Nuffield's Working Papers Series in Politics

The idea of global citizenship

David Miller, Nuffield College, Oxford

Email: david.miller@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

(Published 16 Feb. 2011)

The idea of global citizenship[1] (third draft)

David Miller

Nuffield College, Oxford

The idea of global, or world, citizenship is a very old one, but it has recently come back into fashion. To avoid a possible source of confusion right away, it is not equivalent to the idea of global, or world, *government*. If some form of global government were to be created, then perhaps it would have global citizens to go with it. But enthusiasm for global citizenship reaches far beyond support for world government, whose feasibility problems and practical limitations are widely recognized.[2] The thought is that it may be possible for people to be, and act as, global citizens even in the absence of political institutions at global level sufficiently like those that presently exist at national level to qualify as government in the normal sense. What this might mean is one of the questions I shall be addressing. To anticipate the main idea of the paper, I am going to argue that citizenship is a political idea – the relationship that holds between co-citizens must be a political relationship, whether or not it involves institutions of government in their familiar form – whereas the idea of global citizenship is essentially apolitical. Whatever merits it may have in other regards, it is damaging if it comes to be seen as a substitute for or alternative to our political relationships. I want in other words to defend real citizenship against its ghostly shadow, which is what I believe the idea of global citizenship amounts to once we understand it properly.

---

[1] This chapter was first given as the annual Warrender Lecture at the University of Sheffield on November 26th, 2009. A revised version was presented to the annual conference of the Penn DCC Program on 'Sovereignty, Territoriality and Plural Citizenship' at the University of Pennsylvania on May 30th 2010, and to audiences at the Universities of Cambridge and Bradford. I should like to thank all those present on these occasions for helpful questions that have prompted significant revisions to the text, and also Neal Carrier for his research assistance.

[2] I have considered and rejected the idea that world government could be democratic in 'Against Global Democracy' in K. Breen and S. O'Neill (eds.), *After the Nation: Critical Reflections on Post-Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For a contrasting view, defending world government though without addressing the issue of democracy specifically, see R. Goodin, 'World Government is *Here*!' in this volume.

My starting point will be a short passage by Hannah Arendt which sets out the position I have just outlined in its starkest terms. It comes from an essay she wrote about her friend and mentor Karl Jaspers entitled 'Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?'.[3] 'World Citizen' was a title that Jaspers liked to apply to himself, and indeed an idea that informed much of his philosophical writing, which involved an attempt to write a unifying history of world philosophy, to portray the different currents of thought stretching back across many centuries and different continents as flowing into a single stream.[4] Arendt in the larger part of the essay praises this endeavour, but it is the opening passage that caught my eye and that is most relevant to my present argument. It begins succinctly: 'Nobody can be a citizen of the world as he is the citizen of his country'. And then after claiming that any world government whatever its form would be 'a forbidding nightmare of tyranny', Arendt continues:

> 'A citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens in a country among countries. His rights and duties must be defined and limited, not only by those of his fellow citizens, but also by the boundaries of a territory. Philosophy may conceive of the earth as the homeland of mankind and of one unwritten law, eternal and valid for all. Politics deals with men, nationals of many countries and heirs to many pasts; its laws are the positively established fences which hedge in, protect, and limit the space in which freedom is not a concept, but a living, political reality.'[5]

I am not in the business here of defending Hannah Arendt's contributions to political theory in general. Recall Isaiah Berlin's damning verdict: 'she produces no arguments, no evidence of serious philosophical or historical thought. It is all a stream of metaphysical free association…'.[6] The passage quoted above illustrates well both her strength and her weakness. It is a bold and challenging claim about the nature of citizenship. But the claim is simply asserted; there is no supporting argument. 'A citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries'. But is that really so, or is it just stipulation on Arendt's part? Consider citizenship under the Roman Empire, whose aspirations were unlimited (*sine fine)* in scope. People proudly proclaimed their status as Roman citizens – this was famously the case with the Apostle Paul, for example, whose ability to travel round and spread the gospel was in part due to his having inherited the status of Roman citizen despite having been born in what we now call Turkey . In doing so they no doubt implicitly recognized that there were many other human beings who were *not* citizens; the valued status of citizen was contrasted with its opposite (being a slave, for example). But did Roman citizens also recognize the existence and standing of other, rival citizenships to their own? Would they have had any compunction in extending the Empire to incorporate hitherto independent cities or regions on the grounds that this would involve denying the rights of citizens in other places? Surely not. If I am right about this, then we cannot say that the very idea of citizenship in place A depends upon the recognition of other citizenships in other places. So we cannot rule out global citizenship by definitional fiat, which is what Arendt seems to be doing here. We cannot say that the very idea of world citizenship is incoherent because there is no place other than the world from which it can be separated by territorial boundaries.

---

[3] H. Arendt, 'Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?' in *Men in Dark Times* (London: Cape, 1970).

[4] See for example K. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. M. Bullock (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953); K. Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. R. Manheim (London: Hart-Davis, 1962).

[5] Arendt, 'Karl Jaspers', pp. 81-2.

But there is another idea in the passage above which is more fruitful and provides the thread for my paper. This is the contrast Arendt draws between politics and philosophy, and her suggestion that citizenship is a political concept and not a philosophical one. What this means, however, is not very clear, and I hope to make it a bit clearer as I proceed.

So let's begin to think about what the idea of world or global citizenship actually means or could mean. Its origins are usually traced back to the Greek Stoics and especially to their Roman successors, including Cicero in the first century BC and later Seneca and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. After that period it was largely submerged until it reappeared in the work of certain Enlightenment philosophers, and especially in Kant. It enjoyed political popularity in the middle years of the twentieth century, when various world citizenship organizations were established – you could for example add your name to the International Registry of World Citizens, established in 1949 and now claiming to have 900,000 members – and supported by prominent philosophers such as Bertrand Russell. So it is an idea with a long history, but without, in general, any very clear meaning. I have suggested already that it should not be confused with advocacy of world government, an idea popular mainly in the middle decades of the twentieth century among certain intellectuals including Russell himself. This expresses one specific version of global citizenship, but by no means the only one possible.

---

[6] R. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Phoenix, 1993), p. 82.

It originates, I believe, from something much less tangible, the idea of human beings as forming in some sense a single community. There is such a thing as mankind over and above the many and various peoples of the earth. Cicero expresses this idea using the metaphor of concentric circles.[7] The innermost circle is made up of our family and friends. Next comes the city, where we enjoy a complex set of economic, legal and political relationships with fellow citizens. Then there is the wider group which we would now describe as a nation or people: Cicero describes it as the fellowship of those of the same 'race, tribe and tongue, through which men are bound strongly to one another'.[8] Finally there is the fellowship of all people with each other. Here, Cicero claims ' the bonding consists of reason and speech, which reconcile men to one another, through teaching, learning, communicating, debating and making judgements, and unite them in a kind of natural fellowship'.[9] This is in fact the basic idea that Jaspers was later to pick up and express in his claim that the unity of mankind was to be found in the possibility of universal communication between people. Although we may speak different languages, our common capacity for language and reason makes communication between us possible (in a way that it is not with animals, for example). Moreover it is not just possible, but something that we should positively aim to achieve: we owe it to our fellow human beings to try to understand them, to make sense of what they are saying.

---

[7] Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 21-24.

[8] Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 22.

[9] Cicero, *On Duties*, p 21.

Notice, however, that although Cicero is telling us not to lose sight of the outer circle, he does not see it as competing with or displacing the various inner circles. The picture is one in which we recognize human beings first as close relations, then as fellow-citizens in the strict sense, related to the city itself, then as members of the same tribe or language community (as Greek, for example), then finally just as members of the human species. Here there is a contrast with those early expressions of world citizenship which seem to have involved freeing oneself from all of the inner circles and deliberately positioning oneself as an outcast, a person with no specific city or country. Diogenes the Cynic is supposed to have said, when asked where he came from, ‘I am a citizen of the world’ and the main point of this remark was just to deny the relevance of any particular facts about him such as where he was born or where he happened to be living.[10] Diogenes saw this perspective as essential to his philosophical activity. But it had no political content: there was no *political* relationship between Diogenes and those other persons (if there were any) who joined him in declaring themselves citizens of the world.

I shall come back to this point about the apolitical character of world citizenship shortly, but for now I want to underline that we have already uncovered two different versions of global citizenship as a form of personal self-identification with the rest of humanity. There is the Cicero version where it exists alongside, and apparently in harmony with, a number of other affiliations of more limited scope; and there is the Diogenes version, where it involves renouncing all the more specific identities that human beings normally enjoy.

---

[10] There is some debate about whether Diogenes meant his assertion to be *purely* negative, or whether he was also affirming some positive identity – see the discussion in W. Desmond, *Cynics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 199-207. Desmond suggests that in its positive aspect Cynic cosmopolitanism ‘is not simply or even primarily political, ethical or cultural in register’ (p. 204), but expresses rather a sense of oneness with the cosmos understood as the whole of the natural world.

I don't want to imply, however, that for these ancient philosophers global citizenship was purely a matter of identity. For Cicero at least it had certain concrete ethical implications. First and foremost it involved a requirement to avoid inflicting harm on other human beings. As he puts it 'of justice, the first office is that no man should harm another unless he has been provoked by injustice'.[11] And this is clearly meant to apply throughout the fellowship of mankind. Beyond that, however, there is an interesting second requirement, which is that one must allow others to benefit where this can be done at no cost to oneself. So for example, where there is plenty of water in the stream for all to drink, it would be wrong to deny another person his draught. Or, another of Cicero's examples, if one has lit a fire and somebody else wants to take a light from it, one should allow him to do so.[12] This is something less than what we would now recognize as a duty of aid, but it does set certain limits to what an individual person or a community can claim as their exclusive property. And Cicero goes on to talk about other duties with universal scope, for example those having to do with the treatment of defeated enemies in war.

I have been using Cicero to illustrate the interpretation of global citizenship as an ethical idea, even though Cicero himself does not, as far as I know, use the phrase 'citizen of the world' himself. Other Stoics, especially Marcus Aurelius were more forthcoming on that score, perhaps because Marcus was an imperialist whereas Cicero was a republican. But if we read the *Meditations* to see what Marcus is actually recommending when he tells to think and act as though we are members of the universal city of mankind, we see that what he is expressing is a philosophical idea.[13] He assumes that his readers have a clear sense of what is owed to the other members of a real, concrete city, such as Rome. And then he says that we should try to think about our relationship to the human species as a whole in an analogous way. Reason, Marcus says, is the common possession of mankind, and so 'the reason which enjoins what is to be done or left undone is common [to all]'.[14] In other words there is a universal morality. Because as rational creatures we are subject to this common moral law, we are all citizens of the universal city. But Marcus never suggests that this requires us to enter into a *political* relationship with human beings at large, in the sense of establishing common institutions or practices. Indeed it is not at all clear whether any practical consequences follow at all. The *Meditations* were written while Marcus was acting as Roman commander-in-chief in the so-called Marcomannic Wars, a series of sometimes brutal engagements with Germanic tribes (vividly depicted in the opening scene of the film *Gladiator*) earning him the title 'Germanicus' – conqueror of the Germans. His Stoicism appears not to have deterred him from ordering the slaughter or brutal punishment of his enemies as the occasion demanded.[15]

---

[11] Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 9.

[12] Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 22.

[13] Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, trans. A.S.L. Farquarson, ed. R.B. Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

I have said that when Stoics in the classical period talk about world citizenship, they are not using 'citizenship' in its normally accepted sense as involving a political relationship between human beings. But I need now to explain more fully what I mean by a political relationship and therefore why these ancient cosmopolitan ideas do not imply one.

I assume, first of all, that when standing in a political relationship, people are committed to resolving their disagreements in certain ways and not in others – in particular not by fighting or by the direct application of coercive force. Political relationships are necessary because it is always possible that people will disagree about how to order their other relationships, and that this disagreement cannot be resolved by rational discussion alone. So politics must involve the idea of an authority whose decisions on some contested issue are taken in general as binding – either an individual arbiter such as a Hobbesian sovereign, or an institution that uses a procedure such as majority voting to determine the outcome. It is, then, a condition of A and B standing in a political relationship to one another that, even if in other respects they are fierce rivals or competitors, they should be willing, in general, to accept the decisions made by the authority as having normative force – I insert 'in general' here because a political relationship can co-exist with specific instances of dissent, that is cases where people reject the decision, disobey the law, and so forth. What can't be the case, if the relationship is to hold, is for the parties to it merely to pick and choose which rulings to comply with and which to ignore.

---

[14] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, p. 24.

[15] See A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (London: Batsford, 1987), ch. 8.

This implies that all political relationships involve a certain weak form of reciprocity, in that those party to them must generally be willing to accept authoritative decisions that go against their wishes in the expectation that they will benefit from later decisions. There is also a further form of reciprocity involved, namely that participants should avoid pressing for decisions that they know in advance will prove completely unacceptable to other parties. This holds even in cases where the relationship is a very unequal one. A king who rules his subjects politically – as opposed to dominating them by the use of brute force – must recognize certain limits to his rule, avoiding measures that would be so repugnant to those subject to them that they would be moved to end the political relationship through rebellion or secession. To put the point differently, political relationships must meet certain legitimacy requirements, such that reasons can be given to those subject to them to accept the terms of the relationship, and these will typically include limits on what can be decided, for example a set of customary or constitutional rights that must be respected.[16]

Citizenship is centrally a political relationship between co-citizens (it is usually also a *legal* status and a *social role* – see further below – but these are derivative features). As such it involves the weak reciprocity that, I have suggested, all political relationships must involve, but it also requires, by its nature, stronger forms of reciprocity. How strong this requirement is depends upon the form that citizenship takes. The common feature is that citizens aim at reaching an agreement with each other such that each can accept the authoritative decisions that are taken. In liberal understandings of citizenship, this takes the form of an agreement on basic principles of justice, which form a kind of boundary within which other matters can be decided procedurally, for example by majority voting with each citizen supporting his or her preferred option. In republican understandings, the aim is to achieve a consensus on what is to be done, by an exchange of reasons that allows participants to modify their initial positions and reach a compromise.[17] Now it would be wrong to assume that global citizenship must mirror in all respects the forms of citizenship that have so far been achieved at city-state or national level – that would be too impose too demanding a standard. Nevertheless, if it is to be a form of citizenship at all, the relationship between co-citizens must be a reciprocal one. That in turn requires two things. First, citizens must know who their fellow-citizens are, and must expect them to *act* as citizens, that is to say be motivated to achieve whatever form of political agreement is appropriate to the particular relationship in question. Second, each must know enough about the others – about their beliefs and their interests – to know which outcomes are ones that they could possibly accept and which are not. This again could be expressed in terms of legitimacy – all forms of citizenship presuppose principles of legitimacy that are common knowledge among the citizen body and that limit the demands that can be pressed.

---

[16] I am indebted here to Bernard Williams' idea that what distinguishes a political relationship from one of pure coercive power is that the former meets what he calls a 'Basic Legitimation Demand' whereby those subject to power are given reasons for their subjection. See B. Williams, 'Realism and Moralism in Political Theory' in *In the Beginning was the Deed*, ed. G. Hawthorn (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

It might be said here that, if we consider the large mass of people who legally hold citizen status in contemporary democracies, they fail to meet even the weaker condition for citizenship laid down in the last paragraph. There is no real sense in which they practise reciprocity towards each other. Their political activity is mainly confined to voting in elections, and on those occasions they simply support the party that they believe best represents their interests. They have no sense of the need to respect the interests or beliefs of those on the other side. It is true, I think, that citizenship in modern democracies is largely mediated through representative institutions, and that where we find reciprocity being practised it is primarily among party leaders who tacitly agree, for example, not to advocate or pursue policies that would be highly detrimental to minorities even if they would attract majority support (draconian measures against illegal immigrants, for example). This underlines how weak contemporary citizenship is – or how much it is in need of strengthening by the creation of more direct forms of citizen involvement in politics. Nonetheless even the existing very imperfect system may be underpinned by shared understandings of what citizens owe to one another that are then reflected in the tacit agreements by political leaders to refrain from targeting minority groups. The ideas that all citizens should enjoy equal rights, that they are entitled to the full protection of the law, etc. are widely accepted and constrain the policies that governments can pursue.

---

[17] For more on the contrast, see my essay 'Citizenship and Pluralism', *Political Studies*, 43 (1995), 432-50, reprinted in D. Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

To be clear, when I claim that to be a citizen one must stand in a certain kind of political relationship with fellow-citizens, I do not mean to imply that a citizen is only a citizen when acting politically. By virtue of the relationship that exists between citizens, each acquires obligations to the others that are not only political but also ethical in nature. Thus, as I suggested in an earlier discussion, many of the concrete actions that a person is likely to perform as a citizen have no direct political component – they may involve, for example, going to the aid of a fellow citizen who is in some kind of trouble, or taking part in volunteer work to provide local amenities, or help conserve the environment.[18] What makes these activities elements of citizenship, however, is not simply their ethical character, but their 'public-spirited' character. The person who performs them has a sense of the 'public' on behalf of whom he acts, and this public is formed by the political relationship between its members. There is a difference, then, between volunteering to help repaint the classrooms in your local school, and volunteering to travel abroad to repaint classrooms in Quito, say – the relevant difference being that the second activity is purely charitable in nature, whereas the first is undertaken as part of a 'co-operative venture for mutual advantage', to use Rawls' phrase, to which fellow participants can also be expected to make their contributions in turn when the occasion arises.

The problem, therefore, with the ancient conception of world citizenship as found in the authors I have referred to is that it does not entail a political relationship of any kind. At most if involves assuming a cosmopolitan identity, and an ethic of universal respect for human beings. These may be desirable in themselves, but we now have clear grounds for saying that global citizenship so conceived cannot be a genuine form of citizenship. My argument is not merely that it is not citizenship in the same sense as city-based or national citizenship; that much even its defenders would probably concede. My argument is that since it does not presuppose any kind of political relationship, and therefore any kind of reciprocity between people, it cannot be citizenship at all. If we took his words literally, there would be something very odd indeed about Diogenes the Cynic sitting in his wine barrel and proclaiming himself a world citizen without asking the question: who exactly are my fellow-citizens and what can I expect them to do for me?

---

[18] D. Miller, 'Bounded Citizenship' in K. Hutchings and K. Dannreuther (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Citizenship* (London: Macmillan, 1999), reprinted in Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity.*

But perhaps this critique applies specifically to the ancients. So let me now run the clock forward and consider the case of Kant, often now regarded as the leading figure in the modern revival of cosmopolitan citizenship. Kant was evidently influenced by the Stoics, as Martha Nussbaum has shown, but also developed their thinking in ways that might seem more congenial to world citizenship as a version of the genuine article.[19] He dealt with the subject under the general heading of *Recht*, a term that is rendered into English sometimes as ‘right’ and sometimes as ‘law’ (I shall use the former). He divided Public Right into three branches, the first covering the internal constitution of the state, the second the rights of states in relation to one another, or as we might now say international law, and the third with the relations between nations and their members at global level – this he calls cosmopolitan right.[20] Here we are interested in branches two and three, and we see already that Kant gives the state a much more prominent role in his cosmopolitanism than did the ancients. Much of what they might have included as part of a cosmopolitan ethic for individuals – for example the laws of war – Kant treats as a duty of states, as collective bodies.

---

[19] See M. Nussbaum, ‘Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 5 (1997), 1-25.

[20] See I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §§43-62; I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* in H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant’s Political Writings*, trans H. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[21] Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, § 61; Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, pp. 102-5.

Kant's main concern indeed, in this part of his political philosophy, is to find a way to prevent states from going to war with each other; he looked upon war with utter repugnance. And so under the heading of international right he proposed that states should form a league or association with each other, under whose terms they would renounce the use of military force within the association and establish diplomatic institutions that could be used to settle disputes between them.[21] This is sometimes described as a federation of states, but the term is misleading, since Kant makes it clear, first, that membership in the league is voluntary and states can decide to leave at any time, and, second, that the purpose of the league is specifically to prevent war: there is no transfer of governmental powers to a federal body. It's true that there are places in his writing when he seems to think that only something like a universal state could fully achieve the aim of perpetual peace. But this is equally firmly rejected not only on the ground that it would turn into a 'soulless despotism', but also because it denies the moral personality of each independent state.[22]

If one is a citizen of a state that has entered into such a league, does this in any sense amount to global citizenship, or even a step towards it? I cannot see that it does. One's relationship to people in other parts of the league is entirely mediated by the particular state one belongs to. Kant gives clear hints that the business of the league would be conducted through ministers and officials. There is nothing inherently wrong with Kant's proposal in itself, but to dress it up in the language of world citizenship would be wholly misleading.

Perhaps then we should look instead to the third branch of *Recht*, cosmopolitan right. Kant begins here with the idea that the surface of the earth is originally the common possession of mankind, and derives from this the proposition that each of us has the right to travel in order to interact with people in other lands, and specifically to attempt to engage in commercial relations with them. How far this extends is again a little unclear. Kant speaks of hospitality, which he interprets to mean ‘the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory’.[23] But he immediately goes on to say that such a person can be turned away so long as doing so would not cause his death. He is also explicit that the right to travel and engage in commerce is not equivalent to the right to settle in perpetuity. Here again Kant displays a perhaps surprising tenderness towards the idea of national autonomy, even if tempered by a qualified right to freedom of movement of the kind just described.

---

[21] Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, § 61; Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, pp. 102-5.

[22] Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 113.

Once again there seems to be nothing in Kant’s conception of cosmopolitan right that deserves to be called ‘global citizenship’. He gives us the right to move around on the surface of the earth, and to enjoy the presumption that wherever we decide to land we won’t be received with hostility. But in what sense is this citizenship? Are frequent flyers citizens by virtue of the freedom they enjoy? It hardly seems so. Once again what we find missing here is any political relationship between would-be ‘citizens’, and specifically any reciprocity in adjusting to the demands of others.

It begins in fact to seem somewhat mysterious as to how Kant gained his reputation as a far-sighted cosmopolitan, over and above the fact that he liked to think and speak of himself as a world citizen and as we have just seen introduced the unfamiliar notion of ‘cosmopolitan right’. But there is one further aspect of his thought that may help to explain it. Kant certainly had a vision of the unity of mankind, of nations drawing closer to one another gradually over time, of increasing levels of international commerce and communication of other kinds, culminating eventually in a peaceful and orderly world. He believed that this would happen not because anyone willed it directly but as an unintended by-product of the pursuit of economic and security interests by states.[24] We can therefore say that Kant exhibited what Catriona McKinnon has recently called ‘cosmopolitan hope’.[25] And we might also want to say that anyone who shares this vision, and tries to hasten it along a little by their own actions could be described, with a stretch, as a 'global citizen'. As I will argue later, I do not favour this usage, which I believes dilutes the notion of citizenship too far, but if the question is whether Kant has any claim to the title, it would be on this basis rather than on the basis of his claims about international and cosmopolitan right.

---

[23] Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 105.

[24] See Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 114.

So far, I have been looking backwards in an attempt to throw light on the meaning of 'global citizenship', and what has emerged is that this concept appears to have been applied to three different things, none of which, I'm arguing, amounts to citizenship in any recognizable sense. The first is simply a matter of identification: we should identify with humanity as a whole, either in addition to, or instead of, identifying with specific groups of human beings such as our nation or our city. The second is recognition of ethical duties towards all human beings as such, for example duties not to cause them avoidable harm.[26] The third is the idea of states coming together and agreeing by treaty or in some other way to respects each other's rights, avoid recourse to war, and submit their disputes to arbitration. Each of these proposals may be valuable in itself, I have said, but they do not, either separately or together, constitute a form of citizenship. But these ideas were expressed in past centuries. Has the world now perhaps changed in such a way that *real* global citizenship is for the first time possible?

I want to explore three avenues down which we might look to reach this conclusion. The first avenue points towards international law and human rights. There is now, for the first time in human history, something that we might describe as an international legal regime for individuals, as opposed to the older idea of the law of nations as a set of rules governing the relations between states. Starting with the United Nations'

---

[25] C. McKinnon, 'Cosmopolitan Hope' in H. Brighouse and G. Brock (eds.), *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[26] I should perhaps note here that there are those who are happy to describe the mere recognition of such duties as a form of citizenship, Cabrera, for example, writes that 'global citizenship is fundamentally concerned with individual moral requirements in the global frame'. (L Cabrera, 'Global citizenship as the completion of cosmopolitanism', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 4 (2008), p. 85.) I shall later give reasons why the notion of citizenship should not be reduced in this way to a matter of individual ethics.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and continuing through the various later declarations and protocols, signatory states have bound themselves to treat their citizens in certain ways. Moreover these rights and obligations are potentially enforceable inasmuch when one state defaults and begins to violate the rights of its own subjects, other states are permitted, even perhaps required, to take steps to put this right, for example by imposing sanctions on the offending state, or in the most extreme cases by engaging in acts of humanitarian intervention to prevent further violations from taking place.[27] And although the international legal regime in this way depends largely on states acting singly or together to make it effective, there is also now the International Criminal Court, an independent body charged with bringing those who have violated human rights on a large scale to justice.

Let's set aside any doubts about how effective this international regime really is and focus on the question whether it provides us with reasons for thinking that global citizenship is at last becoming a reality. Now clearly having civil and political rights is an important part of what it means to be a citizen, at least on modern understandings of citizenship. So any moves towards strengthening those rights are also moves to strengthen citizenship. But the question that has still to be asked here is 'citizenship of what?' Being a citizen involves being a citizen of somewhere – a specific political community. Of course it is possible to be a citizen within more than one unit at the same time - our city, our nation and now perhaps Europe, for example. The question I am asking about international law, when it is used to protect the rights that go to make up citizenship, is 'within what unit are these rights being defended?'. And the answer, in nearly all cases, is that the rights in question are the rights people enjoy, or should enjoy, within nation states. If, for example, Britain were to apply sanctions to Burma in order to protest against the denial of basic political freedoms in that country, what it would be doing is trying to protect the rights of Burmese people *as* Burmese citizens; it would be trying to secure for them rights that would then be enjoyed and exercised within that country. What international law is primarily doing, therefore, is not to create a new form of citizenship, but to create instruments that can help to support national citizenship in different places by giving people new rights, or turning rights that only exist on paper into real ones. I say 'primarily' because there are a limited number of rights that are not in this way linked to national citizenship, most notably the rights of refugees. When a refugee arrives at the borders of a state and makes a claim based on the so-called principle of non-refoulement – i.e. a claim to be taken in rather than being sent back to a place where his life will be in danger – he is plainly not claiming this right as a citizen of anywhere in particular.[28] He is not, notably, claiming already to be a citizen of the state that he hopes will take him in. But even if we were to focus attention on this limited set of human rights that are not implemented through national citizenship, it is pretty clear that they do not add up to a new and separate form of citizenship. What is missing once again is the political relationship between fellow-citizens that I have argued is an essential component of that idea. Enjoying the protection of a legal regime, although it can provide the basis for citizenship, is something different from citizenship itself.

---

[27] The current status of the right to intervene in international law is unclear. See my essay 'The Responsibility to Protect Human Rights' in L. Meyer (ed.), *Legitimacy, Justice and Public International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and especially the sources cited in f.n. 3 of that essay.

Let us try a second avenue that might appear to lead us towards global citizenship proper. Here we start from something that plainly does have a political character, namely the ever-expanding network of international groups and organizations trying to advance political objectives at global level, or what is often now referred to as global civil society.[29] I am thinking here of bodies such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and Oxfam, bodies in other words that are not created by states or coalitions of states, and so for that reason cannot simply be treated as extensions of national citizenship. The suggestion is that when people join such groups and take part in their activities, they are at the same time becoming and acting as global citizens. They are engaging in activities whose nature is essentially political and they are doing so on behalf of people everywhere. In a concrete case you may be supporting food aid to Mozambique or helping a political prisoner in China, but that is accidental; tomorrow it could be somewhere entirely different. The responsibilities you acknowledge are global in character.

---

[28] For a good discussion of this principle, see M. Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum: Liberal Democracy and the Response to Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 8.

[29] Among those who have appealed to participation in global civil society as a form of citizenship are R. Falk, *On Humane Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); M. Kaldor, 'Transnational Civil Society' in T. Dunne and N. Wheeler (eds.), *Human Rights in Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); N. Dower, 'Situating Global Citizenship' in R. Germain and M. Kenny (eds.), *The Idea of Global Civil Society* (London: Routledge, 2005). For a good critical examination, see K. Hutchings, 'Subjects, citizens or pilgrims? Citizenship and civil society in a global context', also in Germain and Kenny (eds.), *The Idea of Global Civil Society*. See also A. Carter, *The Political Theory of Global Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 2001), ch. 4.

What should we make of this? It's important not to confuse the question whether these groups and activities are things we approve of with the question whether they are manifestations of a new form of citizenship beyond the nation-state. Given the examples I've cited, most of us would no doubt wholeheartedly endorse what these groups are doing (it is characteristic of those who want to portray global civil society as a new arena of citizenship to refer only to those actors within it who have nice, humanitarian aims).[30] But should we call it citizenship? One question that immediately arises, once again, for participants in such groups is who their fellow citizens are supposed to be. One could perhaps speak, a bit unnaturally, of co-citizenship within each of these organizations, but what about the relationship between the members of the group and their political targets, that's to say either the powerful bodies they are likely to be opposing, such as states that violate human rights or damage the environment, or on the other hand the people they are trying to help? This seems not to be a relationship of citizen to citizen. There is no reciprocity involved. Of course such organizations may decide to engage in forms of consultation with their client groups. Oxfam, for example, has adopted an Accountability Charter that commits it to consulting with a range of groups and individuals who it defines as its 'stakeholders', and this of course includes people in developing countries to whom it is supplying aid.[31] This makes perfectly good sense, but I doubt that it establishes a form of relationship that can adequately be described as citizenship. In the end Oxfam and the people who contribute to it will decide on its priorities. If for any reason they decide that their food aid programme to a particular country is not effective, or is helping to prop up a repugnant regime, they will withdraw. In that sense the relationship between the NGO and its clients is a voluntary one, at least on the side of the NGO. As for the relationship between the organization and the governments it is targeting, that is surely best described as one-way pressure rather than reciprocity. It would be not merely unnatural but positively bizarre to describe the relationship between, say, the members of Amnesty International and the military junta in Burma that it is trying to persuade to release political prisoners as one of co-citizenship.

---

[30] Hutchings develops this point more formally, arguing that the global civil society argument rests upon the assumption that Habermasian 'communicative reason' can stand in place of the institutions of citizenship in guiding participants towards 'an essentially liberal moral agenda' (Hutchings, 'Subjects, citizens or pilgrims?', pp. 96-8).

[31] For a thorough discussion of the idea of 'stakeholding' that is being used in this and other similar cases, see T. Macdonald, *Global Stakeholder Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

So my view about the groups that make up global civil society is that they are certainly political, but not political in the way that citizens have to be. They do not have to engage with others on terms of reciprocity, and this gives them a kind of freedom that citizens lack. They don't carry the responsibility of having to reach agreement with those who are their equals that will then form the basis for an authoritative decision. If they have to make compromises, this will be on pragmatic grounds rather than as a matter of principle. Amnesty may decide to mute its criticisms of the Burmese government if it thinks that will help to get more prisoners released, but it doesn't have to moderate its stance on grounds of principle, in the interests of coming to a decision that everyone can accept. Rather than saying that these groups exemplify global citizenship, it would be better to say that we need them precisely because global citizenship is what we don't have, and foreseeably can't have. In that sense we can say that they contribute to that rather amorphous thing called 'global governance'. They act as a check on the uncontrolled behaviour of states just as the international legal regime does. But that is a different matter.

I said that there were three avenues we might try to follow towards contemporary global citizenship. The third avenue involves something we could describe as everyday global citizenship. What I have in mind here is the person who tries in daily life to live in such a way as to recognize the equal claims of all the world's

---

inhabitants. In particular such a person will try to avoid inflicting harm on others, either directly or by using more than her fair share of global resources. She might, for example, try to reduce her carbon footprint to the size that, she judges, is sustainable for everybody on the planet – i.e. if everyone had a footprint no bigger than hers, then harmful global warming would be avoided. She might give up eating meat because she calculates that the world can only produce enough food to satisfy everyone's hunger by avoiding wasteful meat production. She might avoid buying goods that she knows are made using sweatshop labour. And so forth. Now so far this just looks like good ethical behaviour – merely an update in new circumstances of Cicero's claim about the universal duty to avoid harming others. But the reason it looks a bit more like citizenship is that unlike more traditional forms of non-harming it relies implicitly on reciprocity. That is, it relies on the assumption that other people are going to behave in the same way, otherwise the behaviour begins to look largely pointless. There's little value in my reducing my carbon footprint unless large numbers of others do the same. Or putting it slightly differently, the person who acts in this way sees herself as engaging in a form of collective action to make the planet safe for human beings to live in.

Behaviour like this is at least quasi-political, particularly if it is done in such a way as to encourage others to follow suit. Its corresponding limitation is that it is not more explicitly political, that is it doesn't involve creating an authority structure to ensure that the reciprocation really does occur. Not using plastic shopping bags yourself is good; organizing to get your town or city to declare itself a bag-free zone is far better. And this suggests that the person who aspires to be a good global citizen in this everyday sense needs first of all to become an active citizen at local and national level, because this is where the necessary authority structures already exist. It is becoming clear that in order to take effective action on the issues referred to above, such as global warming and natural resource depletion, a top-down approach where governments try to alter behaviour by offering sticks and carrots, legislation and financial incentives to do things like buying a greener car, is not going to be enough. Citizen involvement is needed to produce the right kind of motivation and commitment. But it has to be done on a scale where people can see that others are reciprocating when they are asked to bear certain costs, like giving up their treasured Hummers or 'Chelsea Tractors' for a smaller hybrid or electric vehicle. The most effective scenario will be one where citizens take the initiative in lobbying for better recycling or greater use of renewable energy resources, but political bodies such as local councils translate this into policy in such a way that everyone is compelled, or at least strongly encouraged, to behave in the right kind of way (sorting their garbage, and so on).

My argument, then, is that it is wrong to think of global citizenship as though it were an alternative to local or national citizenship. We can't have a relationship to all our fellow human beings that is genuinely a relation of citizen to citizen; what we can do is identify with them, show ethical concern for them, arrange our institutions to avoid global harms. In other words we can have citizenship that incorporates global concern; besides factoring in the beliefs and interests of our compatriots when collective decisions have to be made, we can take account of the concerns of people outside of the political community. How best to do this is of course a big practical problem. It may involve forms of dialogue such as inviting outside representatives into our assemblies to make their case. But this is not the place to start creating institutional blueprints.[32]

One likely response to the argument I have made is that it needlessly restrictive to define global citizenship in such a way that it blocks the three avenues I have just been exploring. Since these are all avenues it is desirable for us to travel down, why refuse to award them the attractive-sounding name of global citizenship? Consider the second and third avenues especially. We can agree that it desirable for people to get involved in at least some of the groups and associations that together make up global civil society; we think that by doing so they help to promote valuable ends such as protecting human rights or conserving endangered species of animals. We can also agree that it is good if people adopt a global ethic to cover some parts of their daily lives, such as limiting their carbon footprints. If it helps to motivate people to act in these ways by describing their actions as forms of 'global citizenship', what objection can there be, especially in view of the fact that 'real' global citizenship is not available in the absence of authoritative political institutions at global level?

---

[32] I have said a little more in D. Miller, 'Democracy's Domain', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 37 (2009), 203-28.

Don't new circumstances call for the creative development of our existing concepts, including the concept of citizenship?[33]

Although there can be no general reason for opposing conceptual change, it carries with it a particular danger that appears to be realised in this case. The danger is that when a concept is extended to apply in a new setting, it continues to embody assumptions that held in the original setting but cannot hold in the new one. Users of the extended concept are thereby misled, or perhaps self-deceived. Applying this to the case of the concept of global citizenship, first, someone who takes himself to be acting as a global citizen may consciously or unconsciously believe that his actions are being reciprocated by many others, and that he is therefore contributing to a collective outcome which, in fact, is not being achieved. His efforts are futile and constitute a diversion from political engagements that would actually bear some fruit.[34] Second, citizenship, as I have argued, implies that the citizen is accountable to fellow-citizens for the arguments she makes and the actions she takes. Such accountability is lacking in the case of some of the activities that have been described as forms of global citizenship. Suppose somebody contributes to a well-intentioned aid programme that has malign effects on the local economy in the place to which it is directed (for example, sending consignments of second-hand clothing to a poor country such as Uganda or Zambia which results in serious damage to the local textile-making industry). Such a person has in fact behaved irresponsibly, but will never be held to account for the results of her action. Covering the action with the mantle of citizenship disguises this lack of accountability: it suggests that there is some collective body within which deliberation has taken place and which can be held responsible if its behaviour has harmful consequences.

---

[33] See, for example, the complaints levelled by Andrew Dobson against the 'Definition Secretariat' who wish to rule out new forms of citizenship by simple definitional fiat, in 'Citizenship' in A. Dobson and R. Eckersley (eds.), *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Dobson helpfully reminds us that our understanding of citizenship has developed historically as different forms of political life came to be seen as the arenas in which it was practised, but he muddies the water when he says that any form of activity that aims for the common good can qualify as citizenship – see pp. 227-8.

[34] This danger is greater with the Diogenesian conception of world citizenship as *replacing* all other forms of citizenship than with the Ciceronian conception which treats it as the outer circle in a concentric series – see p. 4-5 above.

To return finally to the Hannah Arendt quotation with which I began: Arendt's concern, as anyone who is familiar with her writing will know, was to defend politics as the sphere within which the highest form of human freedom could be achieved. That was what lay behind her passionate defence of a bounded form of citizenship. I don't want to make such lofty claims for politics. My insistence that citizenship must be seen as a political relationship and not, for instance, simply as an ethical perspective, rests rather on a belief about the kinds of goal that can only be achieved politically and not by other means. The promise of citizenship is that we can have the power to get things done that politics creates but keep that power under our collective control (*pace* Hobbes who thought that was impossible). Arendt, who in her essay on Jaspers as a world citizen was also reflecting his fears about the danger of a nuclear holocaust, saw that something beyond national politics would be needed – she gestures towards Kant's idea of an association of states to prevent war. And this is surely correct: no-one could seriously challenge the need for mechanisms beyond the state to help solve this and other global problems.[35] My question has not been about the need for some form of global governance as such, but specifically about the idea of citizenship. Nor do I want to deny that the responsibilities of citizenship change as we move into a world in which co-ordination at global level on issues like climate change becomes increasingly vital. So we do need to reconceive citizenship, though not, I have argued, by changing the central arenas in which it is practised. Not the global citizen, but the globally *concerned* citizen, is the ideal we should be aiming to promote.

---

[35] For some discussion of these mechanisms, and of why it is wrong to think of them as necessarily having a *democratic* character, see my essay 'Against Global Democracy'.