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Theorising Citizenship

Theorising Citizenship

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The following chapters discuss how contemporary challenges to citizenship have been taken on in political and democratic *theory*. In this subfield, the role of the citizen was to some extent forgotten for a longer period and explicitly re-introduced only in the 1960s following the work of T.H. Marshall (1950), after which the discussion on citizenship heated up in the 1980s and the 1990s (Magnette 2005, 1-2). But, as Quentin Skinner notes, “political life itself sets the problems for the political theorist” (Skinner 1978, Preface, xi). Therefore recent political and social developments concerning citizenship also entailed and required further theoretical reflection, when, for example, migration and transnational democratic institutions set new questions for defining citizenship.

The following chapters accordingly take up a number of current issues in political theory and their linkages to the concept of citizenship, discussing the dimensions of rights together with duties, and active participation (Garcia-Gutián, Lietzmann and Gil). The framework for these contemporary theoretical insights is set by an introduction to the development of the concept of citizenship from a long-term perspective (Ilyin). Ilyin’s chapter outlines the variations of the history of the concept of citizenship and sketches the conceptual approaches to citizenship over time: Greek vs. Roman; civic vs. ethnic; liberal vs. republican. The core ideas of these traditions both echo in the background of contemporary citizenship debates and are debated in prominent theories of citizenship.

Definitions and different interpretations of the (supposed) relationship between the citizen and the state vary in Western political and democratic thought. The main traditions—liberalism,

republicanism, and communitarianism— each embrace the concept of citizenship differently, in regard to which aspects are emphasised. In liberalism, the key to citizenship is access to rights, after which the realisation of one's citizenship is in the hands of the individual. Republicanism, on the other hand, stresses active participation, whereas communitarian theories embrace the idea of belonging as a key aspect of citizenship.

The liberal view is the most common understanding of citizenship in Western countries today. In liberal theories the relationship between the citizen and the state in its ideal form is kept as light as possible (see e.g. Schumpeter 1994 as a prominent case of a “thin” idea of democracy). Here, the possibility of practising citizenship remains with the individual and is ensured without much emphasis on citizen's duties. In liberal models, then, citizenship is primarily a legal status guaranteeing access to rights. In her chapter, Garcia-Gutián discusses the conflict between narrow and broader definitions of the citizen.

In the republican tradition, the focus is on active engagement with the polity's life as a key aspect to citizenship. Theories stemming from this tradition emphasise the need for participation almost to the point of obligation. The roots of the republican tradition lie in the Athenian *polis*, where full citizens were both entitled and expected to participate in public life. Following this republican strand of ideas, Skinner (1993) has argued that active engagement by citizens in the polity is a prerequisite for maximising an individual's liberty because an involved citizen is less likely to have their will subjected to the domination of others. In his essay “Two Concepts of Citizenship” (1993), he discusses the possibility of using the law as a tool for enforcing civic duties, which would mean using law as a means for producing liberty and not merely securing it. When it comes to putting such ideas into practice, it turns out that only a few democratic states in Europe have introduced political citizenship duties such as obligatory voting (with a few exceptions, see Malkopoulou 2015).

Active participation, nevertheless, has become one of the dominant debating points in the contemporary discourses on citizenship. The question of citizenship duties is taken up in the chapters by Garcia-Gutián and Gil Martin.

In the communitarian tradition, citizen's ties to communities play a central role, which raises the question of community, its definition and conditions. In this tradition, the concept of identity is linked with citizenship (e.g. Delanty 2002; Etzioni 1995; Walzer 1994 and 2005). "Identity" here refers to what is also called "group identities", as the communal ties often presuppose the notion of cultural and historical belongings. The question of community has been, and still is one of the key features of debates concerning naturalisation.

These theoretical traditions form the background against which to read contemporary debates in democratic theory and their links to the concept of citizenship. Again, Ilyin opens up the panorama by introducing a range of historical concepts of citizenship extending up to today's understanding of multiple citizenships. The basis is on prototypical distinctions that are related to the concept of citizenship, but Ilyin takes us a step further from the conventional canon when he discusses the logic of dichotomies and imaginaries that the historical concepts of citizenship hint at. The chapter gives examples of the reflexive conceptual analysis at work: linking historical and contemporary sources, theoretical insights and common expressions with extensive meanings, it shows the interconnectedness of past and present interpretations of concepts.

Ilyin's outline of the historically constructed meanings of citizenship and its dimensions frames the field and leads to the present-day examples of modern representative democratic systems, which have citizenship at their core and which are discussed in the remaining chapters.

The focus of the chapters by García-Gutián, Lietzmann and Gil is hence on aspects that are currently crucial both in democratic theory and in politics: Voting, participation, and the crisis of democracy. They show that there are a number of issues under scrutiny during processes of change when representative democratic citizenship is theorised. The interpretations of participation, rights and representation show the complexity of the relations between political involvement, citizenship and democracy.

García-Gutián analyses how different modes of *political activity* imply different ideas of citizenship and different notions of democracy. She argues that the diversity of political behaviour among citizens supports a mode of theorising citizen participation which differs from the idealised view of the active citizen and which can be conceived as a source of diverse and complementary (non-electoral) forms of political representation. She discusses the figure of a “good enough citizen” as a reaction to the contemporary cries for the crisis of representative democracy and the need to innovation. The debates about the ideal typical citizenship rewrite the concept from the perspective of participation, asking the important question of when a citizen is doing enough in terms of political activity—when he or she is being a “good-enough” citizen.

In that context, García-Gutián criticises the sharp division between representative and participatory democracy that is common in modern democratic theory, and discusses the multiple changes in ways and degrees of citizen involvement and interest in politics. These changes have the potential to renew democracy and improve the deliberative character of democracies as well as transform representative democracies into participatory democracies. The idea is that the complex forms of citizen participation should be viewed as part of political representation. García-Gutián argues for a diversity of citizenship types: Critical,

even anti-establishment citizens are important for renewing democracy, yet they should not dominate. Rather, the new forms of participation are present along with the traditional ones (such as voting).

Lietzmann continues to discuss the possible crisis of representation. He, however, analyses the representative systems and their legitimacy by raising the issue of the symbolic dimension of the concept of representation. Political representation is the primary way of linking citizens to parliaments and governments, where different ideas and arrangements formulate the relations between citizens and politics. Lietzmann asks whether current changes in the practice of political participation and representation really represent a “crisis”, or rather, whether they lead to a claim for an iconologic turn in democratic theory? The iconological perspective means that citizens are the main actors in the belief in, and the legitimacy of, political representation. According to Lietzmann, the crisis of legitimacy regarding the representative forms of democracy would benefit from a visual reading of the concept of representation in political theory. This is, he states, because the traditional concept of representation no longer fits the present social and political realities. On the other hand, whereas the old concepts of representation fail, new ones are opening up – such as the iconological concept of representation.

Finally, Gíl also places representative democracy at the centre of his discussion of citizenship. His perspective on citizen participation is through voting, which he analyses from the point of view of abstention. This question of “abstaining citizenship” ties together the three dimensions of (voting) rights, duties and active participation. Gil argues that abstaining from voting should be taken seriously as a form of political action, at least potentially, and that as a conscious choice, refraining from voting should be interpreted as more than mere passivity. Rather, Gil argues that abstaining potentially serves as a means of exercising political power,

even if it is an ambiguous move because it does not express clear political preferences. He criticises both the claim that only qualified citizens should be allowed to vote and that those who are incompetent had a moral duty not to vote in order to avoid outcomes that have negative effects on others. His main example of such thinking is James Brennan, whose views Gíl traces back to Mill's analyses of an ethics of voting. Gíl, thus, problematises the concept of abstention through a reading of Brennan and Mill, and provides an insight to the concept of citizenship through political philosophy.

Following Ilyin's analysis of historical dichotomies, García-Gutián, Lietzmann, and Gíl hence discuss the impact of political theory for the concept of citizenship from the contemporary perspective of democratic theory. In these chapters, citizenship is reflected from the perspective of representation, participation and voting, which are also key concepts in modern democratic theory and political science. New practices and modes of participation in decision-making in representative democracies, such as the deliberative mini-publics mentioned by Gil, or the participatory practices organised by administration, as discussed in the chapter by Mäkinen, construct new types of relations between citizens and polities and new ways of citizen involvement. Both types of participation contribute to diversifying the idea of citizenship and the citizens' relation to the polity, although sometimes the outcome is a limited degree of guided and organised participation. As mentioned above in the case of political activity discussed by García-Gutián, different ideas and forms of citizenship have different implications for democracy.

Finally, the chapters in the theory section also open a perspective onto the further chapters of the book: Ilyin discusses the dichotomies and logics which resonate with the divisions between citizens and non-citizens, thus echoing with the chapters authored by Björk, Kivistö and Nielsen. Furthermore García-Gutián gives an introduction to the more empirical chapter

about participation by Mäkinen, and Gil provides an introduction to the more empirical chapters about rights by Kivistö, Nielsen, Nyssönen, and Metsälä.

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