Sexuality, Suffrage, and the State: Mary Austin's Theory of Citizenship

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"All this time I was giving interviews on Suffrage and related subjects. I did not talk a great deal; talking on Suffrage bored me. There were always women who made a point of pulling me back, of correcting me and setting me right. I was weary of being pulled into standardized arguments, although I knew well enough that there was a great deal of reason for keeping the public on the beaten track, for going over and over it, for rubbing it in."

Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon* (1932, 327)

Mary Hunter Austin is most often noted as one of America's first great female nature writers. Her most famous work, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), is known for its vivid descriptions of the Southwest deserts, and its audacious assertion of feminine power and sexuality rooted in the land. But, Austin wrote prolifically on a wide variety of topics including the nature of genius, regional literature, economics, international affairs, conservation, Native American thought and custom, primitivism, and woman suffrage. Over the course of her career, she wrote thirty-four books and most accounts tally her magazine articles– for *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers*, and *Century Magazine,* to name a few-- at 250 (Ellis 1996; Graulich 1999). One of the themes coursing through this corpus is a resistance to the strictures of middle-class morality. The conflict between womanhood and work was one of the principle tensions that required Austin to create new narrative space as a means of freeing herself from traditional social norms (Carew-Miller 1999; Graulich 1999). This tension is evident in her works on suffrage, where Austin

constructs a theory of democratic citizenship that re-genders the American state such that women share in the productive work, political voice, and institutional authority of the polity while still retaining their distinctive feminine sexuality.

This essay explicates Mary Austin's theory of citizenship through an examination of her arguments for woman suffrage in the following texts. The primary text is Austin's much-ignored monograph, *The Young Woman Citizen,* which was written for and published by the Young Women's Christian Association in 1918. Three other texts provide principle support. The Young Women's Christian Association also published *Young Women in the New Social Order* (1919), a study outline prepared by Mary Cady that was intended to accompany the Austin monograph. *Suffrage and Government,* published by the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1914, is a brief tract authored by Mary Austin and Anne Martin that argues for woman suffrage in the West, and in Nevada in particular, on the basis of government by consent. The final text is *The Sturdy Oak*, a composite novel-- or one in which each of the chapters is written by a different author—edited by Elizabeth Jordan. This entertaining novel was written to advance the suffrage campaign in New York and was first published in 1917. Mary Austin contributed one chapter, but more importantly, set the theme for the entire novel.

In recovering Austin's theory of citizenship, this essay contributes generally to a growing body of literature on the development of American citizenship, and more specifically to our understanding of the tensions involved in competing justifications for political inclusion. First, like many of her peers, Austin employs a difference-argument for female suffrage, but she significantly alters it so as to open women's access to productive labor while also securing protections for women's reproductive labor. In

place of the traditional emphasis on women's virtue, Austin reframes the gender-difference argument in terms of women's intellect. Second, Austin understands that any claim to equality must address inequity root and branch. Thus, her theory of citizenship asserts co-sovereignty culturally at the level of the nation, institutionally through the apparatus of the state, and socially in state policy. Lastly, Austin's theory of citizenship presses women's claim for inclusion far beyond the old-fashioned realm of electoral politics and into the center of the twentieth century administrative state. Austin's theory contributes to two contemporary areas of scholarly debate: that over the roles of ascriptive hierarchies and liberal commitments in American political discourse, and the "sameness-difference" debate in feminism.

Progressive Reform and Woman Suffrage at the Turn of the Century

The widespread disruptions of the late nineteenth century– industrialization, conflict between labor and capital, record immigration, urbanization, economic depression, and foreign policy expansion– spilled over into the early twentieth century and gave rise to the rather amorphous movement of the Progressives. While the Progressive label included individuals across the political spectrum-- such as Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, Woodrow Wilson, John Dewey, Horace Kallen, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman– they shared a commitment to reform and elements of a new vision for political life (Smith 1997). In the eyes of these reformers, unprecedented state action was required to alleviate the social ills that accompanied the transformation to an industrialized nation. However, these reformers recognized that such a departure from the limited government of the past would require formidable justification. Towards that end, they drew upon advances in philosophy and

the sciences in order to reconceptualize not only the state, but also the individual's relationship to the state, and the rights and obligations of citizenship (Kloppenberg 1986; Rodgers 1998; Schudson 1998; Smith 1997). As Rogers Smith explains, "Most professed beliefs in empirical scientific expertise, experimentation, efficiency via rational organization, evolution, pragmatically defined values, and the fundamental reality of human interdependence. They thought that these beliefs supported ultimate democratic control of government and values of honesty, community service, and virtuous personal self-realization" (1997, 412).

Amidst this larger reform movement, turn-of-the-century activists launched a new phase in their continuing campaign for the vote. Whereas the antebellum suffrage movement had drawn upon the language of the Declaration of Independence and its mooring in natural rights, post-bellum activists turned to a gender-difference argument that sought to secure the vote on the basis of women's biological and cultural distinctiveness. The maternalist rhetoric of this later generation of activists had its roots in the nineteenth century ideologies of separate spheres and the Cult of True Womanhood (Kerber 1980; Kraditor 1965; Welter 1966).[1] But, it also gained powerful support from contemporary evolutionary theory (Matthews 2003). Under these doctrines, men were naturally inclined toward and prepared for the public sphere of business and politics while woman's rightful place was in the home where she was best able to exercise and maintain her natural traits of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 1966).

Arguments in favor of women's suffrage threatened to upset this delicate balance between public and private, interest and virtue, politics and the home. Yet, women at the

turn of the century found that if they used this ideology to support their claim for the vote they at least gained a public hearing and at best could link their own interests to those of other reform-minded women and men. In their arguments, suffragists drew upon their moral authority as mothers and homemakers in order to expand their public role and gain access to the political sphere (Baker 1984; Kraditor 1965; Mink 1995; Nackenoff 1999; Ryan 1990; Skocpol 1992). As Paula Baker explains, the "domestication of politics" that marked the beginnings of the American welfare state emerged out of the confluence of "the ideology of domesticity, the suffrage fight, the re-emergence of governmental activism, and the public involvement of nineteenth century women" (1984, 621, also see Skocpol 1992).

The backbone of the "difference-argument" for suffrage was comprised of a two pronged challenge to the traditional public/private split in American politics: it obliquely questioned orthodox gender roles while it attacked the conventional sphere of state action head on. The problems of the late nineteenth century dashed the already compromised but still predominant civic ideal of an independent, self-sufficient, autonomous, white male citizen (Nackenoff 1999; Schudson 1998; Smith 1997). Progressives required a new civic ideal that better fit the expanding sphere of state action demanded by their reforms. Women activists contributed to this ideal by rejecting nineteenth century individualism and embracing interdependence as the chief characteristic of the modern polity.

In an effort to make clear women's expanded, but still traditional, obligations Jane Addams wrote, "This paper is an attempt to show that many women to-day are failing to discharge their duties to their own households properly simply because they do not perceive that as society grows more complicated, it is necessary that woman shall extend

her sense of responsibility to many things outside of her own home if she would continue to preserve the home in its entirety." After outlining the numerous ways in which the modern household was dependent upon municipal services, Addams continued, "In short, if woman would keep on with her old business of caring for her house and rearing her children she will have to have some conscience in regard to public affairs lying quite outside of her immediate household. The individual conscience and devotion are no longer effective" (Addams, 1915, 1). Thus, middle class, white reformers combined a lobby for social legislation, which increased the reach of the modern state, with one for female suffrage that expanded the bounds of women's sphere.

In the example above, Addams bases her argument for women's entry into the political sphere upon an understanding of women's traditional obligation to the home. In order to maintain that duty, women must become engaged in the larger political community. This rather lofty call to conscience was not the only form the difference argument took. Women's natural or instinctual characteristics and women's special experience or expertise also served to ground suffragists' arguments for the vote. Whether they were biologically hardwired or learned through years of domestic duty, women's maternal instincts and nurturing traits defined them as different from men and suited them to deal with many of the social problems afflicting the nation. As Nackenoff explains, "Women would enter the public sphere bringing biologically based values, skills, and temperaments to bear on its institutions. This would produce a more egalitarian society, not just because women were now included, but because of what women cared about" (1999, 149-50). One of the most prominent themes among suffragists was that of government housecleaning (Kraditor 1965; Skocpol 1992).

Women's experience in the home– and in housecleaning in particular-- could be translated into the expertise necessary for national social improvement. Others, like Jane Addams, argued that clubwork schooled women in both the democratic values of fraternity and tolerance and the methods and practices of social science (Nackenoff 1999). Whether in the home or through voluntary associations, women argued that their service to others qualified them for political participation.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, the dominant message conveyed by the mainstream suffrage movement was that women's *virtue* qualified them for a larger public role. Aileen Kraditor writes, "But most of their arguments on this subject.... emphasized the benefits that would immediately accrue to a society that enfranchised its women, owing to women's expert knowledge of many of the fields in which modern governments operated and owing to women's superior morality, sobriety, and literacy" (1965, 103). While women's skills were mentioned in the arguments for suffrage, it was their disposition to care for others that took center stage.

As scholars have noted, this emphasis on virtue was used by middle-class white women to distinguish their own (superior) claims to citizenship from those of working women, immigrants, and women of color. Nackenoff writes, "Egalitarianism was supplanted by the politics of virtue.... Women argued their claim to citizenship by contrasting their virtue with the corruption and greed of a male-dominated economy and polity. They argued their virtue by contrast with that of the foreign-born immigrant, and with the level of civilization enfranchised African-American males had attained" (1999, 166).[2]

This ideology further distanced middle-class women from their working counterparts by its assumption of leisure. The moral authority of middle-class white women was founded upon their role in the home– not as workers. Further, it was rooted in their biology– as women and as mothers. While the discourse of difference initially universalized the experience of motherhood as a means of uniting women, several scholars have argued that in the long run it essentially stripped working class women of a powerful source of authority in public debate, institutionalized relationships of dependency, and reified hierarchies of citizenship as middle-class white women became the administrators of programs for the working poor (Gorham 1995; Muncy 1991; Nackenoff 1999, 2001; Ritter 2000; Ryan 1990).

The emphasis on women's biology in maternalist rhetoric also intensified the dualism that relegated women to the emotional realm while reserving the intellectual for men. This, in turn, diminished women's claims to intellectual equality and thereby created a significant obstacle for professional women.[3] In reference to women writers, Elizabeth Ammons notes, "the earlier generation of [women] fiction writers tried to conceive of authorship as an occupation compatible with the pervasive middle-class feminine ideal of domesticity. They therefore thought of themselves as writers, not artists" (quoted in Carew-Miller, 108). Thus, for many, maternalist rhetoric was a double-edged sword. It granted women the moral authority to gain entrance into new professional careers within the public sphere but, at the same time, it highlighted the conflict between work and womanhood or productive and reproductive labor.

For Mary Austin, and the next generation of women activists, the goal was to attain both a career and a family. But, neither the traditional gender-difference argument

nor an equal rights "sameness" argument opened this door. The abstract rights grounding of earlier suffrage efforts asserted women's equal political status, but in doing so, it ignored women's biological difference and thereby essentially unsexed the public sphere. The sameness standard implicitly reinforced a male norm. While gaining women the vote, the traditional gender-difference argument did little to advance women's claims. Several contemporary scholars have argued that the short-term success of the vote was significantly diminished by the long-term costs that resulted from the reification of difference in maternalist rhetoric (Kovin and Michel 1993; McDonagh 1999). As McDonagh states, "The significant aspect of this model of legitimation was to preserve women's *informal*, rather than *formal*, political status in the form of privileging women's private maternal roles as benefiting political society rather than women's formal political roles" (1999, 167).[4]

Many turn-of-the-century female professionals sought to erode the tension between womanhood and work by rejecting sentimentalism in favor of "scientific motherhood" (Ladd-Taylor 1995). But, theoretical resolutions did little to solve the problem that was raised by the *fact* of women's entrance into public life.[5] While access to higher education and voluntary organizations had opened up new opportunities for middle-class white women, productive, professional labor was largely reserved for *single* women. Thus, for many, the price of professional expression was often sexual satisfaction.[6] While the gender-difference argument valued women's historic cultural role, acknowledged women's biological difference and sexuality, and supported state policies to protect women, it did not affirm an equal place for women in public life. As long as the social norm that chastised women who yearned for both work and family

stood firm, the gender-difference argument could not fully humanize public life, much less, feminize it.

Many successful women of the period accepted this tradeoff. Mary Austin was not among them. Both practically and theoretically, Austin sought to carve out a life and narrative that would allow her to unleash her creative energy through productive work that contributed to the common good while retaining her body, her sexuality, and her womanhood.

The Young Woman Citizen

Reprinted in 1920 and again in 1976, Mary Austin's *The Young Woman Citizen* was first published in 1918. Since then, it has received little scholarly attention. In one of the few references to it, Nancy Porter writes, "[it] reads like a primer on how women can overcome their native suspicion of politics as a male game and function effectively in the political process for the benefit of their concerns," (1985, 313). A gross underestimate of Austin's achievement, this description is better fitted to a text like Mary Sumner Boyd's published the same year and entitled *The Woman Citizen*. Boyd's text describes the differences between civil and political rights, provides a table of state suffrage qualifications and regulations, explains how to apply for citizenship, and discusses the different levels of government within the United States. According to Boyd, the purpose of her text "is to show when and how the citizen actually uses the vote" (1918, viii). In contrast, Mary Austin describes *The Young Woman Citizen* as a "working philosophy of citizenship" (foreword).[7] This text is not merely a descriptive "how to" manual or elementary lesson in civics, but a theory of citizenship that advances a normative and theoretical argument for redefining American citizenship.

Austin's text is comprised of ten chapters that take the reader from a reassessment of the differences between men and women to a new conception of the gendered polity. Along the way, Austin delineates the most pressing problems facing the nation and argues that they stem from a misguided understanding of politics. Austin directly challenges the traditional conception of the public and private spheres as it applies to both gender and the appropriate scope of state action. Further, she argues that not only woman suffrage but woman's way of thinking is critical to alleviating the nation's problems. Towards this end, Austin employs a gender-difference argument. However, she casts that argument in a new mold; rather than stressing women's virtue and service to others, Austin emphasizes women's intellectual capabilities– both native and learned. Ultimately, Austin argues that in order to address the problems of the day, the United States must give up the male dominated distributive politics of the nineteenth century and embrace a female centered generative politics. Below, I first outline Austin's gender-difference argument and then demonstrate how it contributes to the goal of co-sovereignty at the center of her larger theory of citizenship.

Austin's Gender-Difference Argument

One of the legacies of the ideology of separate spheres and much of the maternalist rhetoric of the period was that it overburdened women with the expectation of superior virtue. This association limited the horizons of women's experience and led to an underestimation of their social and political worth. Austin eschews this approach and instead reframes women's difference from men. Rather than defining women's contribution to the polity simply in terms of their social service to others, Austin

emphasizes the national necessity of cultivating and exercising the intellectual capacities of women in the public realm.

Austin's advice to young women is that if they are going to be effective in politics, they must begin with an honest assessment of themselves and what they offer to the nation. To do this, women need a boost of courage because the long entrenched custom of measuring women by a male standard has taken a toll on women's confidence in their own traits and methods. She writes, "Unconsciously this age-long habit so colors all our thinking, that the first thing that the woman citizen must ask herself is whether she is coming to her new obligation as another, less experienced man, or whether she has anything to contribute as a woman" (16). Austin's answer to that question couldn't be clearer or bolder: "This has been kept until the last, because it is at once the most immediate of our national interests, and the point of departure for the new politics, the politics which is sprung from the woman-thought of the world" (160).

At the outset, Austin identifies two primary characteristics that form the foundation of women's contribution to political life: a capacity for intuitive judgment and a "habit of centering the administration of her affairs around the production and nourishment of life" (19, 22). While Austin touches on a variety of other issues, the remainder of the text is dedicated to two primary goals. The first is to show her reader that, historically, these two traits have been misunderstood and therefore undervalued. In each case, Austin aims to strip women's traits of the shroud of sentimentality, emotion, and feeling that hides their real character. Her second goal is to offer a proper understanding of these two traits, one that also makes plain women's potential contribution to solving the problems of the modern polity.

Austin defines intuitive judgment as an intellectual trait; she claims that it is a way of seeing the world rather than a maternal instinct or a feeling. She writes, "At any rate, it is the woman habit to *think the next thing* which enables women to keep their opinions in a continuous state of mobilization without any suspicion of inconsistency...This is what women have to stand on squarely; not their ability to see the world in the way men see it, but the importance and validity of their seeing it some other way" (19). In contrast to the rather rigid approach of men, Austin argues that women's way of thinking about social problems allows for constant adjustments that smooth and straighten society's path towards a particular goal.

The second trait that Austin discusses is women's tendency to nurture. Austin is adamant in her assertion that this is a question of value prioritization, not of feeling and sentimentality. She writes, "The difference between man-thinking and woman-thinking on these points... is a difference in the appreciation of values from which the thinking starts... Left to herself, woman would not think of milk as a means of *making* a living; she would think of it as a means of *giving* a living" (22). Austin emphasizes women's difference, but avoids essentializing it. In theory, men as well as women could make the value shift necessary to change from a distributive politics to a generative one.

Further, Austin focuses our attention on both women's values and their *activities*. What women have to contribute to politics is their ability to translate values into ends through the process of administration. She writes, "The first gift of woman to society was order, some kind of regularity of eating and coming home to sleep. A genius for organization is so likely a thing to come from woman that it should need no miracle to have it accepted" (41-42). Cultivating this ability for the good of the nation would result

in “the new art of the administration of social forces,” in which “women are its chief exponents, women doctors, women lawyers, women social workers... For women have an age-long experience in the administration of social energy, the administration of the family for the family’s sake” (164).

Austin is writing a new narrative about how women’s experience translates into the political sphere; one that does not only expand women’s space, but also reevaluates women’s worth. Regarding both women’s intuitive judgment and their habits to nurture, Austin emphasizes perspective, ways of thinking, and intellectual traits. But, it is women’s experience that gives rise to their difference from men and in this Austin relies on the well-established notion that it is woman’s experience in the home that defines her special traits and abilities.[8] While history, art, and science are all tools that help in the administration of social life, Austin claims that the enduring truths of political life must be rooted in common experience.[9] Woman’s contribution to the problems of the nation will be grounded in her own unique experience, and a nation that ignores these experiences will remain fundamentally unbalanced and unnatural.

The primary problem that Austin must address is that women’s experience has been misinterpreted such as to diminish their actual abilities, competencies, and worth to the nation. Two parallel misunderstandings contribute to the exclusion of women from politics: the first over the nature of government and the second over the nature of virtue. In the narrative of American citizenship, work and war are old and recurring themes. For advocates of women suffrage and progressive reformers, dislodging or transforming these themes was the first step in the effort to reconstruct democratic citizenship. In *Suffrage and Government*, Austin argues that the ancient conception of government as “force”

contributes to the exclusion of women from politics because it wrongly rests on the notion that women cannot successfully fight rather than on the recognition that to oblige them to do so risks "racial disaster" (*Suffrage and Government*, 3). Austin asserts that the modern conception of government as "consent" fosters suffrage "By resting the right to participation in government on the ability to consent, rather than on fighting capacity, [which] disposes forever of the ancient argument that women ought not to vote because it is not desirable that they should go to battle" (ibid., 4).[10] Still, in *The Young Woman Citizen* Austin recognizes the enduring power of this conception of government by concluding that the "immediate work of the woman voter" must be to "somehow plan and bring to pass the recognition of her gift for social administration as part of the work of winning the war. She must have it recognized as part of the work of the war, in order that it may be taken seriously as part of the business of building a new world order in which war shall have no place" (166).

The second misconception that contributes to the exclusion of women from politics is a misunderstanding over the public value of private virtue. For Austin, the virtues that contribute to democracy are *social* virtues. In a section in which Austin discusses what we can expect of political candidates, she writes:

> But of his private character the only thing that may be justly asked is whether there is anything in it which would defeat the purpose for which he may be elected. To attempt to measure public men by the criterion of woman virtue is to repeat the enormity of man's waste of woman, *his refusal to take into social consideration any of her capacities which do not appeal to his private interest in her*. Woman suffrage is woman's denial of the idea that her place and function in society is in any way or particular established by what men feel about her. It affirms, so far as it concerns her sex, that womanhood and motherhood have definite, geometric values which are obscured rather than enhanced by all this confused and cloudy sentiment (86, emphasis added).

In this passage, Austin is warning the reader against using the standard of "woman virtue" to judge public men. The problem of private character enters the passage because women's worth has been measured *only* by their contributions to the private realm– as mothers and homemakers. Austin makes clear that these are valuable roles. The problem is that women's contribution to the nation has been determined exclusively by men's private needs, not by women's actual abilities. Austin informs her reader that women's experience in the home gives rise to talents that allow her to transcend the confines of the home.

Austin's disdain for the standard of private virtue as a measure of political worth is also evident in an extended discussion of the political parties. Austin explains the failure of earlier attempts to "clean up" political corruption. What the earlier generation of reformers found was that political corruption sprung from the persuasive power of personality not from an institutional error that might be corrected. It was not that the political parties created incentives for the morally corrupt to enter politics, but that party politics was characterized by the mob spirit. For Austin, the failure of the party to effectively govern is not due to the moral lapses of office holders, nor will an infusion of individuals of superior moral character uplift political life. She states, "What is wanted is a superior quality of social thinking. Otherwise the women voters will find themselves in the situation of the "muck-raked" politician of ten years ago, pathetically offering the unimpeachable conduct of their private business and their domestic virtues to offset the charge of political corruption" (80). In this passage, Austin emphasizes that resolving the problems of political life requires progressive social *thinking*, not superior moral virtue.

Both of these problems of private virtue are revisited in the novel *The Sturdy Oak* where the newly married and unimpeachable George Remington begins his campaign for local district attorney with a politically misguided anti-suffrage statement that invokes all of the overly sentimentalized virtues of women as a reason for protecting them from politics. By the end of the novel, it is only with the help of his lovely, and quite capable wife, Genevieve, and a few other brainy and powerful women, that George is able to extract himself from a plot by the political machine to kidnap the key opposition to his election—a female suffrage leader. George eventually recants his earlier anti-suffrage statement, becomes an advocate of both social reform and suffrage, and carries the election handily. What the reader learns is that private virtue is no match for the power of the political machine nor is it a useful guide by which to judge women's contribution to political life. During the Progressive Era, the sphere of the private (both interest and virtue) came under attack in an effort to increase the regulatory reach of the American state.

Austin's Theory of Democratic Citizenship: The Problem of the Public/Private Split

One of the chief impediments to achieving an expanded role for the state was an old fashioned understanding of government that grew out of a strict separation between the public and private. Austin states, "The old idea of political science as a process of *denaturing* government, by removing it as far as possible from the business of making a living, had no use for art, since art is, of all man's modes of expression, closest to the heart of life" (43, emphasis added). In a pair of companion quotes the evoke Aristotle, Austin critiques the traditional public/private split as a means of refusing women's entrance into the public sphere and restricting the appropriate scope of state action. For

Aristotle, the mere life towards which the partnership of the household is directed pales in comparison to living well; an ideal that can only be achieved through partnership in the polis. "The household is the partnership constituted by nature for [the needs of] daily life…. The partnership arising from [the union of] several villages that is complete is the city. It reaches a level of full self-sufficiency, so to speak; and while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well" (*The Politics* I, 2-8). The ideology of separate spheres maps nicely onto this Aristotelian division between the material and the political– a division which is the source of Austin's first round of criticism. She argues that the problems so evident in American society have grown out of a failure to accurately distinguish the practical from the spiritual. She writes,

> We think of these two as divided by a great gap. We think of one of them as being base, but necessary, and the other as lovely, but unattainable...Things that are called practical become spiritual, not through a process of emotion, but through *a process of administration*. Every day of their lives women are taking such common and material things as bread and meat and sex, wounds and old clothes, and rendering them spiritual by administering them in the interests of religion, family affection, humanity (20).

Women are firmly rooted in the realm of the material but their skills in administrating the goods of this realm elevate their activities to a higher art. Austin does not destroy the distinction which associates women with the material and the bodily, but she certainly complicates it.

In a companion quote that questions this same division when applied to the state, Austin writes: "Bread and housing are much more imperative as influencing the conditions under which men live together than either policies or principles. It was part of our two-mindedness about public and private life, that we thought of this at first as base, whereas it is merely true. There is no such separation between living and the means of

living as our political philosophies implied. Bread and land, work and the tools of work are the body and sinew of liberty, without which it and justice are but poor houseless ghosts" (139). Whereas the first quote challenged the traditional perception of women's work in the home, the second questions the division between the material and political in order to assert the regulatory responsibilities of the state.

Austin rejects the classical liberal conception of the state as a mere umpire hired to settle competing rights claims. In the face of pressing social needs and simmering social unrest, she claims that a new conception of politics is required. "Modern politics is … an influence proceeding toward the people, out of the unavoidable unification of social life, a crackling, dynamic energy generated at the crossing of their wires. And out of this new conception of politics as proceeding toward the individual instead of from him, has sprung the question of the hour: To what extent and on what occasions is any business to be thought of as private and subject to individual control?" (149). With this statement, Austin turns the traditional question regarding the appropriate sphere of state action on its head.

Like most progressives, Austin conceived of the state as an organic, living, developing entity. Where the old political science denatured government and conceived of it as a mechanical instrument, Austin's politics was rooted in the natural. Looking at the long sweep of history, Austin claims that each form of government has been an attempt to negotiate the competing demands of the individual and the group. In a teleological vision of social life, Austin depicts this development as a continually rising and broadening spiral staircase. She states, "when we look for a single item to measure the up-sweep of the curve, we find it in the degree of voluntary participation by the

members of the group, in group affairs"(4). Thus, women's full inclusion into public life is necessary to progress to the next stair. Austin's choice of metaphor is also instructive. At the time, many of the anti-suffragists argued that destruction of the state and the family would follow women's entry into politics. Thus, at the outset of her piece, Austin employs an architectural metaphor in order to underscore the conventionality of politics. She writes: "Government is the frame and form by which we function citizenly, the furniture of our social house, which we can arrange at our convenience; nor should we expect anything world-shaking to happen should a piece by accident be overturned" (14).

Later in her text, Austin elaborates upon her teleological conception of social life and grounds the political in nature. In discussing social movements worthy of one's energy Austin states, "The test of the validity of any political movement is in its conformity to life, to the principle of growth, and change. It must have roots" (65). And, in describing the goal of a politics dedicated towards progress she writes, "The tendency of natural growth is always toward form, but without fixity, the flowing shape of a fountain, of an elm tree, infinitely variable and airy and recognizable. The beauty of the flower or the frost on the pane is the beauty of order and organization; losing that, they become mist and dust again" (69). Austin uses this metaphor to break out of the rigid boundaries that characterize the nineteenth century conceptions of public and private as they relate to both politics and gender. But, Austin is quite serious when she grounds politics in the natural. She is not merely employing a metaphor for the sake of illustration. She writes, "Human life comes up like a great vine, the secret of whose growth is underground.... This is not a mere poetic fancy. It is a statement so vital to our understanding of life that it can only be made in terms of other life" (118). In the first of

many challenges to binary thinking, Austin complicates the customary duality of nature and convention. She argues that politics is conventional, but that all things political are rooted in nature.

Austin defines politics as "the progressive practice of social relations"(11) or the "technique of living together" (30). Consistent with her teleological conception of social life and her critique of the material and spiritual/political realms, Austin claims "The search of today is not for a fixed frame of living, but for the principle of elasticity" (30). As the conditions and character of social life are always changing, a well functioning polity must be comprised of flexible citizens capable of adaptation and improvisation. But, these citizens also must be self-directed towards the good of the whole.

Austin defines public-spiritedness as "a state of continuous awareness of the extent to which other people are involved in everything we do, and of their right to be considered" (32). Based upon a strict separation of the public and the private, early American republicanism identified independence and vigilance as the foremost civic virtues. The oft repeated phrase "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" pointed to the necessity of a citizenry educated in the basics of human nature (best achieved through a careful reading of history according to Jefferson) such that they could identify and defend against ambitious leaders intent upon abusing the public trust of power. But, this conception left the public commons open to plunder by private interests. Austin explains, "We have got into this state of detachment from our markets and our banks, by coming to them from a habit of thinking of the family as the social unit, and the making of a living as the private business of the family. We have thought of that vast area of human activity

which extends beyond individual control as a sort of commons, free for all, and most of all free from any personal responsibility" (148).

A direct corollary of the public/private split, Austin argues that the bifurcation of norms of behavior contributes to the erosion of the common good. The conflict between individual and group that has driven the historical succession of experiments in social living is exacerbated by the practice of deeming one set of characteristics acceptable for private life and another for those in public service. It is this custom that countenances the free roaming of private interest so long as it does not break the letter of the law– no mind the spirit of it (31). Austin states, "And yet our whole political life is based on the assumption that a man can fill his private life with practices opposed to everything that would be demanded of him in a public career, and still be eligible for public office" (31). Such an attitude erodes the common good and cheapens public life.

In *The Sturdy Oak*, George Remington's friends aim to teach him this lesson by cleverly convincing his anti-suffrage female relatives to hold him to his word by taking up residence with him and his new wife. If man was to defend and protect the innocent female flower from the filth of political life, surely George should support both his widowed and spinster cousins. George dutifully withstands the discomfort that their presence brings, but, in the end, he learns the lesson by advancing the plank of suffrage and social reform, and expelling the dependents from his home.

An efficient and well functioning democracy can no longer maintain a strict separation between the public and private realms. The price of liberty is no longer paid by the vigilant citizen but by those "who are willing to pay the costs of social awareness" (foreword). Watchfulness remains the key sense; but the citizen's eye must now pan the

whole social spectrum rather than remaining focused on the state. In order to achieve this ideal, "an end must be made to the idea that there is such a thing as private character, as distinguished from the sort of character we are expected to exhibit in public affairs" (30).

To correct for this, Austin advocates a graduated program of civic education in which at each stage of development and interaction with the wider world the individual's social responsibilities increase. Thus, one's social responsibility or public spiritedness develops proportionately with one's private interests. The purpose is to create an integrated standard of citizen behavior, to blur those rigid boundaries that separate the public and private, to mitigate the conflicts that emerge between the individual and the group, and to foster a sense of mutuality and interdependence. As will become apparent, this education is particularly important for women, but is necessary for all citizens in order to combat the isolating tendencies of individualism and to "provide openings for entering without affectation into view-points other than our own" (62).

From Distributive to Generative Politics

In the preface to her insightful study on the cultural understanding of women's rights, Sandra VanBurkleo writes, "Nothing impeded women more decisively than the fiction of the unitary domestic sovereign—the main enemy of many antebellum reformers and a monkey on every woman's back well into the modern era" (2001, xiii). Austin's challenge to the traditional understanding of women's role is housed inside a larger theory of democratic citizenship that wages a frontal attack on this fiction by asserting women's co-sovereignty with men, culturally, socially, and institutionally. Austin's theory posits that the American nation is stationed on the cusp of modernity and in need of a new language of citizenship to voice the American contribution to World

Democracy. Writing in the midst of World War I, Austin states, "We have bound ourselves to produce a world politics and we have not even the habit of world thinking out of which to conceive it" (6). However, with war has come clarity of thinking regarding the true nature of the problems America faces and the appropriate manner of resolving them (161).[11]

The first of these is a misconception of the true nature of nations. For Austin, "Nationality is the expression in political form, of the temperament of a people made homogeneous by living in one place…If self-determination is the factor that gives political life to nations, it is the inter-action of land and race that gives them character" (92-93). The nation is both natural and gendered. It is composed of two parts—male and female—and has a natural tendency to grow and therefore demand greater territory. The key to a successful nation is to maintain the balance between the masculine and feminine. Austin writes, "There can be no true and progressive nationality in which the land does not speak equally with the race… It makes nations well-balanced between the father and mother principles of their origin, the male element of race and the mothering element of land, cradling and nourishing" (106). Austin uses this definition to critique the Germans, who she argues have denied "the mother-right of the land" and therefore are doggedly pursuing racial dominance (106). As the land nourishes it also restrains the more aggressive tendencies of masculinity and provides for a feminine voice at the most fundamental level of modern politics.[12]

An additional set of problems uncovered by the condition of war point to the mismanagement of American politics at the institutional level. Austin explains, "All of them relate to the problem of stored energy expressed in terms of money" (149). One of

the first necessities of the war was an expansion of the American state and a centralization of control over industry. Austin does not take issue with the expanded state, but with the "business" mind-set and norms that informed its realization. Austin argues that the masculine way of thinking that characterizes American business is wrongly applied to the state. It reflects the distributive politics characteristic of the parties and a nineteenth-century understanding of political life. Austin finds that the process of centralization has proven more complex than previously expected, that it has not produced sufficient munitions for fighting the war, and that it is directed towards the wrong priorities. Regarding the last point she states,

> For women, business has meant the home and the children, the right sort of home and the right thing done in it to bring up children happily and well. It may as well be faced, the whole woman movement is in some sort an admission that American 'business' has not 'worked.' ... They [women] want much more for themselves and the race, but first of all they understand that womanhood is not wholly valued, or the dignity of motherhood affirmed so long as great numbers of children are born and brought up in misery and poverty (151).

Here, is evidence of the more familiar pairing of women's virtue and men's greed. But, Austin is at pains to make clear that this is a function of different experiences, and different ways of *thinking*, rather than essential personality differences between women and men. At root, the problem is that the state has wrongly been conceived as wholly masculine.

For Austin, expansion of the state must reflect the priorities of a generative, not a distributive politics. Austin writes, "We have developed a class of men clever at accumulation, expert in the administration of money capital and credit capital, but inexperienced, on the whole, in the investment of Social Capital" (162). Founded in the deeper Social Stream, she defines social capital as:

> the measure of group potentiality. It grows out of the capacity of men to combine. Ten men socially combined can do more than ten men working separately. This extra potentiality is the Social Capital of that group. But its value depends on the vitality of the spiritual organization of the group. Men are said to be spiritually organized when they are held together by some alikeness of aim or spirit"(155).[13]

The chief problem with distributive politics is that it has completely ignored the category of social capital (155).[14] And, Austin claims, "The most remarkable evidence of the lack of what we may call a national technique.... is their waste of woman-power" (157).

The new generative politics that is needed to fight both domestic and foreign enemies is a politics built out of the experience and talents of American women. Early on, Austin signals to the reader that access to the vote, is only the first step to achieving equal political voice and authority for women. She writes, "If we can vote without bringing the skies down upon us, we can no doubt open other doors upon unknown prospects" (15). Both women's distinctive capabilities and the needs of the nation suggest that women must be involved in more than electoral politics. Austin understands that any claim to equality must attend to both the traditional forms of participation and the shifting institutional arrangements of the political system. Thus, Austin argues that political equality requires that women gain access, not only to the old-fashioned, male dominated, realm of electoral politics, but to the emerging center of political power for the twentieth century—the administrative state.

Political equality requires that women and femininity hold, not only a cultural foundation in the polity, but also an institutional one. Austin does not join those who would argue that the role of women is to clean up party politics. She states, "Party politics is an expression, in groups of organization, of the masculine temperament," and "Party is as fundamental a social unit and practically as inescapable, as the family" (74).

The party's historical antecedent is the gang and as such it is an expression of equality, of togetherness, and of democracy. Austin writes, "The root of democracy is a joyous, objectiveless sense of allness… To be able to enter into the crowd and the shout without any undercurrent of a wish to turn it in your particular direction is the true preface to politics" (24). For men, party politics is a "substitute for adventure, a mimicry of the chase, a temporary recurrent release from social isolation" (78). And, while it is reasonable to expect that extending the vote to women will change the nature of party politics, its rootedness in human nature ensures that it will continue to perform a role in American politics (78). But, given its masculine spirit, one cannot expect that women will thrive here.

Instead, women must find their institutional expression and political motivation in the family, the organization, and its institutional peer—administration. As has been shown above, women's intellectual capacities and their experience in the family has fitted them for this position. Austin maintains that they are also qualified by temperament. "Every good woman is at heart a matriarch. Naturally the organizing center of the family group, she has not so much experienced democracy as seized upon it as a means of making everybody more comfortable. It is for this chiefly that men fear her, not for the things she may by the ballot do *with* society, but for her ancient maternal instinct to do something *to* it" (23). With these traits, women are qualified to step into the administrative apparatus and direct, as Austin claims, "new art of the administration of social forces. Women are its chief exponents, women doctors, women lawyers, women social workers. There are several reasons why this should have come from the middle classes, the best of all reasons why it should come from women. For women have an

age-long experience in the administration of social energy, the administration of the family for the family's sake" (164). Still, while the isolation of the home has cultivated some of women's greatest gifts, it has also left them unschooled in the democratic spirit. The most obvious source for this lesson is in the political party. But, Austin argues that for a number of reasons– including the overly masculine character of the parties and their imminent decline– that this may not be the best resource for women.[15]

In order to appreciate the interdependent nature of social living and to practice social awareness, Austin argues that women must experience a diversity of living conditions. Towards that end she provides a plan for citizen education that entails the reading of history and novels, and lessons in the appreciation of art in order to enlarge the citizen's "social horizon" (64). But, the best way for women to do this is through participation in voluntary associations.

> An ideal state would no doubt recognize the need of social experience as a part of legitimate preparation for citizenship. One can imagine such a thing as a young citizen draft, working out its traditional three years in public service chosen to give the greatest possible range of awareness. As a substitute for citizen training, the opportunities offered by the settlement house, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's Trade Union League, reinforced by all manner of neighborhood associations and local welfare clubs, seems meager enough (61-2).

One of the legacies of the ideology of separate spheres is that it taints such experience as disreputable for the women who need it most. Austin states, "At the very least, this [a wide acquaintance with living conditions] involves the personal exploration of some other manner of life than your own. This is not easy for women who, through the long inheritance of ladyhood, conditioned largely by the number of things they might not do, are predisposed to selected experience. Though we officially repudiate it by giving women the vote, the idea that a woman's value to society is increased by limiting her

social experience to soft and pleasant phases is unconsciously a factor in the training of young women" (61). Despite this, Austin acknowledges that women have gained political experience through their participation in voluntary associations (82). And, it is women's combined experience in the home and in these associations that has fitted them with the intellectual tools necessary to address the nation's current problems. In dealing women into the administrative state, Austin has not only expanded women's sphere but she has placed them at the center of a new world politics first, by showing what that politics requires and second, by demonstrating it is women who can best answer that need.

Conclusion

Full entry into politics was essential for women to both protect their own interests and to be recognized as full members of the polity. In *The Young Woman Citizen*, Austin employs a gender difference argument that justifies women's full inclusion on the basis of their distinctive capacities. However, by emphasizing intellect rather than virtue, Austin creates a narrative that opens a new avenue to power for women (especially well educated middle class women) and reevaluates women's worth to the larger community. Austin argues that women's experience in the home and in the family honed an adaptive way of thinking peculiar to women that must be cultivated and exercised for the good of the whole. Indicative of Austin's ability to negotiate binary poles, she constructs an argument that demands equal respect for womanhood and intellect. She is unwilling to lose her body in an abstract argument for equality and she is unwilling to abandon her intellect for a sham virtue. For Austin, dignity requires both attention to difference and an equal opportunity to cultivate and express it.[16] In a passage that brilliantly articulates

these commitments, she writes: "Great women must be more than wondered at, more than admired. But first of all they must be understood as women, higher-powered, deeper-breathing, neither mimics nor angels. The Amazons were not born breastless" (42).

To be sure, Austin's theory is not without significant problems. Her text provides evidence of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment as well as a strong class bias that speaks, first and foremost, to the needs of professional women. However, her account also avoids several of the liabilities that attend the emphasis on virtue characteristic of most of the mainstream suffrage arguments. First, Austin's theory would seem to lift the burden of virtue placed on many American women. At a minimum, Austin questions the notion that women are of a superior morality than men and, more importantly, shifts attention to the institutional structure of modern society.

Second, Austin's emphasis upon administration, organization, and intellect create greater room for the inclusion of working women than does the language of virtue. In discussing the difference between the practical and the spiritual, she writes: "The piece that is lost is the one upon which it is written that spirituality is something to do. It is lost somewhere in the experience of the average woman, hidden under the rubbish of domesticity and overlaid with false idealism, so that she herself scarcely knows that it is there. But as soon as it is uncovered, the least educated immigrant woman can recognize it as the most familiar item of her experience" (20). The language of virtue was based upon women's roles as women and mothers and the privilege of a rather sheltered life in the home. While that narrative unified women on the basis of their bodies it differentiated them according to class. By emphasizing the nature of women's work in the home and

linking it to women's participation in voluntary associations, Austin provides greater space for the inclusion of working women.

What is still more interesting about Austin's argument is her effort to stake out a position that speaks to both equality and difference. Recent empirical research suggests that, when institutionalized, it is these types of arrangements that have allowed for the greatest degree of political access for women (McDonagh 2002). As is the case with Austin in so many ways, she held a transitional position within the feminist movement. After the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, the feminist movement largely disintegrated in the battle over the Equal Rights Amendment and the articulation of competing discursive foundations for political inclusion (Cott 1987). As such, Austin's theory provides a compelling textual example of the more nuanced claims that women of this transitional period put forward. Austin's theory contributes to our understanding of the emergent conception of social democratic citizenship at the turn of the twentieth century while also deepening our appreciation of the challenges that women faced as they labored to construct new narratives for advancing their political goals.

ENDNOTES

[1] Integrating a strain of republicanism, this ideology held that women's chief civic role was to provide moral instruction and example to sons and husbands; the vote was supposedly superfluous given women's impressive powers of influence. Further, gendering the polity in this manner ensured that business enterprise and virtue would not conflict, but both could flourish in their respective spheres (Kann 1990).

[2] While Austin defines virtue differently she does privilege the claims of middle class white women over those of immigrant, African-American, and working women (9-11, 114-115, 135-36, 165).

[3] Despite these criticisms of the difference argument, scholars have also been careful to identify the emancipatory potential embedded within the conception of social democratic citizenship that was emerging among feminists of the period such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, and Carrie Chapman Catt to name a few. In its most sophisticated articulation, the gender-difference argument held the potential to feminize, and thereby humanize, Americans' understanding of political equality. Practically, it provided a means to gain social legislation and worker protections for women that could eventually be applied to men as well (Sarvasy 1997).

[4] More recent work by McDonagh argues that women's political inclusion may be best provided for by nations that affirm both women's equality and their gender difference (2002).

[5] Lower birth rates and later marriage dates among middle-class white women provided sufficient evidence on this score.

[6] Certainly, exceptions existed, and many women found love and intimacy within the female circles of Progressive Era settlement houses and club work (Muncy 1991).

[7] Unless otherwise indicated, all simple page number citations of Austin's work refer to *The Young Woman Citizen*.

[8] As the epigraph at the start of this paper suggests, at some times Austin is much more traditional than at others. In *Suffrage and Government*, Austin and Martin's discussion of the "Business of Women" is much more consistent with traditional gender-difference arguments such as those found in the writings of Jane Addams and other mainstream suffragists. She and Martin write, "The chief business of women is mothering….The woman of today who wishes to do her business well, finds herself in a serious predicament. For today the greater part of all the activities upon which the successful bringing up of a family depends are carried on outside the home" (5-6).

[9] She writes, "For if politics is something strange and unrelated to the common life, if it is something for which rules cannot be drawn out of the common occasions by which we live together, then democracy is a delusion... And if the experience of being a woman

does not itself establish some kind of fitness for social living, then the achievement of women in France and England is the greatest miracle that ever happened (167).

[10] Also see *The Young Woman Citizen*, 90.

[11] "We are in the habit of saying that the advantage of war is that it brings us keener appreciation of the fundamental, eternal things. We are thinking about things in relation to life and conduct when we say this, but if politics is nothing after all but group conduct, does it not seem that war might reveal some of the fundamental, eternal things of politics?" (161).

[12] While contemporary eco-feminists and environmentalists offer cogent and compelling critiques of the identification of women with the land, Austin's aim is to provide some balance and cultural position for women at the most fundamental level of modern political life (this literature is too voluminous to cite, but Kolodny 1975 provides a nice early example). Interestingly enough, Austin's more famous work, *The Land of Little Rain*, is often noted as a precursor to modern eco-feminism. A fact that indicates both Austin's transitional position within the feminist and environmentalist movements and the failure of *The Young Woman Citizen* to attract scholarly attention.

[13] From a cursory review another of Austin's contributions may be the term "social capital". Robert Putnam cites the earliest usage as Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 138 in "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*." Journal of Democracy* 6: 65-78.

[14] "Our great industrial managers... have never thought of the social potentiality of the spiritually organized group as part of our national resources" (155).

[15] In reference to women and the parties generally she states, "...the pull of party instinct was never strong enough to counter the individualizing influence of the home" (78).

[16] For recent statements see McDonagh 2002, Taylor 1992.

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