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Reimagining Solidarity: The Ethical Duty of Global Citizens in the time of COVID-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 has brought death around the globe, affects our physical and mental health, and produced an environmental crisis. COVID-19 has also brought the opportunity to rethink our collective commitments and global responsibilities towards others. In discussing global responsibility towards others, this paper focuses on two concepts: global citizenship and solidarity as a basis for one's ethical duty. There are three parts to this paper. First is the discussion on the concept of global citizenship and why it is crucial in the time of COVID-19. When a person claims herself as a global citizen, she acknowledges her responsibilities as a moral agent with an ethical obligation towards others in the global community. Second is the examination of the concept of solidarity based on Anselm K. Min's understanding. Min argues that solidarity is a quality that exists within human nature. Consequently, to be human means to have solidarity towards others. Min introduces the idea of the "solidarity of others" that is based on the acknowledgment that even though we are different from one another, we are all responsible for one another. The third part is the analysis of the relationship between solidarity and the ethical duty of global citizens in the time of COVID-19. This paper concludes that being a global citizen in the time of COVID-19 demands the ability to reimagine solidarity as the basis of ethical duty and to bring justice for others in need.

Keywords: Global Citizenship, COVID-19, Solidarity, Ethics, Justice



Overview of the paper

- Introduction
- Research questions
- Literature review:
 - Global Citizenship
 - Solidarity and Ethical Duty
- Discussion
- Conclusion: Reimagining Solidarity



Introduction

- The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020 and announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19 on February 11, 2020 ().
- Today COVID-19 has brought death around the globe and affects not only our physical and mental health but also produced an environmental crisis.
- COVID-19 brought the possibility for global citizens to reimagine the role of solidarity as the basis of a person's ethical duty.
- The configured term “global citizenship” represents how the understanding of a person's moral duties toward one another can and should be understood within the global dimension (The Practice of Global Citizenship, 2012: 14).
- WHO in their *Guidance for Managing Ethical Issues in Infectious Disease Outbreaks* identifies solidarity as one of the seven relevant ethical principles along with justice, beneficence, utility, respect for persons, liberty, and reciprocity (WHO, 2016: 8-9). Solidarity in this written guide is understood as “a social relation in which a group, community, nation, or, potentially, the global community stands together. The principle of solidarity justifies collective action in the face of common threats” (WHO, 2016: 9).

Research questions

- Who is included in the concept of global citizenship, and why does the concept matter in the time of COVID-19?
- How can solidarity as the basis of ethical duty contribute to strengthening the role of the global citizen in the time of COVID-19?



Global Citizenship: Between Institutional Rights and Ethical Duties

- What is the relation between the word 'global' and the word 'citizenship', and how is the combination of these two contested and complex terms understood in this paper? Undoubtedly, we are aware that we have global obligations, but does that make us global citizens?
- It is important to distinguish between the institutional and ethical understandings of global citizenship. In this paper, in particular, the focus will be on the latter.
- Citizenship is usually understood concerning national membership. Hence, Nigel Dower states that "for us to be citizens of the world we need to have some formal relationship to world institutions, such as a world state or a world organization, in which one could democratically participate, for example through elected representatives. These do not exist now, so we are not now world citizens" (Nigel Dower, 2003: 143).
- "When someone says of himself 'I am a global citizen', he is making some kind of moral claim about the nature and scope of our moral obligations" (Nigel Dower, 2002: 146). Here, the term citizen is understood not in its legal sense but refers to membership in the moral community. Because we all belong to one global moral community, we all have global responsibility towards others.

Global Citizenship: Between Institutional Rights and Ethical Duties

- Dower believes that "in some respects, we are all global citizens, for instance, because of a certain moral or legal status, but in other respects, only some people are global citizens by virtue of their self-descriptions and/or active engagement with the world" (Nigel Dower, 2008: 39).
- Those who accept the concept of global citizenship acknowledge that "all human beings have a certain moral status, and that we have a moral responsibility toward one another in this global moral domain/ sphere or notional community" (Nigel Dower, 2008: 41).
- It can be concluded that "first, anyone who sees herself as a global citizen will have some set of beliefs about what moral values are important in the world and what we ought to do to promote them. Second, there is a great amount of variation in the ethical views which people hold, about which values are important, what kinds of action are effective, what kinds of means are morally acceptable" (Nigel Dower, 2002: 149).

Solidarity as the Basis of Ethical Duty

- The concept of global citizenship is closely related to the question of our ethical duties while living in an interconnected and global world.
- Anselm K. Min in *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* argues that solidarity is a quality that exists within human nature. Consequently, to be human means to have solidarity towards others.
- For Min, “human solidarity is something already rooted deep in the sociality of human nature, which alone makes it something human and profound; but it is also in need of disciplined cultivation under concrete historical conditions, which also makes it an ethical task and today a compelling task” (Anselm K. Min, 2004: 79).
- Solidarity is within us; it is “inherent and intrinsic to human existence as such and needs only to be activated. It is not something we have to artificially invent or add to an existence already constituted as an individual” (Anselm K. Min, 2004: 79).

Solidarity as the Basis of Ethical Duty

- Min's concept of solidarity is based within the 21st-century context, where globalization and interconnection play a vital role in the lives of individuals and communities around the world.
- The acknowledgment towards the context that we are living today, according to Min leads to a twofold dialectic in the relationship with others that Min calls "*the dialectic of differentiation*, in which we are made increasingly aware of differences" and "*the dialectic of interdependence*, in which we are compelled to find a way of living together despite our differences" (Anselm K. Min, 2004: 1). Solidarity is an act based on the understanding of these twofold dialectical notions.
- Solidarity must lead us not only to respect our differences but also to treasure our differences as the reason for solidarity. Therefore, our solidarity is not merely with others; it is *of* others, of those who are other and of others who are suffering.

Solidarity as the Basis of Ethical Duty

- Min believes in the “solidarity *of* others” instead of “solidarity *with* others” because solidarity *of* others concentrates on the acknowledgment that “all are others to one another, that we as others to one another are equally responsible, and that all are subjects, not objects” (Anselm K. Min, 2004: 82).
- Min states that it is the ability to acknowledge differences that will lead to the “solidarity *of* others.”
- Solidarity aims to bring peace and justice in the midst of living our differences. Again, it is impossible to build on solidarity without acknowledging our differences.
- Amid our differences, it is our responsibility to stand in solidarity towards others. We need not pass over our differences and focus on the similarities; instead, we must acknowledge our differences to stand in the solidarity *of* others.

Building New Bridges Together in the Time of COVID-19

- From an unknown pneumonia that caused death in Wuhan, China, today, COVID-19 has become a disease that is killing more than a million people worldwide.
- The ethical duties of a global citizen are closely related to the question of **what we ought to do as human beings living in a world with COVID-19.**
- The answer to this reflective question lies in the ability to be a solidarity *of* others. Solidarity is a significant ethical approach, given its two constitutive elements crucial to human interdependency: consciousness and participation for the common good.
- Acknowledging solidarity as a basis for a global citizen's moral duty in time of COVID-19 does not mean arguing that solidarity is the only relevant approach to understanding the ethical duty of global citizens; however, it is undoubtedly one important ethical approach on which this paper chose to focus.

Building New Bridges Together in the Time of COVID-19

- COVID-19, like other crises, brought the opportunity to rethink collective commitments to others and reminds us of the global responsibilities of global citizens around the world.
- Individuals and communities in a different part of the world are doing different things to fight against COVID-19. It is crucial that all these efforts, when conducted by global citizens, are being carried out under the acknowledgment of the solidarity *of* others. Whether it is caring for elders, wearing and or stitching masks, working/studying from home, practicing social and physical distancing, protecting homeless impacted by the virus, working at health institutions, or working against the environmental justice crisis caused by COVID-19, these acts of solidarity must be translated into a broader collective response as global citizens.

Building New Bridges Together in the Time of COVID-19

- Miguel H. Díaz in “Walking with others in an age of social distancing” discusses the possibility of reimagining solidarity through the new regulations of COVID-19.
- Díaz reflects that “because the virus knows no borders, we have become much more attuned to our common humanity and how those that live beyond our cities, states and national borders share in our present and future”
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- Díaz explains that social distancing in the time of COVID 19 must bring us to recognize that we can and must always walk with others even in times of social distancing.
- Practicing social distancing in the time of COVID-19 gives us the opportunity to protect others who might be vulnerable and at risk of the disease.
- Again, in the time of COVID-19, global citizens are given the opportunity to focus on the solidarity of others who are part of high-risk groups, including older adults, people with chronic illness, people with disabilities, and many more.

Conclusion: Reimagining Solidarity

- With the interconnection and interdependency in our world today, what is global has become a part of our daily lives.
- The concept of global citizenship is closely related to one's moral values and moral responsibilities toward one another in the world.
- From Min, we learn that to practice solidarity, individuals must start from understanding that differences and interdependence are two things that connect and affect each other. Hence, the ability to be in solidarity depends on the ability to self-reflect, which will lead to the acknowledgment of our interdependencies. Once the acknowledgment of interdependencies amid our differences is achieved, solidarity must lead to the real action of reaching out towards other groups to work together for peace and justice.
- COVID-19 gave global citizens the opportunity to self-reflect on their differences and interdependencies and call them into the solidarity of others.
- With COVID-19, the number of deaths grows aggressively, many have lost their jobs, and the environmental damage puts the vulnerable communities at a more significant risk of increased pollution. What is needed in this time is the ability to reimagine solidarity: solidarity that is not a form of charity and not based on the mere feeling of sympathy, but solidarity as the ethical duty of each global citizen.





Thank You.



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