



**Doctoral School of  
International Relations  
and Political Science**

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

**Anna Ujlaki**

**The Political Theory of Migration  
*A Critical Cosmopolitan Care Approach***

Ph.D. Dissertation

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. Habil. Zoltán Gábor Szűcs**  
Habil. Associate Professor

Budapest, 2023

**Institute of Social and Political Sciences**

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## 1. Background and relevance of the research

### 1.1. Should migration be considered an issue?

From the migration crisis in 2015, it is more and more apparent that human movement and migration have serious reasons and consequences both on the side of states who face practical challenges related to migration and on the side of migrants and refugees themselves who experience serious, often life-changing and sometimes life-threatening effects related to their movement. However, the migration crisis and its consequent heightened public discourse around migration have shown something more fundamental, that is, migration is an ineliminable feature, so to speak, a natural fact of human life. The reality is that humans have always migrated.

Notwithstanding, both from the perspective of public political discourse and social scientific research, especially from the viewpoint of political theory, it is common to see migration as a *problem*. Indeed, numerous social, political, economic, and environmental challenges arise in relation to the reasons, the process itself, the outcomes, and the later impacts of human migration. But this does not mean that migration is a phenomenon that should or even could be eradicated from human life.

Political theoretical works on migration usually begin with shocking or even outrageous stories about the death and suffering of migrant people. Most of us are informed about some of these tragedies of persons on the move and ‘outsiders’ thankfully to the world press. We are sometimes even familiar with the names of these people who came into the spotlight either because of the battles they fought for their rights or the tragedies which caused their violent death.

This work is as much about these people as those *without a name*. When I am saying ‘without a name’, I have two things in mind. Apparently, I am thinking about the refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, immigrants, so-called resident aliens, and members of ethnic minorities whose individual sufferings are collectively represented in the stories that have gained public attention. But I also have in mind another person who is ‘nameless’. This person is *the migrant* whom all of us might become. This is the person who might move voluntarily, partly voluntarily, or coerced to move by force, for some reason; either from one area of her home country to another or by crossing state borders. Her movement might be of a short period, recurring, or continuous. And her movement could fundamentally affect her fate, her future, her possibilities, and the very foundations of the security and decency of her life. In some

senses, all of us are this individual concerning that there is an ongoing possibility of human life that a person migrates in one way or another.

This dissertation is about this permanent characteristic of social and political life. It is not only an empathetic or solidaristic attempt to raise awareness of the challenges, dangers, and sufferings, which we could all face in case of becoming a migrant. It is also an inquiry to understand what migration really is, and to get closer to recognizing the fundamental role that human movement and migration play in our social and political communities.

## 1.2. Migration in mainstream political theory

The term ‘migration’ originally derives from the Latin term *migrare* which means ‘to move from one place to another’. Later, migration has become to be seen as a ‘change of residence and habitat, removal or transit from one locality to another, especially at distance’.<sup>1</sup> In this broad sense, migration is intertwined with human existence ever since early humans left Africa and a group of them arrived at the Australian shores at least 40,000 years ago. Interestingly, migration in this broader sense is still relatively unrecognized in political thought.

While both ancient and modern political philosophy has addressed other issues of social and political relevance, the political theory and the ethics of migration came to the fore only in the past three decades. The inquiry about the topic is still partial and impoverished because political theorists and ethicists focus mainly on the *admission* and *inclusion* of *immigrant* people to host countries. Concerning *admission*, mainstream liberal literature is occupied primarily with the debate about closed *versus* open borders. In this regard, the fundamental question is whether the state has a right to restrict immigration. Regarding *inclusion*, political theory focuses on whether and how non-citizens should be included in societies and what challenges the inclusion of non-native populations inflicts.

The *Conventional View* on immigration (the notion was coined by Joseph Carens [2013] the famous advocate of more open borders) insists that the state has a discretionary right to control immigration. According to the *Conventional View*, freedom of movement cannot constitute an absolute right (Miller 2005; Wellman 2008). There are different kinds of arguments for the ‘closed borders’ conclusion, some are more in line with influential public opinions – even fears – about migration, and corresponding arguments on the unjustifiability of these arguments.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/migration> Accessed: 04 December 2022.

- (1) The argument from the *number of members* justifies exclusion in terms of the effectiveness of the state (e.g., Miller 2005; 2016a; Rawls 2000).
- (2) The argument from *territorial jurisdiction* evokes the effectiveness of states as a justification for exclusion (Blake 2013).
- (3) The argument from *self-determination* appeals to the legitimate state's right to the freedom of association, which includes the freedom to refuse to admit non-members (Wellman 2016; he makes a similar argument in Wellman – Cole 2011).
- (4) The argument from *culture* justifies exclusion based on the idea that mass immigration would fundamentally transform the culture of the host society (e.g., Miller 2016a; 2016b; Kymlicka 2003; Rawls 2000, Walzer 1983; and even advocates of open borders, such as Carens [1992] recognize the argument from culture as a good reason to exclude immigrants; cf. Oberman 2016; Scheffler 2007).
- (5) The argument from *nationality* (cf. Kukathas 2014) is closely connected to the former argument from culture. The latter appeals to the idea that obligations of the members of a state are owed precisely to fellow members. In this framework, the fundamental change of the society's culture, the undermining character of fundamentally different values (Buchanan 1995), and the lack of *solidarity* and *fairness* between members (Miller 1995) are all potential dangers connected to immigration.
- (6) The argument from *distributive justice* justifies exclusion with the idea of the need to avoid deepening injustices (e.g., Isbister 2000; cf. Oberman 2016).
- (7) The argument from *property rights* evokes considerations of 'associative ownership' (Pevnick 2011).
- (8) A different kind of approach is Abizadeh's (2008), call this the *democratic justification* argument. His approach is specific in the sense that it applies the perspective of democratic theory (instead of the predominantly egalitarian approaches of liberal theory), and claims that despite the widely accepted view that democratic theory is straightforwardly connected to the unilateral right to control borders, migration controls require a democratic justification for all, hence they coerce all outsiders.

Today, the case for open borders is perhaps as influential as the Conventional View, enough if one thinks about Carens' early statement about 'borders have guards and guards have guns' (Carens 1987, p. 271) and the intuitive power of this idea. There are three possible strategies to argue for a right to immigrate (categorized by Miller 2016b):

- (1) the *direct strategy* (if it is declared as a basic human need),
- (2) the *instrumental strategy* (if it is regarded as essential to the realization of an already declared human right), and
- (3) the *cantilever strategy* (if there is a logical connection between a claim to the right to immigration and other already declared rights).

The most influential argument for open borders is offered by Carens, who relies on the cantilever strategy. In his view, the domestic freedom of movement (declared, in practice, by Article 13 of UDHR) and the freedom to move internationally are logically connected, and it would be irrational not to recognize the latter as a fundamental right (Carens 1992, 2013). In Carens's view, 'every reason why one might want to move within a state may also be a reason for moving between states' (Carens 2013, p. 239). However, he recognizes that a world with open borders is currently only an ideal, because of *feasibility* issues. Therefore, in this later work of his, he focuses on immigration, for the most part, within the framework of the Conventional View. Therefore, the dissertation shows that both sides of the closed *versus* open borders debate address the very similar questions from a quite similar perspective.

### 1.3. Migration in out-of-the-mainstream literature

In order to offer an alternative approach to the normative political theory of migration, the dissertation turns to novel, more critical literature out of the mainstream. In doing so, it utilizes contemporary republican literature on the dominating character of border controls and immigration restrictions (e.g., Benton 2014, Bohman 2012, Honohan 2014, Hoye 2021, Laborde 2010, Sager 2017). Deportation, detention, and dehumanization are also less addressed issues in the political theory of migration (Bosniak 2010, Silverman 2016), and there are serious attempts to challenge the concept of 'illegality' of migrants (Benhabib 2004, Mendoza 2016). Crimes related to trafficking and smuggling are also addressed lately (Ottonelli – Torresi 2016).

Specifically feminist contributions to the literature on migration are also relatively new. There are arguments about the feminization of migration (Castles – Miller 1993, Passerini et al. 2007, Nawyn 2010), family migration (Yong 2016, Thorne et al. 2003), and there is a growing literature about the feminist *ethics of care* understood as an ethic of migration (Datta et al. 2010;

Hamington 2017; Raghuram 2016; Robinson 1999; Williams 2011). The issues of sexism and racism in the enforcement of migration controls have appeared relatively new in the field (Fine 2016; Mendoza 2016). Furthermore, interestingly, temporary and seasonal workers are also underrepresented in the mainstream literature, as opposed to legal residents (Bauböck 2011; Carens 2008), as well as external and transnational citizenship are underrepresented in mainstream discussions (Bauböck 2006). There are attempts to balance the topic of immigration with an inquiry into emigration and the phenomenon called 'brain drain' (Blake – Brock 2014, Stilz 2016; Sager 2016).

What seems to be troubling here, concerning the mainstream literature, is its simplified view of the state and the nation (sometimes the relationship between the two concepts is not explicated), the fixed nature of state boundaries, and a perspective that overrepresents the problems that migration bears on host countries, opposed to the problems with which different migrant figures face in connection to their movement. Fortunately, there are attempts in political theory to address these issues as well. The state centrism of contemporary approaches to migration is criticized by Benhabib. In her view, liberal democracies are fundamentally devoted to claims to self-determination, on the one hand, and principles of human rights, on the other. She claims that to address this 'dual commitment', the state centrism of mainstream approaches must be challenged, and cross-border migration should be treated as an essential feature of the modern world (Benhabib 2004). Shachar (2020; 2022) challenges another presumption of mainstream theories, namely, their view of borders as territorially fixed boundaries, and she proposes the conceptions of the *shifting border* and *gated citizenship*, to show that states control migration in a highly selective way. The standpoint of mainstream theories, from which they are approaching migration, and which is analogous to the viewpoint of the state, is challenged by theorists who advocate an approach that takes the experiences of migrants, that is, the 'migrants' eye-view' seriously (Sager 2018). Nail's (2015) approach to historically addressing the 'figure of the migrant' is also exceptional in the sense that it highlights how migration is fundamentally intertwined with the conceptions of exclusion and expulsion. Both Sager and Nail challenge the common view that regards migration as a *problem* and argue instead that migration is an ordinary element of human life.



**2. Applied methods**

2.1. The analytical method: two levels of the argument

The aim of the dissertation is twofold. First, it critically examines the current state of the literature. In doing so, it puts forward a *two-pronged criticism* of the mainstream political theory of migration distinguishing analytically between two levels of the argument. On the *epistemological level*, it criticizes the most prominent works for their bias towards *methodological nationalism*, by which they treat the nation-state in an inadequate way and give preference to immobility and sedentariness at the expense of mobility, motion, and change. On the *normative level*, it challenges what I call the *host standpoint* of mainstream literature, manifested in what I label as the thesis of *benevolent superiority* and the *alarmist agenda*. The argument in this regard is that the normative discussion about migration is addressed from a perspective analogous to the viewpoint of host or destination states; and this partial approach leaves out several essential elements of migration from consideration.

The second aim of the dissertation is to outline an alternative approach to migration on both levels of the argument. On the epistemological level, methodological nationalism is substituted with *critical cosmopolitanism*, which includes a more complex understanding of borders and boundaries in its agenda and describes migration as a broader phenomenon with various possible forms, reasons, and effects. On the normative level, the host standpoint is supplemented with a feminist *care* approach to the ethics and politics of migration. The care approach is intended to highlight the limitations of the individualistic and universalistic ethical and political theories and offers a perspective to migration in which care and vulnerability gain moral importance, and the recognition of others and ‘otherness’, as well as the interconnectedness of the world are properly addressed.

The resulting approach to migration is what I call the *Critical Cosmopolitan Care (CCC)* approach which aims not only to critically examine the current discussions about migration but also to offer a substantive solution to it (**Table 1**).

	<b>The Mainstream Political Theory of Migration</b>	<b>A Critical Cosmopolitan Care Approach</b>
<b>Epistemological level</b>	<i>Methodological Nationalism</i>	<i>Critical Cosmopolitanism</i>
<b>Normative level</b>	The <i>Host Standpoint</i>	The Ethics and Politics of <i>Care</i>

**Table 1.** Mainstream approaches to migration versus a CCC Approach

## 2.2. Purely normative theory and empirically grounded normative theory

The main idea behind this work is to argue that there are indeed answers to these problems inflicted by migration in contemporary mainstream normative political theory of migration, these answers are partly unsatisfactory in depicting what human migration truly is, analyzing its own underlying problems, and offering the right normative answers for it. This work is purely normative in the sense that it does not contain its own empirical findings, however, the critique and the answers this work offers build on existing literature on normative political theory as well as ‘empirically grounded normative theory’ (Ackerly et al. 2021) or ‘unified political theory’ (Bauböck 2008) (among this literature the dissertation utilizes the findings of Santos 2021, Stivens 2017, Shachar 2022).

## 2.3. Interdisciplinary sensitivity

The dissertation also borrows ideas and results from more interdisciplinary research for strengthening its arguments. An important preliminary example of the interdisciplinary sensitivity behind this work is related to the very notion of the *migrant* and *migration*. While most of normative theory focuses on *immigration*, the dissertation borrows a broader definition of these concepts from other disciplines (such as migration studies, sociology, and demography studies), that give equal consideration to a broad range of migrant persons, such as long-term non-citizen residents, temporary and guest workers, circular migrants, foreign students, visitors and, of course, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked persons, and forcedly displaced people. In doing so, it builds primarily on the works of Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003), and Alex Sager (2016b; 2018).

It is also particularly sensitive to the different *social characteristics* of migrant people, primarily gender, but race, social class, and age can also seriously affect their migratory experiences (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Nawyn 2010). Furthermore, the dissertation offers a broader understanding of migration: it reflects on the similarities and correlations between international and *internal* migration while giving space to understand the dimension of *emigration*. The work is also deeply committed to the idea to theorize migration not only as a phenomenon during persons’ movement but also as something that affects our lives *before* attempting to migrate and long after we have migrated.

## 2.4. A novel approach

This work is placed on the more critical side of contemporary debates about the political theory of migration. It attempts to show that there is indeed a wide normative literature on migration, however, this influential literature is inapt to offer answers for several issues on human movement, and the reasons for these are rather systematic underlying biases in the way we conceive of political theorizing (and, more broadly, how we are doing social sciences) rather than results of *ad hoc* inaccuracies. In order to formulate this criticism, it welcomes a broad range of alternative research on the topic, however, it does not stop here. It also offers one possible solution, which is partly feminist, to show that migration is a broader and more profound part of human life with its diverse and serious implications on our lives. It does not claim that the mainstream literature and its focus on the admission and inclusion of migrants would not be of huge importance, rather, it re-orientes normative political theory of migration to equally consider more aspects of migration, and in doing so, to challenge the ways in which we typically answer the questions around migration. In this sense, the dissertation is a programmatic work, the Critical Cosmopolitan Care approach that is a novel approach rather than a novel substantive theory for normative political theorizing.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. A review of the literature

- In the literature review, the dissertation offers a chronological sketch for reconstructing the place of migration in political thought.
- It offers a brief sketch about how migration has been regarded as problematic and that the 'domestic' and the 'citizen' have always been favored against the 'outside' world and the 'stranger'.
- It demonstrates how migration is put aside as an important issue in John Rawls's political philosophy by what I call the 'Closed System Premise', generating a problem of *circularity* by which Rawls transfers the topic of migration from the scope of his domestic theories of justice to his foreign policy focused theory and *vice versa*.
- It shows why Rawls's obscure remarks on migration are problematic.
- It offers an unusual interpretation of Rawls's original concepts to offer an alternative, however, fundamentally Rawlsian interpretation of migration arguing that there is

nothing that makes deep disagreements between migrants and citizens more dangerous than domestic disagreements.

- It illustrates that, surprisingly, despite the differences between Rawlsian liberal and republican political theory, it is the Rawlsian legacy that challenges Philip Pettit to offer a genuinely republican approach to migration despite the latter's potential (as it is shown by some contemporary republican arguments).
- Then, it offers a comprehensive literature review on mainstream discussions on migration as well as on the potential critical positions that might be helpful in overcoming the shortcomings of the former.

### 3.2. The *Dual Bias* of political theory of migration

- The main result of the first, critical part, of the dissertation is that it detects and analytically differentiates between two levels in which the mainstream literature is biased.
- On the epistemological level of this criticism, the dissertation appeals to the criticism of *methodological nationalism* and shows how deeply it biases the discussions on admission and inclusion.
- On the normative level, it shows how what I call the *host standpoint* makes it difficult to address the reasons, consequences, underlying characteristics, and implications of migration in its complexity.
- It demonstrates that the host standpoint is linked to the unique language of normative political theory with its 'classical' framework of addressing the political realm with a specific focus on the relationship between the state and its citizens. The dissertation shows that, in contrast, several types of human migration and other social, political, economic, and environmental issues *extend* both beyond the analytical and real boundaries of the political community and exceed this special relationship between the state and its subject. Therefore, the problem is that addressing these from the 'classical' framework of political theory that focuses on the *domestic* realm would predetermine the language with which rights and obligations will be discussed.
- The conception of the host standpoint is intended to show that mainstream literature applies the perspective of advanced liberal states (primary host states) when addressing migration, and this leads to a specific asymmetry in its analysis and in the normative answers provided to the issues of migrants and refugees.
- The dissertation shows how the host standpoint applies to both less skeptical approaches to migration (primarily within the *human rights discourse*) generating what I call the

*benevolent superiority thesis* (it is *benevolent* in the sense that it starts from the idea that host states have certain obligations towards these people, however, this acceptance is connected to a moral stance of *superiority*, in the sense that it reserves the option to the unfulfillment of these obligations under certain contexts in which the fulfillment would require too excessive costs from the part of host states) and the more *alarmist view* (that base their justification of immigration restrictions on the threat posed by migrants to the culture, economy, population density, or political processes of host states).

### 3.3. The *Critical Cosmopolitan Care* (CCC) Approach

- The second, substantive, part of the dissertation sketches the CCC approach on two levels. On the epistemological level, it highlights the commonalities and differences between the different approaches to *critical cosmopolitanism* that attempt to overcome the shortcomings of methodological nationalism.
- In doing so, it demonstrates how critical cosmopolitanism could be formulated as an epistemological framework for addressing migration.
- On the normative level, the dissertation shows what *feminisms* offer us to show the underlying characteristics of human migration in general addressing differently the *empirical, political theoretical, and ethical* aspects.
- Accordingly, it offers an argument for a feminist *care ethics and politics* as a possible and helpful alternative normative framework for addressing migration.

### 3.4. The implications of the CCC approach

- The dissertation addresses the direct implications of the CCC approach both in abstract and practical terms.
- The more *abstract, theoretical*, implications highlight how the CCC approach might help us to acknowledge (1) *the complexity of the social-political world*, (2) the role of our *joint responsibilities* in the formation of unequal statuses, and (3) the moral and political significance of human *vulnerability*.
- The acknowledgment of (1) *the complexity of the social-political world* means that the CCC approach is a ‘global’ rather than an ‘international’: instead of taking states almost exclusively as the appropriate unit of analysis of the international sphere, it considers individuals as equally important subjects of the inquiry and makes room for a balanced view of ethically significant reasons for migration as well as for considering the relevant group characteristics of migrant people.

- The acknowledgment of (2) the role of our *joint responsibilities* in the formation of unequal statuses means that the CCC approach could highlight that the world as we see it now is partly a result of human conduct and there is a responsibility for it that can be reasonably attributed to those whose agency in creating this state of affairs can be established. Nation-building, colonization, and technological development, in fact, largely determine the distribution of environmental, social, and economic resources, therefore strongly influencing different claims. From this approach, others' deprivations, inequalities, dependencies, and oppressions can no longer be seen as results of their 'misfortune'.
- The acknowledgment of (3) the moral and political significance of human *vulnerability* means that hence migration is an experience depending on one's race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and social class, the CCC approach is especially sensitive to the fact that the most vulnerable groups of contemporary societies suffer from the very same patterns of dependency and domination.
- The more *direct, practical*, implications demonstrate how the CCC approach could offer more robust normative answers to some issues of migration. In doing so, it addresses three cases: (1) the case of *persons stuck in transit states or camps*, (2) the case of *slow onset climate change migration*, and (3) the case of the *global care chain*.
- The (1) case of *persons stuck in transit states or camps* demonstrates that despite the widely accepted principles of international migration, such as the *non-refoulement* principle (that prohibits states from transferring or removing individuals from their jurisdiction in cases where the person would be expectedly exposed to harm upon return), states have and indeed use a broad range of tools and mechanisms to avert their share of responsibilities regarding migrants and refugees. In consequence, several migrants spend plenty of time, sometimes years, in transit countries, waiting zones, refugee camps, or immigration detention centers such as in the case of Hungarian transit zones in the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2015 and 2020. It is important to add that the COVID-19 Pandemic, for example, heightened the health risks for people living 'temporarily' in these areas. Another aspect of the case of these persons is that sometimes there is a gendered characteristic (moreover, a 'maternal' element) in who volunteers in asylum seeker advocacy groups and participates in social movements against government refugee and migration policies.

- The (2) case of *slow onset climate change migration* highlights that the fact that particular areas of the world slowly become unlivable, as in the case of the Pacific Island States, will be of serious consequences. Because slow onset events such as sea level rise, salinization, drought, and desertification happen gradually, there is a gap in the protection of migration and displacement related to slow onset climate change, because it is not easy to ascertain the point from which one should be considered as a refugee and not an economic migrant, for example. The CCC approach can show that certain people are more vulnerable to certain risks, even if that risk, in a given period of time, seems less radical than the effects of sudden disasters.
- The (3) case of *global care chain* reflects on the feminization of migration: it shows that for works of maintaining daily life and doing care work, in developed countries the ‘cheapest’ solution is to hire an immigrant woman from a poor country to do this work. The CCC approach could highlight that women in care chains do not abandon their traditionally unpaid care ‘duties’ at home, but the opposite, they have parallel responsibilities and often send *remittances* to their families left in their countries of origin. They are often *invisible* in two senses: the care work they do is usually regarded as invisible in patriarchal societies, but very often they are invisible themselves in the sense of being ‘unauthorized’ migrants. The CCC approach could reveal these vulnerabilities and highlight care needs with regard to the intersectional characteristics of human experience in movement and migration.
- The dissertation also addresses some *possible objections* to why critical cosmopolitanism should be offered on the epistemological level, why the feminist ethics and politics of care should be offered on the normative level, and finally, it addresses some possible *general* objections to the entire CCC approach.
- As an *indirect* implication, the dissertation synthesizes the underlying concerns of *vulnerability* and *domination* of contemporary republican political theory and feminist political thought and. It shows that the synthesized republican-feminist position can contribute to the acknowledgment of certain dispossessions of a voice, a status, and the very possibility to formulate claims for acquiring such a status (especially striking in the case of migrants and refugees).
- As another *indirect* implication, the dissertation offers an argument that the focus on *experience* and the inherent fact of *exclusion* in human migration and movement that are fundamental to the CCC approach could be welcomed by contemporary realist political theorists and their search for a distinctively political normativity. The argument here is that

exclusion is inherently political because it is (1) *definitive* (it hinders any further possibilities to get back into the ‘game’ or be included in the first place; it is (2) *propulsive* in the sense that it is a primary driving force for the political sphere (politics not only produces its excluded, but those who exclude often benefit from the dispossession of liberty, equality, recognition, voice, economic security, or certain statuses of the excluded). Finally, exclusion is (3) *structural* (in seemingly private exclusions gender, race, sexual orientation, and other social characteristics often can be underlying reasons for excluding someone). The argument here shows that both three characteristics are especially present in *exclusion in migration*, which strengthens the overall argument of the dissertation that political theorizing should start from the idea of movement and migration.

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## 5. The author's publication on the topic

### Peer-reviewed Journal Articles (In English Journals)

Gyulai Attila, Ujlaki Anna (2021): The political AI: A realist account of AI regulation. *Információs Társadalom: Társadalomtudományi Folyóirat* 21 (2): 29–42. <https://doi.org/10.22503/inftars.XXI.2021.2.3>

### Peer-reviewed Journal Articles (In Hungarian Journals)

Ujlaki Anna (Forthcoming): Politikai kötelezettségek az állampolgárságon túl: Hogyan magyarázhatók a nemállampolgárok politikai kötelezettségei? *Politikatudományi Szemle*

Ujlaki Anna (Forthcoming): Rawls és a migráció. *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* 2022 (2)

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