



Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship

Noelle McAfee

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Do poststructuralist accounts of the self undermine the prospects for effective democratic politics? In addressing this question, Nolle McAfee brings together the theories of Jrgen Habermas and Julia Kristeva, two major figures whose work is seldom juxtaposed. She examines their respective notions of subjectivity and politics and their implicit definitions of citizenship: the extent to which someone is able to deliberate and act in community with others..

Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship begins by tracing the rise of modern and poststructural views of subjectivity, and then critiques these views as they are represented in the writings of Habermas and Kristeva. McAfee argues that Habermas's theory of subjectivity is overly optimistic about the possibility for individuals to know their own interests and act autonomously. Kristeva's poststructuralism has its own problems: it seems to limit political agency, since it considers the subject to be split and at odds with itself. Nevertheless, this book shows how Kristevan conceptions of the self can contribute to Habermas's hope for a more democratic, deliberative politics.

Combining an insight from poststructural theory--that identity is constituted by a web of relationships--with the theory of deliberative democracy, McAfee argues that we need not be the kinds of individuals supposed by the modern liberal tradition to be effective political agents. The more we recognize our indebtedness to and relationship with others in our midst, the more likely we are to be capable members of political communities.

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