

Analyzing the Concept of Citizenship and Freedom in Aristotle's Theory of Constitution

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ABSTRACT

In the article, my purpose is to examine Aristotle's conception of citizenship and freedom in his *Politics*. The thesis explores the distinctive role of Aristotle's conception of citizenship in ancient Greece. Citizenship is a political identity and is the ultimate end of the individuals in city-state. The reason why we work on Aristotle's concept of citizenship depends on the values he gives to the identity of its citizens. For Aristotle, the political life is the highest form of human life. His model of the active citizen is the way self-realization himself in political life. To participate in political life, people must have freedom so our study makes possible to examine the citizenship in the context of freedom. The issue of citizenship is difficult because there are many concepts interrelated with each other in Aristotle. We have three important aspects which are the concepts of citizenship, freedom and constitution. Given the subject of freedom as the fundamental, we would have the different models of citizen in different forms of constitution.

This study was based primarily on Aristotle *Politics*. This article concludes with the referents of Aristotle conception of freedom and citizenship in his best form of government in his *Politics*. There are many academic works on Aristotle's conception of citizenship but this study may open a window to look his approach to the political freedom of a citizen in ancient Greece.

Key Words: Citizenship, freedom, constitution, best form of constitution, ancient Greece

Throughout political history, the relationship between individuals and the government constituted a serious problem insofar as the individual acquired his identity through his citizenship. The concept of citizenship is significant and dominant. The identity of individuals mirrors their way of life. It is important because their identity allows citizens to participate in the political life in their society. Citizenship defines the individual's form of life of their community.

In addition to this, citizenship has important attributes such as rights and responsibilities, corresponding forms of state, and types of people. In this thesis, we shall examine the concept of citizenship and the freedom of the citizen in Aristotle's constitutional theories. In my study, Aristotle's concept of citizenship is comprised of some essential elements: identity, participation, form of government, common good, happiness, freedom, and ideal city-state. To define citizenship, I will evaluate the relationship between these elements. The role of citizens is to participate in their system of government. Aristotle distinguishes many forms of government in his *Politics*. For Aristotle, the definition of citizenship changes according to the form of

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government.¹ Different definitions of citizenship would apply in different systems. Aristotle discusses the differentiated concept of citizenship in his *Politics*: “[...] that the same person is a citizen; often somebody who would be a citizen in a democracy is not a citizen under an oligarchy.”² The different forms of government define the citizen differently. It shows that there is a relationship between the forms of government and the citizen. In his *Politics*, Aristotle classifies the forms of government as good and bad forms.³ Aristotle’s classification comes from observing many city-states which he then classifies into different groups, based on the common good criteria between the state and the citizen.⁴ For this reason, I will show the importance of common good between the state and the citizen.

To have a clear understanding about citizenship issues, I will begin to examine how the city-state is organized for Aristotle. For Aristotle, human beings are by nature creatures that live in a city-state (*polis*)⁵, which is composed of citizens. For Aristotle, citizens are distinguished from others who are children, women, resident aliens, and slaves. Women, slaves, and foreigners could not take part in government. Aristotle divides individuals according to their natural capacity.⁶ The citizen is a person who has the capability and right to participate in governing. Some persons are incapable of self-governance. They cannot be citizens because they belong to a master. They need a natural master to direct them. They are called as ‘slaves’ who are not free. For Aristotle, the city-state is a partnership of the free.⁷ Freedom is also a debated topic in different types of constitution. To be a citizen, the individual must be free in the city-state. To sum up, there is a relationship between freedom and citizenship in ancient Greece. Aristotle examines the concept of freedom to identify the type of citizen. I build on this analysis to identify political aspects of citizenship in *Politics*. For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of citizenship will be analyzed in ancient Greek life.

The differentiation of citizenship implies more than one type of citizenship. Aristotle observes the different definitions of citizenship in different constitutions. His general definition of citizenship is important to evaluate the constitution. Aristotle defines the citizen as follows: “A citizen pure and simple is defined by nothing else so much as by the right to participate in judicial functions and in office.”⁸ The citizen has an active role in the city-state for Aristotle. The active participation of citizens unites them for reaching the common good in society.

In the history of political thinking, there had been different relationships between the citizen and the state. For example: the liberal and republican tradition of citizenship had been discussed in the context of being a citizen: “[...] the republic is contrasted to personal or authoritarian government; it also differs from the liberal model, which sees society as a collection of atomistic individuals held together by

¹ Pol. 1275b. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6762/6762-h/6762-h.htm>. Accessed at 10.12.2013.

² Pol. 1275a.

³ Pol. 1289a.

⁴ Pol. 1279a.

⁵ Pol. 1253a.

⁶ Pol. 1260a.

⁷ Pol. 1279a.

⁸ Pol. 1275a.

common rules designed to allow them maximum freedom to follow their particular and varied values and interests.”⁹ The liberal form of citizenship means that there is a legal relationship between the individual and the state. A citizen is defined as a free individual but he ought not to harm others. The important value is that individual interests must be protected by laws and liberal tradition of citizenship has individualistic meaning.

The definition of republicanism includes an active, participatory citizenship.¹⁰ The republican forms of citizenship refer to direct participation in political life. One can argue that the citizen plays the more important role in public life than liberal tradition of citizenship. In the republican form, citizens have a connection with each other in political life, so it is not individualistic. It comes from the common good criteria. “The active participation of citizens is united by a concern for the common good.”¹¹ People are linked with each other by nature. Living together is more meaningful in the republican system. “The key principle of the republican model is civic self-rule, underpinning Aristotle's characterization of the citizen as one capable of ruling and being ruled in turn.”¹² From this point of view, Aristotle plays an important role in the development of the concept of the participant citizen. His ideal form of citizenship leads to a republican type of citizen.

I will argue that there is a significant link between ancient and early modern perceptions of citizenship, even if the two concepts are importantly different. The early modern understanding of citizenship will help us to reveal distinctive features of Aristotle's political philosophy. Aristotle's conception of a citizen is different from the modern conception: first of all because it is not representative.¹³ This means that the citizen has the more passive role in the early modern world. One could argue that the early modern political philosophers encouraged or implied a deeper idea of participation. In Aristotle's political philosophy, the citizen has an active role in political life. In this thesis, the central point is that citizenship becomes more meaningful starting from Aristotle's ideas. In his *Politics* he writes: “man is by nature a political animal [...]”¹⁴ (Pol. 1253a) Aristotle gives a teleological value to the citizen in his political philosophy: the individual can fulfill the end of his existence only in political life. Finally, man has a political identity, which is citizenship.

These opinions and discussions are important in terms of individuals, the role and importance of the individual in society, rights, freedoms, systems of public order; and state structure. For Aristotle; city-states are not only forms of living together, but of living well. The common good is the necessary criterion for happy and ideal life. Aristotle considers many forms of government to reach an ideal form of state. For our

⁹ Moulakis, Athanasios, "Civic Humanism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/humanism-civic/>>. Accessed at 10.09.2014.

¹⁰ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humanism-civic/>. Accessed at: 10.09.2014.

¹¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humanism-civic/>. Accessed at: 10.09.2014.

¹² Leydet, Dominique, "Citizenship", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/citizenship/>>. Accessed at 10.09.2014.

¹³ Joseph Zarrì.

¹⁴ Benjamin Jowett, (Trans), Jonathan Barnes (Ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume 1*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

study, that was the attractive point of Aristotle's political views. He classified forms of government to show the importance of common good in society. There is a close relationship between the common good and the ideal state. I approve Aristotle's pursuit of the ideal state because citizens aim to have a happy and virtuous life. My point is to explore Aristotle's perception of citizenship in his *Politics*. Aristotle shows that the participatory citizenship provides self-determination in political life. For Aristotle, we are not subjects; we are human beings. For him, a human being does not depend unconsciously on political life because man can reach his ultimate end in the political system. Aristotle gives more humanistic meaning to the definition of politics. For him, politics is the nature of man, so human being is the main part of political life not as a tool. In early modern philosophy, politics sees the individual as subjects of political life not more things. Consequently, I focus how meaningful is Aristotle's active citizen for political life.

I propose to reveal the relationship between freedom and citizenship in each constitution. I will present an ideal form of constitution according to Aristotle. Our study will show the place of the citizen in the ideal form of government. I will pay special attention to Aristotle's concept of citizenship in which he gives special meaning to citizens. It is important to explain why citizens are different from non-citizens. The freedom of the citizen is related to his participation in the political sphere. In ancient Greece, freedom was the most important foundation for the citizenship. Different perspectives on citizenship have been explained since early political thought. Aristotle's *Politics* explores citizenship from the perspective of different constitution forms. My thesis aims to investigate the concept of freedom that is part of the identity of a citizen.

It is obvious that Aristotle's concepts of citizens and freedom could not be applied to modern societies. Modern political systems only arrange life in society in a formal sense. People see politics as a necessary tool for organizing our living together, without referring to pre-political values. But Aristotle's ideal political system provides to acquire happiness and a virtuous life. Aristotle's concept of citizenship adds worth and values to the meaning of citizenship. Aristotle distinguishes citizen from others in that politics is the teleological end of life for the citizen. Therefore, his description of the active citizen is central to our study. Participation in political life is a necessary condition for citizenship, which is more like an exercise in potentiality than a state for Aristotle. And human capacity is sufficient to reach a better life for Aristotle. For us, the active citizen is the positive side of his definition of citizenship.

Although Aristotle claims that all human beings are political animals by nature, Aristotle excludes some groups from political life. Aristotle divides people according to their natural capacity, especially their capacity for being rational. The citizen is free, but others humans are neither free nor citizens. I do not approve Aristotle's privileged perception of freedom, which should not be restricted to a particular group. Thus, I do not support Aristotle's divisions of class in the city-state. On the other hand, we today observe the constructive society model in Aristotle's political ideas. For Aristotle, the common good is necessary to have an ideal virtuous life. The "common good" combines people in a common end for Aristotle. To sum up, a positive part of Aristotle's political ideas are the design of a collective society.

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