



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI
SOCIALI E POLITICI

No Democracy For Devils

**Democratic citizenship between interests
and justice**

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Aim of the presentation

- Question: What kind of people are fit for a democracy? Can they be ‘devils’ or must they be ‘gods’?
- Focus: on the theories of Rawls and Christiano → to better understand the roles of personal interest and public concerns

“The problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved even for a race of devils, if only they are intelligent.” – I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*

“If there were a nation of gods, it would be governed democratically” – J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*



Outline of the presentation

1. Justification for democracy & theories of liberal democratic citizenship
2. Three examples: minimalist, 'objectivist' and constructive proceduralisms
3. The justice-first approach: the case of John Rawls
 1. Reasonableness
 2. Public reasons
4. The interests-based approach: Thomas Christiano
 1. Fundamental interests
 2. Egalitarian standpoint



Justifications of democracy...

Instrumentalism

- Enhancing quality of outcomes
- Improving citizens' competence and motivation

Proceduralism

- Pure/imperfect procedures
- Expressing certain values, like freedom, equality, etc...



... And democratic citizenship

A certain justification of democracy in terms of its constitutive values or of the quality of its outcomes

- Higher level of the justification of democratic authority and democratic institutions

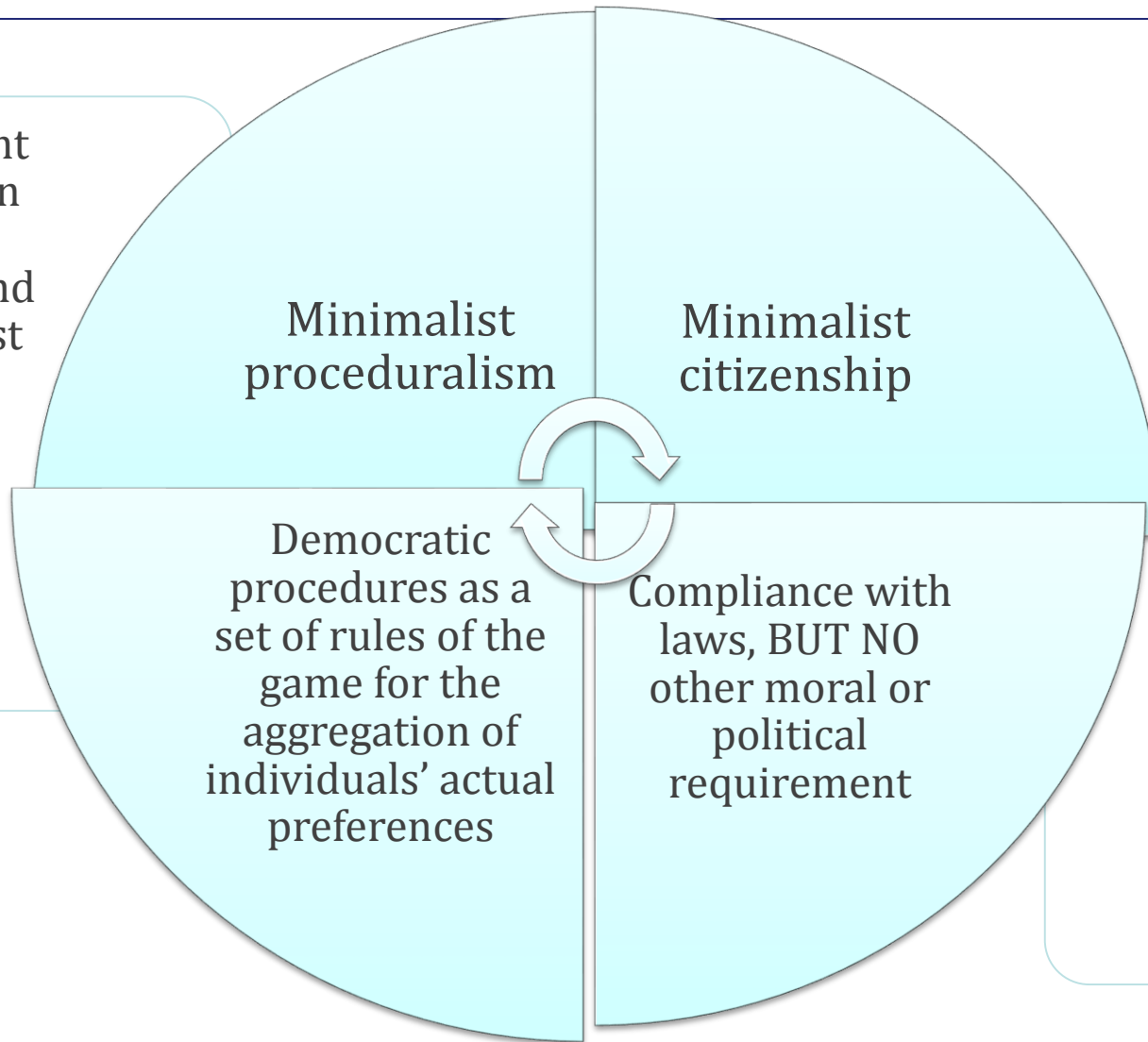
A given theory of democratic citizenship as moral requirements (duties, obligation, virtues) that citizens *must* display in order for the democratic system to work

- Lower level of public morality and citizens' political actions



Ex. 1: minimalist proceduralism

- Inconsistent justification based on freedom and self-interest

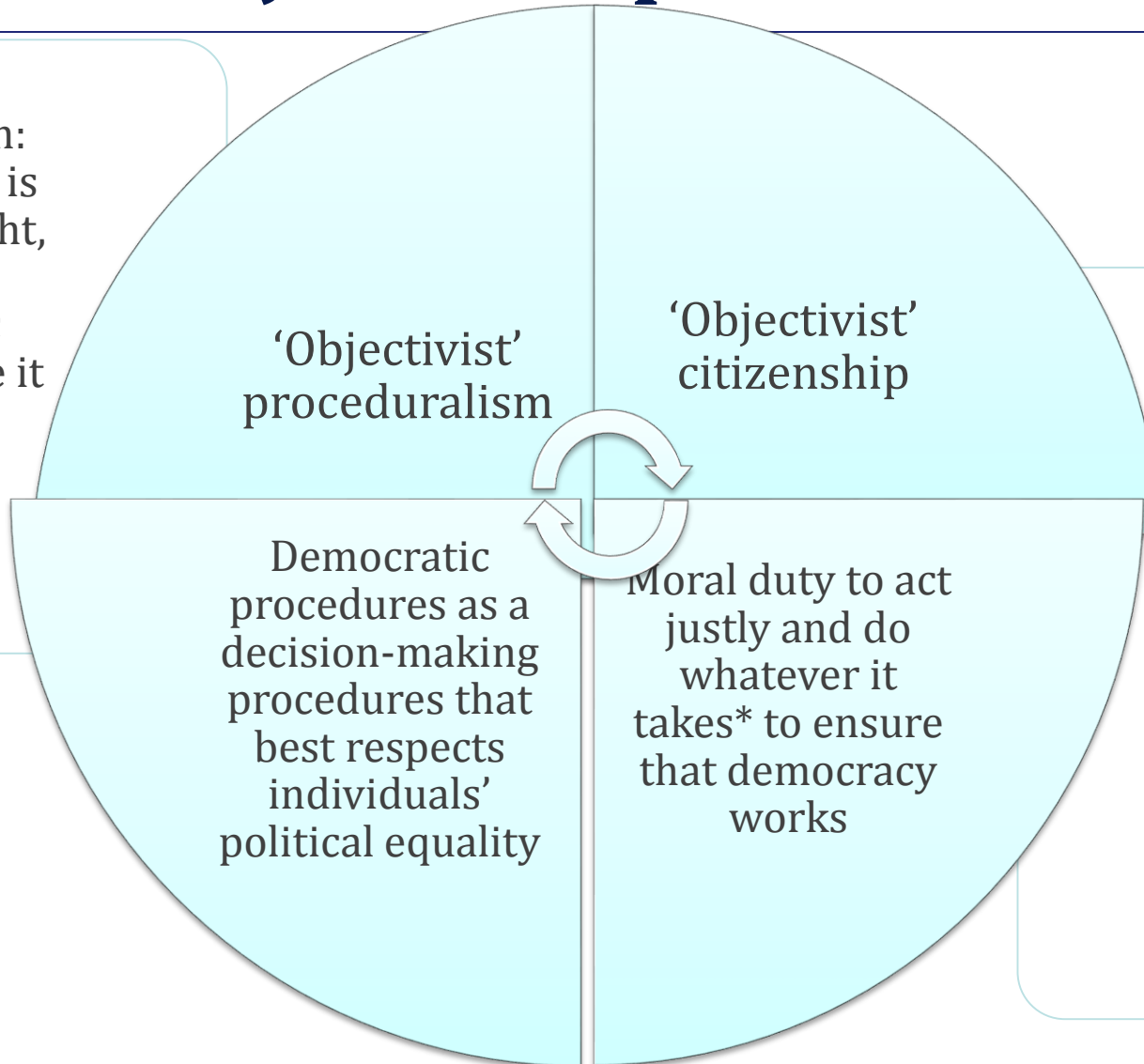


- Political preferences \neq economic preferences



Ex. 2: 'objectivist' proceduralism

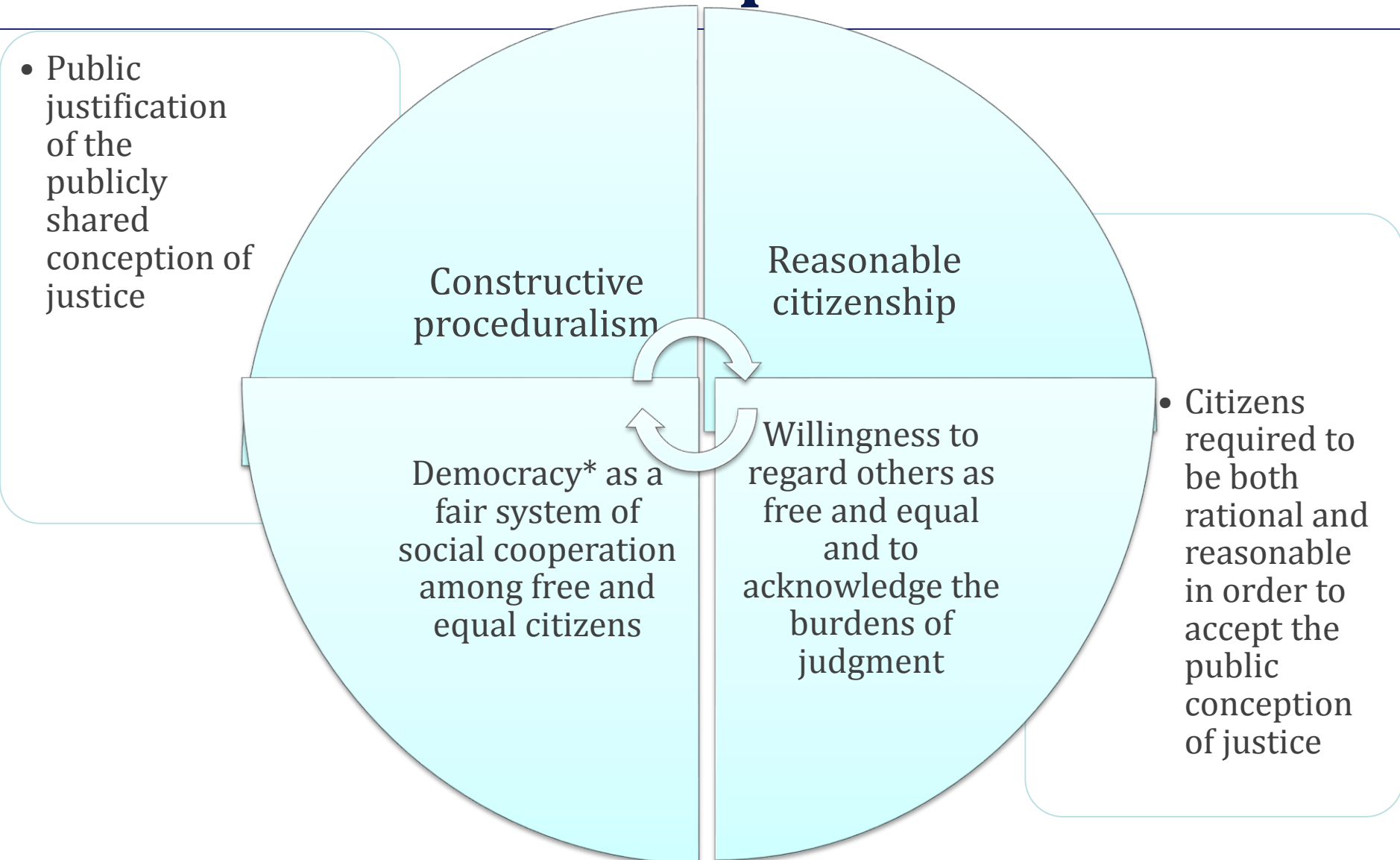
- 'Intrinsic' justification: democracy is morally right, whether democratic citizens see it or not



- To what extent are citizens morally asked to accept the right justification of democracy?



Ex. 3: constructive proceduralism



Rawls: the justice-first approach

- Democratic citizens of a well-ordered society: “free and equal, rational and **reasonable**”
- Reasonableness = both a **disposition** and a **virtue**
- “the capacity for a sense of justice is the capacity to understand, to apply, and *to normally be moved by an effective desire to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of justice as the fair terms of social cooperation*” (PL, p. 302, italic added)
- Moral side = reciprocity
- Epistemic side = burdens of judgment



What does reasonableness entail?

- To be willing to propose and accept fair terms of cooperation
- To acknowledge the burdens of judgment → the priority of the right over the good
- To recognize other fellow citizens as free and equal
- To propose in the public sphere reasons that others may reasonably accept → public reasons!
 - Constitutional essentials and basic justice VS. matters of ordinary politics
 - Is this distinction conspicuous?
- Comprehensive doctrines of the good:
 - Compatible with the political conception of justice
 - Excluded per se as legitimate public reasons



Why to require reasonableness?

Democratic
citizens as free
and equal

Rationality and
reasonableness

Well-ordered
society as a fair
system of
cooperation



Is it convincing?



Lack of motivation

Congruence and moral psychology in TJ
Internalism of reasons in PL (assumed, but unavailable)



Lack of epistemic means

Believing in freedom and equality DOES NOT imply being reasonable
What if I don't think the Original Position to be a good model for justice?

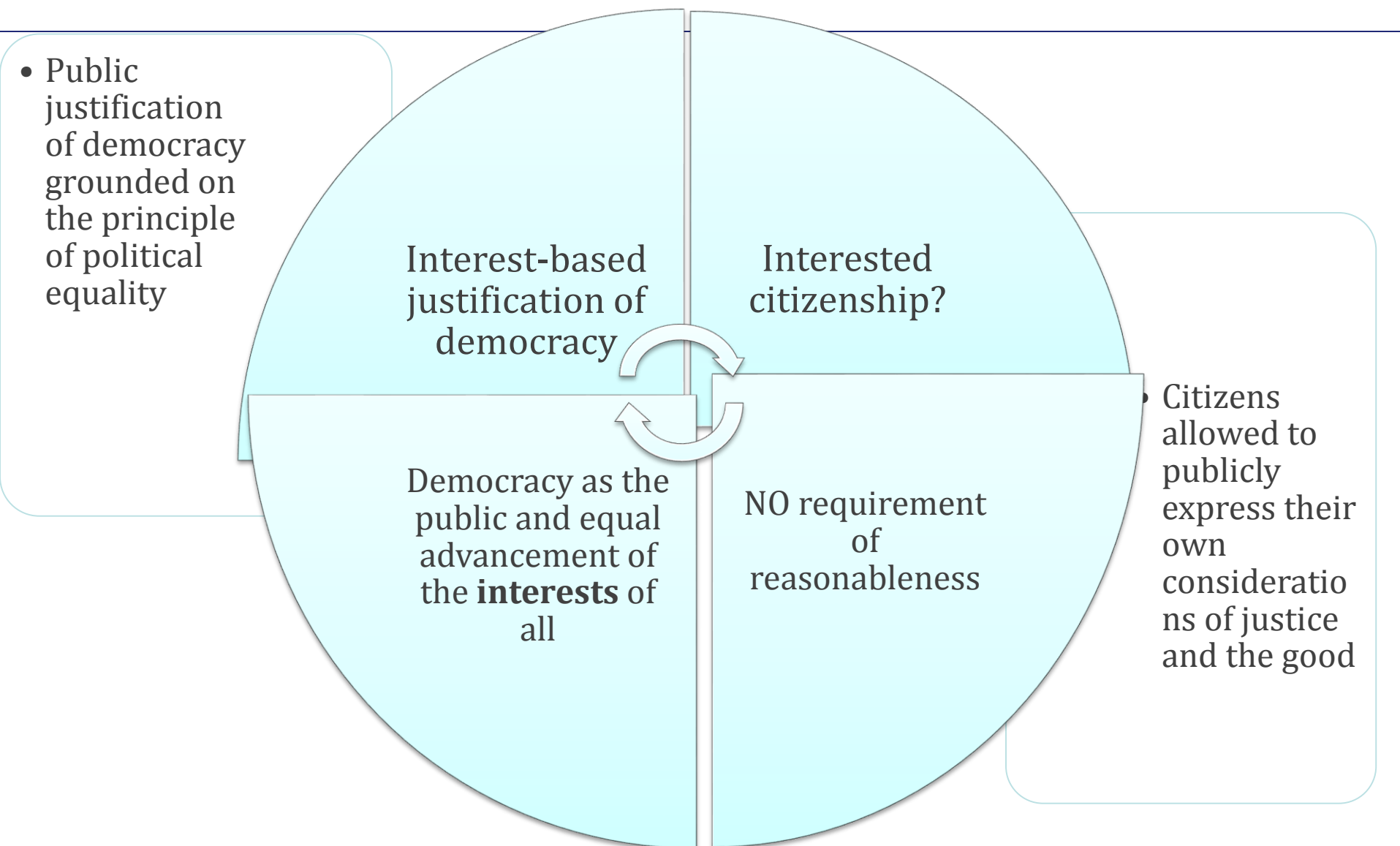


Demandingness

Democratic citizens must always prioritize the political conception of justice over their comprehensive doctrines
They must politically act on the principles of justice



Ex. 4: Christiano's case



What are the fundamental interests?

- Three fundamental interests as conditions of well-being in social life:
 1. The interest in correcting one's own cognitive bias
 2. The interest in being at home in the world
 3. The interest in having recognized one's own moral standing as equal
- All immaterial interests
- All universal interests
- All normative interests



The egalitarian standpoint

- Egalitarian standpoint: “we now ask what everyone would agree to when they are properly informed and conscientiously trying to figure out what equality implies for society” (CE, 69) → 3 features:
 1. Taking each person’s interests into account
 2. Figuring out **what equality demands**
 3. Taking the background ‘facts of judgment’ into account
- Justification based on the egalitarian standpoint: in order to be public it should be undertaken by citizens when assessing reciprocal claims



Citizens' assumed disposition

- Egalitarian and objective standpoint on justice → other fundamental interests *cannot* be incompatible with the principle of public equality
- Which kind of disposition citizens should display in the political domain?

“They desire that the society they live in be just and the interests of each be advanced in the context of the advance of the interests of all.” (CE 86)

“To the extent that citizens genuinely try to learn from one another and attempt to discern the most defensible ideas, citizens show that **they desire to advance morally desirable aims.**” (CE 190)



A comparison between gods...

Rawls	Christiano
Moral justification based on a conception of justice → agreement on the public conception of justice = required	Moral justification based on individuals' interests → weak publicity
Conception of justice = precondition for a well-ordered society where anyone can follow her own conception of the good	Egalitarian standpoint = precondition for individuals' forming and developing their other particular interests
Citizens = required to be reasonable in order to agree on the conception of justice	Citizens = required to acknowledge the egalitarian standpoint when debating about justice



Preliminary conclusion

No requirements at all: citizens as they are

?

Demanding idea of citizenship as the capacity to be reasonable (Rawls) or to assume the egalitarian standpoint (Christiano)

Very demanding idea of citizenship as moral commitment to realize justice



Thank you!

