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CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY TRADITION: SOME DISPUTABLE QUESTIONS

Abstract:

It is widely recognized that effective citizenship rests on a rigorous and viable system of civic and political education which informs the individual of his civil rights and obligations (M. Janowitz et al.). While the norms of democratic citizenship were initially of West European origin, the historical experience of many European nations demonstrated a less favourable picture of the average citizen. For instance, the theory of the “unsophisticated citizen” developed the arguments of Joseph Schumpeter, who, at the beginning of the 1940s, expressed a fundamental doubt about the possibility of realization of the ‘classical conception of democracy’ due to its incompatibility with human nature and the irrationalities of everyday human conduct. Radical transformation in the characteristics of the Western general public occurred only during the last thirty years of the 20th century. The essential growth of educational level of the American and West-European electorate has also changed the level of political sophistication, thus creating the premises for the development of the process which is usually described as a cognitive mobilization. It is quite natural that the problem of civic and political education has become crucial in the discussions on this new democratic theory. In a civilized society, political culture and political education are not only inseparable from each other, but are also, in a definite sense, equivalent. In its narrow form, civic education focuses mainly on the attitudes of the student to the central agencies of government. In the framework of the Western pluralist model, there are two main institutes in which the educational processes have crystallized: 1) the system of universal (free) education in state and private schools; 2) the modern university system. In both systems the three main aspects of civic and political education are realized on different levels: a) formulating, securing, and transmitting the general principles of political mentality; b) mastering a wide circle of political sciences (the scientific level of understanding politics and the phenomenon itself of the political); c) preparing for both participation in elections and professional political activity. The approach itself to the analysis of new prospects of political knowledge and education would be impossible without taking account of impulses to the development of liberal spirit created by modern universities.

Keywords:

democratic citizenship, civic education, educational processes, educational level, modern universities, political culture

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