



“Summary of article by Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman: Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory” in Frontier Issues in Economic Thought, Volume 3: Human Well-Being and Economic Goals, Island Press: Washington DC, 1997. pp. 227-231

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Citizenship defines the status of an individual in society and is thus of fundamental importance for enhancing individual wellbeing. Postwar citizenship theorists defined citizenship primarily in terms of rights. In more recent years, two major critiques of this dominant view of citizenship have arisen and are summarized in this article. One set of critiques concerns the need for more active assertions of citizen responsibilities and virtues, such as economic self-reliance, political participation, and civility. The other set of critiques involves the need for the citizenship concept to adjust to the social and cultural pluralism of modern societies.

RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND VIRTUES OF CITIZENSHIP

T.H. Marshall was the most influential thinker of the postwar citizenship theorists. He advocated state guarantees of social rights, including rights to public education, health care, unemployment insurance, and pensions, to enable the disadvantaged to enter the mainstream of society and to exercise their political and civil rights. This conception of citizenship is often thought of as passive or private citizenship. It emphasizes passive entitlements without obligations.

The New Right argues that these rights have produced passivity and dependency among the poor, without improving their life chances; such passive citizenship overlooks ways in which people need to fulfill obligations, such as supporting themselves, to be accepted as full members of society. To ensure the full social and cultural integration of the poor, society must look "beyond entitlements" and focus on the responsibility to earn a living.

In response, critics of the New Right argue that the welfare-dependency model ignores other forces, such as global restructuring, which lead to unemployment. In addition, New Right reforms of the 1980s -- tax cuts, deregulation, and freer trade -- appear to have done little to promote responsible citizenship. Rather, unprecedented greed and economic recklessness have resulted, leaving many citizens disenfranchised and unable to participate in the new economy.

Many left and feminist critics of the New Right agree that citizenship entails not only rights but also responsibilities. However, they contend that rights must first be ensured before people can be expected to fulfill all their responsibilities. Many leftists hesitate to impose obligations such as work requirements, believing that lack of jobs, not lack of motivation, prevents people from working. Many feminists believe that the rhetoric of economic self-sufficiency often masks underlying assumptions that men should be breadwinners and that women should care for

children and the home, thus increasing women's dependence on men and reinforcing barriers to women's full participation in society.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of both citizen rights and citizen responsibilities, critics of postwar citizenship concepts also recognize that numerous personal lifestyle decisions affect basic public policy concerns: families need to take care of their members, or the state would be overwhelmed; citizens must adopt responsible habits of resource use or public environmental goals cannot be met; and there can be no progress towards a more just society if citizens are prejudiced and intolerant. At the same time, civility and public spirit appear to be in decline. Thus, citizenship theorists recently have considered how to instill those virtues which enable citizens to carry out their responsibilities in both the private and public spheres. Recommendations have been developed from a variety of perspectives, including the following:

The New Right appears to depend on the market to teach responsibility and related virtues necessary for citizenship. Critics say that market forces alone are inadequate for this task.

The left emphasizes freedom and the devolution of power through participatory democracy, but it has been criticized for assuming that responsibility will be learned through political participation alone. Participating citizens may still be irresponsible -- pushing for tax breaks and other benefits for themselves while scapegoating the poor or certain ethnic groups.

Civic republicans view political life as of great intrinsic value for those who participate in it; they also view public life as superior to private life. However, most people in the modern world find their greatest pleasure in their private lives, not their public activities -- a view shared by citizenship theorists of virtually all other perspectives. Civic republicans believe that this has resulted from the decline of public life, but it may have resulted more from the enrichment of private life.

Civil society theorists emphasize the importance of civility and self-control, but believe that these virtues are best learned through the voluntary organizations of civil society. Such groups, by relying on personal approval and disapproval rather than legal punishments, enable a sense of personal responsibility to be internalized. Yet there is little empirical evidence to show that exposure to and participation in civil society creates civic virtue. Neighborhood groups, families, and churches may foster prejudice, intolerance, domination, submission, and other attitudes presumably incompatible with civic virtues.

Liberal virtue theorists say that the necessary civic virtues should be taught through schools. Students need to be taught not only to obey authority but also how to participate in public debate as well as how to question authority and traditions as necessary. But teaching children to question authority and their own background is controversial -- groups which depend on unquestioning acceptance of their traditions do not want the open debate of liberal education.

In postwar political theory, justice and democracy were the basic normative political concepts, with citizenship derivative of these two concepts. Many have now come to believe that citizenship is itself an independent normative concept, with urgent measures required to foster it. Yet the few suggested solutions in the current citizenship debate are usually not new and appear

timid. It is not even clear that a genuine crisis exists. Crime may be increasing and voting rates down, but society also appears to be more committed to tolerance, democracy, and constitutionalism than in previous generations. Thus, it is not clear how urgent the need is to promote citizenship, nor how it could or should be done.

CITIZENSHIP, IDENTITY, AND DIFFERENCE

The wellbeing of minority groups is related to unique needs and circumstances which are not readily accommodated in majority-rule democracies. Even though they possess common citizenship rights, many members of these groups still feel excluded. Defining citizenship only in terms of individual rights and responsibilities does not resolve this problem. Cultural pluralists argue that citizenship theory must consider those differences that make people feel excluded and that some citizen rights should depend on group membership. Such group-differentiated citizenship directly challenges the prevailing notion of citizens as individuals with equal rights. In fact, it is a return to historical notions which conferred rights based on religious, ethnic, or class identity.

One of the leading exponents of such differentiated citizenship, Iris Marion Young, gives two reasons why group differences need to be affirmed rather than denied to promote genuine equality. First, traditionally oppressed groups start out with a disadvantage in the political process and require institutional measures to ensure full recognition and representation. Second, groups which have been excluded by culture have distinctive needs, such as language or land rights.

Critics of cultural pluralism fear that granting special group rights threatens the ability of the citizenship concept to integrate society. Citizenship would no longer supply a common sense of purpose; a group rights system would encourage a "politics of grievance," rather than mutual striving to overcome differences.

Three different types of groups and group rights need to be identified in order to evaluate the appropriateness of any recommended measures. Special representation rights would apply to disadvantaged groups. The special rights would enable groups to overcome past oppression and would last only as long as the oppression exists. Multicultural rights would enable people to express their unique cultures and identities without restricting their opportunities in the dominant society. Self-government rights would apply to cultures, peoples, or nations with a valid claim to self-determination.

Both special representation rights and multicultural rights are demands to promote inclusion in the larger society. Self-government rights, on the other hand, appear unlikely to promote integration. Insofar as citizenship provides identity, then self-government rights may promote feelings of dual citizenship and to conflicting loyalties.

Few multinational democracies (meaning countries containing minority groups with valid claims to self-government) today truly follow a "common citizenship" strategy; most make some allowances for minorities of one kind or another. What is the source of unity for such countries? Rawls claims that modern societies are united by a shared sense of justice.¹ But two countries

may have similar conceptions of justice and still wish to remain separate countries. An important challenge for citizenship theory is thus to understand what gives citizens common identity in countries where some citizens belong as individuals while others gain their identity through special group membership.

Notes

1. John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 515-572.