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The Sociology of Knowledge, Citizenship and the Purification of Politics

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ABSTRACT

We reinterpret citizenship using Mannheim's classical sociology of knowledge and through a more recent variant on them in Latour's argument that "we have never been modern" (Latour, 1991). On that basis, we understand citizenship as a recursive effect of disputes over belonging and membership (Isin, 2002), where those disputes entail the three forms of political rationality or "thought styles" which Mannheim and Latour variously suggested: the linearly individual rationality of liberalism; dialectically collective socialism; and culturally collective conservatism. Marshall defines citizenship as a "status bestowed on those who are full members of a community" (Marshall, 1973). He presents an image of evolutionary progress, from civil to political rights and finally to the social form, in Britain. We argue that Marshall was entangled in evolutionary and teleological images of citizenship. We reinterpret citizenship using Mannheim's classical sociology of knowledge. We suggest that sociologies of knowledge allow a re-reading of "citizenship" that can accommodate conceptual difficulties. Mannheim called into question the "progress" implied or stated in theories of "stages". He stressed instead the continuing interaction between different ways of knowing social reality, or between what he called "thought styles". We apply Mannheim to "citizenship" in order to lift two "purifications", so that humanity is both natural and political.

KEYWORDS

Sociology of Knowledge; Citizenship; Purification and Politics

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