

Citizenship as Partnership
The Transformative Power of Love in Politics

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The concept of citizenship, to be meaningful, must involve a union between groups of people forming a greater whole where people collaborate and share resources to improve their lives. Reconceptualizing citizenship as a partnership between citizens who genuinely care about one another and work together to improve their lives is essential to resolving the multiple crises that we currently face. Through this reconceptualization, we can address the stark divisions and inequality that were created by the prevailing paradigm. In his paper, "Love, Activism, and Social Justice", Emerick discusses three different accounts of love that focus on different aspects of love. In this paper, I will briefly discuss how these three accounts of love can inform our understanding of the role that love plays in the concept of citizenship and how we can reconceptualize citizenship as a partnership in order to fully realize the purpose that citizenship plays in our lives.

In the union account of love developed by Nozick and Friedman, love involves an extension of the boundaries of oneself with a partner, creating a new entity and forming a shared identity, a "we". In this shared identity, we find ourselves bound up with one another, we become affected by our partner's experiences and their well-being. This view was originally conceived as an account of romantic love, but we could easily include non-romantic relationships we have with everyone else in our lives (Emerick pg3). We are partially connected to everyone who we interact with and, thus, we are affected by our interactions and by the experiences which shape all of us. Having said that, it is not enough to include only people with whom we directly interact because we occupy different social locations and we are mostly only directly connected to people who occupy our same social location. Yet, we ultimately affect everyone in society and everyone affects us (Emerick pg5). We need to include everyone in the social "we", otherwise we don't include all the people who we affect or who are affected by us through our social structures. We need citizenship.

A good complement to the union conception of love is Campbell's idea of "relational self-construction". We are not separable individuals; our boundaries are blurred by our connections with one another. We are formed through our relations with others and partially shaped by the commitments and responsibilities that we accept in our lives. Since we all affect one another, we matter to each other and we need to shift our focus from the idea of self-sovereign individuals to one where individuals are co-constituted, shaping one another through their interactions (Shotwell pg8). While we are bound together, we are still separate individuals and must be respected as such. This brings us to the idea of "significant otherness", where we are relationally constituted

but we are still individuals who are different (Shotwell pg7). Our differences are valuable because they allow us to play different roles in society in such a way that our union as individuals working together and cooperating in society results in a society that is greater than the sum of us as individuals. It makes sense to think of our fellow citizens as a part of our extended self because we are embedded in this web of relationships with everyone else in society and we all make a unique contribution to one another's lives and affect one another either directly or indirectly. Thus, our well-being is tied together and it is in our own best interest to consider everyone's well-being in order to ensure our own.

Our well-being is not only tied because we perceive ourselves to be meaningfully connected, it is also tied because we feel the effects of that connection. That brings us to the second aspect of love, the way in which love motivates us through our emotions. Emerick refers to this as the "sentimentalist" account of love. The feeling of love orients us toward one another in a certain way (Emerick pg8). In this account, love is conceptualized as an emotion that motivates us to act with kindness. We treat those who we love with kindness because we empathize with them, and we feel their emotions with them. Love motivates us to be mindful of how we react to others and to be responsive to others because they matter to us and we matter to them. It is this feeling, that we matter to one another, that motivates our responsibility towards one another. That responsibility is part of "the expressive behavior that constitutes our emotional attachment to others" (Shotwell pg8).

Feeling love leads to a desire to understand and be responsive to those who we disagree with but also a desire to pursue positive change in others. We are compelled by love to be kind to one another, but being kind doesn't mean just being nice regardless of how others behave. Being kind involves caring about others as complete people, as moral agents who are responsible for their actions. If we truly care about them, we hold them accountable for their actions and expect them to improve (Emerick pg10). We can see this love in action when a parent teaches their child. In that same way, we should see each other as both children and parents of one another. We should love one another in the same way a parent loves their child and their child loves their parent. We have all been born into this world without knowing anything, and without any malice in our hearts. We have all become who we are through our interactions with one another in our environment, which was completely out of our control. Since luck plays such a significant role in who we become, we should be understanding towards everyone,

regardless of who they became, and we should help one another become better people, not only for the sake of each individual but also for the sake of society as a whole.

This desire to pursue positive change in others brings us to our final aspect of love, the power of love to change the world, and the final account of love, which is the fate account. In the fate account, love is understood as an unstoppable independent force of the universe that inevitably leads us towards justice regardless of what we do. Emerick points out that this conception of love as a force that exists independent from human agency and inevitably results in social justice is not only wrong but dangerous. He worries that seeing love and justice as an inevitable fate encourages inaction (Emerick pg12). I agree, and I would argue that this conception involves a misunderstanding of the meaning of fate and justice.

Some may understand fate as a universal inevitability, but I would argue that fate is, instead, the inevitability of an effect given a cause. Achieving social justice is the effect, love is the cause that realizes that effect. Love is the means by which we can achieve social justice. It is not sufficient to simply believe that love will inevitably result in social justice, social justice requires action. Love in this context is a tool and, as a tool, it needs to be used in order to function. Having faith in the transformative power of love requires action (James 2:14-26). Faith is not just a belief, it is the expression of a belief; it is a conviction that leads to action. One who truly loves and who believes in the power of love shows their love through their words and actions (1 John 3:18). It is through our words and actions that the power of love realizes a transformation of society. The power of love inevitably leads us to a better life and a better society if we commit to it.

Love plays a transformative role in politics through its ability to meaningfully connect people, provide an internal motivation to pursue positive change, and compel people to act in order to achieve that positive change. By seeing other citizens as equal and significant partners in the co-creation of society, we motivate and empower citizens to work together towards the improvement of everyone's well-being and society as a whole. Understanding citizenship as a form of partnership between citizens who matter to one another and care about each other can, thus, transform the way we do politics and, in that process, transform the world.

Works Cited

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