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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(PLAYS ON PRINCIPLE: TEN 10-MINUTE PLAYS)

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Plays on Principle (which originally included seven of the ten plays here) was premiered at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore in 2019 as part of a bicentennial celebration. The production was funded by a Creativity Grant awarded to the playwright by the Maryland State Arts Council.

CAST:

Christine Demuth	Michelle Lee
Chris Edwards	Richard Peck
Flinn Leigh Eng	Vernon Rey
Melissa Feliciano	Molly Ruhlman
Layla Hodge	Owen Sahnou
Timothy Johnson	Sally Wall

PRODUCTION:

Director	Pat Montley
Set, Sound & Lighting Designer	Daryl Beard
Stage Managers	Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo
Set Crew	Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnou

Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Enough!</i>	7
Should we give until it hurts? (2 any gender)	
<i>Life/Choice</i>	15
How can we disagree without being disagreeable? (2w.)	
<i>Just Deserts</i>	24
Which is more important—justice or mercy? (1m., 1w.)	
<i>Suckled by Wolves</i>	33
Who deserves forgiveness? (2m.)	
<i>March!</i>	42
Is it ever OK to compromise our values? What happens when we do? (2w.)	
<i>Voting Your Conscience</i>	49
How do we decide if the end justifies the means? (2 any gender)	
<i>Foxholes</i>	57
What gives meaning to life? (1m., 1 any gender)	
<i>Madrigal in Black and White</i>	67
How can we move beyond racial stereotypes? (4w.)	
<i>The Cutting</i>	76
Who gets to say which human life has worth? (1m., 1w.)	
<i>Rachel Carson Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea</i>	85
What would you sacrifice to save the earth? (2m., 1w.)	

For Sally
my best critic
and dearest

Enough

CHARACTERS

ZERO: Any age, race, sex; a homeless person who is intelligent, well read, frustrated, desperate and clever.

RAY: Any age, race, sex; a business executive who is wealthy, accustomed to power and smug.

TIME: Any time.

PLACE: A surrealistic crossroads in a distant place of metaphor/nightmare, or a street corner.

Question: Should we give until it hurts?

(A bench on a street corner. ZERO's stuff includes a beat-up backpack, an open McDonald's bag and a small hand drum.

At lights up, ZERO, unkempt, barefoot and wearing shabby clothing, beats the drum on bench.)

ZERO (*singing to the tune of "Jingle Bells"*).

BEAT THE DRUM,

BEAT THE DRUM,

BEAT IT LOUD AND CLEAR.

IF YOU DO NOT SHARE THE WEALTH,

THE END IS SURELY NEAR ... EAR!

SOME HAVE MUCH,

SOME HAVE LESS,

SOME HAVE NONE AT ALL.

NOW'S THE TIME TO EQUALIZE,

SO HEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE CALL.

(RAY enters, dressed in a suit, working a smartphone or its futuristic equivalent. He looks out, as though waiting for someone. ZERO stares at RAY, who is oblivious.)

ZERO *(cont'd)*.

NOW'S THE TIME TO EQUALIZE,
SO HEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE CALL.

(ZERO continues to beat the drum.

RAY now notices ZERO's stare and tries to ignore it but grows increasingly uncomfortable.)

RAY. What?

(ZERO stops playing, continues to stare.)

RAY *(cont'd)*. What?!

ZERO. I suffer.

RAY. I see.

ZERO. Will you help?

RAY *(unnerved)*. Well ... I guess ... yes ... of course. Not to help would be selfish, wouldn't it?

(RAY extracts a dollar bill from his wallet and drops it into ZERO's McDonald's bag. He waits for a "thank you.")

RAY *(cont'd)*. Don't bother to thank me. It's my *moral* obligation.

ZERO. Yes, that's true.

RAY. You're welcome.

(Beat.)

ZERO. I need more.

RAY. More?

ZERO. I still suffer.

RAY. Well, *do* something about it.

ZERO. What?

RAY. Pick yourself up by your own—

ZERO. I have no boots.

RAY. Is that my problem?

ZERO. Yes.

RAY. Why?

ZERO. Because you have many.

RAY. Which I worked very hard to get.

ZERO. No harder than I.

RAY. Then why don't you have—?

ZERO. Poor soil. Drought. Flood. Famine. War. Uneven playing field. Unemployment. Bad government.

RAY. Get rid of it.

ZERO. I tried.

RAY. Look, I sympathize ...

ZERO. Show me.

RAY. Oh, all right. (*Putting another bill in ZERO's bag.*)
Here's a ten.

(ZERO does not look at it.)

RAY (*cont'd*). Now will you leave me alone?

ZERO. You are the one free to leave.

RAY. I'm meeting someone here.

ZERO. I see.

RAY. Look, I've been more than generous.

ZERO. You have given from your excess.

RAY. What do you expect?

ZERO. More.

RAY. Why?

ZERO. The same sun shines on me that shines on you.

RAY. So what? What gives you the right to—

ZERO. To live?

RAY. To live off me?

ZERO. No one should have more than enough ... while others have less than they need.

RAY. Says who?

ZERO. The moral philosophers.

RAY. Bunk!

ZERO. It is written.

RAY. Where?

ZERO. In the hearts of the just.

(Beat.)

RAY. Oh all right! *(Counts two bills into ZERO's bag.)*
Twenty, forty.

(ZERO does not look at them, continuing to stare at RAY, who grows exasperated with ZERO's ingratitude.)

RAY *(cont'd)*. Just how much do you want?

ZERO. As much as I'm entitled to.

RAY. And what would that be?

ZERO. Give until you reach the level of "marginal utility."

RAY. The what?

ZERO. The level at which, to give more would cause as much suffering to you as would be relieved in me.

RAY. Where did you get that wacko idea?