

Kant on Citizenship: Abstract

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This thesis argues that Kant has a systematic account of citizenship. Kant claims that citizens possess three attributes: (i) freedom, (ii) equality, and (iii) independence. Each of these attributes specifies a relation between the state and its members. Freedom is the institutionalised version of the innate right to freedom. Citizens possess freedom when the state only permits its members to perform those actions that are compatible with the innate right. Equality is possessed by citizens when each member of a state bears the same relationship to the law as every other member. Finally, independence is the attribute possessed by members of a state who are not under the authority of any other member and who contribute to the state.

There are three kinds of rights in Kant's political philosophy: the innate right to freedom, acquired rights, and public rights. Each of the attributes of citizenship provides us with additional resources for thinking about one of these rights. Freedom sheds light on the innate right by specifying the requirements of that right in the only condition in which it imposes constraints on the actions of others (i.e., the state). Equality sheds light on acquired rights. This is because the implications of Kant's account of the equality of citizens primarily concern those rights. Kant's account of equality tells us both that privileges associated with a certain status cannot be hereditary, and that great material inequality is permissible. Independence sheds light on public rights. Those who are independent are active citizens. Active citizens are free and equal members of a state who contribute to the existence and the laws of that state. In doing so, they also contribute to a necessary condition for the validity of the rights of each.