

This paper is one of a series of individual essays written within the conceptual constraints provided by "Forms for a Future." The collection of essays will become the individual episodes of the podcast.

'... Forums for A Future...'

Podcast (#12) World Citizenship, NOT Citizenships of the World
Edward Renner, Evaluation Research
www.kerenner.com

Prelude

Part I of the series contains a brief 2-minute promotional and a conceptual foundation for thinking about change as the convergence of economic, political, social and personal perspectives. Part II is a set of four podcasts providing a philosophy for the 21st century. Part III is a set of four podcasts describing three lessons from modern history on the interplay of Power, Wealth and Belief for informing the present. Part IV presents three prescriptive principles for having a future. Today, in Podcast # 12, I will discuss the first of these three principles: World Citizenship, Not Citizenships of the World.

Key Concept

World citizenship, not citizenships of the world, describes the appropriate interplay of power, wealth and beliefs as a political perspective for the new Post-Modern Era of the 21st Century.

Introduction

There are two complementary dimensions to citizenship I wish to explore. They are:

- The decline of Citizenship as civic responsibilities, and
- The rise of Citizenship as ethnic and national identities.

The first meaning of citizenship is captured by the notion of "being a good citizen." This implies doing those things on which community cohesiveness is based. The second meaning usually implies a geographic location and is descriptive of either an ethnic or national identity. The decline of the first, civic responsibilities, and the rise of the second, ethnic and national identities, is the *exact opposite* of what is essential for making the transition from the national to the global perspective required for the new Post-Modern era. We are moving in the wrong direction.

The Decline of Citizenship as Civic Responsibilities

Members of any community have responsibilities to their community, or else there is no community. Community has traditionally been centered on one's own village, where the

inhabitants were almost exclusively inter-dependent on each other. But, now, with globalization, we often have more in common, and are more inter-dependent, on others who may be thousands of miles away, than we are on the person next door. As an example, I routinely communicate in a both personal and professional ways with friends and colleagues who live 1,000s of miles away, more than with my closest neighbors. This new reality has direct personal, economic, social, and political implications for how we now need to fulfill our civic responsibilities.

The Personal

At the personal level, civic citizenship gives us the experiences we feel and understand as “belongingness.” Often this belongingness is centered on those we consider our family. In our mind we may know we are increasingly interdependent with distant others, and that we belong to a larger unit -- humanity. But, emotionally, we gain our personal sense of belonging from the family and friends with whom we share space, time, labor, food and shelter.

Although it is understandable how our personal sense of self is deeply rooted in this kind of belongingness, the personal challenge of our time is in constructing more inclusive alternatives for defining our sense of self. Meeting this challenge will determine whether we are able to make a successful transition in to the new era we are entering. This is why I began my podcast with a series of episodes I called "A Philosophy for the 21st Century" (Podcasts #s 3,4,5 & 6). That philosophy -- The Philosophy of Constructive Alternativism -- is about the capacity to successfully respond to times of change by developing alternative personal perspectives. Particularly, changing those perspectives on which our own sense of self -- our sense of belonging -- is based.

The Economic

At the economic level (I discuss in podcast #6), one of the defining economic features of the new Post-Modern Era of the 21st Century, is corporate escape from regulation that globalization has permitted. In the context of citizenship, globalization has allowed corporations to escape from the civic duty of citizenship. Containing this escape has been a continuous struggle through out the evolution of the industrial, scientific and technological changes of the previous Modern Era. But, now, in this new era, there are no longer economic connections with any clearly defined community, other than unrestricted growth and financial return to corporate investors. Without civic responsibilities, global economic forces are free to escape national boundaries and, therefore, both the bonds of employee loyalty, and the obligations of regulation and taxation, that compose civic citizenship.

The Social/Cultural

At the social and cultural level, the most important impact of a global economy, based on unlimited growth, is the resulting impact on the earth, and on the capacity of the planet to support the economic pursuit of greater and greater consumerism. The best known of which is the impact of climate change, and in particular global warming. If we continue on the current path, the collective "footprint" (demands) of the people of the world will be larger than the available supply of food, water, and energy. However, unlike the collapse of isolated societies in

the past -- societies that outstripped the capacity of their local land to support their ever expanding social/cultural lifestyle and practices – once the planet is over-consumed, there is no place else to go. The social collapse about which Jared Diamond has warned us, is human life, as we know it, on this planet. Societies, in the past, that have successfully sustained themselves for thousands of years, did so through political structures that enable them to recognize these challenges soon enough to be able to make significant social adaptations. Now, however, in the context of globalization, we are talking about one society -- the human enterprise -- and one geography -- the planet itself. Thus, the emerging imperative is for World Citizenship, not for competing citizenships of the world that place self-interest first and collective preservation second.

The Political

At the political level, the most important issue of the Post-Modern Era is winning the fight against the new global economic imperialism. If national boundaries continue to define who the players are, the result will be a winner take all struggle between nations for survival in a zero sum game. This is what the politics of our time is about. It is about rejecting territorial space of a nation as the significant unit, and rising above the limited perspective of the separate citizenships of the world. A global economy, within the finite capacity of global resources, also requires more effective global politics. We need to think beyond national boundaries to the larger context of World Citizenship to be able to hold corporations accountable for their global civic responsibilities.

Of course, the stark reality is that we lack a political structure that has this capacity. At the city level, we have a mayor and city council, at the state level we have governors and legislatures, and at the national level we have a two-party system with a President who is also Commander in Chief. As such, this single person, and the largely invisible Foreign Service and Central Intelligence Agency, are responsible for how our nation relates to the world. But we have no structure to give us a direct voice in the world, only an indirect voice through national politics. There is no comparable world political structure to our local, state, and national political structures that gives us, or anyone else in the world, a chance to become citizens of the world. The structure we have -- the United Nations -- allows only our indirect participation through our individual nation states.

We know, in our dealings with other people, that it is sometimes hard to make cooperative choices, rather than competitive ones, often to our mutual disadvantage. Likewise, it is especially hard for nations, and in particular powerful nations, such as the US, to act cooperatively with other nations, rather than to act on simple self-interest. At present, the best we can do is to try to hold our own country accountable to be a full and cooperative partner in world politics, as we continue to search for stronger and more effective ways for claiming world citizenship. Clearly, our collective future now surpasses national boundaries.

Thus, all four elements – the personal, economic, social and political – are all conspiring to reduce the relative strength of citizenship as civic responsibility. This decline is directly proportional to the rise in citizenship as either ethnic or national identities that move us toward less, rather than deeper, engagements of mutual accountability with others.

The Rise of Citizenship As Ethnic and National Identities

In his book *Blood and Belonging* Michael Ignatieff¹ sees ethnic and national identities as the cause of conflicts around the world, such as in Croatia and Serbia, and as have now been unleashed by the United States within Iraq. These ethnic and regional conflicts have replaced the militarism of the Cold War that had previously divided the world into two opposing spheres of influence. This two-sided division subjugated these ethnic and regional differences to less intrusive sources of world tension than they are today.

These traditional sources of personal identity based on ether blood (religions or ethnic affiliations) or national belonging (patriotism) have always been an excuse for having those who are the most marginal be the warriors who fight wars for the benefit of the Lords, whether they be chiefs, Presidents, or the brokers of wealth. But now, patriotic nationalism in the US, and it's close relative of religious and ethnic identification, are the most dangerous forces on the globe. And, it is not just radical Islamic Fundamentalism that has put the world at risk, but it is also the coalition of the religious right and the neoconservatives in the United States who have aroused national self-righteous patriotism as the motivation for both the invasion of Iraq and for the suppression of dissent. These two instances of blood and belonging, captured by the slogans of "Jihad" and "God Bless America" have pushed the world close to disaster through misguided expressions of ethnic and national citizenship.

The US (as us) versus Them

Gwynn Dyer describes the depths of the current danger in Chapter 5 "The System (Such as it is)." ² He begins the chapter by writing:

“ If we could have a safer, fairer global order through the unilateral exercise of American power, many people in the West (though not elsewhere) would reluctantly accept that solution. After all, the United Nations has not exactly been an unqualified success. But most people suspect that *Pax Americana* won't work, because Americans will not be willing to bear for long the burden of high casualties and high taxes that such a policy involves.

What we risk ending up with instead is a world in which all the old institutions of international governance have been destroyed or gravely undermined by the actions of the neoconservatives, but the rival American bid to provide world order has crashed and burned. We may end up with nothing, in other words. No working multilateral institutions (and) little by way of international co-operation..." (p.195).

The Centrality of the United Nations

Ever since nuclear war became a reality, there has been no such thing as uninvolved by-standers in world politics. If war had occurred between the superpowers during the period of the Cold War, the whole world would have been the loser. That reality was what made the UN a necessity, and why it survived when the League of Nations, following World War I, did not.

The UN did what it was supposed to do. It got the world through the Cold War and created a structure for international cooperation and world peace through rule by law, not unilateral military actions. This is not to say that the UN achieved this remarkable outcome flawlessly or without considerable strain and challenge. But, the UN, however imperfectly, delivered the world to threshold of a prospect for peace. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the resulting peace dividend made it possible for the UN to begin to address the other pressing social, economic and humanitarian issues of the world. In the last decade of the Modern Era the door was opened to the possibility of expanding the role and mandate of the UN from peace, to one of better world health, more universal human rights and less world poverty as the mechanism of choice for abating the seeds of terrorism and regional tensions.

Given the magnitude of the social, economic, environmental and health issues facing the world, it is certainly debatable as to whether the nations of the world, through the UN, could have reacted with sufficient quickness and decisiveness to confront the growing challenges of world collapse. But at least there was hope; there was a structure, and there was a precedent.

All of this significant progress and hope were undermined, in less than a decade, by George W. Bush and the neoconservative fantasy of diverting the peace dividend -- which held hope for the world -- into a deliberate strategy for creating a world-wide US military supremacy that could not be challenged. This was accomplished by fanning the flames of patriotic nationalism in the US as the response of choice to 9/11, and which was so uncritically accepted by the American people, as to be a conspicuous display of the failure of citizenship as national identity, in contrast to the missed opportunity for mutual accountability that marked the world-wide response to that event.

What United States did, under the leadership of Bush and the Republican Party, was to stop world political progress dead in its tracks, and to undermine the hopeful efforts for world peace and for rule by law and order, not force. This is why the world needs the United States back, not as self-appointed perpetrator of world order, but as a participating citizen of the world.

World Citizenship

The world needs the strength of the United States for leadership that will take international affairs out from under the vengeance of blood and belonging, and place it squarely in rule by law and order. Participation in world citizenship is essential for international order. There is a long open-ended list of steps that can be taken unilaterally by the US to advance mutual accountability as the prescriptive formula for the future.

Prescriptive Steps

Throughout the history of the US there has always been a contradiction between the founding democratic principles of equality contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and our national history of slavery and imperialism (as discussed in Podcast #11). As Cornell West has written in Democracy Matters:³

"The most painful truth in the making of American -- a truth that shatters all pretensions to innocence and undercuts all efforts of denial -- *is that the enslavement of Africans and the imperial expansion over indigenous peoples and their lands were undeniable preconditions for the possibility of American democracy.* There could be no such thing as an experiment in American democracy without these racist and imperial foundations (p45)."

Why Democracy Matters

The question raised by West is whether this experiment in democracy, barely 200 years old, can resolve this contradiction and fulfill its grand aspirations, or whether it will succumb to the opposing anti-democratic tradition of its history of racism and imperialism. West's answer is positive. He sees in the American culture the capacity to preserve, not to lose, the essence of what this great experiment in democracy is about. This grand experiment in the United States -- more than in any other nation -- has defined the essence of the Modern Era. The question is whether this nation can make the adaptations and changes necessary to translate our democratic heritage to the Post-Modern Era.

If America is to actually fulfill the ambitions of this democratic experiment, West argues that we must "... shore up international law and multilateral institutions that preclude imperial arrangements and colonial invasions... (and that) facilitate the principled transfer of wealth... by massive investments in health care, education,... and the preservation of the environment (p.62)." But, America cannot be the guardian of democracy, as the Bush administration has professed itself to be, by anti-democratic abuse of power at home and by "... and an imperial vision of American as a lone sheriff unilaterally policing a world more and more dependent on foreign oil, trade, and investment while obscene wealth inequalities escalate at home (p 61)."

If a vision of world democracy is to prevail, we must win the fight against imperialism. The responsibility for doing so is largely up to us, the citizens of the United States, because it is the US that is currently the greatest threat to the future. We cannot export the vision of world democracy through the unilateral exercise of military power based on maintaining the economy of Empire. Democracy matters, and it must be nurtured at home through the preservation of our democratic processes, and only be exported by example through respecting democratic principles in the exercise of our foreign affairs. Reclaiming our democratic heritage is the world leadership that the US is uniquely able to provide, and which is essential for our own survival, and for the survival of the great democratic experiment as a world exhibit.

Official World Citizenship

What if the United States sponsored the authorization by the United Nations of official certificates of World Citizenship? What if everyone in the world had an individual opportunity to apply for this document, with or without the approval of their own national government? How long would it take for individual nations to recognize the legitimacy of this form of dual citizenship? How long would it take for the UN itself to start to evolve toward a structure that reflected popular, not just nation-state, participation? I cannot think of any more effective way to

start to promote the notion that democracy matters, and to officially legitimize the concept that World Citizenship has a rightful place alongside the national citizenships of the world.

Political, Economic and Social

At a less idealistic level are the very practical steps that separate nation-states can take of moving toward rule of law on political, economic and social issues. Similar to what was required to create international mechanisms for enforcing the principle that nations cannot gain territory through military actions, this can also be accomplished in the economic and social areas. One starting place for the US is to embrace and officially sign existing treaties and declarations of the UN that have previously been rejected (such as the Kyoto accord on global warming, the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), or which have been withdrawn from (such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the International Court of Justice); and, to make these international treaties and obligations enforceable through the courts as the law of the land.

Yes, it is true that gaining world consensus usually makes such treaties and declarations largely voluntary, but agreement on the principal is the starting point. These are all discrete elements, none of which are sufficient, but all of which are necessary. They are the individual “baby steps” that can be accomplished, one at a time, as feasible, without the necessity of a unified, simultaneously coherent, master plan. If a treaty or accord advances the common good, for however an isolated issue, that is a step forward.

Personal

Ultimately, the smallest common denominator is the individual. On the one hand, as individuals, we need to believe in the Philosophy of Constructive Alternativism. Once we acknowledge that significant reconstructions of our core beliefs are required, we can then act on those beliefs and gain the subjective experience of a coherent sense of self-direction and values. We can feel a sense of purpose, and as a result, make direct contributions to a growing tide of civic awareness and civic responsibility that are the seeds of change. Many of us already have flagpoles from which to display the flag of United Nations as a reminder to ourselves and to our neighbors of the need for World Citizenship. The rest of us can easily get them from a flag store (www.united-states-flag.com/world-united-nation.html). We can listen to public radio and other alternative news and information sources (e.g., You-tube and Current TV). We can organize and participate in family and public political forums that are described in the next section of this podcast. The youth and adults of today are now joined together, as one, as both the authors and the recipients of one collective future.

¹ Michael Ignatieff. **Blood and Belonging**, Penguin Books, 1993.

² Gwynne Dyer. **Future:Tense**, McClelland Stewart, 2004,

³ Cornell West. **Democracy Matters**, Penguin Books, 2004