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THE THREAT OF GOOD CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN is to play the role of the citizen well. This role, according to H. Mark Roelof, comprises three functions: participation, loyalty, and privacy.¹ Roelof's inclusion of privacy, which encompasses such matters as individual achievement and independent ethical standards, seems to me commendable; unfortunately it also sets him apart from most writers on good citizenship. In fact, as this article contends, most modern students of American politics and most classical political theorists have formulated concepts of the good citizen that are completely group-directed and do not at all include privacy.

Throughout this century many Americans—educational researchers, public officials, and social scientists—have written on good citizenship. Their audiences and purposes have varied, but their message on this subject has remained the same. Good citizenship, they have said, is socially oriented; it leaves almost no scope for privacy and its values.

According to Stanley E. Diamond, citizenship includes virtually all social relations: "For this study, then, citizenship means the relations of the individual to his government and, in addition, his relationship to other members and groups in a democratic society."² The characteristics that Diamond advocated are consistent with this definition; he wanted "a more thoughtful, active citizenry", "thoughtful, wise, *participating* citizens . . . who understand society and perform their *social* obligations." Indeed, he named as the five qualities of the good citizen that he (1) "is aware of the importance of meeting *basic human needs* and is concerned with the extension of the essentials of life to more individuals"; (2) "gives allegiance to the ideals of democracy"; (3) "practices the kind of *human relationships* that are consistent with a democratic society"; (4) "recognizes and endeavors to help in the *solution of the social problems* of the times"; (5) "possesses and uses *knowledge*,

skills and abilities to facilitate the process of democratic living." Though this listing may not be well constructed, all five characteristics are clearly concerned with participation in society and loyalty to its values; none emphasizes privacy or the value of the individual in and of himself.

Diamond is primarily a researcher in educational processes; but professional practitioners and students of politics have reached similar conclusions.³ Supreme Court Justice David Brewer, who in 1902 initiated the "Yale Lectures on the Responsibilities of Citizenship", spun a virtual panegyric to obligation, asserting that "there is no more magnificent word in the English language than 'duty'" and that it is thus "the citizen's privilege, his duty, his glory to stand firmly against all movements and efforts to weaken the forces of law, to disturb the social order . . ."⁴ Obedience is an all-pervading requirement for the citizen, not a mere passive condition. "It is an active virtue. The law commands as well as forbids; and obedience requires the doing of the act which the law commands as well as the not doing that which it forbids."⁵ And political participation is raised to the level of religion:

We must impress upon all the solemn fact that the voting booth is the temple of American institutions. No single tribe or family is chosen to watch the sacred fires evermore burning on its altars, or to tend its services. Each one of us is a priest. To each is given the care of the ark of the covenant. Each of us ministers at its altars.

Brewer's rhetoric may well have run away with itself; but the other notables who trooped to Yale to inform the students about good citizenship delivered a substantially similar message. Good citizenship, they said, consists in group living and not in private values. Surely, the participation should be intelligent, the service should be spirited; however, such individual traits as intelligence and spirit are considered only because and to the extent that they are implicated in the group process. Intelligence, that is to say, is not a mark of the good citizen. Intelligent *participation* is.

That was the advice that Elihu Root gave the men of Yale. "The first and chief duty of citizenship", he stated, "is to serve in the ranks—not to await some great and glorious occasion to win fame and power."⁶ So too, he advocated "combined action which subordinates individual interests, the interests of groups and localities and classes. . . ."; "be happy in your work" could be his motto: "The primary object with every man should be to do the work that comes into his hands just as well and as thoroughly as he possibly can do it." And do not be critical of your society. "Pessimism is criminal weakness", and "the preservation and development of civilization require affirmative forces."

Even James Bryce, less extreme than Brewer and Root, spoke of good citizen-

ship chiefly in terms of loyal participation. Though the qualities that he catalogued ("Intelligence, Self-Control, Conscience"⁷) initially seem individualistic, they are consistently related to group living only. Thus, good citizens

will have enough sense to judge of *public affairs*, discernment enough to choose the right men *for office*, self-control enough to seek the *general interest* rather than try to secure their own at the expense of *the community*, *public spirit* enough to take trouble or even face danger for the good of *the community*.

Several decades later, in the 1930's and 40's, American social scientists were still characterizing good citizenship as the total integration of the individual into his community. Charles C. Selecman and S. D. Myres held that the good citizen should give "continuous and painstaking attention to public issues" and evidence "active interest and participation in politics."⁸ The authors also emphasized loyalty, and in so doing extolled patriotism. "True patriotism", they said, "means more than merely waving the flag and singing the Star Spangled Banner on special occasions. It requires living the good life—day by day—in *the interest of the State*." And this remark would mean, of course, that no act of behaviour is irrelevant to politics.

Frederick A. Ogg, too, held that good citizenship encompassed most aspects of life:

It is conscious, intelligent, and effective partnership in the life and working of democracy. It embraces voting, helping to form public opinion, and rendering military service. But it extends into the realms of social relations, industry, business, and trade—matters, incidentally, that in these days are more than ever interrelated with government and law.⁹

The duties of the citizen are of greatest importance: "The thing most needing to be taught" is "that the citizen's responsibilities do not end with discharging the legal and constitutional obligations resting upon him." And his extra-legal duties, be it noted, go far beyond voting and being informed "down to such humble matters as refraining from 'jay-walking' and helping to keep streets, parks, and public buildings sightly. He should be prepared to report to proper authorities law evasion *and other wrongdoing* coming to his attention."

In Ogg's words one hears an echo of an old Platonic notion in which the informer receives great honour and the vigilante is considered "the great man in the city and perfect and prize-winner in *arete*."¹⁰ For both Plato and Ogg a good citizen informs on his neighbour whenever this neighbour breaks any law, even a minor regulation like jaywalking, or when, not breaking a law, he merely does "any other wrongdoing."

But far more extensive comparisons can be drawn than merely between Plato

and Ogg. For among the great writers of classical political theory generally, just as among modern writers on political subjects, good citizenship has generally meant participation and subordination, and group-orientation to the extinction of other modes of valuation. To both classes of writers the good citizen is simply he who participates well in his political community and serves it well.

In this regard let us consider statements by Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill—all of them great figures in the history of Western political theory.¹¹

Thucydides had Pericles declare that the good citizen is distinguished by service to his city: honour comes to him who "has something good to do for the city."¹² His outstanding characteristics are bravery, caring for honour more than for monetary gain, participation in politics ("we decide things ourselves"), and obedience to laws, especially "those which unwritten bring unanimously-agreed disgrace." The good citizen, in Periclean terms, behaves consonantly with the societal norms of group living; and he is literally a "lover" of his city.

Socrates, in Plato's *Crito*, held a similar, though simpler, view of good citizenship. The citizen, he said, has made an agreement with the city and the laws of the city which he should keep.¹³ If he does not, then instead of being a good citizen he acts like "the meanest slave." The good citizen's personality, in short, is solely a function of the norms of his society: he is "offspring *and slave*" of his city's laws.

In his most famous political works, too, Plato's good citizen had similar traits. Among the citizenry of his Callipolis, for example, nothing, not even sexual relations, is a private and intimate matter, and everything is of public concern. Thus it becomes a legal duty "for a woman to bear *for the city*" and "for a man to beget *for the city* until fifty-five years of age."¹⁴ The good citizen has no feeling of "mine" and "not-mine"; rather there is to be, among the guardians at least, "a single conviction about their own" and a "similar feeling of pleasure and pain." In a later dialogue Plato again held that the aim of legislation and the chief criterion of the good citizenry is unity—either a synthetic unity in which all are alike or an organic unity in which no one has anything really his own.¹⁵ The goal, throughout the *Republic* and the *Laws*, is for a city with no internal dissensions and no factions; and the good citizen is he who is willing to sacrifice himself and all his desires, and his family as well, to the good and unity of his city.

Aristotle had a completely participatory definition of citizenship: "*Citizen* simply is defined by nothing else than by the participation in decision and office."¹⁶ Eager that a city be not just a collocation of persons but a unity, he also stressed its cohesiveness. "And at the same time one ought not think that any of the citizens is

his own; rather all are the city's, for each is a part of the city, and the superintendence of each part naturally looks to the superintendence of the whole."

Thomas Hobbes postulated a population yoked together by participation in a social covenant.¹⁷ Basically, his citizenry has its virtues in this participation and in subjugation to a sovereign who may "do whatever he shall think necessary to be done." Privacy and conscience are the marks not of a good but of a bad citizen. Hobbes therefore opposed doctrines that state that every private man is judge of good or evil actions; or that action against conscience is sin; or "that every private man has an absolute propriety in his goods such as excludeth the rights of the sovereign." Indeed, for the most part liberty becomes for the individual citizen a mere residual. "The liberty of a subject, lieth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the sovereign hath pretermitted. . . ."

Locke subordinated the individual to the political community by equating group good and individual good, and considering majority decision identical to individual decision.¹⁸ Personal consent then seems to mean little more than the assent of the majority of parliament, with the only safeguard the rather rare "appeal to heaven." Once more liberty is merely obedience to law ("To be under no other legislative power but that established by consent in the commonwealth") or a residual (liberty to handle and dispose of one's property "within the allowance of those laws under which he is").

Rousseau's citizenry, again defined by participation in a social compact,¹⁹ has numerous public obligations to fulfill. It must be alert and informed on public issues; and "public service" should be "the principal business of the citizens." Indeed, members of the government, "in taking charge of the functions that the State imposes on them, are only doing the fulfilling of their duties as citizens without having in any way the right of arguing as to its conditions."

Ideally, the individual is to count virtually as nothing in comparison with the community. "If each citizen is nothing, and can do nothing except with all the others, and the force acquired by the whole is equal or superior to the sum of the natural forces of *all* the individuals, it can be said that the legislation is at the highest point of perfection that it can attain." In Rousseau's opinion, "Everything that breaks the social unity is worth nothing. . . ." And, just as he praised the Romans for being "devoured by ardent love of glory and of country", he advocated that there be a cult that "makes country the object of the citizens' adoration and teaches them that to serve the State is to serve its tutelary god."

Even John Stuart Mill had a similar conception of the good citizen. He deprecated "mentally passive people", who "will not *cooperate actively* with the law

and public authorities in the repression of evil-doers" and are "too ignorant, too passive, or too careless and inattentive to do their part"; and advocated instead that "the whole people participate."²⁰ Political machinery, he said, "needs, not their [the citizens'] simple acquiescence, but their active participation. . . . They must be willing and able to do what *it* requires of *them* to enable it to fulfill its purposes."

The aim of representative government, Mill claimed, is to give persons a strong emotional attachment to government—to "kindle a desire", imbue them with a "sufficient value for, and *attachment to*, a representative constitution", give them "a sense of personal accountability in the matter." In fact, so strong is the identification of citizen and community to be that invariably "He is made to feel himself one of the public and *whatever is their interest to be his interest*", a phrase on which Plato, the anti-democrat and totalitarian,²¹ would not at all disagree with Mill.

In defining good citizenship in terms of participation in and subordination to the political community, a writer probably assumes that the community he is describing is good, or relatively good, or at least as good as is humanly possible. Though Mill's ideally representative state differs greatly from Plato's ideal polity, both think the political systems they project are as good as human nature will allow, and neither shrinks then from depicting the good citizen as merely group-oriented. So too, the modern writers reviewed earlier evidently assume that the American political system (or a slightly improved version of it) is good.

It has, of course, become common of late to recognize one or another classical political theorist as totalitarian. Not only Hobbes but Plato and Locke and Rousseau, among others, have so been interpreted.²² Such an evaluation of Ogg or Root or the other recent writers cited above is highly doubtful. But because they have assumed that the political community they consider, or a slightly changed form of it, is good, they too have tended to identify as the good citizen the person who integrates fully with that community and helps most to perpetuate it.

Our more sophisticated brethren in sociology have recently been chiding themselves for implicitly defending the *status quo* in their theories.²³ Writers in the mainstream of political science seem open to the same charge. By accepting without question the societal context in which the individual moves, and by concentrating instead on how he should participate and subordinate himself, political writers have often avoided the crucial questions of emerging claims and political change. At the least, the formulation of the classical theorists and the modern writers on politics discussed here have all had a conservative bias. They could hardly justify those who oppose a given political system—either the Germans who opposed Hitler or the followers of Gandhi who opposed the British in India.

It would be well to emphasize that a person is involved in more than one political community. He is a member not only of his present community, but of possible future communities that may grow out of it. The claims of the present are diminished by those of the future, and those of the future by those yet more distant. The precise way in which these claims are diminished depends on the evaluation made of the various present and future communities. This may seem to mean returning to the old ethical subject of the good society. But, in reality, political writers have never left the subject; for by assuming a given society to be good, they have in effect been making such a judgment.

Only by evaluating societies and seeing that they *all* fall short in some considerable measure of an imaginable ideal, can a conception of good citizenship be developed in which a good citizen need be less than totally integrated into his present community, in which there is some place for conscience and the other values of privacy.

NOTES

1. H. Mark Roelof, *The Tension of Citizenship* (New York: Rinehart, 1957); for a succinct statement of this view, see pp. 155-6. Unless otherwise noted, all translations and italics in this article are mine.
2. Stanley E. Diamond, *Schools and the Development of Good Citizens* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1953), p. 36. Other quotations are at pp. 1, 2, 207 and 37 (italics and punctuation in last quotation in original).
3. In addition to works discussed in the text, see William Howard Taft, *Four Aspects of Civic Duty* (New York: Scribners, 1906); Carl Brinkmann, *Recent Theories of Citizenship in its Relationship to Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927); and cf. "Goals of Citizenship Education" in *Goals for Political Science* (Report of the Committee for the Advancement of Teaching, American Political Science Association, published by William Sloane Associates, Inc. of New York, 1951), pp. 24-43.
4. David Brewer, *American Citizenship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1902), pp. 9 and 27. For other citations see pp. 92-3 and 79.
5. This is not to deny that there are "circumstances under which disobedience to law may become a duty" (*ibid.*, p. 90); but "the instances in which the higher law will conflict with the law of the nation are so rare that it does not seem profitable to use much time in discussing them" (p. 91).
6. Elihu Root, *The Citizen's Part in Government* (New York: Scribners, 1907), p. 62. See also pp. 21, 68, 96 and 33.
7. James Bryce, *The Hindrances to Good Citizenship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), p. 7. Also see p. 11.
8. Charles C. Seleckman and S. D. Myres, *The Challenge of Citizenship* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1933), p. 21. The other quotation is at p. 29.

9. Frederick A. Ogg, "The Role of Political Science", in Franklin L. Burdette (ed.), *Education for Citizen Responsibilities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), p. 84. See also pp. 85, 86, and 88.
10. *Laws*, 730 d; cf. 745 a.
11. Theorists are omitted here either because they do not consider the qualities of the good citizen in any detail (Machiavelli) or because they are of relatively minor importance (the author of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*).
12. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II: xl, 1. See also xlii, ff.; xliv, 4; xl, 2; xxxv, 3; xxxvii, 3; and xliii.
13. *Crito*, 49 e, 50 c-e, 51 c. See also 50 a, ff. and 50 e.
14. *Republic*, 460 e. And see 464 d.
15. For synthetic unity see *Laws*, 816 cd; for organic unity see *ibid.*, 923 ab and 942 a-d.
16. *Politics* 1275 a (cf. 1276 a and 1278 a). The other citation is at 1337 a.
17. *Leviathan*, II: 17. See also II: 18, 26, and 21. (Spelling is modernized.)
18. "But still it must be made with his own consent—*i.e.*, the consent of the majority, giving it either by themselves or their representatives chosen by them." *Two Treatises of Government*, II: 140 (cf. I: 92). For other citations see II: 167, 240, 241, 242, 22, and 57.
19. *Du contrat social ou principes du droit politiques*, I: v. See also III: xv, III: xviii, II: vii, and IV: viii.
20. *Considerations on Representative Government* (New York: Holt, 1873), pp. 56, 18, 42, and 80. Other quotations are at pp. 13, 19, 83, 193-4, and 97.
21. See, for example, Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1950); E. R. Dodds, "Plato and the Irrational" (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1945); and Gregory Vlastos, "Slavery in Plato's Thought" (*Philosophical Review*, 1941).
22. For Plato see previous note. For Locke see Willmoore Kendall, *John Locke and The Doctrine of Majority Rule* (1941); and for Rousseau, J. L. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952).
23. See Alvin W. Gouldner, "Some Observations on Systematic Theory, 1945-55," in Hans L. Zetterberg (ed.), *Sociology in the United States of America* (Paris: UNESCO, 1956), pp. 34-42.