A Common Framework
for
the Ethics of the 21st Century

Yersu Kim
Division of Philosophy and Ethics
UNESCO

September 1999
Paris
Contents

Introduction
by Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO

Prospects for a Universal Ethics

I. The Global Crisis
   1. The Globalization of Problems 1
   2. The Crisis of Values and International Efforts 4
   3. The Western Synthesis 8

II. The Search for Common Values: Tentative Steps 10
   1. International Commissions 11
      a) Our Global Neighborhood
      b) Our Creative Diversity 12
   2. Religious, Political and Cultural Institutions 13
      a) The Parliament of the World’s Religions 14
      b) The InterAction Council
      c) Institute for Global Ethics 15
   3. Global Common Values in Action 17
      a) Business and Finance
      b) International Governance Agencies
      c) Global Academic and Cultural Conventions 18
III. The UNESCO Universal Ethics Project

1. The First Steps
2. Aims
3. Feasibility
4. Methodology
5. Universality in Diversity
6. Ethics and Human Rights

IV. Prospects

1. Toward the Ethics Charter of the 21st Century
2. The Task Ahead

A Common Framework for the Ethics of the 21st Century

Bibliography

Annex
Documents containing ethical values consulted to date
International efforts to identify common values constitute a task of the utmost importance today. The global problems that we face and the need for coordinated responses transcending cultural differences and national borders require the emergence and recognition of a common substratum of values. This would help to make economically, socially and culturally viable coexistence possible on a world-wide scale.

A Common Framework for the Ethics of the 21st Century, by Yersu Kim, Director of the UNESCO Division of Philosophy and Ethics, is the product of extensive research and consultations carried out since 1997 in the frame of the UNESCO Universal Ethics Project.

It is my hope that, following consideration by representatives of UNESCO Member States and the public, this document may serve as a particularly relevant working document for the year 2001, United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilisations. It could form an excellent basis for dialogue and discussion at the regional preparatory meetings for the celebration of that Year.

After taking into account the outcome of these further consultations, the document could then be forwarded by UNESCO to the General Assembly of the United Nations, as part of UNESCO’s contribution to the program of the Year 2001, a year of reflection on the values and aspirations shared by our world’s people and civilisations.

23 JUL 1999

Federico Mayor
Prospects for a Universal Ethics

I. The Global Crisis

1. The Globalization of Problems

The future cannot be a continuation of the past and there are signs...that we have reached a point of historic crisis...

We do not know where we are going. We only know that history has brought us to this point.

Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*¹

We stand at this century's end in a situation of extraordinary openness. The forces of the techno-scientific economy are threatening

the very foundation of human life, even while they create unheard-of material bounties for a minority of humanity. These same forces are giving rise to ever more complex social, political and moral questions. At the same time, the old ideas and institutions that had served humanity so well over the past several centuries in its tasks of survival and flourishing seem increasingly irrelevant, unimportant or even counter-productive. People are abandoning old loyalties and building allegiances shaped by rapidly shifting ideas and hopes. The last part of the century is, in the words of an eminent historian, an era of “decomposition, uncertainty and crisis”\(^2\).

The first clear signs of uncertainty and crisis came in the form of the ecological crisis that accompanied the first oil shock in the early years of the 1970s. Politicization of the energy resources by the oil-producing countries had abruptly exposed the fragility of the “golden” years of post-war economic development, decades that had seemed to promise eradication of poverty and full employment to almost all the countries of the North and for some countries in the developing world. The oil shock, combined with the ideas of the limits-to-growth writers of the 1970s, highlighted the universal or global nature of the crisis. The best known of these documents, the so-called Club of Rome Report, issued a warning that, if the present growth trend in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years.\(^3\)

The universal or global nature of the crisis lay not only in the fact that it affected practically all parts of the world, due to the increasingly integrated and global character of the world economy. Nor was the crisis global simply in the sense of the all-encompassing

\(^2\) *ibid*, p. 6.

interconnectedness of the problems. It was global, first and foremost, in that the problems faced were of such a nature that, while they may be experienced locally, they could only be dealt with by concerted global action across the borders of nation-states, traditionally the basic units of political action.

Several attempts were made during the 1970s to arrive at a comprehensive statement of the world’s problems. The Report of the Club of Rome, mentioned above, may have received the most attention, but there were also other earnest attempts at a comprehensive inventory made by: the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis, the World Model Institute, the Russian Institute of System Studies, and the Batelle Institute, among others. But no other listing of global problems approaches the comprehensiveness of Aurelio Peccei’s *The Human Quality* (1979). That list includes:

- uncontrolled human proliferation
- chaos and divisions in society
- social injustice
- hunger and malnutrition
- widespread poverty
- the mania for growth
- inflation
- energy crisis
- international trade and monetary disruptions
- protectionism
- illiteracy and anachronistic education
- youth rebellion
- alienation
- uncontrolled urban spread and decay
- crime and drugs
- violence and brutality
- torture and terrorism
- disregard for law and order

nuclear folly
sclerosis and inadequacy of institutions
corruption
bureaucratization
degradation of environment
decline of moral values
loss of faith
sense of instability
lack of understanding of the above problems
and their interrelationship.

2. The Crisis of Values and International Efforts

As the sense of uncertainty and crisis deepened, it became increasingly clear that the ideas, assumptions and institutions on which modern society had been founded were no longer adequate to deal with many of the problems facing humanity. The crisis was increasingly seen as a crisis of ideas, beliefs and values that had been the foundation of the modern society, in the face of new historical realities engendered by the accelerating process of globalization. Nation-states, which had been the cornerstones of modern political development in the West since the middle of the 17th century, were being pulled apart by the contradictory forces of economic globalization and ethnic fragmentation. Since Westphalia, the national state had come to be seen as the only valid form of political-social organization. It was now woefully inadequate to deal with the new wave of global, transboundary problems. The model of political authority that had been at the basis of modern society was based on the supremacy of national states and national interests, and not on the idea of global responsibility and governance.

The full global dimension of the developing crisis was beginning to be appreciated by the international community throughout
the 1970s and 1980s. The United Nations established over a period of seven years three independent commissions to report on different aspects of what was coming to be recognized as a common crisis. The Independent Commission on International Development Issues (known as the Brandt Commission) was established in 1977. In 1980, the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (the Palme Commission) was constituted, while the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development came into being in 1984.

The 1990s saw a remarkable series of world conferences convened by the United Nations, all addressing problems of a global magnitude. It was acknowledged that the solution of these problems exceeds the capacities of individual Member States, and depends upon a concerted international effort. The eight conferences were:

- 1990: World Summit for Children
- 1992: UN Conference on Environment and Development
- 1993: World Conference on Human Rights
- 1994: International Conference on Population and Development,
- 1995: World Summit for Social Development
- 1995: Fourth World Conference on Women
- 1992: Second UN Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat II)\(^5\)

The international community convened other major conferences to address some of the most pressing problems facing the world today. They included:

- 1994: UN Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

---

• 1994: International Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction
• 1995: 9th UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders
• 1996: 9th UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD IX)

All of the conferences focused on issues of global well-being and sought to identify ways to link the problems people face at the community level with policies and actions at the international level. They were predicated on the recognition that the world is facing problems that cannot be resolved with action only at the national level.

The conferences together formed a cohesive series of meetings dealing with interrelated issues such as environmental protection, the well-being of children, human rights and the rights of women, population, unemployment, crime, trade, food security and human settlement.

While these conferences built on common ground created over decades by previous world conferences and conventions, there was an increasing demand for an integrated, interrelated and coherent implementation of their outcomes along a common framework. The conferences reflect the increasing acceptance of shared values, shared goals and the strategies to achieve them. The call for a "common framework" for the various initiatives echoed in the conferences reflects the growing convergence of views that democracy, development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are all interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Thus, along with producing action plans and exploring the possibilities of expanding normative guidelines, these conferences played a role in the emergence of global principles such as human-centered development, the priority of poverty eradication, and a concept of justice expressed as the inseparability of civil and political from economic and social rights.
The clearest example is Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which produced not only concrete conventions on climate change and biodiversity, but principles to guide international action on the environment:

**Agenda 21 Principles**

- **Human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development.** They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.
- **Scientific uncertainty should not delay measures to prevent environmental degradation where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage.**
- **States have a sovereign right to exploit their own resources but not to cause damage to the environment of other States.**
- **Eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in worldwide standards of living are “indispensable” for sustainable development.**
- **Full participation of women is essential for achieving sustainable development.**
- **Developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.**

Common themes reappear in the final documents of all these meetings. The 1990 Children’s Summit produced a document whose principles are clearly indicated in its title: World Declaration and Plan of Action on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized a holistic approach linking development, democracy and human rights. The Population Conference likewise stressed that poverty reduction,

---

6 Ibid. p. 24.
environmental protection and the promotion of gender equality work as "mutually reinforcing" factors to slow population growth. The Social Summit's Copenhagen Declaration united social, economic, political and cultural concerns in its "ten commitments" to enhance quality of life, transcending cultural differences. The Beijing Women's Conference addressed 12 areas of concern, in which women are fairly systematically excluded from enjoying their nationally and internationally recognized rights and freedoms. The Habitat and Food Conferences focused attention on two of the most basic components of human well-being.

At the same time, a reappraisal of the factors that augment the quality of life began to call into question the link between simple development and well-being. Dramatic urban growth, mass unemployment, social disintegration, and historically unprecedented polarities of wealth and poverty are consequences of development. According to studies such as UNICEF's Giving Children a Future: The World Summit for Children (1990) and State of the World's Children reports, as well as the 1996 report of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life, economic growth is not necessarily associated with improvement in quality of life. For benefits to be realized, allocation and distribution of resources require some ethical orientation in the light of near universally-shared aims and values.7

3. The Western Synthesis

The symptoms of uncertainty and crisis that mark this fin-de-siècle are, in an important sense, a reflection of the inability of nation states to deal effectively with the new historical situation. But one could argue that even this inability reflects a crisis in the synthesis of ideas and values that had taken the West several centuries to develop.

Based on the ideas of individualism, rationalism, scientism and teleology of progress, the Western synthesis provided a point of reference as societies endeavored to industrialize and modernize. The synthesis had such a preeminence in the minds and affairs of men that nations and societies were practically unanimous in accepting Westernization as the only means of ensuring a viable future. Under the banner of modernization, they abandoned customary truths, values and ways of life, and accepted their degree of Westernization as their measure of progress or regress.

Today the Western synthesis of ideas and values seems no longer able to offer a sure guide to human survival and flourishing. After the demise of socialism and gradual retreat of the Welfare State, the mixed economy of the Keynesian and Asian-values provenience, there does seem to be a certain triumphalism on the part of the advocates of the neo-liberal economic model in today's globalizing economy. They seem, however, unable to deal with the growing impoverishment of much of the South, as well as with phenomena of mass unemployment and growing pauperization of a significant segment of the population in the North.

Many countries in the Third World, having won independence from their former colonial powers, pursued industrialization. In need of the capital and the know-how, they were heavily dependent on the developed world. Today the largest portion of the budgets of many of these countries goes toward servicing their loans, some paying up to 70% of their GNP for this purpose. Nearly one third of the population in developing countries live in absolute poverty, while 100 million children are homeless street-dwellers. Even in the richer countries more than 100 million people live in poverty, and the ranks of the poor are growing.

9 As reported in the International Herald Tribune, Sept. 10, 1998, quoting the Annual Report of UNDP.
It is all too clear that the benefits of globalization do not extend to all countries or social groups. Indeed, the dramatic extremes of wealth and poverty born of globalization menace both democracy and social stability in various regions. For many it signifies a race to the bottom, not only in wages but in standards of environmental regulation and social legislation. And by empowering economic entities over political ones, it has given rise to historically unprecedented heights of regional financial instability. This global state of affairs casts doubt on the once dominant and persuasive cultural model that guided its development.

II. The Search for Common Values: Tentative Steps

It is against this backdrop of fragmentation and uncertainty for human well-being that the search for common ethical values and principles must be seen. Efforts began to crystallize in the 1990s to frame possible solutions to the global problems in comprehensive, ethical terms. Among international organizations, commissions, academic, religious and political institutions, as well as among individual thinkers and advocates, we are witnessing a number of vigorous attempts to arrive at new syntheses of ideas and values that would be acceptable across cultures and societies and relevant to the tasks of human survival and flourishing. We are also witnessing an almost explosive emergence of the so-called one-issue NGOs; these organizations are often expressions of a new value awareness emerging from a situation of cultural disarray and political disempowerment of national governments and other public instances.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the new concern with values also has its negative side: the revival of chauvinisms, the proliferation of sometimes hazardous new religious movements, and
the growing strength of various forms of fundamentalism. Whether 
negative or positive, the phenomenon of value awareness is intimately 
connected with the realization that the global problems that render our 
traditional values, ideas and institutions impotent must be dealt with in 
a creative and novel way. It represents the realization that an 
important, if not the most important, part of such an effort must be 
concentrated on forging a new cultural synthesis of ideas and values 
necessary to deal with the problems of human survival and flourishing 
in an age of globalization.

1. International Commissions

In recent years, a number of studies have drawn particular 
attention to the need to articulate universal norms, values or principles 
that could serve as the basis for peaceful and productive interaction 
among nations and societies, prevention of conflicts and crises, and 
collective efforts toward peace and prosperity.

a) Our Global Neighborhood

*Our Global Neighborhood*, the report of the Commission on 
Global Governance, came out strongly in 1995 for a "global civic 
ethic"\(^{10}\) as the foundation for cooperation among different societies 
and cultures facing common global problems. Such a global ethics 
comprises a common moral minimum of core values shared by all 
cultures and religious traditions, and a set of rights and responsibilities 
constituting a "civic code" based on these core values. These values 
include: respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, mutual respect, 
caring and integrity. They are seen as derived in one way or another 
from the principle of reciprocity known as the Golden Rule — that 
people should treat others as they would themselves wish to be treated.

\(^{10}\) *Our Global Neighborhood*, The Commission on Global Governance (Oxford, 
The report then presents a list of rights and responsibilities based on these core values and representing the minimum basis for progress in building a global civil society. The rights include: the rights to a secure life, equitable treatment, an opportunity to earn a fair living, participation in governance at all levels, equal access to information and, finally, equal access to the global commons. The responsibilities, on the other hand, include: to consider the impact of our actions on others, to promote equity, including gender equity, to protect the interests of future generations, to safeguard the global commons, to preserve humanity’s cultural and intellectual heritage, to be active participants in governance and to work to eliminate corruption.

b) Our Creative Diversity

Also in 1995, the World Commission on Culture and Development, chaired by Javier Pérez de Cuellar, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, published its report Our Creative Diversity. The report makes a plea for a “global ethics”, a core of shared ethical values and principles, that would provide the minimum moral guidance the world needs in its efforts to deal with global issues. Conflicts can be limited within bounds and cooperation between different peoples facilitated if people can see themselves as being bound and motivated by shared commitments. Since all societies need a basis of moral principles for their self-regulation, social order and international relations, there is no reason why ethics should stop at national borders.

The Commission maintains that global ethics could provide the minimum requirements any government and people should meet, while leaving a scope for political creativity, social imagination and cultural pluralism. Such an ethics could be composed of: 1) human rights and responsibilities; 2) democracy and the elements of civil society, such as free, fair and regular elections, freedom of press and information.

and the freedom of association; 3) protection of minority rights; 4) commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and fair negotiation; and 5) equity within and between generations.

2. Religious, Political and Cultural Institutions

   a) The Parliament of the World’s Religions

   In 1993, representatives of more than 120 religions of the world, meeting for the first time in one hundred years in the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, adopted a Declaration towards a Global Ethic. The text of this Declaration was drafted by Dr. Hans Küng, the German Catholic theologian who has for a number of years been at the forefront of the effort to forge a global ethics acceptable to all religions and adequate to deal with the issues arising from a fundamental crisis in global economy, ecology and politics. The starting point of the Declaration is the recognition that there exists within religious teachings of the world a consensus that speaks directly to current global problems. This consensus serves as the basis of a global ethics — a minimal, fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes.

   The 1993 Declaration confirms the existence of two principles which represent a “fundamental demand” of all religious and ethical traditions, namely, that every human being must be treated humanely, and what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others. Further, these principles are seen to give rise to broad moral guidelines which are found in most religions of the world. They are: 1) a commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; 2) a commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; 3) a commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and,

---

finally, 4) a commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

b) The InterAction Council

In 1997, some thirty former heads of state and government who constitute the InterAction Council submitted a draft of a “Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities” to all heads of state and government and of the United Nations and UNESCO. They did so, wrote Helmut Schmidt, who has been the moving force behind the Declaration, “in a hope that the United Nations will adopt our proposed declaration, or at least its spirit, on the 50th Anniversary of the 1948 Human Rights Declaration”. 13

The Declaration of Responsibilities, drafted by Dr. Kung and a group of experts in a series of discussions over a period of two years, consists of a preamble and 19 articles that are ordered under 5 different headings. These headings are: fundamental principles of humanity (4 articles), non-violence and respect for life (3 articles), justice and solidarity (4 articles), truthfulness and tolerance (4 articles), mutual respect and partnership (3 articles) and a conclusion. It is clear that the structure and content of the Declaration are essentially those of the 1993 Declaration adopted by the Parliament of World’s Religions, expressed now however in quasi-legalistic format and language befitting its occasion and sponsorship.

The ethical values and standards identified in the proposed Declaration of Responsibilities are seen to be necessary elements for the creation of a better social order and for the realization of human aspirations for progress. Based on the perception that “exclusive insistence on rights can lead to endless dispute and conflict”, it seeks to balance freedom with responsibility, but also to reconcile

ideologies, beliefs and political views, in apparent reference to the debate between Western proponents of human rights and proponents of the so-called “Asian values”. The Declaration’s provision on freedom of the press in Article 14, which emphasizes a special responsibility for accurate and truthful reporting, has been the subject of critical debate. Against the intention of the sponsors of the Declaration to supplement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, some press associations have denounced it as “diluting” the 1948 Human Rights Declaration.

c) The Institute for Global Ethics

For Rushworth Kidder, the founder of the Institute for Global Ethics (USA), ethics is rapidly becoming as much a survival issue as the nuclear threat, environmental degradation, the population crisis, the gap between have and have-nots and the need for education reform. In Shared Values for a Troubled World, Kidder identifies a number of cross-cultural core values: love, truthfulness, fairness, freedom, unity, tolerance, responsibility and respect for life.

The method used by Kidder is sometimes called “Delphic”. He interviews a number of individuals of high moral influence and sensitivity on the question of what values or sets of values could be identified to form a global code of ethics that would help humanity to deal with the problems enumerated in the preceding paragraph. The interviewees include a Buddhist monk, a former president of Harvard, a Chinese author, an American philosopher, Mozambique’s former first lady and the Director-General of UNESCO. They form the source from which the above eight values are pulled together. Kidder considers them the principles which could contribute to meeting a pressing need for shared values, and from which we may build “downward” to the level of goals, plans and tactics

d) The Third Millennium Project

---

14 Rushworth M. Kidder, Shared Values for a Troubled World (San Francisco, 1994).
A Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities was presented to UNESCO in April, 1999, by the Third Millennium Project of the City of Valencia, Spain, in cooperation with UNESCO and ADC Nouveau Millénaire, to commemorate the arrival of the year 2000. The document was drafted by a “high-level group” chaired by South African Justice Richard J. Goldstone and including Richard Falk, Bernard Kouchner, Ruud Lubbers, Joseph Rothblat and Wole Soyinka among others. The Declaration was the result of congresses hosted by the City of Valencia on “Human Responsibilities and Duties in the Third Millennium: Towards a Pax Planetaria” (January and April 1998) and “The Universal Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities” (December 1998).

The avowed aim of the Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities is to renew the resolve of the international community to rededicate itself to the implementation of human rights and responsibilities by making clear the relationship between rights, duties and responsibilities. Reaffirming the universal significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the related Covenants, the drafters of the Valencia Declaration consider that the realization of rights and freedoms are dependent on the assumption of the political, moral, ethical and legal duties and responsibilities which are implicit in human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized by all relevant players in the global community, including states, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other representatives of civil society, communities, peoples and individuals. Hence the need for an explicit formulation of duties and responsibilities.

The Declaration consists of a preamble, twelve chapters and forty-one articles, spelling out in great detail the duties and responsibilities accruing to different players in different sectors of the international community. The twelve chapters of the Declaration are: general provisions (Articles 1-2); the right to life and human security (Articles 3-9); human security and an equitable international order (Articles 10-15); meaningful participation in public affairs (Article
16); freedom of opinion, expression, assembly, association and religion (Articles 17-20); the right to personal and physical integrity (Articles 21-25); equality (Articles 26-30); protection of minorities and indigenous peoples (Articles 31-32); rights of the child and the elderly (Articles 33-34); work quality of life and standard of living (Articles 35-36); education, arts and culture (Articles 37-38); and finally a right to a remedy (Articles 39-41).\textsuperscript{15}

3. Global Common Values in Action

a) Business and Finance

In practice, sets of international ethical norms and principles are already operating and evolving in many sectors of society. In international business and financial institutions around the world, the Bretton Woods institutions including the IMF and the World Bank or the World Trade Organization set rules and regulations which the members of these organizations ignore only at their peril.

Multilateral agreements exist, covering services such as banking and insurance, and intellectual property rights. They bind national governments, limiting their domestic policy choices. The principles underlying these rules and regulations may be competition, profit, deregulation and transparency. The failure so far of OECD countries to reach an agreement on a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) is also an indication of the difficulty of all attempts to agree upon a globally valid set of codes of conduct, even limited in application to a particular sector.

b) International Governance Agencies

For further illustrations of global ethics in action today, one may point to the dominant value orientations of many international

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities: Background Documents (Fundación Valencia Tercer Milenio, Valencia, 1999).
governance agencies which are global in their scope of activities, e.g.,
the United Nations and its agencies, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and
WHO. The United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights articulate their dominant values, endorsed by their
signatories. There are also the so-called Third Sector organizations,
representing “international civil society”. Many of these NGOs
advocate or implement particular values — such as Médecins-sans-
frontières or Amnesty International. A recent study estimates that the
non-profit organizations in just 22 countries are a $1.1 trillion sector,
employing 19 million people.\textsuperscript{16} Collectively considered, their key
values include voluntarism, care and social justice.

c) Global Academic and Cultural Conventions

Academic, scientific and professional organizations, as well as
the press, have sometimes precisely defined codes of ethics as they
exchange knowledge and information on a worldwide basis across
national frontiers. Their dominant values include truthfulness, right to
intellectual property, free flow of information, and others which may
from time to time come into conflict with national legislations. A
similar situation exists in arts, sport and entertainment. Performances
in these fields have been globalized by the mass media, and they are
governed by agreed standards and practices, supported by a certain
commonality in appreciation of aesthetic qualities. One should also
add that globalization is strengthening the transnational dimension of
crime. International mafias, drug cartels and terrorist organizations are
among the first to take advantage of relaxation of border controls and
advances in communication and transportation. Their operations
across national frontiers are based on a set of implicit codes of
behavior, the breach of which is bound to be met with due
consequences.

\textsuperscript{16} UNDP Human Development Report, 1999, p. 36.
III. The UNESCO Universal Ethics Project

1. The First Steps

The main problems affecting the future of the human race are tending to become more interconnected, and at the same time more widespread. Dealing with them requires a minimum of common understanding and shared values. In a multipolar world of heightened individualism and a possibly unprecedented splintering of perceptions, it is more than ever necessary to look for the acknowledgment, or rather the emergence of a common substratum of values which would make economically, socially and culturally viable coexistence possible on a world-wide scale.


UNESCO has a history of concern with universal values and standards, dating back to its 1945 Constitution, which states that:

"the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern;

that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind."
The Organization’s historic vocation was to enlarge that common ground of intellectual and moral solidarity, to delve into the problems that imperil the future of humanity, and at the same time to facilitate better communication and cooperation among nations and cultures. With the creation of the Division of Philosophy and Ethics some years after its founding, the Organization was able to focus more closely on cross-cultural moral principles residing in all traditions and civilizations.\textsuperscript{17}

While following the emerging movement in support of global shared values in the 1980s, UNESCO began cooperation with the transdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Global Problems and Human Potential,\textsuperscript{18} an innovative and systematic study of universal problems and the corresponding values to which they relate. In 1986, UNESCO requested the Club of Rome to propose an international investigation into the ethical values of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. This resulted in the document \textit{In Search of a Wisdom for the World: The Role of Ethical Values in Education}. It particularly examined the transmission of values and the intersection of traditional and modern value systems. In 1987 a survey-based document, \textit{The World at the Year 2000}, charted the regional distribution of individual and collective values such as freedom, health, material affluence, tolerance, equality, productivity, honesty and power. The report concluded in emphasizing the primacy of education, the promotion of democracy, and new economic, social and cultural changes as essential steps to face the emerging crises of the next century.

More recently, this same direction and dynamic of activity have been seen at work in UNESCO’s transdisciplinary Culture of Peace, Bioethics and InfoEthics programmes. UNESCO’s 186 Member States have repeatedly voiced their support for such initiatives. For example,

\textsuperscript{17} A notable example being the volume \textit{Birthright of Man}, produced by the Division in 1969.

\textsuperscript{18} Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential, ed. Union of International Associations (Munich, K.G. Saur, 1992-95).
General Conference resolution 25 C/5.2 of 1989 recalled “UNESCO’s role in reflecting universal ethical aspirations and also the importance of philosophy and the human sciences in the analysis of the moral principles governing cooperation among peoples, human solidarity, respect for human rights and the promotion of peace”. Likewise, every consultation of Member States and partner organizations receives strong endorsements of the philosophy programme’s role as intellectual forum and focal point for the analysis and promotion of ethical and civic values. One example from preparation of the 1996-97 programme: “The great majority of replies emphasized the Organization’s ethical mandate. In order to ‘avoid new and even deeper splits within the international community’ UNESCO should promote ‘universal values’ such as respect for human dignity, equity, justice, tolerance, equality, peace and solidarity.”

Based on this history, on the perception of a pressing need for common values, and building on the recommendations made in the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, the UNESCO Universal Ethics Project was launched in early 1997. UNESCO is in a unique position, as the global organization for intellectual and cultural cooperation and the only outpost of philosophy in the UN system, to lead a worldwide discussion on common universal values. The UNESCO Universal Ethics Project was conceived in such a way that UNESCO, as coordinator and facilitator, would provide: firstly, the philosophical gridwork to shape and support the project; secondly, the international forum in which philosophers and ethicists come together to test the viability and coherence of their ideas; and thirdly, the intergovernmental platform where breakthroughs in universal ethics could be considered and acted upon.

After a year of preparations, an international meeting of experts under the title “Prolegomènes pour une éthique universelle” was convened in Paris in March, 1997, in cooperation with La Maison des sciences de l’homme. Twelve philosophers, ethicists, theologians and political philosophers who have been at the forefront of intellectual
endeavors directly relevant to universal ethics participated. The meeting was designed primarily to lay a conceptual and philosophical foundation for universal ethics. It consisted of two parts: a public meeting at which work done by individual philosophers on universal ethics was presented to the public, and a series of brainstorming sessions, closed to the public, which saw a lively exchange of views on the goal, methodology and conceptual feasibility of the project.

The second meeting of the Universal Ethics Project took place in the first week of December, 1997, in Naples, Italy, in cooperation with the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici. Some thirty philosophers, ethicists, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, sociologists, jurists and biologists, who have been doing some pioneering work on universal ethics, participated. They included Hans Küng, Karl-Otto Apel, Rudd Lubbers, Hong-Koo Lee, Tu Wei-ming, Hassan Hanafi and Henri Atlan, among others.

Formal presentation and discussions focused on these interrelated questions: the meaning of universality in the age of cultural diversity, ethical implications of globalization, and the enumeration and justification of moral universals discernible beyond cultural differences.

The two meetings, together with research and reflection by the members of the UNESCO Division of Philosophy and Ethics, have contributed substantively to shaping both the structure and content of the Universal Ethics Project. They have been instrumental in elucidating the following aspects of the Project: aim, feasibility, methodology, the problem of universality, the relation to human rights and finally the structure of universal ethics.

2. Aims

The participants of the first meeting of the Universal Ethics Project agreed that the Project should aim at identifying basic ethical
principles for the emerging global society of the 21st century, by
putting together a set of ideas, values and norms that would help
humanity to deal with such global problems as poverty,
underdevelopment, deterioration of the environment, the population
explosion, corruption, religious and other forms of extremism,
intolerance and social exclusion. This agreement, which was
supported by most of the participants of the Second Meeting in Naples,
is noteworthy in that it puts the Universal Ethics Project squarely on
the side of "ethical maximalism".

Indeed, the version of ethics that would result if the proposed
outline in Our Creative Diversity were to be fully worked out, could
very well be called maximalist. It would contain not only a few
existing general principles and precepts that could serve as foundations
for further elaboration, but would also contain certain extrapolated
ethical values and principles which may not be accepted by all cultures
at a certain point in time. Only a maximalist morality, or a "full-
blooded" or "thick" ethical doctrine, in the phrase of Michael
Walzer, would be capable of providing a more or less complete
account of what we ought to do and how we ought to live.19

A minimalist ethics, on the other hand, is not free-standing. It
would not furnish cross-cultural standards of conduct. Sissela Bok, a
minimalist, identifies three clusters of moral values that could be
accepted across communities; first, the positive duties of mutual care
and reciprocity; second, a limited set of negative injunctions
concerning violence, deceit and betrayal; and third, the norms for
certain rudimentary procedures and standards of what is just.20 The
minimalist values, thus pared down, are not sufficient as a full-blooded
ethics adequate for a good life. Rather, they represent a minimum
serving as a basis for a common language of critical inquiry and
dialogue across cultural boundaries, as to how they might be extended
to work out more comprehensive maximalist requirements and ideals.

19 Michael Walzer, Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad
20 Bok, p. 16, p. 57.
The issue between the maximalists and the minimalists is the question of whether it is possible to build "downward" from a few abstract principles to the level of ethical values and principles which would together constitute a full-blooded morality that would be adequate for a good life. Bok, together with Stuart Hampshire, and in some sense, Rushworth Kidder, seem to think so, while for Walzer, a minimalist morality is necessarily expressive of the maximalist morality in which it is embedded. It is not a free-standing morality, and it can only be abstracted temporarily from the maximalist morality in which it is embedded. For Walzer, acceptance of a moral minimum implies acceptance of a full-blooded morality.

3. Feasibility

The participants of the Paris meeting further agreed that there are rational grounds for optimism about the feasibility of the UNESCO Universal Ethics Project, and this agreement was largely shared by the participants of the Naples meeting as well. This consensus is all the more remarkable against the backdrop of the lingering positivism which would impugn objective validity to all propositions concerning norms and values, and of the cultural relativism which emphasizes the historical particularity of all values and norms. As is well known, many so-called post-modernists such as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, as well as neo-pragmatists such as Richard Rorty, deny, for different reasons, the possibility of a system of universally valid ethical values and principles.

Despite these difficulties, we have been able to document a growing search for common universal ethical values and principles both at collective and individual levels. This search is in fact gaining such momentum that it can be said to constitute a key element on the international agenda today. The 1998 State of the Future report, sponsored by the American Council for the United Nations University, lists "encouraging diversity and shared ethical values" fifth among
fifteen global opportunities given to humanity at this century's end: "Global ethics are being debated and studied as never before".21

Such a search has been encouraged by a great shift in the winds of doctrine in philosophy, natural and social sciences. Transcending the once-dominant philosophical abstinence which characterized philosophical reflection on norms and values, philosophers are questioning the positivistic doctrines of meaningfulness, incommensurability and untranslatability among cultures and languages, and seeking to give the notion of universality a new meaning in the context of cultural diversity. Biologists, neurologists and anthropologists are exploring the universals in the physical and cultural constitution of human beings and societies.

Over and above these changes in the winds of doctrine, what gives relevance and urgency to the search for common ethical values and principles is the growing urgency of the need to find means to deal with the great problems facing humanity today. There is "the simple pragmatic need for a renewed global ethic in view of the global issues at stake and of growing global interdependency".22 Social and human scientists are emboldened by a global discourse on human rights and global problems as well as by the emergence of an embryonic global civil society as embodied in various movements led by non-governmental organizations. The legitimacy and efficacy of these organizations do not derive from some organized form of coercion. Rather they spring from the urgency of the problems at hand and from the relevance and persuasiveness of the values and goals that are shared and pursued across national and cultural boundaries. This is what gives substance to the assertion that, if the 20th century had been a century of social sciences, the 21st century is to be a century of ethics.

4. Methodology

Among the agreements reached by the participants in the course of the Universal Ethics Project was a methodological one, which nevertheless contains important substantive implications. The methodology for the Universal Ethics Project which met with the most support among the participants was a combination of two approaches. The ethical values and principles which would form the core of universal ethics, according to this methodology, should be identified by both empirical and reflective approaches. The approach to universal common values begins with an empirical search for values and principles widely and factually held in diverse cultures and religions. Küng thus sets out to identify "the minimum of what the religions of the world already have in common now in the ethical sphere" and professes to draw them from broad, ancient guidelines for human behavior found in most of the religions of the world. This process involves the hermeneutics of religious texts, sociology of religions and morals, cultural anthropology and other social sciences.

An empirical approach may also, however, begin with an empirically ascertainable basic fact about human life and extrapolate from this fact. Thus Sissela Bok finds the basic fact of human life in the shared concern for survival. From this starting point, the search for a set of common values can sort out the common moral constraints and injunctions across communities and "pare down" each one from the point of view of completeness, scope and level of abstraction. According to Bok, survival and prospering are interests common to all human beings, and there are ethical values and principles which can be deduced from these interests. One such principle is reciprocity, another is the prohibition of violence and deceit, and a third is an agreement as to what constitutes justice. These values are "so down-

---

24 Sissela Bok, Common Values (Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1995).
to-earth and so commonplace”25 that they are easily recognizable across national, ethnic, religious and other boundaries. In this way, Bok arrives at a set of moral values, which, however, do not constitute a full-blooded ethics in themselves, but merely a baseline consensus from which to undertake and facilitate further debate.

Bimal K. Matilal, an Indian scholar of Eastern religions and ethics, advocates what might be called an empiricist version of universal morality. According to Matilal, “A minimal universal ethics”26 can be based on “some empirically given concerns of human beings.” Since there are limits as to how much individual moral systems may differ from each other without ceasing to be a moral system, there exists a set of context-neutral rules, which together constitute the basic moral fabric that holds the members of a society together. Matilal identifies the following elements as constituting the universal ethical system: respect for life, truth-telling (or the prohibition against lying), the prohibition against stealing and adultery. He believes justice, social responsibility and the obligation to choose good rather than evil could be added to that list, since they are virtues which are necessary for the adequate maintenance of any worthwhile social life.

At the same time, a reflective method is an indispensable complement to the empirical approach. The task of identifying values and principles needed to deal with the problems of survival and prospering is a task that requires us to go beyond the merely empirical. A reflective method would allow us in some sense to “derive” ethical values and principles considered necessary in relation to the problems to be solved.

Karl-Otto Apel takes what has been called a proceduralist approach, and proposes a “planetary macroethics”\textsuperscript{27} to deal with the problems engendered by the advance of science and technology in our age. Such a macroethics, which would be universal, is based on the idea of discourse ethics elaborated by himself and Jürgen Habermas. It is in the presuppositions of a fair, argumentative discourse that universal norms can be found. The fact that we are obliged to discuss any controversial subject matter by way of an argumentative discourse is neither accidental nor contingent: there is no reasonable alternative to that procedure. It is, as Apel claims, “the transcendental-pragmatic \textit{a priori}” of all philosophical discourse.

Apel identifies four necessary presuppositions implied in any argumentative discourse. First, there are the claims to sharing all intersubjectively valid meaning with the partners of the discourse. Second, the claim to \textit{truth} is presupposed in any discourse. Third, the claim to \textit{truthfulness} or \textit{sincerity} of my speech acts taken as expressions of my intentions must be recognized. Finally, there is the claim to the \textit{morally relevant rightness} of my speech acts.\textsuperscript{28}

Since the non-contingent, normative presuppositions of an argumentative discourse are formal and procedural, they do not prescribe the concrete material norms that are needed in the concrete situation of human interaction. A planetary macroethics would be the never-finished outcome of this argumentative procedure, and as such allow for divergent outcomes of any given moment in the process of ongoing discourse, leaving room for the pluralism of individual forms of life.

This “transcendental” approach requires not only that the goals be clearly set, but also that the problems be clearly understood.


This is the reason why identification of the global problems facing humanity plays such an important part in the project agenda. Many of the "proto-" universal ethics contained in the various declarations mentioned earlier in this report make use of this transcendental reflective method: values and principles are advanced in order to achieve a certain desired state under a series of given constraints. What is essential to the transcendental reflective approach, is that we are asking the question: what values and principles may be mobilized in order to steer the forces of technological and economic change for the purposes of human survival and flourishing? It is quite clear that there are factors which are beyond the power of ideas, values and principles to influence. It is, however, equally clear that the future has elements that may be affected and even determined by the behavior of humans acting on the basis of normative ideas and principles. This is the reason why, as Bertrand de Jouvenel points out29, any long-term forecasting is naturally and even inevitably, normative.

The efficacy of normative ideas and principles to influence and modify the given constraints both in physical nature and in human behavior cannot be a clear-cut causal nexus. It is for this reason that the reflective method makes greater use of conjectures or critical imagination than a purely scientific method. It is in this context that the Delphic method, which relies on the trained imagination and sensibility of those with greater experience and expertise in a given field, acquires a methodological importance in the search for common values.

5. Universality in Diversity

One of the core issues of the Universal Ethics Project is undoubtedly the idea of universality in this age of diversity. In view of the fact of diversity in culture and values as something given and to be respected, the problem of how the very notion of universality should

be understood cannot be avoided. We have already touched upon the deep roots of suspicion regarding all universalistic projects, as well as the alliance of universalistic claims with the hegemonic intentions of certain powers. The idea of universality as something given once and for all in a transcendent or transcendental way, as has been prevalent in the Western philosophical tradition, today lacks persuasion and is in need of revision and development. This is perhaps one lasting service that relativism has rendered to philosophy. New avenues of thought must be explored and made productive for this project, if we are to go forward without remaining mired in this old, now-defunct controversy.

A conception of universality for this age of great cultural diversity would have to meet two demands. On the one hand, it must be able to do justice to the incontrovertible fact that there is de facto a wide range of agreements on values across religions, cultures and societies. On the other hand, the notion of universality must be able to respond satisfactorily to the suspicions of political ambitions indelibly associated with all universalistic projects.

Today, there are many vigorous philosophical attempts to recognize and integrate diversity and relativity within a universalistic framework. Charles Taylor30, for one, attempts to throw new light on the relationship between diversity and universality by making a distinction between the fact of cross-cultural consensus on certain norms and values and the divergent ways of their justification. Background justification may differ from society to society, while factual agreement on the norms themselves would be left unaffected by the differences of underlying belief. This, Taylor contends, is something like the “overlapping consensus ” that Rawls describes in his Political Liberalism.

Taylor then goes on to discuss several concrete examples of the convergence of norms from different philosophical backgrounds. One such example is that of a variety of reform Buddhism represented by the followers of Phutthathat in Thailand, who are strong advocates of human rights and democratic politics. But their justifications of these are not the standard Western justifications centered on the inherent dignity and equality of human beings. Rather, their advocacy is rooted in the fundamental Buddhist value of non-violence, which is seen to imply a respect for the autonomy of each person and rejection of coercion in human affairs. The principle of non-violence also generates a number of other consequences, such as the requirement of ecological sensitivity and the need to set limits to growth.

Michael Walzer makes an interesting attempt to describe an experience of universality or "a moment or a series of moments of moral affirmation, or judgment, or action that either cross cultural/political boundaries or simply make no reference to them." Walzer refers to the demands for "Truth" and "Justice" articulated by a distant people, and the instinctive assent and understanding of these demands by us who are ignorant of the concrete aspirations of this distant people. The thick morality out of which these values spring may be very different from ours. Nevertheless, there is a core of meaning and understanding in these demands, which we share with the distant people. Walzer offers a further example first given by Rousseau: the response of an "uncivilized man" who feels immediate empathy with another human being in distress. Such "first promptings of humanity" may be the source and method of an actual universal morality.

Yersu Kim has been developing a notion of universality that preserves respect for cultures in their individuality. Central to this

---

notion of universality is the idea of the cultural synthesis. Cultures in each time and place strive to forge a synthesis of ideas, values and practices which would enable them to deal with the tasks of survival and flourishing within the constraints set by the natural circumstances and each culture’s knowledge and understanding of these circumstances. As the world and the culture’s knowledge of it change, the synthesis must be in a constant process of adaptation to these changing circumstances.

At some point in time and place, the synthesis would be perceived by those inside as well as outside of the culture to have reached an optimal point, a point of reflective equilibrium in the continuing process of interaction and interchange of ideas and values, on the one hand, and the recalcitrant but changing environment on the other. A culture, having achieved such an optimality, may claim for its synthesis superiority over all others. The basis of the claim would be that it transcends the limitations of its predecessors and competitors, and avoids their weakness while at the same time it incorporates their strengths. Such a claim of optimality should be understood as a claim of universality. Since such a concept of universality is in a constant process of evolution, Kim proposes to regard it as a regulative ideal in the Kantian sense.33

Efforts must be made to take into account these and other dimensions of philosophical thought in our task of providing the philosophical gridwork for universal ethics. The issue of universality is particularly important for the success of the project, because the political and economic uses to which this idea has been put, and is sometimes still being put, have had the effect of discrediting any and all universalist projects.

---

6. Ethics and Human Rights

One of the most frequently discussed issues in the course of evolution of the Universal Ethics Project has been the relationship between universal ethics and the existing documents on universal human rights, values and norms, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the related covenants. A consensus exists among the participants of the Project that these documents should form the starting point of the search for universal ethics. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, enjoys today an acceptance across cultures wider than ever before. It represents in important ways the vanguard of universally shared common values. The international legal framework for human rights, including the 1998 agreement to create an international criminal court, is certainly a great achievement for the international community, one which needs to be further developed and strengthened. As universal ethics aims to identify basic ethical values and principles for the emerging global society of the 21st century, the rights and responsibilities as stipulated in the human rights charter will certainly figure prominently in such an identification process.

It is also clear that universal ethics would also be based on values and principles which would be of a different, most likely higher, axiological order than those enshrined in the human rights documents. They would be values and principles from which particular rights and responsibilities may be derived. Together they would constitute an ethical statement. Universal ethics cannot therefore aim to be a legal or even a quasi-legal instrument, with some organized form of enforcement. The sole source of its authority would be the relevance and persuasiveness of the values and principles for the tasks of human survival and persuasiveness. A declaration with quasi-legalistic intent can give neither appropriate nor adequate expression to such an ethical statement with its own source of authority. Ethical values and principles almost always permit their contraries, and an ethical document if expressed in a legalistic language and form, can
always be nullified by a document containing the contrary values and principles. Universal ethics must be expressible in a literary form that would be capable of showing the dynamic relationships among values and principles, including contrary ones. The task of forging a literary form which would give an adequate expression to a universally shareable ethical commitment is certainly a major challenge for the Universal Ethics Project.

IV. Prospects

1. Toward the Ethics Charter of the 21st Century

How, then, do we proceed from here in our journey to arrive at an ethical statement that could serve as a universally acceptable guideline as humanity struggles to deal with the tasks of survival and flourishing in the 21st century? The outer signposts of such a statement have been clearly posited. It is to be a maximalist document that would contain ethical values and principles adequate and relevant to the myriad of problems facing humanity in the coming century, to be ascertained by empirical as well as by reflective methods. Such a document must also be acceptable universally, although universality must not be exclusive, but inclusive in that it must be capable of accommodating cultural diversity that characterizes the world today. Furthermore, it must be an ethical document of higher axiological order than the human rights charter, showing how the particular rights and responsibilities enshrined in it could be derived from the values and principles contained in the document.

A necessary first step is to make an inventory of ethical values and principles which have been proposed in many declarations and studies, both private and public, national and international, and religious and secular, designed to deal with a certain set of problems
Facing humanity. Five different categories of such documents are scouted for this purpose:

1) values and principles proposed in intergovernmental documents;
2) values and principles advocated in the reports of international commissions and declarations of international conferences;
3) values and principles identified in non-governmental projects and surveys;
4) values and principles put forth by individuals, mainly by participants in the meetings organized in connection with the Universal Ethics Project;
5) values and principles proposed by different religious traditions of the world.

Once the values and principles are thus identified, they will be set in relation to the problems for which they are intended to be the solution. It is clear, however, that the list of problems facing humanity which requires approaches through common universal values can vary greatly according to the level of generality and concreteness at which the problems are identified and described. It can also vary according to the vantage point from which the authors of the documents approach the problems. The participants of the first meeting in Paris, for instance, identified eight such problems, while Aurelio Peccei's list encompasses twenty-seven. Indeed, the Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential\(^{34}\) claims to have identified some 12,203 world problems put forth in international journals and in the documents of some 20,000 international non-profit organizations. In order to circumvent the difficulty inherent in this profusion of problem lists, we have found it useful to make an inventory of problems and issues facing humanity, the solution to which can only be found in the realm of ethical values and principles.

What, then, are the basic issues and problems around which the ethical values and principles could be organized? The following is one among many such proposals, containing several clusters of issues and problems. First, there is the problem of fundamental readjustment of the human relationship to nature. The fundamental dynamic at work here is one of accommodating unlimited human needs and desires to a limited planetary ecosystem. Our relationship to nature must enable us to manage our economy while sustaining the complexity and stability of nature to sustain our economy. The task ahead is not simply to control nature but to control ourselves as well, so that the economy can fit within the natural ecology. The way we face this challenge is related to the way we see the human person: as a being separate from nature, or as one species among others embedded in the intricate web of natural processes that contains and sustains all forms of life.

The first cluster of issues leads naturally to a second: the conception of what constitutes human happiness or, to put it in another way, of what constitutes the meaning of life, or human fulfillment. Our views regarding what ultimately constitutes the meaning of life are bound to influence the priorities we assign to values and thus the way we behave, both in relation to ourselves and others. An attitude that sees human happiness in the accumulation of material wealth may be contrasted with a holistic perspective, which would enable us to balance and coordinate satisfaction among different dimensions of human existence: between “inner” satisfaction and satisfaction of the material kind.

Such a revision is intimately connected with the issue of the relationship between the individual and the community in which he has his existential root. The basic problem is the role we assign to individual freedom and creativity on the one hand, and the need for the stability and order of the community, on the other, without which no meaningful human existence is possible. The aggressive, individualistic ethics that formed the backbone of modern industrial civilization may require some revision and tempering by greater concern for the human good. The problem of the individual in his
relationship to the community is a particularly difficult one, since a universal ethics worthy of the name must be one that has a place of honor for individuals and their creativity.

The issue of individualism is intimately connected with the problem of justice, both among individuals at national level and among nations at international level. Injustice, at national as well as international levels, is the most important source of disruption in the fabric of society, as well as of conflict among nations. We see at play the tensions between equality and freedom, between the good of one individual or group and another, and between rights and responsibilities. Many conceptions of justice in social organization have been tried: paternalism, colonialism, utilitarianism, capitalism, socialism and now market liberalism. They have all been found to be wanting in fundamental respects, some more than others. Universal ethics must be able to point a way that goes beyond any or all of these.

2. The Task Ahead

The task, then, is how to interrelate the problems and needs of humanity thus identified and the values and principles thus scouted into a persuasive and coherent whole which can serve as the guide for humanity in its tasks of survival and flourishing. It is clear that such a document does not exhaust itself in a simple decretal listing or inventorying of the ascertained values and principles. It must be capable of demonstrating the relationship among these values and principles in such a way that the relationship of foundation and derivation is made clear. Further, since the aim is to forge an ethical statement that is acceptable to all societies and cultures built on different perceptions and aspirations, it must be capable of accommodating the challenge of cultural diversity and polarities of values and principles. Such diversity and polarity reflect not only the living dilemma of action in terms of the values which give rise to it; it reflects the real source of conflict among cultures and societies. The approach of integrating diversity within each principle, rather than
offering a hasty compromise, enables the participants in the ethical dialogue to sense the dimensions of the conflict and the space within which a consensus can be forged. The document must therefore be capable of making clear a dynamic relationship, a relationship of creative tension, among conflicting but not irreconcilable values such that a common vision can emerge in an open-ended, evolutionary process of dialogue and mutual learning.

What is offered in the following pages, A Common Framework for the Ethics of the 21st Century, is a document which goes a long way toward meeting the above requirements. It would however be foolhardy to expect that it will meet with the unanimous consent of the international community. At best, it will be the beginning and starting point of a long and arduous evolutionary process of intercultural debate and consensus-building. It is intended to serve as the framework within which a dialogue of humankind, a conversation of humankind, could take place, so that a common ethical vision can emerge out of this process of dialogue and mutual learning.
A Common Framework for the Ethics of the Twenty-first Century

Preamble

Humanity stands at this century's end in a situation of extraordinary challenge and openness. Scientific and technological advances are creating new opportunities on a scale previously unimagined, even as they threaten to destroy the very foundation of human life. The forces of a globalizing economy are creating great wealth for humanity, even as they widen the gap between the haves and have-nots within and among societies and nations. Increasing global interdependence gives rise to ever more complex transboundary questions defying traditional solutions.

Ideas and institutions, values and practices that served humanity so well in its endeavour to industrialize and modernize are increasingly called into question. Individualism, rationalism, scientism and teleology of progress, which had been the driving forces of the modern industrial civilization, seem now to be working at cross purposes with the tasks of human survival and flourishing as societies and nations attempt to come to terms with the new historical realities.
Yet, no culture is possible without agreement on a foundation of common values and ideas to guide the tasks of governance.

Global problems require global values. Such was the view shared by an impressive series of intergovernmental conferences organized by the United Nations, reports of international commissions, advocacies of academic, political and religious institutions, as well as the works of concerned individual thinkers around the world throughout the closing decade of the 20th century. It is clear that peaceful and productive cooperation among different peoples can be facilitated if they can see themselves as being bound and motivated by shared commitment to a basis of ethical values and principles.

These are the impetus behind the present articulation of ethical values and principles viable and needed across cultures and societies. Its task is to identify and forge ethical values and principles into a coherent and dynamic whole adequate to deal with the problems facing humanity. The process of identification scouts certain views of the common good that are lived and practiced in daily life across cultures. The process of forging an ethical common ground is based on the global problems which humanity faces in common.

The universality of the present ethical articulation is then founded on the universality of the global problems it addresses. The task is both enriched and challenged by the cultural pluralism that characterizes contemporary societies. It allies itself with an inclusive notion of universality that is capable of accommodating the diversity of perceptions and aspirations of different cultures. Such a conception is based on two concrete facts: the commonality of ethical practice in the daily life of different cultures, and the commonality of the tasks which humanity faces.

Formulated in response to the global problems, the four sections represent those clusters of ethical values and principles which together would be adequate to meet the challenge. The four sections each strike a balance: sustainability for the earth, human fulfillment
in the free exercise of both rights and responsibilities, complementarity between the individual and the community, and peace through justice.

Each principle within each section reflects the range of positions afforded by the diversity and even polarity of values and principles, encompassing not only a lived dilemma of action but also a possible source of conflicts among cultures and societies, religions and world-views. In so doing, it also makes clear a dynamic relationship, a relationship of creative interaction among the conflicting but by no means irreconcilable values. Each principle allows us to see that the ideal terminus of such a dynamic relationship is a reflective equilibrium, optimally suited to deal with the problems at hand.

Different human communities, like individuals, share many ethical values. Above all, we share the common goal of survival and prospering. Today we are facing self-annihilation from problems which lie beyond the scope of law, and beyond the power of any individual person or nation to remedy. The scope of our ethical practice can no longer stop at the edge of our family, our society, or our nation. Hope lies in action in accordance with a shared ethics.

Here, then, is a common ethical framework within which all cultures, societies and individuals are invited to deliberate on the tasks of survival and flourishing. It invites all stakeholders in the ethics of the 21st century to take their respective positions. It is a framework for a conversation of humankind, - the beginning of a long arduous evolutionary process in which the commonality of the problems facing humanity, in spite of differences which separate, will, lead to a common ethical vision. It is a framework for a process that must be nurtured in an open-ended way through dialogue, mutual learning, and, above all, good will.
I. Relationship to Nature

1. The view of nature as accessible through causal-mechanistic law has enabled humanity to control nature and provide for itself the good life on earth. The same view has also contributed to destruction of the natural environment and alienation of human beings. We must therefore seek a balance such that we may maintain a sustainable harmonious relationship between the human species and nature.

2. As nature is a finite quantity, we must learn to manage the economy to sustain the complexity and stability of nature while at the same time to manage nature so as to sustain our economy. As our desires are insatiable, we must learn to accommodate our desires to the limits nature sets, not to push the limits of nature beyond its capacity for regeneration.

3. Humanity needs to develop economically and technologically in order to deal with the problem of poverty in which a great majority of human beings still live. Continuation of economic development at the present rate endangers the rights of future generations to life and a healthy environment. We must therefore learn to balance short-term thinking and immediate gratification with long-term thinking for future generations by shifting the balance towards quality rather than quantity.

4. Consumption contributes to human well-being when it enlarges the capabilities and enriches the lives of the people. Consumption, when excessive, undermines the resource base and exacerbates inequalities. Consumption therefore must be such as to ensure basic needs for all, without compromising the well-being of others and without mortgaging the choices of future generations.
II. Human Fulfillment

1 Every person is unique in his or her individuality. He or she is at the same time embedded in a living tradition in which the ideas of a common good are transmitted. Thus meaningful life entails an openness and dialogue with the cultural space that surrounds every individual.

2 Truthfulness promotes trust. Without trust, the foundation of relations among human beings and possibility of a moral society are threatened. Truth-telling therefore is the fundamental presupposition of an ethical life.

3 Preponderance of emotion impairs our ability to think clearly about the possibilities and consequences of choice. Yet, exclusive emphasis on reason tends to make humans cold and calculating. Thus, thinking and feeling should be seen as complements, mutually enriching each other.

4 The life of individual satisfaction is ultimately shallow and narcissistic. The life of transcendent goals often slips into fanaticism and denial of life. Mindful of the deeper structure of our life, we must cultivate an active moral intuition entailing a connection to the idea of the good.

5 Since a human person is possessed of both mind and body, requiring both spiritual and material fulfillment, pursuit of wealth must be tempered by the cultivation of the mind. Outer satisfactions of a material kind should be enhanced by the inner satisfaction of the mind and spirit, and vice versa.
III. Individual and Community

1. Everyone should be treated with respect, embodying a set of rights which an individual possesses as an attribute of his or her dignity as a human being. At the same time he or she must be recognized as the center of relationships, encompassing family, society, nation and humanity of which he or she is a part. Every individual must therefore be seen as the locus of both rights and responsibilities.

2. While the claims of different groups to live according to their authentic values should be respected, emphasis on cultural identity should not be self-centered and exclusivistic. Self-centeredness can only be overcome by willingness for dialogue and mutual learning.

3. Without order, anarchy prevails; without autonomy communities turn into authoritarian states. We must therefore strive for an equilibrium between individual rights and the concern for the common good such that individual rights and respect for the common good enhance each other.

4. We must give help to people and communities in need. Prolonged reliance on help from others weakens creativity and initiative. Help must therefore be rendered in such a way as to promote the creativity and initiative of those being helped.

5. Dialogue alone is incapable of solving the problems facing humanity. Yet, action without dialogue often leads to unintended aggression. Recognizing that dialogue is essential to harmonious co-existence, we must learn to act in such a way that dialogue accompanies every action.
IV. Justice

1 While every person should be treated equally, it is also necessary that everyone should be free to develop his or her potentialities to the fullest. We must therefore learn to balance claims of equality and claims of freedom such that every individual is able to realize his or her potentialities to the fullest extent possible, compatible with similar freedoms for others.

2 Globalization holds great potential to enhance human welfare. It also widens the gap between rich and poor, among individuals, groups and nations. It must therefore be managed to the advantage of weaker nations, disadvantaged groups and individuals.

3 In order to maintain a society in which democracy and human rights are respected, the livelihood of the people must be sustained. It should be an explicit policy objective to ensure that all have enough to eat, adequate housing and decent employment, that no child goes without education, that no human being is denied access to health care, safe water and basic sanitation. We must live simply in order that others may simply live.

4 In defense against aggression and intolerance, the use of force may become necessary. Yet force may create counter violence. We must therefore aim at an effective rule of law, including at the international level.

5 Too much legislation numbs the sense of individual responsibility. Too little legislation leads to anarchy and disorder. Legislation is best when it is conducive to promotion of individual responsibility.
Bibliography


Brecher, Jeremy, John Childs, and Jill Cutler, eds., *Global visions: Beyond the New World Order*, South End Press, 1993


Falk, Richard, Robert C. Johansen, and Samul S. Kim, eds., *The
Constitutional Foundations of World Peace, State University of New York Press, 1993


Feinburg, John S. / Feinburg, Paul D., Ethics for a Brave New World, Wheaton, IL : Crossway Books, 1994


Fukuyama, Francis, The End of History and the Last Man, The Free Press, 1992


Habermas, J., *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985


Kidder, Rushworth M. & W. Loges, Global Values, Moral Boundaries, A Pilot


Kishore Mahbubani, “The Pacific Way”, *Foreign Affairs* 74, Jan/Feb 1995


Küng, Hans and Jürgen Moltmann, eds., *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights*, SCM Press, 1990


Max, Werner, *Is there a Measure on Earth? Foundations for a Non-Metaphysical Ethics*, Chicago, III: University of


Rawls, John, “Fairness to Goodness”, *The Philosophical Review*, 1975, p. 538


Rabinowicz, W. *Universalisability*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979


Sandel, Michael, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a*

Schneider, Herbert, Morals for Mankind, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1960


Singer, Markus G., Generalization in Ethics, New York: Knopf, 1961


Sorokin, Pitirim, Social Philosophy of an Age in Crisis, Boston: Beacon Press, 1950

Srisang, Koson, ed.: Perspectives on Political Ethics An Ecumenical Inquiry, WCC Publications, 1983


Rights organized by the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Relations in Bangkok, March 1996


Union of International Associations ed., The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential, Munich: K. G. Saur, 1992-95


**Working Papers:**


Bexell, Göran, A Background Paper for the Seminar on “The Search for Shared Values in Global Governance”, organized by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation within the frame of the Tercentenary Foundation within the frame of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policy and Development, Stockholm, 30 March-2nd April, 1998

Annex: Documents Consulted in Value Identification

1. Intergovernmental Documents Used in Value Identification

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December 1948

American Declaration of the Human Rights and Duties of Man, O.A.S. Res. XXX, adopted by the Ninth International Conference of American States, 1948

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants of 1966:


- World Conference on Human Rights, The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Vienna Austria, June 1993, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
II. Reports and studies by International Commissions and Conferences Used in Values Identification

- "Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace", UNESCO meeting on the "Contributions by Religions to the Culture of Peace" held in Barcelona from 12 to 18 December 1994


- Genoa Declaration on Science and Society, in Genoa Forum of UNESCO on Science and Society, Genoa, Italy, Oct. 1995


- The Earth Charter Benchmark Draft, reviewed and presented during the Rio+5 forum, March 1997

- "Déclaration de Maputo", UNESCO and OAU supported international conference on "Culture of Peace and Good Governance", Maputo, Mozambique, September 1997

"Déclaration de Rabat", UNESCO meeting on "Dialogue between the Three Monotheistic Religions", Rabat Morocco 16 February 1998
III. Non-governmental Projects and Surveys Used in Value Identification


- "A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities", proposed by the InterAction Council, Vienna, Austria, April 1997

IV. Individual Thinkers' Documents Used in Value Identification


4. Sissela Bok, Common Values, University of Missouri Press, Missouri, 1995

- Sissela Bok, "Address to First Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project," Paris, March 1997

59
5. Osvaldo Guariglia, "Universal Principles and Human Rights" the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997


8. Vittorio Hösele, "Universal Ethics and Natural Law", the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics, Napoli, December 1997

9. Ioanna Kuçuradi, "Reflection on the Conditions of a "Universal Ethics" and Draft" the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997


12. Shu-hsien Liu, "Reflections on Approaches to Universal Ethics from a Contemporary Neo-Confucian Perspective", the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997

13. Ruud Lubbers, "Nation States, Global Society, and Ethical Values", the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997

14. Ram Adhar Mall, "Hermeneutics of an Overlapping Ethos and Intercultural Understanding", the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997

15. Tadashi Ogawa, "Are there Ethical Universals in the West and the East?", the Second Meeting of the Universal Ethics Project, Napoli, December 1997