

### **Rights and Responsibilities: A Philosophical Inquiry into Citizenship**

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#### **Abstract:**

This research conducts a philosophical inquiry into the concepts of rights and responsibilities within the framework of citizenship. As societies evolve, the relationship between individual rights and civic duties becomes increasingly complex, raising critical questions about the nature of citizenship in contemporary contexts. The study explores historical and theoretical perspectives on citizenship, examining how various philosophical traditions, from liberalism to communitarianism, define the balance between individual freedoms and collective responsibilities. Key themes include the moral obligations of citizens, the role of participation in democratic processes, and the implications of globalization on national citizenship. By analyzing case studies that illustrate the tensions between rights and responsibilities, the research highlights the ethical dimensions of citizenship and the challenges faced in upholding both. The findings suggest that a robust understanding of citizenship must encompass not only the protection of rights but also an emphasis on civic engagement and social responsibility. Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to ongoing debates on citizenship, advocating for a more integrated approach that fosters both individual autonomy and communal well-being in diverse societies.

**Keywords:** citizenship, rights, responsibilities, philosophical inquiry, civic duties, democracy, globalization, ethical dimensions.

#### **1. Introduction**

In the past two semesters, the world has witnessed a surge in migrants and refugees. In Hungary, families flee alongside journalists; in Germany, Turkey, and Lebanon, displaced people face expulsion

through simple refusal. In the southwestern U.S., threats and deportation cannot stop those seeking a better life. This raises the question: what defines someone as a refugee, immigrant, or citizen? Is 'citizen' the right term? In order to judge the permissibility, desirability, and power different forms of treatment might wield, we must reflect on what being a citizen or noncitizen could mean in order to imagine what, perhaps, it should mean. I will address the question of the kinds of rights to which citizens and noncitizens might be entitled in a companion essay. There is no equivalent task of determining the rights of citizens. From that fact, various questions arise. How do responsibilities inhere in citizenship, and what does that tell us about what it is to be a citizen? Do different forms of rights correspond to different conceptions of citizenship, and, if so, in what ways? How do the responsibilities incumbent upon citizens affect their lives and those of noncitizens, and what does that tell us about the relation of the citizen to his or her community? (O'Malley & Dittmar, 2021)

### **1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This study explores the philosophical foundations of the rights and responsibilities that come with being a citizen. In answer to two questions: 'What is a citizen?' and 'What contractual arrangements bind citizens together?', we discuss the various kinds of answers that these questions may warrant. We also do this for the further questions that arise: 'Why are citizenship debates so prominent today?' and 'What might or should being a citizen mean in the future?' That is, we discuss historical and contemporary ways of understanding 'the people' and 'citizenship', and the ethical implications of so doing. We thus explore diverse local and global manifestations of the rights associated with citizenship, and of the duties associated with citizenship, such as duties of public service, military service, and jury duty, as well as the so-called responsibility to protect. We argue that the rights that pertain to citizenship are of central political concern, and that the duties associated with citizenship are indicative of what a given political society expects from its citizens. Although several

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

different sorts of expectations are bundled together under the name 'citizenship' – ranging from historical realities and democratic statism to corporeal and embodied cosmopolitanism – we argue that it requires a philosophical approach to try to articulate and make sense of these expectations. Moreover, we aim to contribute to recent scholarly debates surrounding the fraught issue of constructing normative models of passive and active citizenship in an increasingly disciplinary world. Specifically, then, these volumes should be of interest to those scholars exploring various dimensions of political philosophy and the history of political thought, as well as to undergraduate and postgraduate students, and engaged citizens. (Martin and Stulgaitis 2022)

## **2. Defining Citizenship**

Citizenship is the contemporary expression we use to describe the relationship between individuals and political communities. While initially introduced as a legal concept, relevant to those possessing the capacity to represent themselves in a court of law, the term has been reappropriated and redefined many times over history. It has variously been understood as a political status and as an expression of belonging to an ethno-national community. The relationship between citizenship and community has been a fraught one, bound up as it is with questions of identity and belonging. The numerous attempts to define this concept reflect a general consensus that legal definitions of citizenship are inadequate and often incommensurate with the lived experience of belonging to a modern polity. Recognizably modern is the argument that citizenship depends on the satisfaction of certain conditions. It has come to be seen as a touchstone for liberal accounts of citizenship. It is held that “No one ought to be wholly disenfranchised by any agency short of the main criminal law; and citizenship should depend on the consent of the governed – that is, of every grown man of sound mind who contributes his share in the maintenance of the state, either by taxes or by personal service; whichever being the test recognized in the country.” Nevertheless, it is widely recognized that definitions for ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’ must

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

**<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>**

move beyond the purely legal; indeed, many argue that this definition is more akin to naïveté. The citizenship realm, to be caught conceptually, also has a number of attributes of engagement that come closer to distinguishing citizens. Although the precise criteria for citizenship vary across cultures and historical periods, all scholarly accounts share a number of core concerns. These include questions of legal status, the enjoyment of rights and assumption of responsibilities, the scope of political participation, and whether this status can be actively sought or whether it is a passively held social identity bestowed upon one by formal or informal institutions. Some account of these attributes is to be found in the contributions to this volume, and the tensions between the relative emphases given to each attribute form the basis for much of the discussion below. (Franczak & Lutz, 2022)

## **2.1. Historical Perspectives**

This article deals with the problem of contemporary citizenship from a philosophical perspective and aims to answer two guiding questions: What does being a citizen mean today? What claims can individuals make on societies of which they are members, on the practices and resources within those societies, and on the agencies of government that control their lives? These questions are significant because they are of eminent relevance to the reported economic crisis which could lead to social and political unrest, in a scenario marked by designations and fluctuations, as both contributors to, and products of, the economic downturn. Addressing these questions will also enhance the reader's appreciation of the temporal nature of citizenship. This is important: without an understanding of where the citizenship concept came from, and in what particular historical, political and social contexts alternative ideas emerged, there is a legitimization of options in the future. The second follows from the first: presenting alternative globalization projects or civil society advocacy will prove more successful if we have a sensory grasp of the stirrings of change that are taking place in and around us. This first section is an overview of the

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

long history of citizenship, which ranges from ancient and medieval times to the early 21st century, summarizing its major features and developments. From ancient times, citizenship literally meant being a member of society, and traditionally those who were citizens were by definition members of a particular community that handled public matters rather than private matters, and this tradition persists even today. Being a citizen also meant having the power to intervene in the governance, and as such was itself subsequently extended to become one of the more prominent features of the modern democratic conduct of governance. Thus, in a circular motion, being a citizen meant having power over government; all those who were members of the local political community and who had public responsibilities were considered citizens. The distinctiveness resides in the fact that ancients privileged the public at the expense of the private aspects of life, and in so doing set themselves and their political theories peculiarly apart from the usages of these concepts today. (Doña-Reveco, 2021)

## **2.2. Contemporary Definitions**

What is citizenship in the contemporary, globalized era? The commonly stated paradox is that while borders and states seem to come into constant flux, and international migration seems to be rising, we have not reached the end of the nation-state or citizenship. Scholarship has been equally divided; while some have observed how citizenship has remained plastic across time and place, others have proclaimed or predicted the end of citizenship as we historically know it. For scholars of citizenship, it thus becomes critical to define this apparently unchanging concept in the era of rapid and fluid change we find ourselves in. A particularly vibrant debate focuses on how we might want to define citizenship today. Thinkers have given three broad sets of definitions. The first are legal ones, the second normative and ethical ones, and the last are hybrid definitions which seek to marry the normative with the legal and give, as a result, a broader definition of citizenship.

A definition of citizenship as the ability to wield obligations and rights in a participatory manner matches definitions of a citizen as a co-equal

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

participant in a public community. For these authors, the existence of expressed agency and civic orientation is essential in the definition of citizenship. Within the field of sociology, on the other hand, primacy is given to two kinds of citizenship regimes – of participation (where exclusions happen on the basis of different taxa of participation) and of status (where exclusions are based on attributes of inequality of members). Over time, theorizing on the social and legal has become more porous. Multiple definitional debates as to what constitutes citizenship are still raging in the discipline. In the following subsections, I shall trace different definitions of citizenship in the contemporary era, as encompassed in the writings of scholars, policymakers, and activists. (Mittelmeier and Cockayne2021)

### **3. Theoretical Frameworks**

In trying to answer the question, "What is citizenship?", the literature offers a number of ways to approach the study of citizenship. These different ways of understanding citizenship are the result of different theoretical frameworks: philosophical traditions or families. By outlining different theoretical foundations, we can begin to examine what rights and responsibilities one has as a citizen. As citizenship is an English word with a deep philosophical history, the majority of philosophers work within the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

This paper points to liberal thought as the primary framework that allows us to understand citizenship today. Liberal thought, which canvasses a wide variety of theoretical positions and arguments, understands citizenship most fundamentally as a set of rights and responsibilities held by individuals within a given state or local community, usually delineated through the law. In other words, liberalism is the family of thought that articulates itself around the inviolability of the individual, freedom, and the state: that is, those organizations that seek to protect these individual rights. While not nearly as dominant, many scholars have turned to communitarian, Marxist, or critical theories in order to help us better understand what is at stake in matters of citizenship. These perspectives argue that to take rights as the key determinant within citizenship theory is

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

mistaken, as it overlooks the fact that citizenship is "a set of historically contingent and socially malleable practices." In other words, they attempt to decouple the idea of citizenship from the protection of rights and argue that it can be interpreted in a number of other ways, such as political activity, international relations, or obligations to others that may or may not involve rights.

Two positions help us to understand this tension in political thought. Rousseau is also pertinent for us in this section, as his work illustrates that the tension between rights and responsibilities is not always present and has in many ways been exaggerated by other theorists. Overall, this section provides a window into the many challenges that face those who study citizenship, yet it also shows the diversity of thought in the area. While different philosophers and theories bring new insight and methodological approaches to the table, they remain somewhat internally coherent. The idea that there are two sets of moral obligations and that both exist is one that runs across many of the following accounts. No single author attempts to articulate a position that completely forswears the value of one member of the couplet. Each theory can be read as offering a series of arguments meant to reconcile the two conflicting ideological poles in terms most ambivalently favorable to personal freedoms and collective nurturance and security, or vice versa. (Boruchowicz et al., 2021)

### **3.1. Liberalism and Citizenship**

We start here with a close examination of the very act of citizenship and situating this act more generally. In this, we wish to focus on and closely analyze citizenship to identify the limitations of this concept. This section will thus ask about the traditional "triad" of questions concerning the boundary, the rights of citizenship, duties once citizenship has been established, and finally who is able to contribute to the conceptualizations made within the broader field. Taking considerably more account than so far of the ways in which we continue to categorize "ourselves", situating our reflections more soundly, even if not with less difficulty, in the "national" and "Western" ideologies from which the category itself arises.



# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

The belief and structure of thought that has become known as liberalism, a social and political ideology advocating increased rights in the classical sense of “negative” freedoms and what we shall define below as a necessary, yet only vaguely institutionalized, social process. From the beginning of her seminal work, it was argued for the emancipation of women on the grounds that humanity had a fundamental right to “self-legislate”, to decide for itself what individual freedom should look like, resting firmly on the grounds of human reason and therefore the equality of man. The concepts of political justice that underpin the thinking of both men and those that follow in their wake are grounded in what is now labeled ‘liberal’ rights, which center on freedom along the lines of autonomy, which “is the reward for self-legislated man, the quintessence of rational humanity.” (Rung and Adamson2022)

## **4. Rights of Citizenship**

The third element in our analysis concerns citizenship and human rights. There are three crucial related topics we shall discuss: the rights of citizenship, the responsibilities of citizenship, and acquiring and losing citizenship. Let us start with a philosophical inquiry into the rights of citizenship.

In general, we can distinguish three categories of 'rights' of citizenship: (1) civil rights, or individual, personal rights, privileges, and immunities; (2) political rights, or activity rights to take part in government, in particular, to vote and to be elected, the power to act; and (3) social or economic rights or welfare rights to certain standards of life, powers of the will, or material goods (divided into security, subsistence, prosperity, basic self-respect, or development). The oldest distinction made with regard to the rights of citizenship is that between civil and political rights of citizens. Especially in the USA, these individual freedoms are guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, included in the Constitution: the right to free speech, religion, press, assembly, to petition the government; the right to keep and bear arms, to trial by jury; to due process of law, against self-incrimination, and to



# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

**<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>**

property. Security bears on liberty, not action, not well-being or welfare. As far back as the eleventh century AD, the preachers of the Crusades were advocating freedom of speech, the German peasants against the Pope and Emperor in the twelfth century, and the American revolutionaries against the English King in the eighteenth century.

Distinguishing civil rights from political ones, or political responsibilities from civic ones, also shows that these rights are individual or the rights of individuals, not social or the rights of all the citizens. A written constitution guarantees these negative individual rights against officials, makes people feel safer or at home, by preventing officials from doing things to them. It does not make social citizens happier. A written wheel is a security feature for one's car, not a source of petrol or a driving capacity to enjoy it. Also, the two sorts are consistent, not excluding one another. Everyone should have access to the political process. Democratic participation is very important. Democratic socialists of various kinds have always believed that a government of the people can do things for the people, and that civic and political rights go hand in hand in the struggle against totalitarian tyranny and exploitation; they are conditions of solidarity, cooperative collective action to fulfill social and economic rights or welfare benefits in the interest of all the people. Everyone is indeed responsible for realized equality of right-order in the part of the establishment over which they have democratic control or exercise of voting; it is their duty to vote responsibly. (Martínez et al.2021)

## **4.1. Civil Rights**

Civil rights are a crucial component of citizenship. Citizenship contains within it civil, political, and social rights. In this subsection, we consider the first of these – civil rights. Civil rights are important because they protect individuals from any arbitrary use of governmental power and protect individual freedoms. They create status independence and, in enabling individuals to live their lives in the public arena freely, they pave the way for individuals to participate politically. It has a long and hard-fought history; all the

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

landmarks of Britain's 'constitution of liberty' from the 13th century to the 1689 contain an element of freedom from arbitrary governmental power. Of course, civil rights may be either symbolic or substantive: they may exist more in the breach than in reality. Some might argue that for a great many people the latter is the case. But it remains the case that greater protection is given to individuals in virtue of their membership of a state. An effective civil rights jurisprudence is essential in a well-functioning democratic state that values public participation and individual freedom, indeed, depending upon this.

The common law has grown a corpus of rights which encompass some positive and negative rights protecting individuals from discrimination: the right to free speech encompasses a right to blaspheme; the right of assembly includes, virtually, the right to assemble as a union; the right to fair procedure before a public interest; and the right to privacy. Statutorily, the HRA incorporated rights such as the right to life and to marry, prohibiting inhuman and degrading treatment, discrimination and slavery, and ensuring a fair trial, protection of private and family life, and freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, freedom of expression, assembly, and association. The common law has provided for a private action civil wrong to individuals to prohibit unjust and arbitrary interference by the state as well as between persons. (Primdahl et al.2021

## **4.2. Political Rights**

A fundamental aspect of citizenship is the association of specific rights with political relationships. In the context of political rights, the currency of citizenship functions as a set of rights grounded in social duties. Political rights hold together other rights and are basic and important in themselves. In all societies where citizens have some kind of popular representative government, the fundamental political right traditionally recognized is the right to vote. This right has two dimensions: the right to vote for the legislators in making laws and to help secure basic rights and freedom, and the right to run for office,

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

also known as the right to be elected. In the absence of this right, the right to vote could not be adequately expressed and enacted.

The activist left argues that all people have a moral right to participate in political processes because citizens have a special interest in political processes due to the fact that government action has significant consequences for all categories of private interest. In general, from the view of the social contract, citizens have the burden of enacting and enabling the principles of justice—this “burden of judgment” demands respect for others simply as citizens. Many people will not be obviously right, even with a realization of intelligence and universal goodwill. This accumulation of goods often requires restrictions on rights, leading citizens to give up certain rights and to accept certain obligations, as well as sacrificing for the rights of fellow citizens. The justice as fairness argues that the exercise of citizens’ rights and duties is restricted by the social order and based on common interest. If resident aliens have established themselves in society, they should share certain basic rights of citizenship.

### **4.3. Social and Economic Rights**

As with civil and political rights, social and economic rights are also central elements of citizenship. Often characterized as being concerned with human welfare, social and economic rights encompass a set of essential entitlements that are necessary for individuals and families to lead lives of minimally acceptable dignity. These include not just education, employment, and the protection against want and hunger, but also opportunities to gain the necessary skills and education that will enable one to participate fully in society. These rights generally tend to be flexible and open-ended in their content. This means that the state is typically required to respect, protect, and fulfill them with available resources.

Rights to education or employment are typically constrained by what can be reasonably supplied by the authorities. Even though in many jurisdictions and much academic discussion makes a distinction between civil and political rights on the one hand, and social and economic rights on the other, it is important to remember that these

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

rights are all overlapping and interconnected. The degree of correlation provided to essential social and economic rights tends to be highly variable. In most contemporary societies, the state uses its resources to make social and economic rights at least provisionally realizable for many. Countries also differ greatly in the amount of inequality that they find acceptable. Much turns on the importance allotted to such rights in the political and social life of a particular country. When inequalities in income are too great, social and economic rights are narrowed and minimized.

Three essential social and economic rights without which a political society ceases to be just are: (1) the right of self-ownership (which includes the acquisition of private property), (2) the right to employment and the security of sabbatical (unemployment insurance and pensions), and (3) the right to seek care for one's health (i.e., to have access to health services including preventative steps). A right to housing is often mentioned as a fourth right, but in modern industrial society, obviously, a government of mature principles only provides some remedial support for those who, because of acute and dire emergencies, find themselves without a place to live. Otherwise, housing is a distributive concern that should have been in the province of the civic community, for the present housing situation is an outcome of a long history of group interests. Government authority is typically required to observe, shield, and accomplish these social and economic assurances with available contributions. Fitting in with the letter of the acceptance normally indicates that they uphold these legal protections at least communally and that they subsequently conjoin supplementary taxes or possible income distribution to finance the savings.

## **5. Responsibilities of Citizenship**

We have reflected now and in previous chapters on the rights that people can expect in a given society. We have examined many of the issues that arise when rights are understood in legal or ethical terms. A right that we have not discussed before is a correlative of many rights, with the notion that for every right there is a responsibility. If you

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

<https://dialogueresearchreview.com/index.php/14/about>

have a right to free speech, for example, I have a responsibility to protect your speech. In particular, I have a responsibility not to engage in speech that defames you. This chapter explores our responsibilities as citizens, or the correlative of the rights that we have been discussing in previous chapters. More specifically, if citizens have the right to participate in policymaking, they also have the responsibility to do so. If citizens have the right to good schools and streets without potholes, they also have the responsibility to participate in the electoral and community-based processes that contribute to the betterment of the community.

One of the central connections we are interested in is the relationship between rights and responsibilities at the societal level. In this regard, we are interested in exploring how the individual pursuit of rights can have implications for collective responsibility. We focus not on pilots in commercial airplanes or midwives, but on everyday activities common to non-citizens and citizens alike. We also address the normative questions that arise when rights and responsibilities are not pursued in equilibrium. Does the pursuit of rights by individuals have potential societal implications? Is there harm—societal as well as individual—when societal responsibility is absent or not pursued? Among other things, we press whether individual rights and collective responsibilities would be expected to exist in proportion to one another. In other words, we press whether there is an ethical prerequisite that our focus on rights comes proportionate to a focus on responsibilities such that both are pursued equally. Both considerations help us explore the philosophical value of the rights and responsibilities approach. For in bringing these considerations to bear, it is our ambition to show that an ethical focus on the latter contributes to the flourishing of a vibrant democracy. Finally, in this exploration, we will touch upon the observation that the responsibilities differ across different cultures and political systems. Different constituencies exercise differing priorities in the codification and cultivation of these responsibilities.

### **5.1. Civic Duties**

Civic duties are another key aspect of citizenship responsibilities, obligations that citizens hold towards their community and government. They recommend themselves as candidates for being part of the core of responsible citizenship. Civic duties may be legal requirements, obligations of loyalty, or positive duties. They may include voting in elections, serving on a jury or military conscription, and following just laws. In some cases, those who live within the boundaries of a particular democratic state may also have the civic duty to engage in positive and overly demanding acts of good citizenship, such as volunteer work and other forms of community service, although such responsibilities are highly debated.

The significance of these responsibilities is rather obvious, for they are fundamentally about active participation in democratic processes. Voting, serving on a jury, or providing community service are obligations we take on because we are engaged as responsible citizens. Not serving or not participating negatively impacts others, upon the systems in which democracy is contained and can reduce levels of trust that exist in society. To stay abstention is to be complicit with such systems. Being compelled not to vote, or not to stand for office, reduces access and opportunity to individuals who wish to participate in a form of government that they have a right to participate in, by definition. For some of these duties, individuals who do not meet them may even be penalized, by being fined for not voting, or imprisoned, if called to jury service and fail to attend. Put another way, duties can have consequences if not fulfilled. Political systems fail when citizens fail to meet their responsibilities in this way.

### **5.2. Ethical Responsibilities**

Citizens have various rights and responsibilities, both through law and logically, that are ethical. Not only in dealing with issues of justice, but in any ethical reflection, the existence of private sector responsibilities is becoming increasingly central. Again, many describe citizenship in terms of responsibilities that people have to each other independently of any society-related legislation. A strong argument for citizenship

# **The Dialogue Research Review**

**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

**<https://dialoguereview.com/index.php/14/about>**

keeping ethical judgment as a condition is the role it plays in helping people make decisions. Since this is a significant and potentially alienating problem, the need to go beyond narrow law-centered considerations suggests that it is not only the domain of a small ethical elite. What do we mean by personal responsibility in this way – and what are the conditions, attributes, or behaviors necessary for individuals to bear these responsibilities? What sorts of relationships should exist between citizens, and with the state, for it to be reasonable to insist that the actions they take in response to the rights of the other implicated parties taking rights ethically may be reasonable? Answers to these questions will differ, depending on whether or not the relationships on which they depend are seen firstly as voluntary, such as those in a free market, or what has been properly described as the public and semi-public relationships which embody our obligations to strangers, yet as fellow citizens to cooperate in maintaining our community. And given the purpose of the National Curriculum to support the development of such community members, such obligations become, in the case of citizenship education, more relevant: A specifically ethical dimension is clear. For a commitment to the common good helps students practice other positive character traits.

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**Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)**

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