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Thom Brooks

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Ethical Citizenship

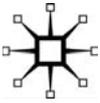
British Idealism and the Politics of Recognition

Edited by

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Selection, introduction and editorial matter © Thom Brooks 2014
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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-32995-0
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First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke,
Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
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ISBN 978-1-349-46076-2 ISBN 978-1-137-32996-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137329967

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully
managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing
processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the
country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ethical citizenship : British idealism and the politics of recognition / [edited
by] Thom Brooks, Durham Law School, Durham University, UK.
pages cm.—(Palgrave studies in ethics and public policy)
ISBN 978-1-349-46076-2

1. Citizenship – Moral and ethical aspects – Great Britain. 2. Common good.
3. Political ethics. 4. Social ethics. I. Brooks, Thom, editor of compilation.

JN906.E75 2014
72—dc23

2014025905

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1

Introduction

Thom Brooks

Introduction

Citizenship has come under increasing strain in the face of globalization. Our world gets ever smaller while it sometimes seems our borders are becoming ever more closed. What is citizenship and how can be it ethical? Should citizens owe each other special duties that are denied others? How might theories about citizenship impact our practices?

This book offers a significant and distinctive contribution to how we might understand citizenship today through a reengagement with the idea of 'ethical citizenship'. This idea was first defended by British Idealists writing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who continue to retain deep contemporary relevance today.¹ Ethical citizenship is a communitarian relationship between compatriots based around a shared conception of the common good. This book is the first full-length treatment to explore ethical citizenship as developed by the British Idealists. The introduction begins by re-examining the historical roots of ethical citizenship before proceeding to show how this idea of citizenship helps illuminate our present condition domestically and internationally. This discussion reveals the potential impact of British Idealism for this important area of ethics and public policy. The chapter concludes with an overview of this book's essays.

Ethical citizenship and British Idealism

Ethical citizenship is a normative idea about the relation of individuals to each other in a community. Its earlier philosophical roots are perhaps found in the *Politics* by Aristotle.² He distinguishes the resident from the citizen in an interesting way. The resident is someone who merely

resides within a certain space, but the citizen is a member of a community. Our relations to others as community members is special because this shared belonging can yield special duties that group members have to other members and not to persons outside this group. Special duties can be translated today into the duties we may owe to co-nationals on the basis of our shared political relationship within a common polity, but this does not extend to others beyond our community. These duties are contrasted with our duties which hold 'generally' to all persons irrespective of their national membership.

The idea of ethical citizenship is specific to British Idealism, a philosophical movement that erupted in the late 19th century and began to wane shortly after the start of the First World War.³ For a time its figures were the leading philosophers of the day. British Idealism was the dominant philosophical tradition for several decades in Oxford, Glasgow, and elsewhere. Key Idealists include T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, Edward Caird, Henry Jones, David Ritchie, James Seth, Sir Hector Hetherington, John Henry Muirhead, John Stuart Mackenzie, R. G. Collingwood, and Michael Oakeshott (see Brooks, 2011). One contribution of British Idealism to contemporary philosophy is that its earliest proponents were among the first to introduce the English-speaking world to the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel.⁴ Their second contribution is to offer novel perspectives – often seeking to bring together elements from Kantian and Hegelian philosophy – on aesthetics, applied ethics, metaphysics, political thought, and other pursuits.

Ethical citizenship is one area that British Idealism has much to offer. While there remain important differences between particular figures, Idealists argued generally for a distinctive view of community based around a shared common good and 'mutual membership'.⁵ British Idealists defended a communitarian view of the self that respected individuality. For example, they rejected the idea that individuals exist for the community (see Seth, 1898: 271). Individuals are not then to be dominated by the community either. Instead, the community exists only for the individuals that compose it. Furthermore, 'citizenship' and common membership is a kind of 'moral claim' to be justified through mutual recognition by individuals (see Hetherington and Muirhead, 1918: 47). Our common good is a good for us because we recognize it as such. This process of recognition raises questions about itself, the relations between individuals in a community and the content of the common good they share. While different British Idealists provide multiple understandings of how such questions might be raised, there remains sufficiently broad agreement that permits our reference to a British Idealist perspective on these questions.

This perspective is interesting because it resists easy characterization into active or passive citizenship and other dualisms. Citizenship for British Idealists is not a mere group, but a community of interconnected individuals. Citizens have a substantial connection to each other through a common good inclusive to everyone and recognized as such. This contrasts with the more libertarian and disconnected experiences many people have of citizenship today where fellow citizens may be like strangers.

For British Idealism, there is something important ethically about our shared group membership as citizens within a polity. British Idealists claim ethical citizenship is created and maintained through our mutually recognized connection to a common good. Idealists, such as T. H. Green, claim the mutual recognition of others as contributors to a common good shared by each provides a substantial, ethical link between its members (see 1941: 45–46 [§26]). This shared good held in common by all helps make our individual rights possible *as individual members of a common good* (see Green, 1941: 47–48 [§§30–31]).⁶ Indeed, for Green and others:

an interest in [a] common good is the ground of political society, in the sense that without it no body of people would recognise any authority as having a claim on their common obedience. It is so far as a government represents to them a common good that the subjects are conscious that they ought to obey it, i.e. that obedience to it is a means to an end desirable in itself or absolutely (Green, 1941: 109 [§98]).

This common good must be a public good that ‘is for the public good’ and not merely the preferences of a majority or dominant group within society (Green, 1941: 117 [§117]). So it is not simply the fact we live together within a certain *geographical proximity* that is important, but the *ethical relationships* we share in common equally.⁷ This claim – that citizens have special bonds connecting them within a shared identity of mutual belonging – resonates with contemporary discussions of citizenship and identity. For example, Bhikhu Parekh argues:

Members of a political community are bound to each other by countless ties. They have a common interest in maintaining a stable community, a system of basic rights and liberties, and a general climate of civility and mutual trust... They see it as their community, feel responsible for it, take an active interest in its affairs, and feel

proud or ashamed when it does or does not live up to their moral expectations of it. Through all this, relations between citizens are a form of special relations...Citizens therefore have duties to each other that they do not have to outsiders (2008: 247).

The idea that citizens have special duties to one another as equal members of a shared community based on some form of common good is not an idea of purely historical interest, but one that continues to possess real currency today in our debates. What makes British Idealism important is the range and depth of its contributions to how ethical citizenship might be best understood.

Surprisingly, there has been relatively little work exploring the contributions of British Idealism to citizenship (see Vincent and Plant 1984; Boucher and Vincent, 2000: 27–54, 158–164, 170–180). The essays in this book explore this from its historical roots to its contemporary relevance and application in the international context. What emerges is a tradition that may remain less visible than others, but whose vision speaks as clearly to us and our concerns today than ever before.

Historical roots

Part I of this book examines the historical roots of ethical citizenship in British Idealism. The first two chapters explore its presence in the work of T. H. Green and all establish connections to contemporary debates. What emerges is the rich depth of philosophical insights from the close scrutiny of Idealist texts.

Rex Martin argues that Green defends a distinctive account of persons and citizens whereby our affiliations with others take us beyond the immediacy of self and family. Martin delivers an engaging and forensic analysis of Green's account with a focus on his theory of self-realization, his theory of the common good in relation to individual rights and Green's understanding of democracy. Martin argues that today there is often thought to be a gulf between the politics of the common good and the politics of self-interest. The value of Green's views on citizenship is that they help show how this difference might become reconciled. Avital Simhony explores a confusion about citizenship and how Green's views have been misappropriated. Theories about citizenship are routinely categorized in terms of familiar labels, such as active or passive citizenship and civic republican or liberal citizenship accounts. She argues that Green defends citizenship as 'mutual membership' that overcomes the traditional dualisms found in the citizenship literature.

Green's position uniquely blends together members' social service with a structure of social justice recognizing the shared citizenship others hold in common with us.

Leslie Armour considers ethical citizenship as a kind of moral puzzle. Globalization is everywhere. So how might we justify our special duties to some while excluding many other groups in an ever more interconnected world? Armour reveals a rich tapestry of British Idealist debate and argument spanning several figures in a comprehensive overview of how Idealists have attempted to justify ethical citizenship. This section concludes with a chapter by Greg Claeys. He considers a different 19th century figure, John Stuart Mill, whose views often contrasted with those of British Idealists (see Brooks, 2008). Claeys examines Mill's famous *On Liberty* essay where Mill, while protecting a large domain of behaviour as 'self-regarding', nonetheless defends permitting a substantial amount of moral admonition in society as a means of regulating behaviour and ensuring moral progress. This activity, which can be construed as an important element in Mill's ideal of citizenship, has however rarely been assessed carefully before.

Contemporary relevance

Part II considers the contemporary relevance of ethical citizenship. This is an area perhaps easy to overlook because British Idealism has been relegated to a status as a more minor tradition within the history of philosophy – although it could be argued this assessment is too premature. British Idealism is not a movement that happened and whose time has gone, but it lives on and speaks to us as it helps us address our concerns today.

Robert Kocis begins by critically examining what he identifies as a tension in liberalism between 'individual liberalism' which views persons as libertarian and disconnected to others versus 'communal liberalism' articulated by British Idealism. Kocis claims this debate matters and he argues that Idealism provides us with a more compelling view of the person and society. Kocis connects this to wider issues, such as hate speech. He argues that a defence to communal liberalism should commit us to ban hate speech as sufficiently harmful to warrant prohibition.

Thom Brooks explores models of citizenship with a focus on how they address societal diversity. One model is John Rawls's political liberalism which seeks to overcome our differences by constructing a new overlapping consensus. A second model is Bhikhu Parekh's theory of multiculturalism which understands our differences as an inescapable fact to be

embraced. Brooks argues these models are vulnerable to the problem of political alienation understood as about our political convictions, or their lack, regarding shared senses of belonging. Brooks defends stakeholding – a principle that claims those who have a stake should have a say and a conviction about viewing oneself as a stakeholder – and he traces its support in the work of British Idealism. Brooks argues that Parekh’s model is more compelling because it more compatible with stakeholding, and it raises important issues about how political alienation might be addressed.⁸

William J. Mander examines how several key British Idealists understood the process of education for citizenship, including Caird, Jones, Muirhead, Mackenzie, MacCunn, and Hetherington. Mander reveals a novel perspective never before explored in such rich detail where an individual’s education for its own sake is coincident with an education for citizenship. Mander argues that Idealists sought to foster a sense of citizenship of a ‘we’ inclusive of all members rather than an ‘us’ that prioritized some over others. Ethical citizenship is about inclusion and shared commonality. Mander concludes by exploring the relevance for citizenship education in Britain today.

Owen James Fellows concludes this section by bringing into conversation Rawls and Collingwood on citizenship. Fellows demonstrates several illuminating points of connection between them that raise new insights into the understanding of political philosophy and the idea of a realistic utopia.

International context

Part III investigates ethical citizenship within an international content. This is the area where British Idealism is perhaps discussed the least but that is perhaps best explained by the relative paucity of their work in this area. The fact they published much less in this area is no indication of the rich insights to be gained through a close examination of their writings as evidenced in this section.

Matthew Hann challenges the interpretation of Green’s ethical citizenship as non-cosmopolitan. In a ground-breaking essay, Hann argues this reading rests on a serious misreading of Green’s theory and its potential application. Ethical citizenship can be more than a view about special duties to fellow members of our community but can extend globally to our ‘cosmopolity’. British Idealism’s idea of ethical citizenship can account for our diverse, globalized world much better than it is given credit for.

Maria Dimova-Cookson brings together for the first time Bernard Bosanquet and David Miller to provide a critical, comparative analysis of their related philosophical views concerning the justification of special duties for co-nationals. Dimova-Cookson argues there are surprising commonalities concerning ideas about morality, community, and particularism. She argues that Bosanquet offers us a more balanced and acceptable view of particularity and universality than Miller.

The part and book concludes with a chapter by James Connelly on climate ethics. He considers the justifiable limits for state action in supporting and promoting environmental virtues. Connelly applies Green's views to a reconsideration of environmental citizenship. While British Idealists are well known for their arguments for a common good pertaining to members of a distinct political community, Connelly argues many of them might be sympathetic to extending this more widely to a common environmental good shared by all.

Conclusion

Ethical Citizenship is the first book-length examination of this topic in the work of British Idealists available. Its sections explore the philosophical roots, contemporary relevance and application to an international context covering a wide range of fascinating philosophical figures and ideas whose resonance with our concerns today and in public policy circles are clear.

This book has the further objective of promoting the ideas and relevance of British Idealist philosophy to a new generation to inspire further research into the movement's rich history, but also to foster the return of British Idealism as a serious *and living* philosophical tradition represented by many of the authors contributing to this book. *Ethical Citizenship* is an attempt to demonstrate the continuing power of their ideas to our contemporary debates. It will not be the last.⁹

Notes

1. See Mander (2011) for the most comprehensive historical account of British Idealism.
2. See Chapter 6 by Robert Kocis in this volume.
3. There is much controversy about why British Idealism declined in influence at this time. One view is that its philosophical positions had become untenable after famous attacks by Bertrand Russell and others. This seems unlikely and, even if true, their positions could and should have performed better in response. A second view is that British Idealists suffered for its ties to German

- philosophers like Kant and Hegel at a time where the United Kingdom was entering war with Germany (see Muirhead, 1915).
4. See Green (1941: 6–27 [§§4–25]) for one of many examples.
 5. See Simhony's chapter on the idea of 'mutual membership' in British Idealism.
 6. See Green (1941: 110 [§99]): 'It is on the relation to a society, to other men recognising a common good, that the individual's rights depend, as much as the gravity of a body depends on relations to other bodies'.
 7. This perspective is influenced by Hegel's claims that citizens should ideally view their community membership where each is at home. See Hegel (1990: 196 [§153]); Hardimon (1994) and Brooks (2013a).
 8. The main focus is on clarifying a new perspective on debates about which model of citizenship is most compelling. There is a related issue that is not explored concerning the use of citizenship tests. This is an issue of special interest for me in my current work. I published the only comprehensive report on the uses of a citizenship test within immigration policy in the UK that has been widely cited and highly influential (see Brooks, 2013b). This report with various related links can be found at my personal website: <http://thombrooks.info>.
 9. See Brooks (2012) for one example of a new theory of punishment that seeks to relaunch British Idealism in legal philosophy.

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Part I

Historical Roots