

'Responsible Global Citizenship': Thoughts towards a Conceptual Framework

Background

The concept of 'good citizenship' has occupied philosophical thought for millennia. The earliest civilizations – Egyptian, Babylonian, Judaic, Greek, Roman, Chinese – all developed the notion of the 'good citizen'. This rested on concepts such as group communality and social responsibility. Political legitimacy derived from theories of divine right, with the balance of interest between the ruler and the subject stressing the rights of the former and the responsibilities of the latter.

The concept of 'global citizenship' reflects notions of universalism that can also be traced to classical thought of Greece and Rome (the 'cosmopolitan' in Cynicism and Stoicism) and China ('personal virtue' and 'civic piety' in Confucianism). More recently, revolutionary European thought introduced the idea of individual rights within the social compact, and associated constraints on government.

'Good citizenship' today thus reflects a balance, at times uneasy, between the rights and responsibilities of the ruler (the 'sovereign') and those of the ruled (formerly the 'subject', today the 'citizen').

Throughout these times, political, as opposed to philosophical, discourse surrounding such issues was conducted within the confines of the polity – ultimately the nation-state. In the contemporary age however, dating from the UN Charter, such issues are debated at two levels of international relations – national and global.

- The Charter, formulated in the name of the world's peoples, stresses the primacy of the state – identifying the principles of, *inter alia*, sovereign equality and domestic jurisdiction; and delegating the responsibility of executive agency to national governments.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, with its associated covenants, introduces into international law the inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms of individual humans, while the ICC Statute strengthens the concept of individual criminal responsibility of political leaders and military personnel in international law.

Thus contemporary international law strikes a complex and sensitive mix of governmental and individual rights and responsibilities at both national and global levels.

In recent decades the international community, acting principally through the UN, has confronted problems that are generally recognised to be global in nature. Issues of nuclear technology, economic sustainability and climate stability are seen as intrinsically global in magnitude and import, requiring global responses for them to be properly resolved. This unprecedented phenomenon presents challenges to all UN Member States in various ways – who is to be designated as 'problem-solver', in whose name they are to act, and through what political-diplomatic method.

The emergence of global problems evokes the question whether the chief responsible agent is the international community of states or an emerging global community of peoples. Global problems are recognised to exist but no global sovereign is so recognised, it being left to the governments of nation-states to deal with phenomena that are often above-and-beyond their jurisdictional scope. The classical philosophical challenge of 'global citizenship' has become a modern political challenge.

Thus arises the concept of 'responsible global citizenship' – leaving aside for the moment whether the concept might attend the international community of states (a political concept) or the global community of peoples (a civic concept), or both.

Definition and Meaning

In developing a definition of 'global citizenship' for the purposes of academic enquiry, regard should be given to the terms and concepts incorporated in the UN Charter. The appropriate way to proceed is to

employ the terms and concepts already in the Charter, and to interpret them in a teleological manner, as envisaged by former UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld.

The principal Charter terms that might be seen as relevant are the following: 'mankind' (today 'humankind'), 'peoples of the United Nations'; 'principles of justice and international law'; 'adjustment or settlement of international disputes'; and 'universal peace'.

A definition of 'responsible global citizenship' would, reflecting the above considerations, have two dimensions:

- One pertaining to the government of UN Member States (a 'governmental definition'); and
- One pertaining to the 'peoples of the United Nations' (a 'civic definition')

A governmental definition could be the following:

"The self-perception of a government as a natural member in the comity of nations, deriving rights and assuming obligations from such membership, acting responsibly through the United Nations in the attainment of the common ends of humankind."

A civic definition could be the following:

"The self-perception of an individual, as a natural member of the human family, deriving rights and assuming obligations from such membership, acting responsibly through individual conduct in the attainment of the common ends of humankind."

These definitions beg other definitions, perhaps *ad infinitum*. But the following are necessary at the first derivative level:

- the 'comity of nations' is the entire group of polities recognised as possessing sovereign equality at the United Nations Organization, based on the principle of universality;¹
- the 'common ends of humankind' are those policy goals, identified through legitimate decision-making procedures at the United Nations / Bretton Woods System, that promote the three principal purposes of the UN,² namely:
 - (i) the maintenance of international peace and security;
 - (ii) the development of friendly relations among nations; and
 - (iii) the achievement of international cooperation in solving international problems.

If these definitions are accepted, it is possible to proceed to:

- establish criteria for judging 'responsible global citizenship; and
- identify the contemporary problems for analysis.

'Responsible Global Citizenship': Objective and Criteria

Having regard to the concepts in the UN Charter identified above, it is possible to

- (i) identify the principal objective of 'responsible global citizenship', and
- (ii) develop criteria for judging it.

The objective of 'responsible global citizenship' would be:

"to promote universal peace through the strengthening of the principles of justice and international law in the common interest of humankind."

Having regard to the above objective, the criteria for judging 'responsible global citizenship' would be the following:

- the acceptance and observance of binding obligations in international and domestic law; and
- the promotion and voluntary observance of universal prescriptive norms of natural justice.

¹ UN Charter, Article 2.6

² UN Charter, Article 1 (paras. 1, 2 and 3). The principle in Article 1.4 requires the UN to be the centre for harmonising the actions of nations in pursuit of these three 'common ends' – as referred to in both the governmental and civic definitions.

These two concepts – legal obligation and prescriptive norm – might be taken as comprising the criteria for judging ‘responsible global citizenship’. Although the two are discrete and may thus be judged separately, it is a reasonable assumption that the former is the more compelling criterion. A UN Member State is more widely expected to abide by the international legal undertakings it has accepted than to abide by voluntary norms it may have espoused.

Thus, it is possible to construct an analytical framework that explores the conduct of a UN Member State in terms of its qualities as a ‘responsible global citizen’ in the context of the governmental definition:

1. What international legal obligations has the Member State accepted since 1945 and to what extent has it observed these?
2. What global prescriptive norms does the UN Member State espouse, and to what extent does it observe these?

Contemporary Global Problems: Identification

The identification of global problems would take, as the departure point, the three thematic purposes identified in the UN Charter (identified above). Thus, they might be seen as follows:

Theme I Global Security – maintenance of international peace and security

1. WMD (esp. nuclear weapons NPT obligations & deterrence norms)
2. Collective Security (esp. ‘use of force’ obligations)
3. International Criminal Jurisdiction (esp. ICC & GC obligations)
4. Counter-Terrorism (SCR 1373/1390 obligations; UNGA 3034 norms)

Theme II Global Justice – development of friendly relations among nations

5. Democracy & Self-Determination (LON/UNC obligations & PIF norms)
6. Human Rights

- Civil & Political	(ICCPR obligations)
- Economic, Social & Cultural	(ICESR obligations)
7. Development Assistance (UNGA norms; OECD standards)
8. Trade (WTO obligations; WSF norms)

Theme III Global Sustainability – achievement of international cooperation in international problems

9. Ozone Depletion (Vienna Framework Convention and Montreal (-plus) Protocol obligations)
10. Climate Change (UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol obligations)
11. Sustainable Consumption & Ecological Footprint (Agenda 21 norms)

Kennedy Graham
June 2008