

WORLD CITIZENSHIP: MENACE OR REALITY?

Address by Alain Locke

Professor of Philosophy at Howard University

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It is relatively easy to discuss concepts and ideals like world citizenship on the abstract idealistic plane to which they at once lift our minds by their lofty inclusiveness and their high, humane appeal. At any time, but particularly in the present one of unusual social chaos and conflict, the resolving notion of a community of man looms up before us like a mirage before the weary, bewildered eyes of thirsty, foot-sore travellers. Any one of us may pardonably fall into the Utopian illusions of such wishful thinking and such escapist consolation; in fact, many of us do. But this morning, I am raising the question of world citizenship in a realistic context by discussing not its desirability, which I take it, most of us will concede, but its practicability which is quite a different and not so easy a matter. Among my reasons for doing so is my great respect for one of the ground principles of this Society—the realistic approach to ideals; and it is a pleasure to have an opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to such belief and teaching. Vital morality, we together agree, is the effort to practicalize the ideal, and to do that, one must spend less time in the praise and justification of morality in the abstract and more time and effort on the concrete ways and means of moral action.

And so, I pose the pragmatic question: To what extent is world citizenship possible? How realizable is this ideal, which though so peculiarly involved in the general state of our world today, is nevertheless so old and recurring an idea with all the great spiritual teachers of mankind, the religious prophets especially? Is world citizenship a mirage or can it become a reality?

As contrasted with an idealistic devotee, a realistic believer is one who carefully estimates the discrepancies and obstacles between the actual situation and its proposed ideal objectives. Let us, accordingly take stock of what has stood and still stands between us and any considerable attainment of the goals of world citizenship.

To treat the situation in any realistic way, it is necessary to view the prospects of world citizenship in historical perspective, and then balance quite objectively the favorable chances over against the unfavorable. The first step forces us to realize how considerably both the idea itself and the conditioning factors have changed since the idea of world community first dawned. The "one world" of today is neither the religious concept of a world united by the spiritual bonds of a common belief nor that humanist dream of a world intellectually unified by a common tradition of culture. Instead, the one world of today is the much more realistic notion of a world community politically united by a common loyalty to international law and justice and mutually federated by guaranteed reciprocity in communication, trade and culture. This in itself is an obvious practicalization of the basic idea, and to that extent a real gain both in practicability and in vital relevance to the interests of ordinary men. Brought down within range of the interests and practical understanding of the average man, world citizenship has become a matter of common and vital concern. Thus far, a perspective of widened hope and enhanced reality confronts us as we contemplate the history of the idea.

But all these gains have been accompanied by a considerable shifting of the positive and negative factors in the real prospects of world citizenship. It is a mixed situation; in some respects the chances have improved, in others, the odds have lengthened. Let us consider some of them.

On the positive side, quite in contrast to previous periods when men sought to propagate world fellowship, we do in our day have possession at last of that all-important and basic factor--world communication. Communication is so essential to community, that, in retrospect, we can see that it was a hardy, indeed almost a foolhardy idealism that could seriously contemplate the practicability of world citizenship in the comparative absence of so necessary a means to its realization. But today we have global intercommunication, and to that extent have no insuperable limitations to world-mindedness. Also by the same token, we have no moral alibi for our failure to achieve it. Also on the positive side, we have additionally strong practical reinforcement of our traditional desires for world unity coming from the new and inescapable needs for world collaboration so characteristic of our present day. World War II and its aftermath of world reconstruction have seen to that.

But paradoxically, just as we come into possession for the first time of fully adequate means for world-scale living and sense, also for the first time in any clear way, its practical urgencies and advantages, we confront, on the negative side, greatly augmented obstacles, decidedly intensified hindrances to world citizenship. Indeed, world citizenship today, in the context of a century dominated by intense nationalism, faces psychological barriers of the gravest and most challenging character. Our most characteristic way of life, expansionist and competitive nationalism, thus stands directly in the path of effective internationalism and that world citizenship which is both its rationale and its practical support. From the same source stems another serious obstacle, an almost irreconcilable contradiction of true cosmopolitanism, and that is our almost chronic mind-set of cultural imperialism. This cultural imperialism, with its false identification of nationality with culture and its bigoted and tactless objectives of unity through imposed conformity, is even more insidious and divisive than its political and economic counterparts, and threatens, long even after the liquidation of empire, to raise additional barriers, difficult for constructive world attitudes to surmount.

Ironically enough, then, it seems, as the material hindrances to world unity have been lapsing, the emotional and ideological obstacles have been on the increase. Though imponderable, we know that these barriers of thought and feeling are quite as serious as the material impediments, perhaps more serious. For the older provincialisms were confined to comparatively narrow and natural limits, whereas these synthetic provincialisms of today have wider scope and greater divisive force. They are also more inexcusable as provincialisms with world pretensions, abortively competing in an international setting. Wherefore we must conclude, if we insist on being realistic, that any substantial advance toward the objectives of world citizenship involves challenging and changing all such mind-sets as stand in its way. Clear and courageous thinking on the issue will see no chance for the newer values and broader viewpoints except through head-on battle with these irreconcilables. The highest disservice, therefore, to the cause of world citizenship is to temporize with such manifest contradictions as narrow, traditional patriotism, arbitrary and irresponsible national sovereignty, militant and exclusivist cultural pride and prejudice, while at the same time giving lip service to cosmopolitanism and ideals of world understand-

ing and collaboration. To do so is to contradict oneself, as well as to sabotage the essential next steps of social progress.

But few will dare to be as forthright as two fearless and unimpeachable scholars--Arnold Toynbee and Franz Boas, whom I will take the liberty of quoting to make these points clear. Toynbee unmasks and censures our cultural imperialism in short-shrift fashion. Says he: "We are no longer conscious of the presence in the world of other societies of equal standing, through regarding our society as being identical with civilized mankind, viewing the peoples and cultures outside its pale as being mere 'natives' of the territories which they inhabit on sufferance, but which morally as well as practically are at our disposal by the higher right of our assumed monopoly of civilization." These words were written before the last war, and though there is yet no general change in these characteristic attitudes of Western political and social thinking, it has at least become obvious to many minds and hearts that no sound internationalism can be erected upon so narrow and biased a base. We must all realize that in the course of time we must recant the monopoly of civilization viewpoint or revert again to the competitive pursuits of national imperialism, with one surviving great power as the only logical solution of the professed objectives of "One World." The fact that we at least reject this desperate and unlikely alternative means that eventually we shall have to welcome and embrace the other. Irresponsible nationalism will somehow become modified or outlawed; is in fact in process of such transformation; and only as this happens will we begin to view the true horizon and perspectives of world citizenship.

Franz Boas is even more explicit, and for that reason is additionally convincing about this necessity for enlarging the concept of the nation and revising the character of our loyalty to it. Says Boas: "My opinions are founded to a great extent on the truths taught by the retrospect upon the history of mankind, the study of which has been the business of my life. We see in primitive society the feeling of solidarity confined to the small horde, while every outsider is considered a being specifically distinct, and therefore as a dangerous enemy who must be hunted down. With the advance of civilization, we see the groups which have common interests and in which the bonds of human brotherhood are considered binding expand until we reach the concept that all men are created with equal rights. Socrates, Buddha, and Christ are milestones which indicate the birth of this great idea. But the two thousand years or more that have elapsed since their time have not sufficed, however, to bring about the realization of these ideals. Based on this knowledge, it is my opinion that our first duties are to humanity as a whole, and that in a conflict of duties our obligations to humanity are of higher value than those toward the nation; in other words, that patriotism must be subordinated to humanism." And continuing, he implements this by saying: "For this reason, I believe that the purely emotional basis on which, the world over, patriotic feelings are instilled into the minds of children is one of the most serious faults in our educational system, particularly when we compare these methods with the lukewarm attention that is given to the common interests of humanity."

But this bold, brave, incisive statement does not advocate displacing nationalism entirely, it should be noted, though it does warn of a radical and necessary reconstruction of it. This involves the enlargement both of our conception of the role and responsibility of the nation in world life and a parallel maturing of the character, range and responsibilities of citizenship. That newer citizenship must concern itself so as to make national policy constructively and responsibly international. With that a new morality will have come into politics; as I see it we are today in the throes of

that moral revolution. Only by realigning national policy to international perspectives and obligations can we resolve the dilemma of having to be simultaneously and consistently nationals and citizens of the world. To many, of course, it will seem during the transition that nationalism itself is at stake; retrospectively however, it appears that a new nationalism has emerged from the death of chauvinism and national sovereignty. The world citizen is not going to be a renegade patriot or an expatriate who lives or thinks as an unanchored cosmopolite. It is the citizen who will live in intelligent awareness of his and his nation's place in the world, acting or striving to act to force his nation to act in the light of its world responsibilities--he is the world citizen, and such values and their loyalties constitute the dynamic citizenship of the future.

Such world citizenship, moreover, will be discovered to have a cultural as well as a political dimension. Great minds in many ages have seen this clearly, especially those like Voltaire and Goethe who saw life from the favorable humanist background and perspective of the Enlightenment. Indeed it was on the elevation of this cultural plane that they helped us achieve one of the most important revelations of world citizenship. We should resolutely have pursued world citizenship on this plane; perhaps could have except for what in the course of time will appear to be the 19th Century's great spiritual tragedy--the misuse of culture in culture-politics. Only as we purge our minds of culture-politics will we be able to recapture the vision and the dynamic of cultural cosmopolitanism. Fortunately scientific knowledge escaped largely from the impositions and distortions of culture-politics, and now in a time when we again must try to internationalize culture, points the way and leads the new advance.

But here again, as on the plane of politics, world dimensions in culture will not be found in uniformity but in reciprocity, not in dominance but in the ideals of cultural mutuality and parity. If so, the profitable objective will not be the fusing of cultures but the coordination and collaboration of cultures. In the process we shall, of course, discover many unrevealed common denominators, but culture, as distinct from science, is rooted in specific soils. Culture without regional flavor and national color will never or rarely be attained; what world culture will present will be a liberalizing of our perspectives, reciprocity and exchange without hindrance of arbitrary cultural frontiers, and a mutual appreciation of cultures which must enrich and deepen the quality of civilization far more valuably than could any superficial sharing of a so-called "common civilization."

This is the understanding and the task to which we are formally committed in UNESCO, for although UNESCO's specific objectives are the buttressing of peace through international cultural collaboration, the end result must be to establish a positive and creative maintenance of culture on a world-scale. This cannot be accomplished except through the almost complete elimination of the proprietary idea of culture, and the separation of the true pride of creating culture from the false pride of possessive ownership of it. And just as we grant, even with observable inequalities, the basic equality of men as individuals, so we shall have to assert and maintain the essential parity of cultures. On this point, someone has aptly reminded us that "the barbarians think we are the barbarians." We shall need to progress to the position where the only barbarians will be those who refuse to participate and collaborate in the world maintenance of culture; and few will court that self-confession of barbarity.

To establish such common stewardship of culture will unite more quickly and more effectively than any attempt to found a common culture. What seems to

be most necessary for cultural sympathy and tolerant mutual understanding is the development of attitudes supplanting the cultural arrogance which is such a chronic inheritance from the old tradition of a proprietary concept of culture. As soon, however, as this psychological distance between cultures has been cut down, we shall be more minded to emphasize similarities rather than divergence. Yet the encouraging over-all result will be the formation of constructive attitudes toward difference. Those whose good fortune it may be to grow up in the dispensation of the newer perspectives, will welcome diversity and by so doing discover latent harmony and agreement in many instances.

A word, but only a brief one, needs to be added as a footnote to this matter of cultural tolerance and understanding. For in the realm of religion and morals must come one of its chief uses and vindications. Reciprocity and tolerance in this field seems imperative, but will, of course, be most difficult to attain. Indeed it is not likely to be achieved except through a quite thoroughgoing reorientation of our general attitudes toward culture. Though this enlargement of view may be the last to establish itself generally, surely it must come as a capstone fulfillment of the progression toward cultural understanding on the world scale. It is of the utmost importance to supplement the many secular trends toward world order by religious movements and moral perspectives of similar scope and outlook. Although there has been considerable organizational initiative and effort in world-wide religious rapprochement, there still is little internal renouncing on the part of religious bodies of their sectarian parochialisms and their mutually conflicting claims. Yet here obviously is the crux of the whole issue: if the brotherhood of man is an inescapable corollary of the 'fatherhood of God' principle, so also is the confraternity of religions. This enlightened religion must learn—that the realistic way to become a world religion is not through world pretensions and world rivalry, but through promoting world-wide peace and understanding and moral cooperation of all sorts on a world-scale. On that outcome hangs a goodly part of any real ideological peace, since religion, for all its universalistic claims, instead of being a universalizer has so often been the prime weapon in the rationalization of partisan strife and limited parochial attitudes and loyalties.

These, then, seem to be the practical prospects of the international trends of our time. No one with realistic wisdom will underestimate the opposing forces, either those of tradition and habit or those of vested interest and reaction. However, we do seem committed to the experimental prosecution of the world-uniting task. To see all of these objectives—political, cultural and moral—in relationship to one another and to the crisis of the time is to sense the crucial importance of the movement as a whole. In the context of today, accordingly, world citizenship means more than enlightened citizenship transforming narrow nationalism into enlightened political internationalism, although it does mean that importantly. It also means an equally urgent crusade for world culture with its enlarged tolerances and understandings and on the moral plane, at least a world-wide truce, if not eventually a world-scale alliance of the major religions.

There have always been a few whose lives have been cast and lived in these dimensions. But to open them up as possibilities for the average man and to bring him the benefits of a world so universally oriented and collaboratively organized is the peculiar task of our times. In an age when we have the facilities for the attainment of world citizenship as well as the desperate need to achieve it, it follows that this task assumes

an imperative which on the one hand is sobering, but on the other hand, most challenging. Its possibilities are the hope of our generation and if realized, will be the compensation for having passed through such critical and crucial times. If, on the other hand, world citizenship remains a mere idealist's mirage, it will be because we have failed to carry through in the difficult but not hopeless task of making it a realized reality.