

**PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGES OF THE HUMAN BEING:
CITIZEN OF THE WORLD AS A CULTURAL FIGURE**

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In European culture, the figure of the ‘world citizen’ has developed as a philosophical image of the human being since the Stoics, such as Cicero, Seneca, Marc Aurelius, and many other philosophers over 2,000 years ago. But the idea of the ‘citizen of the world’ can also be found in the Confucian classic *Ta Hsüeh*, or *The Great learning of the Highest Order of Cultivation*, one of the five Chinese classics,^[1] which was probably written in the 3rd century BC, i.e., three hundred years before the great Stoic philosophers. This leads us to believe that the figure of the ‘citizen of the world’ may find support in every culture that has cultivated ideas of a universal human fellowship.

The central idea in these cosmopolitan doctrines is that every human being is considered as a member of mankind and thus has two citizenships: national citizenship and world citizenship. And as there are duties and rights in relation to other citizens, there are duties and rights in relation to mankind.^[2] This means that, to some extent, we

humans today understand ourselves in the same way and are the same living beings as we have been throughout our known history.

This is true already on a very elementary level. We are living beings mastering a language that can help us to express our experiences, knowledge and wishes, coordinate our actions, and focus on ourselves in order to understand what we are, in short, conscious living beings. Moreover, we can fix signs in different materials, so that we can communicate not only live but also through time, thereby developing a human time that includes a long past and long future. Thus, we are cultural living being from the origin of our humanity. And as such we have created philosophical images about ourselves that are exceedingly old.

However, by the constantly growing domination of our globe, our condition has radically changed, and we are not the same as we were only hundred years ago. Thereby, the figure of the 'world citizen' has acquired a new sense. The Stoics in ancient Greek philosophy talked about the 'cosmopolitan' in relation to human being having reason in common with other human beings, but the philosophers of Enlightenment enlarge the content of this figure. Like Kant, they considered that every human being has the right to travel and to be received as visitor. And now in our age, which is that of globalization, the 'cosmopolitan' embodies the person who recognizes that technological development has created great problems of different kinds, which no single country and no single state can handle alone.

One of these problems is how to assure sustainable development that permits future generations to live with at least some possibilities/opportunities, e.g., climate conditions that are not inferior to those at our disposal. Another problem is how to

tolerate other cultures and other ritualistic behavior beyond those that we know from our own tradition(s). A third problem is how to apply democratic control of financial transactions on a global scale, in a similar manner to the democratic control that we have made over our national economies. Finally we have the problem how to establish a legal world order for actions across borders in order to proscribe criminality and in particular, that which since the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials in 1947, has been referred to as ‘crimes against humanity’.

These common global problems, which must now be the problems of the ‘citizen of the world’, must change our world as life-world on two different levels. On the existential level, the encounter with the ‘other’ can no more be limited to an I-thou relationship and even not to ‘being together in a group’; the other is not only a family member, a collaborator, or a national fellow, but s/he is also the stranger coming from other cultures/nations. This means that we must offer openness and tolerance to others, independent of the kind of culture and tradition from which they may come.

On the social/political level, the figure of the ‘citizen of the world’ means that s/he not only belongs to a state, but in some respect, also belongs to a community beyond any state, i.e., community of international or transnational actors such as multinational companies, NGOs, global scientific networks, transnational tribunals, transnational revolt groups, etc. This means that we now must accept other political actors on the global political scene than the states, i.e., the so-called non state-actors.

This entails new ideas about how to be human. Firstly, there must be a new idea of living together in peace. This life together can be motivated in two radical different ways, by the fear of one’s own death, as in Hobbes where people originally involved in a

struggle/conflict of 'all against all accept' to live together in order to avoid being killed. Or by a wish to live together in order to be enriched by this common life in the same way that Aristotle described life in true friendship. The Hobbesian idea was, in a way, sufficient to understand the power of the state and to consider conflicts between states as normal, but in an age where we have to live together across state boundaries, we cannot cope if we consider every foreigner as an enemy. Only the wish to be enriched by a life together can create the true peace.

Secondly, there must be a new idea of the relationship between the individual and state. For several hundred years, the individual human being was considered only as subject to a prince or a state. According to international law, an individual was not on the same level as the state. S/he was always subjected to a state or stateless, a tragic condition for any person. But since the trials in Nuremberg and Tokyo after the Second World War, and since the proclamation of the Universal Human Rights in 1948, a person can both be a passive legal subject, as in the case of an individual accused of having committed crime against humanity, or an active legal subject as in the case of a process in the European Court for Human Rights, where the individual can carry on a lawsuit against his/her own state.

Thirdly, there must be a new idea of the social contract. This contract or covenant that we know from Hobbes and, in another form, from Rousseau and Kant, cannot any longer be only a national covenant. We must presuppose a global social contract that maintains a global world order valid for every human being. This idea it is taken up in our time in a new way as a condition for global citizenship by David Held, Martha Nussbaum, and Ulrich Beck.^[3]

Finally, there must be a new idea of world history. A different criticism of Hegel's concept of world history in which every event is integrated in a global worldview has been disqualified since Søren Kierkegaard's revolt against philosophical speculation. And in more recent time, Jean-Francois Lyotard introduced the claim that all of the big stories should now be replaced by small stories.^[4] World History seemed to have come to an end. Francis Fukuyama proclaimed: 'The end of history and the last man'.^[5] However, by recognizing our human condition as 'cosmopolitan' we cannot only consider what we are here and now, but also what we have done, and what we wish to do on a global scale, and thereby conceive our belonging to a world history. In other words, we must accept a new kind of common history for all mankind. A new philosophy of history becomes a necessity.

Thus, the revival of the 'citizen of the world' as a cultural and political figure for our time obliges us to rethink our condition as 'cosmopolitans' guided by new ideas about living together, individual responsibility, global social contract, and world history. Philosophical images of the human being might often be mirrors of the state of affairs, but such an image can also be a guide of humanity. This, I believe, is the case of the 'citizen of the world' as a cultural figure.

Notes:

^[1] Cf - Manuel B. Dy, Jr., "A Cosmopolitan Ethics of the Ta Hsueh", unpublished paper at the 28th Symposium of Eco-ethica, Roskilde, organized by the Tomonobu Imamichi Institute for eco-ethica, October, 2009.

[2] Peter Kemp: Citizen of the world. A Cosmopolitan Ideal for the 21st Century, Humanity Books/Prometheus books, New York, forthcoming April 2010.

[3] Francis Fukuyama: The End of History and the Last Man, Penguin Books, New York, 1992, pp 336 ff.

[4] David Held: The Global Covenant, Polity, London, 2004; Martha Nussbaum: Frontiers of Justice, Belknap, Harvard, 2006, and Ulrich Beck: *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter. Neue weltpolitische Ökonomie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, Edition Zweite Moderne, 2002; in English: Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy. Trans. Kathleen Cross. London: Polity Press, 2005.*

[5] The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Manchester University Press, 1984.