Chapter 19
World Citizenship

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the history of the concept of world citizenship as well as the several basic senses in which this phrase has been used in contemporary literature. It links the concept with the developing tradition of human rights, and the emergence of the new holistic paradigm beginning in the 20th century. It also relates the concept of world citizenship with a main stream in contemporary psychological theories of human development that see becoming “worldcentric” as a higher level of human maturity. Finally, it reviews a number of organizations today that promote world citizenship, and addresses the concept of legal citizenship which today remains with the nation-states. It asks the question: is there a need for a legalized world citizenship under the authority of a Constitution for the Federation of Earth?

OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS

The ideas behind “world citizenship” have a long and complex history. The ancient Greek and Roman Stoics thought of themselves as citizens of the world (kosmopolites). This was primarily because they believed that reason and its laws were universal to all human beings. Subsequently, the realization has developed that we are not only the same in this way, we are also interrelated and interdependent. One of the first to recognize the interconnectedness of our human reality in terms of planetary events was Immanuel Kant at the close of his 1795 essay Perpetual Peace (Kant, 1983). The development of democratic theory by John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers also emphasized the universality of reason (Locke, Paine, Madison, Tocqueville, Mill, Rawls & Bellah, 2000). They also derived from this an additional concept of natural rights that applied universally to all human beings.

Since the 18th century, the ideas of human rights and democracy have spread worldwide. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 affirmed that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Assembly, 1948). In the words of Hernan Santa Cruz of Chile, a member of the drafting commission, this exceptional document asserted “the supreme value of the human person, a value that did not originate in the decision of a worldly power, but rather in the fact of existing” (cited...
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in Reimers, Chopra, Chung, Higdon, & O’Donnell, 2016: xxxvi). Since that time the UN has passed some nine “human rights” conventions signed by most of the world’s nations, nearly all recognizing the human person as intrinsically valuable independently of the laws of all existing nation-states.

Such ideas of “inherent dignity of all members of the human family” often appealed to similar universal concepts found in world cultures and religions, for example, the traditional Hindu notion of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family). Various religions, such as the Baha’i International Community or the Universal Love and Brotherhood Association (ULBA) of the Oomoto religion in Japan, have also explicitly promoted this idea, and, of course, religions everywhere have often thought of all persons as being children of one God (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) or as bearers of one divine reality (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism).

Today, awareness of the interconnectedness of our planetary ecology, and of global economics, communications, and politics, has come together with Enlightenment ideas about human rights, democracy, and human dignity. They have also synthesized with more traditional (universal) religious ideas giving rise to a worldwide movement concerned with global or world citizenship and promoted by a number of different organizations. A World Citizen (also often referred to as a Global Citizen), therefore, can be defined as someone who recognizes the oneness, dignity, and interdependence of our common humanity and who lives from this inherent unity in diversity.

The *Wikipedia* website (2017), for example, defines “world citizenship” as “the idea is that one’s identity transcends geography or political borders and that the planetary human community is interdependent and whole; humankind is essentially one.” *Kosmos Journal* website (2017) declares that a “global citizen is someone who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community’s values and practices.” People who recognize the oneness of humanity are often understood as promoting peace, justice, freedom, sustainability, and democracy for our planet as a whole.

For many decades, psychologists, philosophers, and developmental thinkers have been defining the stages of human moral, cognitive, and spiritual growth. On the level of individual development there has been a powerful consensus with respect to basic stages of development. These are relatively distinct and identifiable stages of growth toward moral, cognitive, and spiritual maturity. Ken Wilber, for example, who synthesizes all these traditions in many of his books, summarizes the work of Carol Gilligan and others into four basic stages. He calls the first stage “egocentric,” in which young children have not yet been fully socialized. The second stage can be called “ethnocentric.” It includes older children and many adults who accept the conventions and customs within which they grew up as “true” or basically correct.

The third stage, and the beginning of moral and cognitive maturity, can be termed “worldcentric”: “I now have care and compassion,” Wilber writes, “not just for me (egocentric), and not just for my family, my tribe, or my nation (ethnocentric), but for all humanity, for all men and women everywhere, regardless of race, color, sex, or creed.” Wilber and Gilligan identify a yet higher stage of moral and cognitive maturity, developing out of the worldcentric stage, that they name “integrated.” At this level, the masculine and feminine attributes of our care and compassion come together in a higher synthesis of holistic and integrated consciousness. Such a person exhibits an integration of our highest human qualities: relationship (to all other humans) with autonomy, mercy (towards all) with justice, and compassion (for all) with wisdom (Wilber, 2007: 46-51). This stage can be termed an ideal of world citizenship.

For all human beings everywhere, these thinkers argue, moral maturity involves becoming “worldcentric,” an orientation that would automatically involve world citizenship or global citizenship and its attendant values. Very often, for Wilber and other thinkers who reflect on human civilizational