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Citizenship in a Globalising World: The Role of Civilisation Dialogue

The paper attempts to sketch a new conception of citizenship that responds to the needs of human security in the age of globalisation.

It begins by revisiting the theory of citizenship as it emerged during the Enlightenment and subsequently evolved in the context of the western liberal democratic state. Particular attention focuses on the notion of political community, to which 'citizens' belong and from which they derive both rights and obligations. Critical questions to be explored here include:

- What is the precise relationship between community and individual postulated by the notion of citizenship?
- How does it reconcile the liberal conception of freedom with the more radical idea of equality?
- How are civil and political rights reconciled with social and economic rights, and individual with collective rights?
- What is the assumed relationship between state and civil society?

The paper then proceeds to ask how well equipped these notions of citizenship are to handle the vastly altered social, economic and political conditions that we associate with the contemporary world, understood as the post-colonial world of rapid technological change, economic globalisation, shrinking distances and time scales, and the increasing lethality of violence. The analysis here centres on four distinct but closely interconnected imbalances (psycho-social, institutional, economic and ecological) that characterise the contemporary human predicament.

Though still a valuable intellectual and political tool, citizenship, as traditionally conceived and applied, the paper concludes, is in need of considerable reconceptualisation. Can our rich and diverse civilisational inheritance make a useful contribution? The citizen can no longer be understood as pure universal abstraction. On the other hand, the very attempt to set the individual in a concrete religious/cultural/civilisational setting or current raises complex questions on the relationship between material unification and cultural differentiation.

Several questions immediately arise: Can 'civilisational dialogue' play a useful role in addressing the imbalances identified above? To what extent, if at all, can it contribute to a global discourse that places 'citizenship' in a new light? Can it help to ground citizenship in a new conception of governance that is not territorially exclusive, and develops a new approach to peacemaking and peacebuilding? The possible contribution of civilisational dialogue to this enterprise is examined and critically evaluated with respect to five key categories: commonality, complementarity, difference, reconciliation and legitimate governance.