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Simplican, S.C. (2015). *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN: 978-0-8166-9403-7.

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Simplican's interrogation of the social contract in relation to intellectual disability makes an important contribution to our understandings of disability, citizenship, productivity, and human rights. In a time when intellectual work in disability studies, and the humanities and social sciences more broadly, is concerned about neoliberalism, Simplican takes us to a place where neoliberalism is not just a descriptive but an analytic. Simply, Simplican tells us *how it is* that people with intellectual disabilities have been understood as outside of participatory democracy, providing us with close readings of John Locke, John Rawls, Charles Mills and Carole Pateman. Simplican also addresses this exclusion through ethnographic research in the self-advocacy movement, ultimately asking her readers to reevaluate the social contract and our conceptualization of political participation in order to produce a more equitable democratic system.

Simplican's central argument is that anxieties about disability are entrenched in our political system because, as she writes, "disability reveals the deep discrepancy between the ways we conceptualize the demands of political participation and the actual range of ways people act politically" (3). In fact, in Simplican's argument, the production of anxiety itself becomes the way in which the capacity contract operates. This is because we believe the most important ways to participate in democracy are through cognitive deliberation, reflection, reasoning, and judgment. In elaborating on this anxiety, Simplican theorizes two sides of the capacity contract: the first is this cognitive threshold, which naturalizes what she terms "compulsory capacity" and

excludes anyone who does not participate above this threshold; the second is that incapacity—vulnerability—is actually essential to the contract because without vulnerability, we would not need the protections of government. It is the tension between these two (opposing) sides of the capacity contract that produces this anxiety about disability. This argument about how the capacity contract works fundamentally reinterprets our understandings of the social contract itself, placing disability firmly in the realm of American political philosophy; it also asks disability theorists to engage in the complex relationships of intersecting political oppressions, not just recognizing that these oppressions exist, but that they create a constant changing landscape through which to interpret the affects of ableism.

In her first chapter, Simplican demonstrates, through close readings of Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* and Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, that disability has been central to Locke's analysis by tracing the contradictions and ambiguity of Locke's idiot. In his delineations between idiots, mad men, and changelings, Locke contradicts himself about innate versus learned (in)capacity. Yet scholars of the social contract have taken as a given that capacity is still central to political membership, mainly because those deemed as falling below this capacity threshold are still accorded charity. Simplican's work questions this naturalizing of capacity as inherent for political membership; yet because of Locke's ambiguity of his definition of idiot, Simplican argues that we can still use Locke because, simultaneous to his use of idiot, he highlights human vulnerability. This leads to a key political strategy: exacerbate uncertainty and vulnerability to build political coalition.

In her second chapter, the author explores the construction of mental defect through medicine, exploring the work of Gaspard Itard (who displayed a "wild boy" Victor for European freak show audiences) John Langdon Down (after whom Down's syndrome was named), and

Henry H. Goddard (who created the scientific eugenic foundation for *Buck v Bell*). This is perhaps the book's most teachable chapter for an undergraduate audience, effectively demonstrating how anxiety about disability is historically constructed through and alongside racial and sexual contracts.

In her third chapter, Simplican reads the work of John Rawls alongside several feminist political theorists' responses to Rawls, critiquing feminist theorists for their implicit ableism; for instance, in her reading of Iris Marion Young's critique, Simplican writes, "Young's critique is incomplete. She recognizes how normalization affects people with disabilities, but her own example of wheelchair users threatens to reinforce the precariousness of people with intellectual disabilities" (88). Feminist interventions in social contract theory have continued to stigmatize people with intellectual disability through implicit biases about intellectual capacity.

Simplican's critique of critique may read a little social contract-nerdy, but her conclusions highlight how even those of us who think we are addressing systemic intersecting oppressions can still contribute to underlying ableist ideology because our assumptions about cognitive capacity is so entrenched in how we conceptualize political participation.

While her first three chapters provide meaty close readings and political strategies, her work in her final two chapters reads more anecdotal than theoretical. Simplican's primary intervention in Chapter 4, that we resist measuring empowerment through an inner cognitive consciousness and instead understand empowerment through outward actions, draws on the work of Hannah Arendt alongside the history of the Self Advocacy Movement. While Simplican argues that she is "pushing off Arendt" (100) and "thinking Arendt against Arendt" (101) more than conducting a close reading of Arendt, her method falls out of sync with her first three chapters; Simplican focuses on Arendt's conception of political action as spontaneous, plural,

and public but does not tell us specifically why Arendt is needed to formulate these interventions. In her example of using Arendt against Arendt to claim eating in public as a political action, Simplican does not analyze how this is political action (though we can assume an allusion to the ending of her third chapter, where she cites in passing researchers “find that contact with disabled people is the most reliable predictor of positive attitudes toward people with intellectual disability” [90]), or its relationship to this political anxiety she so carefully weaves through her first three chapters. This lack of analysis is partially rectified in her final chapter, where her ethnographic work with a self-advocacy group couples the descriptive with arguments for humor and dance as destabilizing ableist assumptions and suspending and alleviating anxiety. Simplican’s analysis could be strengthened here by more attention to the group’s audience; they are in a partitioned off restaurant space and their able-bodied facilitators have left for the evening. The witnesses to this dance and humour, those who would presumably have their ableist assumptions destabilized, are the restaurant staff. What does it mean that the audience is working class, a group with arguably more proximity to disabled people than the middle and upper class? More analysis is needed to convey how the anxiety of the capacity contract interacts with class positions in an increasingly stratified neoliberal economy.

That Simplican’s final two chapters leave me with more questions than answers speaks to the importance of her critique, the need for more scholars to seriously consider the social contract and disability. The book’s intervention in analyzing the role of ableist anxiety in the production of liberal citizenship is transformative and astute. Simplican calls us all to understand this anxiety about disability as a political resource. How we do this is an open-ended and exciting question for social contract scholars and disability theorists.