

critical theory's well-worn recognition versus redistribution debate. By underscoring marriage's role as an instrument of economic distribution that, before the Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell* ruling, was also deeply structured by sex classification, Currah "troubles the relegation of sex reclassification to the noneconomic" and "shows how the status-based wrongs experienced by people whose gender identity does not conform to social expectations have been deeply imbricated in matters of distributive justice" (p. 102).

Chapter 5 moves away from the figurative bonds of matrimony to the chillingly literal bonds of US prisons. The sex classification policy under scrutiny here is the "freeze-frame" policy mandating that whatever level of treatment a transgender prisoner is receiving at the time they are first incarcerated must determine the level of treatment they will be provided during the term of their incarceration (p. 28). As a result of this policy, many transgender prisoners in the United States are confined in facilities that align with their genital sex, rather than their gender identity, placing them at heightened risk of sexual assault and other forms of violence. Although most critiques of the freeze-frame policy cast it as simply another instance of anti-trans discrimination, Currah reaches beyond the "trans-cis divide" to explore how the policy reflects not merely transphobia but also "larger social logics of incarceration" (pp. 123–24). The upshot of this incisive analysis is the troubling realization that much advocacy on behalf of trans prisoners by mainstream trans rights groups fails to challenge the carceral and neoliberal logics underpinning freeze-frame and other similar policies that make prisons into "dead zones": carceral "islands around which time and civil society flow, but which they do not penetrate," where inmates, regardless of gender identity, are subjected to "a sort of 'living death'" (pp. 134, 137).

Currah's provocative invitation to view the treatment of trans prisoners outside the frame of transphobia in chapter 5 moves seamlessly into the book's conclusion, which offers a timely meditation not only on the necessity but also the limitations of an identity politics orchestrated around the umbrella category "transgender." Although Currah concedes that identity politics has a vital role to play in defending against the targeting of transgender people by a revanchist Right, he is adamant that a movement that embraces gender pluralism while neglecting gender hierarchy will never achieve its goals (p. 145). In Currah's words, a "gender pluralist politics" that "affirms the demands for recognition of sexual and gender minorities" and "makes room for, even celebrates, all the ways in which gender can be revised, remixed, reworked" is "a good thing. But it's not everything" (pp. 146, 149–50).

The "crucial tool" that "risks getting lost" in the move to gender pluralism, Currah argues, is an old-fashioned and decidedly second-wave feminist "emphasis on *asymmetry*" (p. 148). As *Sex Is as Sex Does* shows, the labels that sort us

into M or F "are anchored by forces deeply embedded in the machinery of governance" (p. 147) that predate by centuries the articulation of transgender as a political identity and the targeting of transgender people with discriminatory practices and policies. This is why even "the political jurisdictions most progressive on trans issues" have not stopped "assigning M or F at birth to the vast majority of the newborn population" (p. 147). Sex classification is not only about stigmatizing people with trans or nonbinary genders; it is also about maintaining women's subordination to men. Absent an explicitly feminist challenge to "the larger asymmetry of power in gender relations that is responsible for cementing sex into the legal structures in the first place and is now responsible for continuing gender subordination outside the legal sphere," Currah declares, the trans political movement "will indeed turn out to have been nothing more than a minoritizing, single-focused, limited political project" unable to effect "the kinds of changes we need to make life livable" (pp. 13–14, 151).

Taken together, *Citizenship on the Edge* and *Sex Is as Sex Does* show that lives often described as marginalized are, in fact, central to grasping the forces structuring contemporary political life. At a time when governments and social movements around the globe are working to extirpate critical theory, critical race theory, feminism, and queer theory from educational curricula and public discourse, it is heartening to see these rich and varied intellectual traditions being brought to bear by a diverse set of scholars to illuminate concepts like citizenship and the state and to theorize sex, gender, race, and (dis)ability as potent instruments of governmentality.

**Fanaticism: A Political Philosophical History.** By Zachary R. Goldsmith. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. 196p. \$49.95 cloth.  
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To even consider writing a monograph on fanaticism, in general, and on political fanaticism, in particular, requires a certain amount of scholarly courage, because it implies the ability to avoid not only the Scylla of commonsense platitudes but also the Charybdis of abstract analytical claims with little or no relevance to real life. Fortunately, Zachary Goldsmith has both the courage and the navigation skills to bring this ship to shore in one piece. All maritime metaphors aside, this book presents a necessary reminder of the many forms that fanaticism has taken throughout history and of its versatility today.

It is precisely its resilience and adaptability that signal a feature of fanaticism worth preserving, in the right amount, for the sake of a healthy political life: passion. To his merit,

Goldsmith agrees from the very beginning with authors like Max Weber or Michael Walzer that “a politics totally devoid of passion is also undesirable” (p. 1). According to him, this notion emerged by the eighteenth century, when “enthusiasm presented itself as a third way between fanaticism, on the one hand, and a bloodless rationalistic politics, on the other” (p. 5). The ways in which the Greek word *enthousiasmos* came to double for the Latin *fanaticus* (from *fanum*, meaning “temple” or “holy place”) are detailed in chapter 2. Initially, both words came to designate the possession by a deity as part of a cultic practice, yet even for the ancients, enthusiasm appeared “a gentler form of divine inspiration” than fanaticism, as documented, for example, in the Platonic dialogues *Ion* and *Phaedrus* (pp. 21–23).

As a matter of fact, chapter 2 is the only one that justifies the inclusion of the word “history” in the subtitle of the book. Goldsmith identifies three stages in the development of the concept. According to this history, the Roman cultic understanding of fanaticism was followed by the premodern and then the modern, theological one that crystallized during the Reformation and solidified around the time of the French Revolution into the political and social sense that we tend to associate with fanaticism today. These shifts were accompanied by the transformation of an ontological concept (“in the ancient world a fanatic was thought to be truly possessed by a deity”) into an analogical one (“it is *as if* this person is truly possessed by a deity”). Yet the main characteristics of the fanatic remained the same: excessive passion and a non-negotiable belief in the possession of the Truth, “often implying a highly intellectualized plan to remake the world according to some *a priori* plans” (pp. 51–52).

Each of the next three chapters, representing the bulk of the monograph, focuses on one author—Kant, Burke, and Dostoevsky, respectively: despite their national, temporal, and philosophical differences, they were chosen for their various takes on political fanaticism during the French Revolution and after. This kind of selection always involves a fair amount of subjectivity that needs to be respected as such; yet, in this case, one may wonder why, the French Revolution being first and foremost a national event, Goldsmith did not include a French author as well. Tocqueville, for example, comes to mind as an excellent candidate: he is someone with a deep understanding of religious and political fanaticism on both sides of the Atlantic.

Considering the centrality Goldsmith assigns to the French Revolution for understanding the “transition” from religious to political fanaticism, the reader is left wondering what might have been peculiar to France during the eighteenth century that allowed or even encouraged such a metamorphosis. After all, at that time, France was not the most modernized country in the Western world. Furthermore, the possibility that religious

and political fanaticisms do not succeed one another but, on the contrary, coexist is never seriously considered, despite being alluded to. Isn't it possible that religious convictions become fanatical only when they embrace political overtones, whereas political fanaticism requires, of necessity, a pseudo-religious faith in one's Truth? If so, then it is not only the Reformation that ought to draw the attention of the historian of ideas but also American Puritanism and its subsequent manifestations during the Great Awakenings.

The concluding chapter serves a dual purpose. First, it provides “a cluster account of fanaticism.” As Goldsmith argues persuasively, “Understanding fanaticism in this way attempts, on the one hand, to display the diversity of the many faces of fanaticism, while also pointing to an underlying unity, to the ‘family resemblances’ among various examples of this phenomenon” (p. 132). The result is a surprisingly neat decalogue of criteria: messianism, against reason, embrace of abstraction, desire for novelty, pursuit of perfection, against limits, embrace of violence, certitude, passion, and, last but not least, “an opium for intellectuals” (p. 140). The description of each addresses many possible questions, yet the relationship between fanaticism and intellectuals remains somewhat muddy. Is fanaticism associated with some “attractiveness to intellectuals” (p. 3) or with some “intellectual pretension” (p. 5)? Although the opium metaphor suggests the former, many of the examples offered throughout the book endorse the latter. One may suspect that the explanation for this ambiguity is related to yet another one: How does individual fanaticism become a mass movement? A possible clarification comes through the analysis dedicated to Dostoevsky's *Demons*: “The history of all fanatical movements are populated by a few Pyotrs [“great fanatics”] at the front and hordes of Erkels [“weak fanatics”] following behind, eager to do what needs to be done” (p. 125).

Showing why extremism “is a necessary but not sufficient condition of fanaticism” and how the latter “is fundamentally antidemocratic, antipolitical, antiliberal, and never necessary” (p. 155) serves the second aim of the last chapter, which is to criticize the few but vocal supporters of political fanaticism. Scholars such as Joel Olson or Alberto Toscano consider political fanaticism a political virtue and attempt to develop a “critical theory of fanaticism” for the “radical transformation of the status quo” (pp. 142–53). Here, Goldsmith does a great job taking apart their arguments, or lack thereof, revealing not only internal inconsistencies but also their potentially devastating consequences if taken off library shelves and implemented in the real world. Nevertheless, one feels like this “up-to-date section” could have been expanded to include forms of fanaticism that are not self-identified as such but otherwise fulfill many, if not all, of the 10 criteria Goldsmith proposes. From the opposite perspective, the demanding reader could also

wonder whether John Locke's old advice that "the opprobrious name of fanatics ... might with more prudence be laid aside and forgotten than made use of" (quoted at p. 38) would not deserve a more serious consideration in today's already polarized and names-throwing political life.

All in all, such shortcomings and some distracting repetitions of ideas and quotes aside (e.g., Pocock on pp. 92 and 97 or Dostoevsky's Kirillov on pp. 115 and 122), Goldsmith's *Fanaticism* represents a significant and timely contribution to a much sought-after balance between "the fanatic and the zombie," as Alain Finkielkraut aptly put it (*The Defeat of the Mind*, 1995). It also serves as a reminder that, as one of Dostoevsky's characters quoted in Goldsmith's book phrases it, "The first [fire] is in people's minds, not on the rooftops" (p. 121).

**The Idea of Prison Abolition.** By Tommie Shelby. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. 248p. \$29.95 cloth.  
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The harms of incarceration have continuously been documented by policy practitioners, academics, activists, and abolitionists. Radical abolitionists argue for the eradication of incarceration as the dominant mode of punishment due to its structurally violent (racist, classist, sexist, ageist, ableist), vengeful (retributive justice model), and unjust foundations, behaviors, and outcomes. Angela Y. Davis has written extensively about the necessity of prison abolition (e.g., see *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 2003, and *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons and Torture*, 2005). Davis, along with other radical abolitionists and political prisoners such as Mumia Abu Jamal, Gina Dent, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Erica R. Meiners, Beth E. Ritchie, and Assata Shakur have opposed prisons and prison reform since the 1960s, arguing that prisons are neither natural nor inevitable. They advocate for the necessity of prison abolition, now.

Tommie Shelby's *The Idea of Prison Abolition* (2022) is a Black critical theory analysis that uses "Afro-analytical Marxism" (p. 14) to engage with the idea of prison obsolescence, and abolition that Davis proposes in her writings, speeches, lectures, and interviews. Shelby is a reformist, arguing that he "continues to believe that incarceration has legitimate and socially necessary uses, including as punishment, and so prisons are not inherently unjust" (p. 15). His reformist position finds its way into his conclusions at every turn—from calling for a moratorium on prisons, to advocating for the adoption of non-profit private prisons. His book provides a close examination—yet not a full picture—of radical abolitionists' arguments.

*The Idea of Prison Abolition* initiates its philosophical critique in Chapter 1's analysis of Davis and other radical

Black abolitionists' claims that prisons are an extension of the systems of slavery and settler-colonialism. They argue that the whole of the criminal justice system is a systemic war against poor and Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people. Shelby argues that these objections initially manifested as calls to revolutionary action against the state and transformed into critiques of the on the ground practice of incarceration (p. 43). Chapters 2, 3, and 4 examine Davis and radical abolitionists' specific critiques of imprisonment, namely, that it is dehumanizing, has its roots in slavery, is functionally racist, and commodifies and privatizes incarceration for profit (the prison industrial complex). Chapter 5 looks at the essential question of whether we should have incarceration, by examining the efficacy of incarceration and alternatives as crime control measures. Shelby concludes by contending that prison abolition is utopian and explores both the merits and flaws of this proposal.

Taken individually, Shelby's chapters provide the reader with some productive reform considerations. In particular, his examination of radical abolitionists' functional critique of prisons is well constructed. He provides a detailed explanation of the structure and purpose of functionalist critiques. Additionally, radical abolitionists advocate for community service as acceptable forms of punishment. Shelby deftly situates the contention that prison labor is fundamentally wrong because it is forced labor within this assertion. These moments highlight Shelby's training and skill as a philosopher and theorist. The problem, however, lies when one considers the totality of his arguments in the context of overall treatment of crime and criminality. The crux of Shelby's argument relies on his ability to prove that the harms of incarceration are justifiable because it deters, incapacitates, and rehabilitates "criminals" (p. 52), yet he does not fully analyze this relationship until Chapter 5—a structural flaw that detracts from his argument. Moreover, his argument overemphasizes the prevalence of "serious crime" (p. 181), does not provide sufficient meaningful citations that support his assertions (see for example p. 154), and at points has recourse to denigrating language, such as "ordinary criminal" (p. 37), "ghetto denizen" (p. 36), and "criminal mentality" (p. 32).

Shelby also has a second underlying argument: prisons are not the same as slavery (pp. 68, 75, 78). I want to be clear: radical abolitionists are not arguing that they are the same, but rather that prisons' foundation, structure, and practices are the genealogical descendant of slavery. Shelby rightly posits this as "*genealogical critique*" (p. 79). The United States (and every other imperial/colonial power) is a nation founded on slave labor, genocide, land theft, patriarchy, and capital accumulation through privatization. As a result, what these societies understand as deviant (against social norms) and criminal (against the law) is steeped in the waters of racism, colonization, slavery, imperialism, and patriarchy (see for example Shelby's