only democratic regimes avoid making the paternalizing, “infantilizing” claim that some other agent (namely, the autocrat) knows better than ordinary citizens what is good for them: the autocrat’s claim to know better “is a constant affront, denigrating the very capacities that constitute [the citizen] as human” (p. 94). Civic dignity is ultimately cashed out in quasi-liberal antipaternalist and relational-egalitarian terms (e.g., pp. 122–24), positions that resonate with Mill’s own political philosophy.

These affinities raise the question, which many readers will have, whether Ober’s surgery to separate basic democracy from liberalism has been successful. It is not enough to insist, as the author rightly does, that the quasi-liberal features of basic democracy are not grounded in theories of “personal autonomy, rights, and justice” (p. 2)—one could say the same of Mill’s liberal utilitarianism. Ober also stresses that in a basic democracy (unlike a liberal regime), “citizenship might require religious conformity” (p. 174). But his central commitments share with liberalism an abiding belief that what ultimately matters is how individual lives go, as well as basic agreement on many (but not all) of the conditions and constitutents of individual flourishing. For all the time spent on the operating table, Ober’s basic democracy may remain liberalism’s twin.

Inevitably, the author’s arguments reflect the contents of his toolbox. They are also inflected by what that toolbox lacks: a political economy or sociology. There is little in Demopolis about the specific threats posed to democracy by the unequal influence of the wealthy, and Ober takes no stance on whether contemporary democracies have been captured by wealthy elites (p. 132). He recognizes that in theory, elite capture is a perennial threat to democracies; the book’s response is to insist that basic democracy requires the cultivation of civic capacities and institutions enabling ordinary citizens, when necessary, to dispense with their representatives and govern “the state directly . . . by their own choices” (p. 155). But by and large, Ober seems sanguine that the wealthy will not use their advantages to undermine basic democracy, for example through political donations and campaign spending. Indeed, at times he seems to build the mechanisms for such usurpation into the very structure of basic democracy: “Democracy offers citizens unimpeded [emphasis mine] opportunity to exercise [their] fundamental capacities through participation in collective self-government”—including capacities for persuasion and communication (p. 17).

Ober’s is an avowedly optimistic argument (p. xvi), an account of democracy in which latent factions can be easily and predictably prevented from attempting to oppress one another or otherwise to undermine political equality and civic dignity. In his offering it, some readers might worry that Ober has lost sight of what made preliberal ancient democracy distinctive: the thought that ensuring the civic dignity of the many might require more robust accountability, control, and restrictions on the wealthy few. Yet even those who disagree with the book’s emphasis and argument will learn from a close engagement with it. In method and substance, Demopolis successfully builds on Ober’s previous work on Athens, the wider classical world, institutions, and the organization of knowledge, and he remains an indispensable guide to democracy—past, present, and future.


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Judging by the number of published studies of multiple citizenship, one might be forgiven for thinking that nationalism and immigration were matters of marginal interest in contemporary democracies. Obviously a growing phenomenon in a globalized world, multiple citizenship has failed to interest political theorists in the way it has legal and globalization scholars. And yet the subject, as Ana Tanasoca notes in her new book, is located at the intersection of numerous growing debates in political theory: immigration and the boundaries of the demos; domestic and global justice; public deliberation in democracy; and commodification—in this case, of citizenship itself—with investments in the host country often being one path to obtaining citizenship.

Tanasoca has stepped into this gap in political theory with an innovative and heroic book: heroic because it aims to do away with the sharp dichotomy between citizen and noncitizen without turning away from the needs of democratic cohesiveness in emigrant and immigrant societies. She tries to bridge the gap between scholars who enthusiastically embrace multiple citizenship as heralding a postnational age and legal theorists who are queasy about the effects of postnational citizenship on citizen solidarity and citizen–state affiliation.

Rejecting multiple citizenship’s purported downgrading of the power of citizenship as a unique tie between individuals and a single state, Tanasoca cautions against its indiscriminate embrace. It may undermine the “democratic consensus legitimizing collective decisions” (p. 4), sustain rather than reduce global inequality (Chap. 7), and compromise more ambitious cosmopolitan projects that are “morally more justifiable and politically efficient” (p. 4) because multiple citizenship remains, like its monocitizenship counterpart, a state’s privilege to grant or deny. It reinforces rather than negates the power of citizenship—albeit in more than one state—by reinforcing the link between citizenship and rights, on the one hand, and between noncitizenship and the lack of rights, on the other.

Tanasoca’s alternative is to “unbundle” the various rights now clustered under the umbrella of citizenship.
She argues that only a subset of such rights should be available to immigrants seeking a second or third citizenship. The idea is to avoid “overinclusiveness” in emigrant societies by, for example, denying the vote to nonresident citizens. It can also decouple rights from citizenship, without creating second- or third-class citizens, by giving permanent-resident noncitizens voting rights because people ought to have a say in political decision making and political outcomes that affect them. Already, permanent-resident noncitizens may vote in regional elections in many countries and even in some national elections on the basis of denizenship. Tanasoca believes that this should be extended. Finally, and most radically, she argues that the category of citizenship itself should in some cases be abandoned in favor of a more flexible allocation of different subsets of rights and duties usually associated with it. People may then retain some rights in their country of emigration and others in the country of immigration without having citizenship in either. A powerful reason she offers for decoupling citizenship from rights is to render the business of giving rights to immigrants to facilitate their flourishing less fraught than offering them citizenship.

This is an ambitious book. Unsurprisingly, it is at its normatively most ambitious that it strains the expectation of its applicability in the “world-as-it-is,” to which Tanasoca herself alludes. Where it shines is in taking forward already-existing, if still-meager, notions of degrees of citizenship rights for different individuals. These can make immigrants’ lives a great deal easier and their treatment more just than without exposing them to the fraught national scrutiny that conferring citizenship brings. Thus, the idea that multiple citizenship should be active rather than passive—that it must be renewed periodically where one is nonresident and may come with a tax that compensates the emigrant society for the brain or financial drain—is a fine one. As it happens, it reinforces the importance of citizenship rather than diluting it, but that may not be a bad thing in itself.

The clearest difficulty with the book relates to its most radical and normatively ambitious proposal: the disappearance of citizenship altogether in some cases and the dispersal of different clusters of rights to different people in ways that would be too plural to become the locus of democratic integrity in receiving societies, but not in the ones from which they emigrate. Indeed, by wielding influence beyond their numbers in host societies where they may be part of elites of education or wealth, or constitute vote blocs, they may push immigration and citizenship policies in their new homes in ways that help the less privileged citizens of the countries they have left behind. The real loss to emigrant societies is the brain drain problem which, as writers such as Jagdish Bhagwati have pointed out, is best dealt with through taxation of emigrant citizens, which positively requires dual citizenship.

Second, if birthright citizens remain citizens but without any distinguishing rights—the distinguishing hallmark of modern representative democracy has been the right to vote and run in national elections, after all—what is citizenship for? It has been clearly severed in this book’s conception from the demos, in that noncitizen voters are clearly part of the latter, justly so—but the question still remains.

Third, even if “citizen” becomes an empty honorific, it is a heroic assumption that the consequence would be to equalize citizen and noncitizen. It may do so in formal and variable rights so various that they permit no clear legal hierarchy of belonging. But there seems little reason for optimism that those who sported the honorific would not condescend to those without it, or not persecute them. To think otherwise is to underestimate the force of the narcissism of small differences around which people tend to show the most forceful propensity to engage in conflict.

On the question of retaining or forging democratic cohesiveness by rejecting overinclusiveness, Tanasoca assumes greater homogeneity than is warranted in both emigrant and immigrant societies. Her discussion of the “collective consensus” that legitimizes democratic decisions prompts one to ask whether and where this “consensus” exists—as opposed to legitimately contested claims. The range and degree of differences within a society, after all, are often as large as across societies, plurality is irreducible within groups, and differences across groups are often exaggerated, great as they may in fact be.

In addition, immigrants with multiple citizenships are no more of a threat to democratic cohesiveness than are contemporary, polarized, birthright citizens, divided by fragmented digital and social media and sharing few common narratives, mythologies, and frames of reference. Not just that. Emigrant, developing societies often welcome the purchase that a large diaspora with dual or multiple citizenship can and does bring them in tangible and intangible ways. The rich and more privileged emigrants who may buy citizenship certainly pose a threat to democratic integrity in receiving societies, but not in the ones from which they emigrate. Indeed, by wielding influence beyond their numbers in host societies where they may be part of elites of education or wealth, or constitute vote blocs, they may push immigration and citizenship policies in their new homes in ways that help the less privileged citizens of the countries they have left behind. The real loss to emigrant societies is the brain drain problem which, as writers such as Jagdish Bhagwati have pointed out, is best dealt with through taxation of emigrant citizens, which positively requires dual citizenship.

Finally, for a work deeply concerned with empowering noncitizens, the book seems not fully attentive to the possibility that immigrants may crave the citizen honorific
more as a symbol of standing than for the vote which, after all, helps them only under highly contingent circumstances. If the struggles of groups that came late to citizenship in America—African Americans and women—are any guide, such groups value the standing that full citizenship brings much more than the right to vote. The latter was often viewed instrumentally, as the infallible insignia of full membership, not for its own sake. The chief virtue of The Ethics of Multiple Citizenship resides, then, not in the intricate solutions it offers. Rather, it consists in its challenge alike to facile postnationalist celebrations of multiple citizenship and to the sacrosanct status that citizenship has assumed in democracy, both classical and modern.


For nearly two centuries, J. S. Mill’s thought has frustrated scholarly efforts at categorization. Indeed, although he is now almost universally identified with liberalism, little consensus exists as to what kind of liberal Mill was, or what kind of liberalism his work promotes. This may be the rightful legacy of a self-described “many-sided” thinker; it is also the reason Mill’s thought invites demands—continued attention. The complex quality of his thought is something that Chris Barker’s book takes seriously in attempting a new and comprehensive account of Mill’s social and political writings. It is an attempt that the book largely achieves through a fresh and engaging take on the role of education in Millian liberalism.

Educating Liberty succeeds in part because it offers a broad synthesis of Mill’s writings on education. The argument comes together through a comparative study of his educative concerns with various aspects of social and political life. These include marriage (Chap. 1), labor relations (Chap. 2), the role of experts (Chap. 3), representative government (Chap. 4) and religion (Chap. 5). By working across these themes, Barker is able to showcase the breadth of Mill’s focus on education and can thus convincingly argue that it lies at the heart of his politics. As he elegantly puts it, Mill understood that “[o]ne changes majorities by educating them, and one educates majorities by changing their experience of power” (p. 2).

The book’s general observations about Mill’s investments in reforming character through educative projects are not entirely new. They echo scholars like John Robson, Alan Ryan, Richard Ashcraft, Terence Ball, and others who have examined Mill’s interest in the study of character (ethology), and the eclectic mode of reasoning he embraced. However, Barker invigorates this tradition of Mill scholarship with new momentum by drawing out the importance of things like civic cooperation and friendship for Mill’s educative reasoning. This is the most refreshing aspect of the book: Barker brings to light the essential role that collaborative relationships play in Mill’s proposals concerning gender, class, mass opinion, representative government, and religion. In each case, the author makes clear that Millian education is a deeply social enterprise—one for which individual enlightenment cannot be detached from collective engagements. It is a democratic project.

The book’s focus on gender and class politics are particularly illuminating here. In Mill’s work on marriage, for instance, Barker points out that creating conditions for marital friendship was “the first great change in the education of liberal citizens” that Mill sought (p. 50). Spousal friendship encourages intellectual intimacy between equals, an intimacy that in turn fosters esteem for the mutual recognition, deliberation, and cooperation necessary to “educate citizens for the state” (p. 48). Barker also acknowledges that Mill’s arguments were directly influenced by his own intimate friendship with Harriet Taylor Mill: “[T]he entire project of liberalism was their project,” such that the absence of her friendship and intellectual partnership would have been “disastrous” for Mill (p. 45). In this respect, Educating Liberty has the rare distinction among Mill scholarship of treating Harriet Taylor Mill with the respect Mill himself said she was due.

On class politics, Barker’s discussion similarly highlights the collaborative aims of Mill’s policies, which integrate “his educational aspirations with economic realities” (p. 71). As Barker has it, Mill maintained a commitment to “competition and private property” insofar as both could be directed toward the “education of working men and women and the reformation of the characters and habits of the owners, managers and privileged classes who rely on unearned wealth” (p. 51). Mill’s economic reforms took into account not only the material realities of class relations, then, but also the effects of those relations on mental and moral development. Although Barker readily acknowledges that Mill’s proposals do not necessarily meet these lofty goals, he is right to suggest that Mill’s educative approach can at least inform how the modern reader evaluates market democracy today (p. 82).

Of course, tackling an inclusive study of Mill’s work on education is bound to encounter challenges. One concerns narrative flow. As Mill tells us in the Autobiography, his ideas were forged through critical consideration of other writers. Studies of Mill are consequently confronted with the difficult task of striking a balance between acknowledging his interlocutors and not ceding too much of the narrative focus to them. That balance is occasionally lost in the book. Chapter 3’s discussion of expert knowledge, for example, is almost as much a study of Auguste Comte as it is of Mill. Although Barker aims to offer an exhaustive account of Mill’s intellectual orbit, some readers,