itself a performative act which in a certain way produces its own subject.

This mythic installation and iteration of tradition argues for a compact with the polity and fealty to the nation. A performative becomes a constative via the work of myth. "Making men free by making them subject" is Rousseau's paradox of freedom as a source of good government *and* as the authority of that government over individuals ([1755] 1975, 124, 123). Jürgen Habermas (1989, 65) glosses this paradox thus:

Instead of a  
binding . . .  
agreement, let's  
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According to the official version, political power springs from public will-formation and flows, as it were, through the state apparatus via legislation and administration, returning to a Janus-faced public that takes the form of a public of citizens at the entrance to the state and a public of clients at its exit.

How about reversing the process? Instead of a binding, but not freely made, agreement, let's have a very different form of engagement between state and person, regardless of blood, soil, or travel; let's have exchange-value citizenship. That means an overt and reasonable quid pro quo, based not on the notion that you pledge allegiance and practice obedience but that you give and receive *things*. It takes the rights-responsibilities couplet out of an idealist sphere. *Population* becomes a master signifier, displacing some mythic compact, and demography succeeds PPT as its principal interpretative method. This would get away from "migrant" versus "native" as an axis of deliberation, allowing for the civil-society efforts of social movements that Honig identifies as missing from communitarian accounts. As she suggests, social movements occupy a moral universe. But they also reside in a governmental one—after all, feminists, lesbians, and gays lobby for institutional reform, not just for expressive totality. Honig criticizes "America's democratic constitutionalism" as "too abstract," but she holds onto PPT as her guide and wants to retain mythology. Myths are statements that deny their own conditions of existence, as per the ideal types mentioned above. Wouldn't it be better to start from a material base?

Here's one. Let all taxpayers or residents of this country be citizens. If they want services from government, they must vote. This would not oblige them to support a particular person or party on any given occasion—a spoilt ballot paper would be acceptable. But they must turn up on election day at the booth if they want welfare. After all, the Constitution allows men to be required to register for military service, and all of us to pay taxes. And migrants effectively face the requirement to trade citizenship for benefits already: since social security has been fenced off from resident contributors who are not citizens, naturalization has increased fivefold (Kerber 1997, 33). Mandatory voting would remove the (ironically allegorical) burden placed on migrants to be our "best" citizens because they alone have joined this category as an act of choice. It would require electoral labor from all the public in a way that the current system is spectacularly unable to deliver. (Sixty percent of eligible voters in America don't bother; in Australia, compulsory voting was introduced in the 1920s when participation *fell* to 60 percent!) And it would produce another side effect—I can't see the Republican Party or New Democrats prospering. It is quite clear that the swing voter interpellated by racist and antiwelfare campaigning is valued because the working class is neither a

threat nor a promise to the parties (Piven and Cloward 1989, viii, 13). Mandatory voting would be a new strategy, and it comes to you courtesy of trying to stretch Honig's thought-provoking work a little further, away from PPT ideal types and toward the actually existing population. Not coincidentally, it permits Australian law to be a model rather than Australian filmmaking to be an example.

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