

A Cosmopolitan Mindset Discussed In the Context of National Civic Obligation

Mary Lihong Peng

Every citizen is an active agent of social change and a building block of his or her nation state, and subsequently every nation state collectively determines the international climate. Sequentially, the international climate affects the social, political, economic and ethical functionality of every nation state, and in turn the well being of every nation state shapes the obligations and rights of its every citizen. Therefore, the common approach to understanding national citizenship that is bound by a specific national context is paradoxically flawed because it is practically unrealistic to have a discussion of citizenship that is bereft of the intrinsic interplay between individual civic obligations and global forces.

The understanding and significance of citizenship of a nation state undergo major paradigm shifts as evolving international relations constantly alter the political, economic, socio-cultural and ethical boundaries of nation states. The consideration of citizenry and its obligations is essentially a product of the broader international climate that a nation state braves to achieve stability and prosperity. During World War I and World War II, the obligations of citizens, such as serving the national army and fighting against the country's enemies, were underlined by patriotic sentiment rendered necessary by the desperation of different nation states to survive in a power struggle on a global scale. As the world gravitated towards increasingly pervasive and rapid interconnectedness, the international sphere that was once fixated on nationally bound sentimental and moral rigidity was replaced by one of socio-cultural, economic, and ethical fluidity. The rapid globalization in the 21st century therefore calls our attention to a new approach to understanding the obligations of citizens that will secure stability and prosperity against the current backdrop of world orders.

Bellamy maintains that 'citizenship consists of membership of a political community where all citizens can determine the terms of social cooperation on an equal basis.'¹ The components of rights and participation essentially deal with the legal and political dimensions of citizenship, whereas the component of membership pertains to the ethical dimension of

¹ Bellamy, Richard, and Antonino Palumbo. *Citizenship*. Routledge, 2017.

citizenship, from which ethical obligations of the citizenry also arises. I believe that the legal and political dimensions of citizenship fundamentally serve the ethical dimension of citizenship and obligations---a concern for the common good, a concern for the stability and prosperity of one's nation, fellow citizens and ultimately himself. While the legal and political dimensions are often shaped by the constitutional, governmental, and ideological frameworks of a nation state, such as democracy versus non-democracy, the ethical dimension of citizenship creates a common ground that unites citizens' obligations across nations. Hence, in this paper, as opposed to the discussion of basic obligations of citizens that arise from specific legal and political dimensions of citizenship, such as the submission to the Constitution, participation in the democratic process, paying taxes, jury duties and military service, I will attempt a broad analysis of the primary obligation that arises mainly from the ethical dimension of citizenship of a nation state in both national and global contexts that overarch different ideological frameworks and governmental natures. I will proceed to argue why a cosmopolitan mindset is an indispensable obligation that citizens of nation states need to embrace in their pursuit of their common aspiration towards shared stability and prosperity.

A cosmopolitan mindset is not a concept exclusively applied to the citizenry of the world, but bears as much significance in building a healthy and long-lasting citizenry of every nation state. On the surface, it seems contradictory to juxtapose national loyalties and local identities with identification with a universal community that dissolves national boundaries. However, if we strip a cosmopolitan mindset of its conceptual and geographical technicality, the core of a cosmopolitan mindset is simply the ability to empathize, recognize, tolerate and embrace differences. In a local context, the reason why citizens should be obliged to embrace this mindset is embedded in both the foundation and maintenance of national stability. Social stability is founded on the equilibrium of mutual trust, recognition and acceptance. The social equilibrium can be easily disturbed when newly emerged differences fail to reconcile with the existing paradigms in the belief and value system of a society, thus damaging the foundation of peace and harmony. The high mobility and speedy transmission of people and information in the globalizing era means that the predisposition of traditions and ideas that defines a nation

state and its previous social equilibrium of understanding, empathy, and mutual acknowledgment will be constantly bombarded and challenged by new ideas with outside influence. It is exactly the impossibility to isolate a nation state from the global sphere that necessitates the citizenry's obligation to willingly explore and grapple with different cultural, social, religious, and political ideals that are constantly infused into every nation state. The rejection of differences and the failure to recognize and understand diversity will undermine the maintenance of friendly social relationships, the disintegration of which will subsequently arouse tension and antagonism, thus destabilizing social congruity and order. The Soviet Cultural Purge in the 1920s and the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1970s are two of the many examples that testify to how the narrow scope of nationalist mania and the rejection of a cosmopolitan mindset among the masses could lead to the destruction of social order. Therefore, if an ideal citizenship is indeed a condition of civic equality and social stability, then in light of the global interconnectedness in the 21st century, citizens of any nation state, who are believed to be active architects of a stable social order, are ineluctably obliged to embrace a cosmopolitan mindset so as to enter relationships of mutual respect with the constantly evolving membership of their local communities that is driven by the current global climate.

A cosmopolitan mindset is also of paramount importance to the prosperity of a nation state in the 21st century. A citizen's obligation to work towards the greater good of his or her nation will thus give rise to his or her obligation to embrace the cosmopolitan mindset too. Financial, cultural, intellectual, and technological prosperities in the 21st century are rarely isolated occurrences. A cosmopolitan mindset allows an individual to transcend political and geographical confines to seek cooperation from people based on merits rather than a hollow artificial construct created to draw boundaries, such as political affiliation and national identity. A cosmopolitan mindset is essential in driving economic and socio-cultural exchanges that heavily rely on one's openness to new ideas. Citizens' blind nationalist and patriotic fervors that propel an individual to reject foreign ideas would collectively create a social environment that is hostile to the absorption of new ideas, thus perpetuating the inability of a nation state to keep up with the rapid global advancement. In a world of economic and intellectual integration,

the prosperity of any nation state is embedded in its ability to readily assimilate and adapt to new changes, which is enabled by every individual agent's openness to constantly upgrading one's skills and ideas through the critical acceptance of alien ideas. Hence, our time calls into question a reconfiguration and reconciliation of the understanding of public obligation and the good of collective life, which can no longer be confined solely to a local context. To secure the common good, the stability and the prosperity of one's nation state against the tide of ever-increasing global integration and connectedness, citizens need to realize the urgency and necessity of the obligation to adopt a cosmopolitan mindset, which will allow the prosperity of their nation states as well as the consolidation of their social, political, and cultural rights that are ensured only by a stable social order.

In 'Talking to Strangers', Danielle Allen delivers a powerful critique on the problem of citizenship in terms of the problem of civic distrust. Allen argues that citizens of nation states must find ways to 'generate mutual benefit despite differences of position, experience, and perspective'² in order to alleviate the distrust that hinders the formation of a healthy citizenship. Allen's critique on the challenge of civic distrust reinforces the necessity of cultivating a cosmopolitan mindset among citizens, and a cosmopolitan mindset in turn creates a potential solution to how citizens can overcome distrust and forge a cooperative citizenship. The pervasiveness of civic distrust demonstrates the social chasm between citizens who fail to recognize their shared reality of citizenship that lurks beneath the mask of different social and cultural identities. Only through the cultivation of a civic friendship that recognizes collective experiences, aspirations, difficulties and differences can we solidify the foundation of a stable and vital citizenship. Hence, promoting a cosmopolitan mindset as civic obligation, which steers citizens towards the recognition of a shared social, cultural and political horizon, is at the very heart of the required citizenly responsibility mapped out in Allen's vision of citizenship that is built on trust and mutual recognition.

Allen also speaks eloquently on the social habits of interaction that underline the constitution of citizenship, which lends further support to the need for a cosmopolitan mindset

² Allen, Danielle S. *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006.

among citizens. Allen debunks the common myth of citizenship as purely a set of political duties and legal status. The emphasis on long-enduring habits as the core of citizenship renders inclusive social relations a desideratum in enforcing the integrity and wholeness of a nation state. Inclusive social relations are made possible only by citizens' willingness to embrace and accommodate differences, which is essentially the willingness to adopt a cosmopolitan mindset. Hence, if citizenship is indeed entwined around the basic social habits in public spaces, to obey the civic obligation to maintain the stability and integrity of citizenship of nation states is to develop and exercise habits of interaction that fully incorporate tolerance, mutual trust, empathy, and openness, which inevitably requires citizens to embrace a cosmopolitan mindset.

Allen further elucidates the sacrifices, loss, and disappointments forced upon people by democratic citizenship. However, I believe that sacrifice is not a unique feature of democracy, but an unavoidable collective expense of any social and political construct. The execution of any sort of power and the utilization of any sort of resources imply a choice, which is always accompanied by opportunity costs, explicit or implicit. Given the necessity to retain the functional power of a social and political organization, it's practically impossible for any nation state or government, regardless of its ideological and cultural orientation, to escape the sacrifice of citizenship. Hence, I believe that the concept of the distribution and reconciliation of sacrifices holds a universal truth to any form of citizenship and has an impact on our understanding of civic obligations that goes far beyond democratic citizenship. In light of the necessity to manage sacrifices, a cosmopolitan mindset seems even more pertinent because the first step to responding to sacrifices and fears is mutual recognition and understanding among all the citizens. In order to truly comprehend the frustration, resentment, distrust, and fears of security of those who constantly make sacrifices, and thus act upon the reorganization of the patterns of sacrifice, citizens have to develop mutual understanding and genuinely identify with the pain and loss of others as part of their shared existence. When one recognizes others' sacrifices and losses as their own, a common ground of willingness to accept the redistribution of the negative effects of sacrifices will be established among all citizens, thus facilitating the voluntary creation of networks of mutual benefaction. A cosmopolitan mindset will bridge the

gap between citizens of different experiences and backgrounds and thus catalyze the formation of this network of empathy, trust, and belonging. Hence, to adopt a cosmopolitan mindset as civic obligation is imperative to any citizenship that aims to address sacrifices to promote inclusion, integration and stability.

To argue for the civic obligation to have a cosmopolitan mindset, I must grapple with the conflict that arises from the occasional incompatibility of nationalist sentiment and cosmopolitan ethics. In times of distress, people tend to look to their closer social circle for support and reassurance. The existence of nation states testifies to humans' nature in seeking social congregation for a sense of certainty. Due to practical reasons such as the conflict between limited resources and unlimited demands, warfare driven by selfish desires inevitably arise once in a while as a mechanism to regain and redistribute power and resources. Antagonism and hatred would prevail. The emergence of a common enemy creates the idea of camaraderie that propels the citizens of a nation state to automatically align themselves with their closest community whose interest the members of this community immediately identify with. With their survival and personal interests at stake, citizens are motivated to prioritize their civic obligation to guard their nation's interests over the obligation to embrace a cosmopolitan ethics. However, I'd like to argue that the very cause of chaos, instability and violence that permeate times of conflicts lies in people's failure to fulfill their obligation of embracing a cosmopolitan mindset in their social and political participation. Conflicts and wars can be seen as an amplification of civic distrust, misconception of differences, and the consequent strained social relations on a global scale, which would require a cosmopolitan mindset to resolve. Hence, it is exactly the existing discordance between nationalistic and patriotic ardor and cosmopolitan ethics that points to the need for a cosmopolitan mindset as civic obligations to cement peaceful social relations on a local scale and ultimately an international scale.

Another question that may arise from the obligation to embrace a cosmopolitan mindset is how citizens of a nation state can wrestle with their emotion of universal empathy without compromising their sense of belonging. Central importance is often given to the emotion of

patriotic love that derives from a shared national identity. Citizens may experience frustration or emotional disenfranchisement when they are robbed of their ties to the national communities that they believe they belong to. To those people whose purpose and pleasure in life are deeply entrenched in their national pride, a cosmopolitan mindset that may dilute their sense of nationalism might come into conflict with their emotional and moral faculty. However, I'd argue that a cosmopolitan mindset does not necessarily strip oneself of his or her sense of belonging because such a mindset does not intend to eradicate the unique influence of cultural and historical heritage of a nation state that often gives rise to a sense of national identity. Rather, it intends to demolish the barriers between members and potential members of a nation state on the basis of mutual recognition and respect so as to seek unity through diversity, acknowledge diversity in unity, and ultimately create a sense of wholeness. A new and stronger sense of belonging will be forged as citizens create more diverse emotional and social ties with more people that they identify and empathize with, which will in turn consolidate the social and cultural exuberance and stability of the nation state, fulfilling the common goals set out by civic obligations and their ethical considerations.

In conclusion, I've argued that a cosmopolitan mindset is not an exclusive concept for universal citizenry. Quite the contrary, given the current international climate and the ever-increasing global integration, the adoption of a cosmopolitan mindset should be the obligation of citizens of any nation state regardless of the political and legal nature of their citizenship and the ideological framework of the nation state. Civic obligations should never be discussed in an isolated local context as essentially they are reactants as well as products of social, cultural, political, and economic changes that chart the course of the entire civilization of mankind. The intrinsic connection between today's global and national climates gives rise to the need for citizens of nation states to embrace a cosmopolitan mindset so as to achieve their ethical obligation to create stability and prosperity for their communities as both fellow citizens and human beings.

Bibliography

1. Bellamy, Richard, and Antonino Palumbo. *Citizenship*. Routledge, 2017.
2. Allen, Danielle S. *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006.