

Introduction: Methodology and Non-Ideal Theory in Christine Hobden's *Citizenship in a Globalised World*

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ABSTRACT

This contribution examines the methodology of Christine Hobden's *Citizenship in a Globalised World*. It introduces some concepts, themes, and arguments that arise in the discussion by the three commentators Ashwini Vasanthamukar, Anna Stiliz, and Shuk Ying Chan in this book symposium. It then examines Hobden's approach to non-ideal political theorising and her proposal for citizens' responsibilities.

KEYWORDS

Non-ideal theory, citizenship, collective responsibility; global justice

Mainstream political philosophy traditionally follows Jean-Jacque's Rousseau's lead, "taking men as they are and laws as they can be made" (Rousseau 1998, 3). The non-enforceable responsibilities and obligations of individuals are traditionally the purview of moral philosophy, not political philosophy (putting the 'natural duty of justice' to one side).

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Christine Hobden bucks this tradition in her compelling new book *Citizenship in a Globalised World*. She takes as given the contemporary world of states—with all their injustices, inequalities, and democratic flaws—and she asks after the non-enforceable responsibilities and obligations borne by citizens *qua* citizens of a particular state, in light of their states' real-world failures. Rather than taking citizens as they are and states as they can be made, Hobden takes states as they are and citizens as they can be made. The result is a demanding normative conception of citizenship, which is both ambitious and modest, both global and local.

The account is ambitious in that citizens' responsibilities and obligations run wide and deep. According to Hobden, citizens share in collective backward-looking responsibility for their states' wrongs at home and abroad, and have individual forward-responsibilities or obligations to press their state to realise justice at home while respecting rights abroad. Citizens' obligations are active, dynamic, and participatory. Yet the account is also modest, in that Hobden does not purport to establish exactly what justice requires or to account for states that are not liberal democracies (2021, 9-10). Nor does she claim to provide the “definitive” conception of citizenship or the responsibilities of citizens. Instead, her conclusions are accompanied by a refreshing epistemic humility: her account is simply “one voice among many” (2021, 6). She doesn't purport to have considered all possible relevant perspectives or factors, but offers her account as part of an ongoing conversation about citizenship.

Hobden's proposal is global, insofar as the responsibilities she posits are decidedly outward-focused and cosmopolitan; yet she is carefully attuned to how differences in geographic location and social position affect individuals' capacities to enact their responsibilities and obligations (e.g., 2021, 108-114). Hobden aspires to an anti-racist liberalism that speaks to individuals' varied experiences around the globe (2021, 10-11, 126-

9), while remaining cognizant of her book's highly localized positionality within the white western debates on global justice, citizenship, and liberalism. She aims to push the latter literatures towards attending more closely to the varieties of citizenship in our current unjust world. With this combination of commitments, Hobden makes a distinctive contribution to debates about citizens' responsibilities.

The present symposium embraces Hobden's focus on citizens' responsibilities, while critiquing how she justifies and demarcates them. Ashwini Vasanthakumar examines Hobden's assumption of a state-based world order. For Hobden, this assumption derives from necessity (states are here to stay, whether we like it or not) and desirability (Hobden insists that a plausible moral rationale can be provided to justify a world of states). Vasanthakumar questions the desirability of a state-based world order. If such a world order is undesirable, then perhaps it cannot do the normative work needed to justify strong responsibilities of citizenship, such as those endorsed by Hobden.

Anna Stilz questions Hobden's particular version of consequentialist cosmopolitanism. According to Stilz, a commitment to humans' equal moral worth does not imply (as Hobden perhaps assumes) a commitment to cosmopolitanism, nor a commitment to basic necessities and relational equality as the goals of cosmopolitanism, nor to separate states as the best vehicle for realising those cosmopolitan goals. Stilz also questions whether all citizens are responsible for their states' acts. It is customary to distinguish 'backward-looking responsibility' from 'forward-looking responsibility': roughly, the former involves culpability, while the latter involves obligations. While Stilz and Hobden are in agreement that citizens bear forward-looking responsibilities in the wake of wrongs perpetrated by their state, Hobden goes further by suggesting that citizens are collectively culpable (where this is more than simply being culpable for one's personal voluntary contributions to the state's wrongs, such as voting or protesting). Stilz questions this further step.

Shuk Ying Chan likewise addresses citizens' backward-looking responsibility. While Stiliz exculpates those who oppose their state's wrongdoing through votes or protests, Chan exculpates those who lack any meaningful choice about how to vote or protest within their state—for example, because their votes are suppressed or their protests are brutalised by police. Rather than attributing responsibility for the state's wrongdoings to citizens as a collective (as Hobden does), Chan advocates attributing responsibility for different state injustices to different sub-state and trans-state collectives.

Besides the book's focus on the non-enforceable political responsibilities of realistically-situated individual citizens, *Citizenship in a Globalised World* is made distinctive by its methodological positioning within the realm of non-ideal political theory. We can follow Laura Valentini (2012) in distinguishing three aspects of non-ideal theorising: first, non-ideal theorising might be premised on the fact of 'partial compliance'; second, non-ideal theorising might make a claim to the feasibility of its recommendations; and third, non-ideal theorising might concern how to improve the world as we find it (rather than specifying what a utopian world would look like). Hobden's book is non-ideal in all three senses—but only up to a point.

First, Hobden starts from the fact that states have not, do not, and will not comply with their domestic and global obligations of justice. She asks what states' non-compliance implies about the responsibilities and obligations of citizens. However, she assumes that enough citizens will indeed comply with the responsibilities and obligations she proposes, such that the actions of compliant citizens will not be entirely ineffectual or overly burdensome (2021, 114-6). This is a large assumption, which could usefully be revised to enable further steps into the non-ideal—and, potentially, a recognition of the extreme demands of Hobden's theory.

Second, Hobden claims some feasibility for her proposals. For example, she notes that some of her normative recommendations align with citizens' self-interest, which makes those recommendations easier for citizens to swallow (2021, 105). Yet one could readily doubt the feasibility of her cosmopolitan and outward-focused vision for citizens' action, given the ongoing inward focus of many liberal democracies. It is hard to imagine many citizens taking up the responsibilities Hobden gives them.

Third, Hobden often appears to engage in transitional theory, as when she recommends that citizens must search for "small footholds" to make their states accountable (2021, 18). Yet her overall vision is grounded in an end-state ideal of local and global justice: a utopian vision about how the world could be, in which all humans' basic needs are met and all citizens enjoy relational equality. The chasm between our starting point and that end-state could have been more readily acknowledged.

None of this is to suggest that Hobden's argument is internally inconsistent or untenable; it is simply to point out that she has made careful choices about where to be 'realistic' and where to be 'aspirational'. We might have wound up with different conclusions—which may have been more difficult to defend—if we had made different choices in these domains. As things stand, Hobden's unique set of non-ideal assumptions serve to motivate an urgent call-to-arms for contemporary citizens, even in the face of widespread complacency by states.

Hobden is admirably specific regarding the practical content of her proposals. In her final chapter, she proposes institutionalisation (for example, taxation or regulation), civic education, and political consumerism (for example, boycotts) as three concrete targets for individuals who are wishing to act upon their citizenship responsibilities and obligations. By addressing the reader as a potential political activist who might enact concrete change, Hobden brings to life the theoretical debates that often assert responsibilities without making

any specific demands of the reader. Here, however, Hobden's non-ideal assumptions start to break. After all, Hobden's vision of institutionalisation and civic education are both premised on action by the state: as Hobden describes them, these reforms cannot be enacted on the basis of action by citizens alone; rather, citizens' obligations are to call upon their state to orchestrate citizens' reparative burdens and to educate citizens. For these two proposals to be specified, we have to engage in fairly idealised theorising. Specifically, we have to make the assumption that at least some office-holders will comply with Hobden's account of *their* responsibilities and obligations. As for political consumerism, here we face the problem that different citizens have different ways of fleshing out Hobden's loosely specified and ecumenical conception of justice. With different conceptions of justice in hand, different citizens will engage in different kinds of political consumerism—with the result that justice overall might end up in a worse position than if we had rallied for a more centralised democratic approach.

Again, none of this makes Hobden's account wrong. It simply demonstrates something she readily acknowledges: that a full picture of the demands of justice will include more than the responsibilities of ordinary citizens. There is a wide terrain of more and less idealised theorising, much of which remains to be traversed in the wake of Hobden's innovative book. Hobden's normative ambition, epistemic humility, non-ideal methodology, and practical specificity make her approach a vital contribution to debates about citizens' responsibilities.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

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