PART I

# CHARTING THE CONCEPTUAL TERRAIN

1

# Resurrecting an Ancient Question

## *The Place of Citizenship in a Worthy Life*

> *I die the King's good servant, but God's first.*
>
> – Thomas More's last words before his beheading on 6 July, 1535

> *… it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.*
>
> – Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532)[1]

Many people throughout history have paid a high price for taking a political stance in favor of what they take to be enduring principles of justice and goodness. Witness Socrates' condemnation by the citizens of Athens for persisting in his "impious" philosophical teachings, Thomas More's execution for refusing to recognize Henry VIII as head of the Church, and Martin Luther King's imprisonment for protesting the laws of racial segregation. Although we may not share all of the moral commitments of Socrates, More, and King, many of us admire them for standing by their conscientiously held convictions about justice and the human good, even in the face of great social and political adversity. Their willingness to suffer grievously for the sake of doing what is right sets a challenging example for the rest of us. It also serves as a sobering reminder that politics is not automatically hospitable to the practice of ethical integrity – indeed, many a soul has been corrupted in the corridors of power, or transformed by his "civic participation" into someone who is *anything but* a paragon of virtue and integrity.

[1] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1532]), Chapter xv, p. 61.

The dramatic stories of Socrates, More, and King should not be allowed to obscure the more quotidian ways in which citizenship threatens our capacity to live decent, honest, and worthy lives. Admittedly, citizens of contemporary constitutional democracies are not typically threatened with the gallows for standing by their ethical and religious commitments. However, they do experience considerable pressure, sometimes legal and other times social, to adapt their behavior to the norms and expectations of their political roles. They are subject to civil and criminal laws; pay taxes; serve as soldiers or police officers; vote in local and national elections; debate public policy matters; campaign for political candidates; serve on juries; assume the offices and duties of government ministers, civil servants, legislators, and judges; and are expected to adjust their behavior and attitudes accordingly. If all of these roles systematically lined up with justice and goodness, adapting our behavior to them might not pose much of a threat to integrity. But experience has taught us that human institutions and roles are morally fallible, no less than the humans who create and maintain them. Consequently, political roles may be an occasion of sin as much as an encouragement to virtue.

We are thus confronted with the question: *What is the precise contribution of citizenship to an admirable or worthy life? Does it ennoble our lives or devalue them, and if so, how?* This is hardly a new question, but it is one that has generally been sidelined by modern political philosophers, starting with Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, under the pretext that politics is all about securing the conditions of public order and justice, not about "making men moral." The modern, ethically minimalist approach to civic life tends to treat the question of human character and excellence as either incidental to, or instrumental to, the peace and justice of society. Recent normative political theory has, for the most part, followed suit. It is not that the ethical dimension of civic life has been completely ignored. For example, there are excellent discussions of the quality of public life,[2] the importance of civic virtue and civic friendship,[3] the

[2] See Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12 (1984), 81–96; Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3] See Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Susan D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

need to accommodate ethical and cultural diversity,[4] potential conflicts between ethical integrity and political expediency,[5] and the importance of freeing citizens from habits of blind conformity to political norms.[6] Yet none of these fine discussions amounts to a sustained investigation of the potential contribution of citizenship to a worthy life.

It is specifically this problem that I propose to investigate in this book. Without a compelling narrative about the contribution of citizenship to a worthy life, we suffer from a good deal of ethical confusion about the ultimate value and point of citizenship. This confusion is worrying, for a number of reasons: first, and most obviously perhaps, as rational agents we have a strong interest in clarifying our reasons for action, and exercising a role without a clear sense of its purpose and its place in one's life is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. Second, the absence of any clear narrative about the ethical value of citizenship renders constitutional democracies increasingly vulnerable to political apathy, as politics fails to speak to the highest human aspirations. Citizens may legitimately wonder how their role in sustaining constitutional democratic institutions and values actualizes their potential as human beings. Last but not least, insufficient attention to the ethical basis of civic life renders citizens more vulnerable to manipulative rhetoric, because political ideology flourishes where serious and candid ethical discourse is either silenced or reduced to inarticulacy.

In response to the ethical deficit in modern reflections on citizenship, I offer in this book what I call an *integrationist* approach to citizenship, by which I mean an ideal of citizenship that privileges the standpoint of the person who seeks to integrate his diverse dispositions, projects, and roles into a worthy life. The integrationist approach views citizenship in its various guises not merely as a set of social, moral, and legal norms that are imposed upon the unsuspecting subject, but as the logical outgrowth of a person's commitment to live a worthy life. I argue in this book that citizenship is required to live

[4] See William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and John Tomasi, *Liberalism beyond Justice: Citizens, Society, and the Boundaries of Political Theory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[5] See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 [1932]); Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures: Science as a Vocation, Politics as a Vocation*, ed. Tracy B. Strong, David Owen, and Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett, 2004 [1919]); and Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2.2 (1973), 160–180.

[6] See George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992); Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Peter Alexander Meyers, *Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

a worthy human life both because it is an essential tool for managing our interdependency, and because it is an indispensable vehicle for teaching and learning the virtues of public life. Having made a case for the general ethical value of citizenship, I elucidate the process through which we incorporate civic roles into the fabric of our lives, and propose a set of guiding principles for selecting and enacting those roles with integrity.

This book is aimed principally at two audiences, one academic and the other more general. Within the academic sphere, I hope to speak to political and moral philosophers, social scientists, and theologians who study citizenship and civic participation from a psychological, sociological, political, theological, and/or ethical perspective. I aim to make a case to my academic readers that integrity and its claims deserve a fuller hearing in the study of citizenship, and to share with them a philosophical approach to civic engagement that gives pride of place to ethical concerns, above all the aspiration to live a worthy human life. But the work is also addressed more generally to citizens who are interested in reflecting more deeply on the meaning of their citizenship and its relation to their higher and broader aspirations in life. Many ordinary citizens, whether they work in business, law, medicine, catering, or construction, as well as more "professional" citizens, such as statesmen, legislators, judges, and civil servants, have little time to immerse themselves in the theoretical minutiae of academic debates, yet are thoughtful and responsible people who like to ponder what they are doing and why. With this in mind, I have tried to write in a style that can be followed, for the most part, with minimal prior acquaintance with the specialized jargon and concepts of academic philosophy, and though I engage philosophical arguments and positions along the way, the main line of argument should be accessible even to readers unacquainted with the particular philosophical works I refer to.

## 1.1 A NEGLECTED QUESTION

Undoubtedly, the question of the place of citizenship in a worthy life finds echoes throughout the history of political thought, from Aristotle's *Politics* (*c.* 330 BC)[7] to Machiavelli's *Prince* (1532)[8] and Reinhold Niebuhr's

[7] The relation between being a good citizen and being a good man is raised explicitly in *Politics*, Book 3, 1276b15–20: "There is a point nearly allied to the preceding: Whether the excellence of a good man and a good citizen is the same or not." Aristotle later investigates "what is the best constitution for most states, and the best life for most men" (*Pol.*, Book 4, 1295a25). For quotations from the *Politics*, I will use the Barnes translation, in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[8] See especially Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter xv, p. 61: "… it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity."

*Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932).[9] And it surely retains its vigor and urgency for many citizens of modern political regimes who seek to reconcile their civic responsibilities with their highest ethical aspirations – in short, for those who seek to be not merely good citizens but good *persons*. Traditional ideals of public service and devotion to the common good have come to appear to many as naive and unrealistic as we learn of widespread financial corruption at the highest levels of government; and ordinary citizens frequently feel personally implicated, through their tax contributions and participation in the global economy, in morally questionable military interventions and economic systems that appear stacked against the interests of developing countries. Whatever one's precise views on these and related issues, the deplorable state of our public institutions and the wide-ranging disillusionment among citizens about the character of their political leaders surely warrant a careful reexamination of our ideals of public service and citizenship, and their implications for the way we ought to live.

Yet a careful survey of the modern literature on citizenship and civic participation reveals that important aspects of the ethics of citizenship, at least in the context of modern constitutional democracy, have not been adequately investigated. For example, we appear to have abandoned the project of justifying citizenship as a role that enhances the overall caliber of a human life – instead, we tend to reduce it to a role that furnishes us with basic goods necessary for survival, or perhaps necessary to secure a modicum of public justice, with little explicit connection to the perennial human aspiration to live an honorable and worthy life. Along similar lines, modern discussions of citizenship, whether popular or scholarly, have given surprisingly little attention to the process through which our civic roles become integrated into the moral and psychological fabric of our lives, and the principles that ought to guide this integrative process. Providing a nuanced account of this integrative process, framed in both psychological and normative terms, is the object of the present study.

The ethical perspective through which I view citizenship is, roughly speaking, the standpoint of an agent who cares about living a worthy or admirable life, all things considered, and thus cares not only about the external consequences of his actions, but also about his character,

[9] Niebuhr is not particularly sanguine about the impact of civic life on human virtue. Here is one representative statement: "As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power command" (Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics*, 9). For a more lengthy treatment of Niebuhr's views on the ethical value of citizenship, see Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

viz. the type of person he is becoming.[10] The ethical perspective is widely associated with ancient thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but it has been rearticulated and defended by modern thinkers, including Elizabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, Bernard Williams, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Robert Adams.[11]

The ethical perspective as I am using it here may be distinguished from a number of alternative perspectives on human action: First, though the ethical standpoint is compatible with mistaken conceptions of the good, weakness of will, and other human imperfections, it is oriented in a serious way toward human excellence and consequently cannot be simply reduced to the subjective perspective of the agent, that is, the values or priorities that happen to constitute his psychic economy at any given time.[12] Second, the ethical standpoint is not atomistic or solipsistic, but socially situated and informed. Thus, ethical beliefs cannot be insulated from the influence and criticisms of our peers without a considerable degree of irrationality, self-deception, or dishonesty. Third, the ethical standpoint can be readily distinguished from a certain interpretation of morality or of the "moral" point of view, constituted exclusively or predominantly by other-regarding obligations, and only secondarily by the

[10] My understanding of the ethical standpoint is significantly indebted to Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. Chapter 1, "Socrates' Question." Though the idea of ethical inquiry presupposes the power of human reason to perceive the difference between good and evil, it certainly does not commit us to what MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and others view as the "Enlightenment project" of creating a type of morality that is completely independent from tradition or freed from the necessity of moral training. Thus Hauerwas's critique of ethics as a "bad idea" rests on a narrow and rather unattractive conception of ethics as a product of the Enlightenment (Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* [Nashville: Abington Press, 1999], 27–31). But my conception of ethics is unaffected by his critique since it is guided more by classical (especially Socratic, Aristotelian, and Thomistic) than Enlightenment approaches to the human good.

[11] See in particular G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958), 1–19; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Philippa Foot, *Virtue and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2001 [1977]; repr., 2001); Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*; Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford and New York Clarendon Press, 2006).

[12] For example, the evaluative perspective attributed to agents by Harry Frankfurt's more or less "value-neutral" moral psychology is far more normatively open-ended than the ethical perspective to be elaborated and defended in this book. See, for example, Harry Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

quality of the agent's character.[13] Finally, the ethical standpoint may be distinguished from the political and social standpoints, at least insofar as the latter either disregard issues of character or view them predominantly as functions of political and social order.[14] I am not suggesting that there is anything inherently wrong with adopting the psychological, other-regarding, or social standpoints for certain purposes. But they should not be confused with the ethical standpoint that constitutes the main focus of the present investigation.

Typically modern political theorists, at least those sympathetic to the values of constitutional democracy, have evinced a marked reluctance to offer any explicit account of the relation between the social and political rationale for citizenship – in particular, its contribution to justice, economic prosperity, and social stability – and its ethical rationale, or its contribution to a worthy human life. Prevailing accounts of citizenship overwhelmingly interpret it as a role that enables us to achieve certain instrumental goods (e.g., wealth, personal security), or to honor our obligations toward others (e.g., the obligation to respect the property and person of others), or more generally, to secure the exigencies of a just and stable social and political order (e.g., without law-abiding citizens, a free society would collapse into military rule).

[13] Other-regarding accounts of morality sometimes use the terms "ethical" and "moral" to distinguish between agent-centered and interpersonal types of values or reasons for action. Because I see interpersonal theories of value and obligation as specifying central dimensions of a worthy way of life, I do not think any strong ethical/moral distinction holds up. I use the term "ethical," then, with some reluctance, because if I have to choose between the two sets of connotations, I prefer a term that connotes character and overall worth ("ethical) than one that connotes interpersonal rules of conduct ("moral"), just because the former connotation is more inclusive and less misguiding.

[14] Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) is a good example of an analysis of political and social life undertaken primarily from the political standpoint. Berkowitz's account of civic virtue views character largely through the prism of a liberal democratic regime and its requirements. There is an overwhelming tendency among modern and contemporary political philosophers to view citizenship primarily as a guarantor or facilitator of political and social justice and stability, and only secondarily, if at all, as a component of human excellence. Texts that overwhelmingly privilege the concerns of justice and social order in discussing the role of the citizen abound, but I will just mention a few here: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 1994 [1651]); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 [1961]); Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

This approach is exemplified most conspicuously, perhaps, by John Rawls's "political liberalism," which considers political justice and the concomitant duties of citizenship as part of a "free-standing" political conception, constituted exclusively – at least for purposes of political decision making – by the public values of a constitutional democracy.[15] Along similar lines, Bruce Ackerman urges citizens to bracket out their most intractable ethical disagreements when discussing the basis for policy and law.[16] Finally, Peter Berkowitz, although he does not endorse any comprehensive ideal of ethical neutrality, does appear to suggest that a working account of civic virtue can be derived from the exigencies of a liberal democratic regime, considered independently from any general account of human virtue or excellence.[17]

Ethically thin accounts of citizenship such as Rawls's, Berkowitz's, and Ackerman's undoubtedly have something to be said for them: after all, insofar as the values of justice and social order resonate with most people, it may be possible to build up a more or less persuasive account of civic virtue largely on considerations of justice and social stability. People may agree on certain aspects of justice (e.g., pay your debts, respect property) without agreeing on the best way to live, *all things considered*. Thus, focusing on the demands of citizenship in abstraction from broader ethical considerations may be a promising strategy for consolidating a base of civility and social morality in a culture deeply divided on ethical questions.

The downside of this strategy, however, is that it tends to leave unexamined the broader ethical basis of our civic allegiances. This omission is regrettable, for at least three reasons. First, from an ethical perspective, citizenship is an important aspect of one's identity, whose impact on one's character is not insignificant.[18] The business of citizenship can occupy a

[15] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 10–11: "Political liberalism … aims for a political conception of justice as a freestanding view […] It offers no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself."

[16] See Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), esp. 8–15.

[17] See Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*. Berkowitz does not suggest that human virtue is irrelevant to politics – just that an "inquiry into the moral and political significance of virtue can get under way" before the "[metaphysical] foundations … are secured" (13–14).

[18] This book is intended as a work of ethics and political philosophy, not a work of political theology. However, the ethical standpoint proposed in this book is intended to be broad enough to encompass a fully theological perspective as well, at least within traditions such as Christianity and Judaism, which have become broadly supportive of constitutional democratic institutions and values. For example, the impact of citizenship on one's

sizeable amount of our mental and emotional energy; it can send us into battle; it can urge us to compromise about issues we care about for the sake of social cooperation; it can require us to contribute our income to projects we find morally problematic; it can urge us to set aside our "private" judgments and act in the name of "public" norms and values; it can urge us to do things we find personally repellent in the name of national security or public order; and it may suck away our energies and attention from personally enriching projects or activities. Anyone who cares about the quality of his choices and character has good reason to reflect carefully on how his civic roles either enhance or disfigure his life as a human being, and what he might do about it. And surely political philosophers can lend a hand in this task.

Second, it is worth taking a closer look at the ethical and motivational underpinnings of citizenship because ethical judgments about citizenship will likely have an impact, for better or for worse, on the legitimacy of the regime. This is because in many people's minds, the moral legitimacy of constitutional democracy depends to some extent on its likely effects on the character of citizens not merely qua citizens, but qua *persons*. Many people have doubts about the compatibility of politics with the wholehearted pursuit of a decent and honest way of life, and such doubts may damage the perceived legitimacy of political institutions. These doubts may take a variety of forms: some believe that holding public office inevitably requires one to compromise one's character, whether by turning a blind eye to injustice, or by ingratiating oneself with perpetrators of injustice; others believe that doing business in the public square leads one to compromise one's core convictions by getting into the habit of using the most effective political arguments, even at the expense of the truth. One also encounters the conviction that any degree of participation in a regime that wages morally dubious wars renders one complicit in evil.[19]

life of faith, whether as a Jew, Muslim, or Christian, though not examined closely in this book, would be one among several "thickly described" cases of the impact of citizenship on one's life as a human being who seeks to live a worthy life. It would surely be odd for someone to profess Jewish, Muslim, or Christian beliefs and not view a life infused with religious faith as the epitome of a worthy human life. For a more detailed treatment of the theological implications of citizenship, see my discussion in Section 6.5, "Does the Integrationist Approach Threaten the Capacity of Christian Communities to Witness to a Distinctively Christian Way of Life?"

[19] This logic convinces some citizens, including some believers in the Anabaptist faith, to avoid holding public office as a matter of principle. The potential ethical pitfalls of citizenship are explored at greater length in Sections 6.2 to 6.5.