

# WHO CARES ABOUT ETHICS?

SELECTED ESSAYS FROM [GLOBETHICS.NET](https://globethics.net)

EDITORS: OBIORA IKE - AMÉLÉ ADAMAVI-AHO EKUÉ -

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## Globethics.net Co-Publications & Other

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*Ursula and Walter Linsi and to the U. W. Linsi Foundation that they established, with gratitude for their advice, accompaniment and moral support, for their wisdom and commitment to the power and importance of ethical living and for the principles\* and resources that have contributed so much to forming Globethics.net as an organisation and to transforming the lives of those we work with for the better.*

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\*These principles include: Working together to the top; Placing the common good before self-interest; Employing all senses, energy and strength to achieve a specific target; Staying focused and applying the bottleneck concentration strategy (Engpasskonzentrierte Strategie-EKS®); and the Belimo success story as a model and method for success at Globethics.net.

# INTRODUCTION

## *Who Cares About Ethics?*

### **Defining the Terms**

*Ignace Haaz*<sup>1</sup>

A first reflection concerns the vocabulary that we are using when we say: “Who cares about ethics?” From a semantic perspective we can build two different propositions (P):

First, P1, there is an action, “caring for ethics”,

Second, P2, there is a subject, “who is the agent who cares”.

If we analyse further P1, we can start by showing that “caring for ethics” implies that there is an “ethics of care”, which traditionally is classified as a type of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is the third main paradigm of normative ethics besides consequentialism and deontology. Among varieties of virtue ethics, we could distinguish between:

- Agent-Based Virtue Ethics
- Eudaimonistic Virtue Ethics
- Pluralistic Virtue Ethics
- Sentimentalist Virtue Ethics
- Religiously oriented Virtue Ethics

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<sup>1</sup> Ignace Haaz, Managing Editor, Gobethics.net.

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When a subject says “I care about ethics” he or she virtually says something similar to “I speak in a language”, it is a tautology, caring cannot exist without an ethical attitude, so caring about ethics is a logical circle. Caring about being outside of ethics would be impossible, if by the simple action of caring we enter the sphere of ethics. This impression is of course false, there is precisely an enduring reality of ethics in the first place and this is the reason why we are justified to care about this reality.

We could ask about what properties of virtue ethics, does it make a good candidate among other systems of ethics, to be a real important thing for us. We said that there is mainly consequentialist ethics and deontology, and ask whether we should consider “care based ethics”, as having some sort of priority over the other forms of ethical understanding of human activity,... if yes then why?

Finally it seems that we focus on an “agent oriented” virtue ethics, as it is entailed by the very question “*Who* cares about...?”, but what are the benefits and costs of orienting virtue ethics towards the agent (we don’t distinguish here, for the moment the modality of this subject: I, you, us, the Person including God)?

The entire history of philosophy and anthropology shows the gradual shift from a thinking-centred situation on the conditions of truth and Being, towards a more subjective pole. As subject we are interested by some special conditions to experience truth, the good, the Being. Should we not resist to some degree to this postmodern tendency to speed up on the subjective side, there are so many important things we do?

Should we not focus about the things we want to describe? In the following three small sections the main editors of this volume will answer to our interrogation by 1) reminding us that ethics concerns precisely some essential way we are present to life namely we care about truth and good life. Caring about ethics could mean 2) being more focused on the fragility of the finitude of our presence in the world, and

resist against the deconstruction of this very dimension of our existence, that needs to be considered more thoroughly in our ethical reflection. If there are resistance against our constitutive incompleteness, should we not enquiry about these possibly illegitimate forces? 3) Ethics is a universal concern for all people around the world, we shall simply also take the chance of embark in a journey where a special light is shed “on the role of ethics in achieving harmony, stability, and justice in the world crossing borders, generations and cultures”.

## **Why Ethics Matters for Life and for All**

*Obiora Ike<sup>2</sup>*

Modern society has brought much noticeable progress to the fields of arts, medicine, agriculture, sciences, longevity, technology and lifestyles. Yet, people are not happier and many seem not to find orientation towards ethical values or some rational meaning in anything. Modern society unfortunately has continued to build walls of racial and class distinctions, gender bias and ideological contradictions, which distort hopes of a better world for everybody. There is this disparity and disconnect due to the lack of ethical ingredients in the way human beings think and do things. We seem to have reached a dead end with unethical behaviour and practices leading to dysfunctional societies, climatic disasters, economic declines and political gridlocks. We see these dead ends in the world of business and politics, in commerce and industry, governance and education, religion and culture, in technology and social behaviours, thus the confusion, the disorientation and the lack of happiness noticeable everywhere. We are aware that the centre is not holding any more. Such a situation is a reflection of something gravely wrong in society - a crisis of values and moral uprightness perpetuated by untruths.

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<sup>2</sup> Obiora Ike, Executive Director, Globethics.net.

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Ethics challenges us to reflect on the reality of children who go hungry at night without food, without water, without basic health care and education in a world that can afford basic needs for all. Ethics teaches us to imbibe principles of solidarity, respect for human dignity, regard for the common good and promotion of all life. When we learn the principles of respect for our own life and the lives of others, we learn to integrate diversity and inclusion.

In the light of moral diversity and of the proliferation of ethical dilemmas confronted in every sector, nation and people are we not forced to ask the question about what must remain central to humanity. Nothing? Something? What? Could legislations cover these ambiguities of life? Are any ethical principles universally applicable? Which are these? And how do we cope with the contending characteristics of our age, evident in cultural pluralism, rapid social changes, linguistic distrust of authoritarian and centralistic claims? Of course, these dilemmas and uncertainties concern people and many are asking, “What can be done? What solutions are available to us that will solve these crises? How can we bring about the practice of virtue, ethics, common sense and adherence to common human values, already inherent in various cultures and traditions that can help people in modern life create the better society of our dreams? Why should babies in many developing countries die of curable diseases such as malaria, knowing that we have enough medication to cure the disease? They cannot receive a cure because some people have taken money that belongs to the common good and kept it for themselves alone. The culture of corruption is not sustainable.

This book is a modest search for answers to these varied questions, which ultimately have to do with the meaning of life and the way we live and relate with each other and with our universe. The poet and literary giant T. S. Eliot had asked the question a century ago: “*Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in*

*knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"* To respond comprehensively to these questions one must bring into the answer the domain of ethics. The various selected essays in this collection of essays by Globethics.net team of staff and associates around the world is a service to teaching by doing. The topics range from the ethics of technology, health and sustainability or respect and address concrete issues faced in our everyday living and doing.

Ethics is the queen of sciences that addresses the Good Life. It promotes living well and rightly. Ethics is about doing the right thing, making the right choices, protecting the common good, promoting good behaviour and avoiding harm. Ethics helps to promote collaboration and community coexistence and is a subject taught within the family, in schools and higher education institutions. Through ethics, young people and adults reconnect with a moral and ethical compass for life by practicing virtue. It is indeed clear that without ethics and values-based education, a better world is not possible. Our common challenge therefore is to integrate ethics in education so that people think ethically, govern ethically and act ethically. Education has a value to add by integrating ethical thinking in the young as they shape the future.

This is why ethics matters, and it matters for all peoples globally and urgently.

## **An Ethics of Care for Unsettling Times**

*Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué*<sup>3</sup>

*Who cares about ethics?* The answer to this question may be both complex and short. The immediate response of many of our contemporaries may be one of indifference. An indifference, which is not so much sponsored by resistance to the idea of ethics as such, but more so by its intangibility. Therefore, the short answer to the question,

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<sup>3</sup> Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué, Academic Dean, Globethics.net.



## *16 Who Cares About Ethics?*

which this publication puts forward, is that all humans – or at least a vast majority of people – care about ethics in as much as they are concerned about what sustains their lives and the lives of their offspring. The complexity of the topic is reflected, on the one hand in the wide range of approaches and themes assembled in this collection. On the other hand, and more importantly, we are reminded how complex life in itself is, particularly in these unsettling times.

Ethics may become less abstract now that people have to reflect on how to change their life styles in the face of a global pandemic. The necessity to adapt labour, study, travel, trade, production and consumption patterns to the needs of collective and individual security and wellbeing reveals the vulnerability of life and at the same time its potential resilience. It is probably this delicate link between the fragility our existence is encapsulated in and the resistance against its deconstruction that needs to be considered more thoroughly in our ethical reflection. The dimension of care and the action of caring will have to be brought from the periphery to the centre of a revisited ethics in contemporary times. This book endeavours to set the scene for such a fresh investigation.

### ***A New Paradigm for Reimagining Higher Education***

This is by far not a theoretical question. Caring can be understood as a paradigmatic lens for the practice of ethics in the context of higher education, which is the focus of the third part of this volume and expresses the vision of Globethics.net. Time and again both educators and observers have articulated critiques about the tendencies to ‘monetarise’ higher education by overemphasising quantitative outcome indicators. It appears that one does not have to play out the need for efficiency and financial viability against the goals of a qualitatively oriented education. What has to be repositioned at the heart of higher education is the mission to prepare future generations for increasingly demanding professional and societal tasks. This relates to a lesser extent

to the acquisition of specific skills – in the sense of techniques and tools – but more to the development of holistic and relational capacities of reading and interpreting the world. The current global health crisis provides a propitious opportunity for reimagining higher education as a space for learning *how to care*. Three dimensions may be taken as particularly relevant in this regard.

### *1. Caring About Learning Holistically*

Higher education for the longest time has been perceived as a location and vehicle to promote academic specialisation. The disciplinary fragmentation can be viewed as conducive for such an enterprise, as it allows for a content- and method-oriented concentration in subject areas, as well as a focus on a career-oriented qualification of the graduates. The disadvantage of this academic compartmentalisation, however, is that it overemphasises the acquisition of knowledge and skills in one segment over against profiling methodological knowledge that can be transferred and applied in various areas rather than just in one.

It seems that the specialisation achieved through a disciplinary approach in academia serves well the need to master a specific type of challenges. These challenges may be described as calling for a *reparatory or restorative* approach, which requires a set of tools, such as improving production methods. On the other hand, we realise that there is a wide range of challenges that invite us to think about a *relational and transformative* approach in order to identify viable solutions. It is perhaps in this direction that higher education has to be revisited. How can higher education nurture an ethos of thinking and acting holistically in a world that demands more and more these kinds of qualities? It may be that such a vision will have to be translated into the way higher education programmes are conceptualised *from within* and not only with regard to the currently highly privileged outcome-orientation. In this perspective an ethics of care can offer an inspiration for reorganising

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academic learning environments and methods in an interdisciplinary manner.

### 2. *Caring About Planetary Solidarity*

Such a reorganisation will also contribute to making visible what has remained for the most part imperceptible in higher education: the need to create attention for planetary solidarity and alliances. The contemporary socio-political climate tends to accentuate the differences, the conflicts and the polarisation arising from them. It becomes all the more necessary to rethink higher education also as an opportunity for forming future generations to deal with differences between nations, religious communities and ethnic groups constructively, peacefully and with clear ethical parameters. This publication offers several illustrations on how higher education can be perceived as a propitious location for such a values-based preparation for a civic engagement that fosters unity and togetherness in full recognition and awareness of what may divide people. This is not – or at least not primarily – a matter of skills development, but of character formation. Caring for one another can therefore not be relegated to the ‘caritative margins’ of societal cohabitation, but needs to be moved to the centre of a higher education that takes its holistic educational mandate seriously.

### 3. *Caring About the Future of Life*

Last but not least, an ethics of care will contribute to shifting the attention of all those committed to higher education to take seriously not only the concerns for our immediate environment and time but more so for those related to the future of life on earth. New interdisciplinary fields such as futurology, or initiatives promoted and supported by the international community such as the *Sustainable Development Goals* will assist in modelling creative forms of collaboration and will offer guidance for bridging the gap between the urgency of the ‘now’ and of the ‘tomorrow’. Caring may be the lens to use for this bridge-building

exercise, especially when used as a transversal idea for conceptualising learning in higher education that prepares emerging generations of professionals for these tasks: being apt to observe the current situation; being able to discern with ethical clarity and a caring attitude; and being capable of creating sustainable solutions for the survival of all.

### ***An Invitation to Join the Soft Revolution of an Ethics of Care in Higher Education***

This publication constitutes not just another volume to insert into our library collections and catalogues. It is a genuine invitation to ponder on some of the most fundamental questions of our time. The contributions invite us to do so from the vantage points of the authors, who enrich the dialogue on ethics with their experiences and intellectual insights, but they do so also with an embedded call: that these reflections may be the beginning of a collective action towards caring for one another in a world that has unveiled its frailty. A pertinent call: *Who Cares about Ethics?* – leaving nobody indifferent. A call to join the soft revolution of an ethics of care in higher education, so that we all may live tomorrow.

## **The Journey of Ethics**

*Anja Andriamasy*<sup>4</sup>

This book is an invitation to live and experience the journey of ethics, especially in the context of applied ethics, embracing its scope and its value in the world in various aspects and questions of life. Indeed, ethics is a universal concern for all people around the world and taking part in this journey of ethics through the various chapters is an opportunity, not only to discover but also to enrich and enlarge one's knowledge on the subject of applied ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> Anja Andriamasy, Online Library and Administration Assistant, Globethics.net.

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Walking towards and through applied ethics is a journey that may look frightening and hard when the world nowadays is more inclined to work unethically, but it is in fact reachable and achievable.

This is what Globethics.net believes in and is working towards: promoting the value of applied ethics to achieve true prosperity for all. Although the language and knowledge of applied ethics may sound laborious and considered as an intangible and inaccessible topic, Globethics.net aims to draw everyone's attention to applied ethics. This book will take us on a journey to understand applied ethics, and to raise the understanding of its true value.

As a matter of fact, the world is encountering a large number of challenges in several fields and contexts not necessarily discussed but which deserve to be addressed. Therefore, the objective of this book is to shed light on the role of ethics in achieving harmony, stability, and justice in the world crossing borders, generations and cultures. Applied ethics is an expression of life and morals flourishing in thoughts, customs and actions, which creates and contributes to identity.

This book has been produced with the exclusive participation of Globethics.net collaborators across the world, including members of the Board of Foundation, the staff, the regional programmes, the national contacts and the pool of experts all over the world, who personally depict in various topics, contexts and fields, why ethics matters. The chapters in this book explore how and why ethics has always been relevant through each author's unique approach to share on the topic of applied ethics.

The journey of ethics is taking place throughout the various chapters in this book and begins now.

*Geneva, 15 December 2020*

# **POETICAL EXCURSUS: LIFE MEANS FREEDOM AND CHOICE**

*Anja Andriamasy<sup>5</sup>*

What is Ethics?

If Ethics was not only one word  
But an acronym of various words  
That are interlinked with each other  
This would be the wisest definition to give  
And the wise choice to make

If we could define ETHICS

It would be the wind that blows every heart to Empowerment  
For the true inner Transformation  
For everyone who believes in the Holistic approach  
To create meaningful innovations with Integrity  
From each Competence to build the world Sustainability

If ethics was a note of music

It would espouse all musicality  
That embraces the whole beauty  
Of the world and humanity

If we think that ethics is a piece of art

Then feeling and living its beauty with all one's heart

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<sup>5</sup> Anja Andriamasy, Online Library and Administration Assistant,  
Globethics.net.

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Is the greatest gift given  
That deserves to be honoured

Life means freedom and choice  
To act in the name and the voice,  
The music and the song  
Of love

Life means freedom and choice  
To be free and happy,  
Alive and unconfined  
In the mind

But what if we just choose freedom  
And ignore the rest  
Are values only esoteric features of the human being  
Only meant to rest in the body?

In times of hardship  
We shall remember this word  
Resting in our memory  
The one called responsibility

Freedom if simply defined  
Leads to misunderstanding  
Disorder and damages  
But life calls for responsibility and solidarity

When the world meets crisis  
Whatsoever it may be  
Life calls for freedom to choose responsibility

Freedom to make the beautiful choice

Freedom to be responsible

Towards ourselves and others

Freedom to respect ourselves and others

And living well together

Life means freedom and choice

The choice to be freely responsible

For building a bright future

Listening to the air of ethics

But who cares about this?

And why should we care?

Because it is the safest way to take

For true honour, admiration and respect

Ethics is the sweet melody of life

That caresses its true value and meaning

With a dance of the minor and major chords

Using the soft sound of values and virtues

The musical notes and chords of this song of life

Play the melody of responsibility

Cradled by the sound of freedom

To create a harmony of values and serenity





## WHO NEEDS ETHICS? AN APOLOGY

*Lucy Howe López<sup>6</sup>*

### **Ethics Has No Victims**

“The problem with trying to raise money for an organisation like Globethics.net is that there are no victims.” This was the conclusion that one of our colleagues at Globethics.net, a fundraising specialist with decades of experience in particular in the humanitarian field, came to as we worked together on how we could best appeal to our supporters.

It is true, by and large, that in many fundraising campaigns, especially for humanitarian causes, you can clearly identify those who are in need and hold them up for all to see. They are, among others, the vulnerable, hungry, sick, differently abled, children, the elderly, poor, abandoned, stateless, oppressed, uneducated, excluded, survivors of disaster, conflict or war and/or abused or deprived or discriminated against in any number of ways. We can add to the list of causes the environment, oceans, animal and plant life depleted and extinguished at an alarming rate, and cultural heritage and historical monuments, threatened and crumbling. You can put a face or an image to the campaign, a person or a group, a place, or an animal, that represents those and that which, without the help of the wider community, will probably not survive or at best will fail to thrive.

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<sup>6</sup> Lucy Howe López, Deputy Executive Director, Globethics.net.

The call is for those who have to share with those who do not have, so that basic needs are met to live in dignity without fear of want. The appeal is ultimately based upon the Golden Rule, common to all religions, to do unto others as you would have done unto you. Also on the premise that we are only as strong as the weakest among us; if one among us falls then in a real and important sense we all fall. The call for aid recognises that what is done to the least of us is done to all, that we are interconnected and care for the other is tantamount to self-care. As an old Irish priest friend of mine would say, “What goes around, comes around”, whether it be generosity or hate, compassion or neglect, extending hospitality or closing the door on your neighbour, or perhaps more simply standing a round of drinks when it’s your turn or not at all.

When talking about ethics, as a cause to be fought for, who and/or what are the needy, how do they suffer, are their lives under threat, do they struggle to survive or fail to thrive in the absence of ethics, and if so, what can be done to help them?

This article is not an apology in the sense of asking for forgiveness for something; it is an apology in the sense of making a case for something. In this instance the argument is that there most certainly are victims who suffer from the absence of ethics. Faces and images can be put to this appeal and the needy can be found; in many cases only one look in the bathroom mirror will suffice, i.e. when it comes to ethics the vast majority of us have or are likely to suffer the lack of ethics. We, in fact, are the needy.

## **What Happened to You? The Worst We Can Be**

A question that often touches a person who is suffering or hurt, is not, “What’s wrong with you?” but rather, “What happened to you?” Each one of us has been wronged, at some point(s) in our lives; by another person or people, by an institution or a system, directly or indirectly, deliberately or otherwise. Such wrongs leave marks and

scars. Dig a little and we have plenty to be angry about, and anger that is not expressed often ends in depression and feelings of worthlessness, futility and bewilderment, and/or in the re-enactment of that which has been done to us being done to others in turn, repeating the cycle. This pattern can recur over generations accompanied at the best of times by an equivalent struggle and desire for redress, balance and wholeness, for a fixing of the brokenness.

I have come to the conclusion over the last half century of observation and reflection that whenever a subject becomes an object, invariably harm tends to and actually does happen. As soon as a human or non-human subject is perceived to be and actually is objectified, then that opens the door for 'it' to be treated in a way that is less than human or humane. This act of objectification in and of itself may well be a necessary step for the one or several who are engaged as perpetrators to be able to do what is done and to erect an emotional and psychological shield from the reality of what is or has taken place. A break, divorce, disconnect, a conscious effort to dehumanise, often coupled with a real or perceived threat to and overriding desire for personal survival, and perhaps for the survival of a group or people might be made to rationalise, justify and cope.

Objectification is often referred to in the context of the (mis)treatment of women, in those instances when women and girls are seen in particular as sexual objects or as servants to be used and abused. This objectification is often internalised with the consequence that women gradually become disempowered, weakened, brought low and dehumanised through an exercise of might. What are the effects on those men and women who objectify women and girls (and in some cases also men and boys)? The perpetrators or promoters of such a narrow view of their fellow human beings surely lose some of their own humanity in the process, at least when you look at such practices from a 'do as you would be done by' perspective.

Conflict situations are also occasions for objectification; soldiers belonging to an opposing armed force become ‘the enemy’, demonised, abstracted and faceless. Bombs and drones are aimed at military and non-military ‘targets’, including civilians. The accidental killing of non-army personnel is termed ‘collateral damage’ and military forces are casualties of (not so) ‘friendly fire’. The kill or be killed exigency on the battlefield leaves its mark, it has a cost; soldiers know that if they do not shoot, they themselves will in all likelihood die. They shoot and at that moment a part of themselves does die, is sacrificed in the killing of the other, especially non-military casualties, in order to survive.

Among civilians in conflict settings there are unfortunately numerous examples of ethnic minorities or religious groups that are treated as less than human, including the segregation and genocide of the Jewish population in Europe during the Second World War, and the exile and killings of the Muslim Rohingya people more recently in Myanmar.

Much closer to home, we have all thought, said and done things that are morally wrong, that has caused harm and the chances are that we will continue to do so, either intentionally or not. To err is human so the saying goes; we are none of us blameless.

## **The Best We Can Be**

As our Globethics.net Executive Director, Prof. Dr Obiora Ike, often says, “Ethics is where life is” demonstrating by bringing his fingertips and thumbs of each hand together that ethics touches life, it does not exist in a vacuum, unrelated to and distinct from our day-to-day lives and concerns. We talk then about the ethics of something, of artificial intelligence, of education, of warfare, of journalism, of politics, of health, of business, of the environment, of law enforcement, of humanitarian aid, of culture and so on. When applying ethics, we bring our rich and diverse principles, values, virtues and moral consciousness

and experience to bear in a reflective and dynamic way on specific situations and fields of study and action.

In my view, ethics is foundational; it is universal and transversal, it underpins the rule of law and human rights. Common ethical values can be identified, agreed and called upon to serve as common ground when those of differing worldviews, religious beliefs or traditional or cultural practices cannot agree. Ethics and ethical dialogue and reflection have the potential to reconcile, build consensus and unite and bring peace.

The exercise of ethical reflection does not give us easy, black and white or either/or answers, but rather answers that correspond to every shade of the entire spectrum of colours, as many answers as there are people on this earth. The trick then is to arrive at individual and collective, ideally consensual judgements that respond in as adequate a way as possible in the circumstances to the moral demands of particular moments and situations, bound by time and place and the political will and resources at hand. Then we have to choose, decide and act, or not, in the full knowledge that we, and others, have to live with the consequences. What can be soul crushing and yet at the same time a potential source of self-reconciliation and peace, is that there is no perfect decision; optimally it will be only as much as, though no less than, the best we can do and be when all things are considered.

There are ample grounds for humility and little for smugness when decisions are taken in the interests of trying to make them as close to being 'right' or 'good' or 'correct' as possible. Then, of course, our received and tried and tested ideas of what is 'right' or 'good' may well not be 'right' or 'good' at all for others – most parents can tell you this – then the cry goes out, 'I didn't know that that would happen, that they would feel or react that way'. This position might be described as one of doing the least harm rather than a strict or absolute adherence to the no harm principle.

## **Conclusion**

To go back to the question asked at the beginning – “When talking about ethics... who and/or what are the needy...?” I would argue that the needy, quite simply, are all those who have a responsibility, all those who hold or are given power over something or somebody, all who have ever had or ever will have to take a decision or undertake an action that affects another living being, common property or cultural artefact. How can these people – all people in fact – be helped?

Can the consequences of applying or not applying ethics be quantified; can a price be put upon it? One could argue that ethics is priceless, that it is of such great value that our very survival and that of our environment ultimately depend upon the exercise of ethics, individually and as a collective. At the same time, attempts have been made to quantify the absence of ethics, often in the business sector or in the political arena. For example, unethical practices such as negligence, fraud, corruption and insider trading within companies can not only bring a business into disrepute but can cause its downfall. The cost in terms of lost assets and livelihoods can run to millions.

When we start looking at what happens when ethics is not applied, we might well see that the occasions for wrongdoing, for objectification, for forgetting the preciousness and dignity of the self and the other in our societies are embedded, systemic and frankly overwhelming. With a more positive outlook, however, the daily opportunities to shoulder and exercise our individual and collective responsibilities, to recognise and call out injustice, to speak with and for those who have forgotten how and with compassion understand that those who harm are also harmed, can bring healing and wholeness.

Opening our eyes and ears and paying attention means that we cannot not engage. In our modern interconnected world we can touch so many, our power for right action is great indeed. We cannot do it alone though. We are each other’s mirrors, we reflect each other and in our

way through life cannot often see what others see, that there are other and better ways if we would only stop and listen and look.

One of the most effective and sustainable ways to help is to actively encourage, enable and empower, i.e. to love, each other and thereby ourselves. This is what we try to do at Globethics.net. We strive to be an organisation and a global network of individuals and institutions that mutually contributes to, promotes and reinforces a positive cycle of ethical reflection, dialogue and action, starting from where we are with a focus on education. As our former Board of Foundation member and Senior Advisor Prof. Dr Heidi Hadsell put it rather more succinctly and profoundly in answer to the question “Why are we here (at Globethics.net)?”, “We are here because we care”. We care about and recognise that there is a need for ethics in the world and the benefits of investing in it for the common good are manifold, not least of which is peace of mind and a life well-lived.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Acknowledgements: With thanks to Carlos López Hurtado, husband and friend, and to our three best critics, our sons, Martin, Adrian and Gabriel, for their thoughts and contributions.





**A**

**ETHICS: HAVING POWER OVER  
VS HAVING POWER WITH**



## **MONEY IN ETHICS OUT – BUT?**

*Linda Lilian*<sup>8</sup>

Can a low-income earner manage large sums of money with ease? Why do high-income earners still fall prey to money traps? These are some questions that continue to haunt. The very contrast of the corruption of need and that of greed puts ethics at a distance and celebrates money.

According to Thomas Li-Ping Tang and Chen,<sup>9</sup> research supports the biblical notion that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, but money itself is not. The author argues that the love of money is positively related to the propensity to engage in unethical behaviour. In this chapter, focus is placed on the treachery of hinging life on money often culminating in destruction; while ethics remains a floating idea and ideal, which is not taken seriously but resorted to as the last option, by which point it is a complex operation to attempt to revive a dying reality.

### **Celebrating Money**

Popular culture today celebrates money as ‘dough’, which could be the metaphor for bread that represents the daily meal that sustains life.

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<sup>8</sup> Linda Lilian, Globethics.net National Contact Uganda and member of the Globethics.net East Africa Advisory Board.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Li-Pang and Chen, p. 3

As currency, money enables transactions and purchases. It plays an important part in operationalizing the drive in a supply and value chain of an initiative. Producers need it, human resources need it, consumers need it, leaders need it and industry needs it. The list of the need aligned to money is long. It makes the choice inevitable to either not to desire money or to join in celebrating it. Money could be likened to the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, easy to tempt with and be tempted by; and it holds freewill to ransom. Thomas Li-Ping Tang and Rand Chiu,<sup>10</sup> argue that the meaning of money is, “in the eye of the beholder” and serves as a “frame of reference” in which they examine their everyday lives.

A case presented by Kaptein in his book ‘Why Good People Do Bad Things’, features Abraham Lincoln as the ethical man at the edge of falling from integrity. According to Kaptein,

“Before becoming president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was a respected lawyer in Illinois. One day a criminal came to him. ‘I would like to ask you to defend me’, said the man. Lincoln, who had a sneaking suspicion of the kind of person he was dealing with, replied with the question: ‘Are you guilty?’ ‘Of course, I’m guilty. That’s why I want to hire you; to get me free.’ ‘If you admit guilt to me’, Lincoln explained, ‘then I can’t defend you’. The man reacted with amazement: ‘But you don’t understand. I’m offering you a thousand dollars for your services!’ Although a thousand dollars was a large sum of money at the time, Lincoln resolutely refused. The criminal replied, ‘Mr. Lincoln, I’ll offer you two thousand dollars if you defend me!’ Again Lincoln refused. In desperation, the criminal played his trump card: ‘Mr Lincoln, you’re the best lawyer in the area. I can’t have travelled all this way for nothing. I’ll give you

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Li-Pang Tang and Chiu, p.14

four thousand dollars.’ At that moment Lincoln flew from his seat, grabbed the man by his collar, dragged him out of the office, and threw him into the street. When the man had stood up and pulled his clothes straight, he asked Lincoln: ‘Why did you throw me out when I offered four thousand dollars? Why not for one or two thousand, or when I admitted guilt in the first place?’ Lincoln replied: ‘You were nearing my price!’ Apparently, Lincoln’s integrity had a price: he was ‘for sale’. For a certain price, he was prepared to throw his principles overboard. The question is whether everyone has a price. To answer this question, as in the previous chapter, we should perhaps start by exploring our innate qualities.”

Thomas Li-Ping Tang and Rand Chiu assert that the root of corporate scandals and unethical behavior is related to the bottom line: “money” and “the love of money”. It is within this context that the spikes of capitalism are born. Jahan and Mahmud note,<sup>11</sup> that capitalism’s essential feature is the motive to make a profit. It is absurd that in over ten sessions about business development with the ordinary Ugandan client at the Uganda Industrial Research Institute, people continue to envisage ‘capital’ primarily as ‘money’. Yet when it is taken from the Latin origin as described by the Etymoline,<sup>12</sup> capital is derived from the Latin adjective ‘capitalis’ meaning ‘principal’ which is based on the Latin name ‘caput’ for the head. Thus if capital relates to the head, the first capital that exists is in the human capacity to generate a profitable idea and implement it to gain income. So humans are their first capital. Though money is substantial, it is not about money but the capacity to create the opportunity for it to manifest. When people have a perception that money is all the capital that there is for them to succeed,

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<sup>11</sup> Jahan and Mahmud 2015, p.2

<sup>12</sup> Etymoline,online etymology dictionary.

then there is a possibility that they cease to think in line with bettering who they are in terms of their ability and focus.

Whereas money is a necessity, it can manifest as an idea of being a ‘bottomless pit’, that triggers an incessant want to meet as many needs and beyond. Self-interest becomes inevitable in a moral manner, which is subjective and more inclined to unethical practices. Pavlovic quotes Keynes pointing to the love of money as a, “somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological diseases which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease.”<sup>13</sup> In this stance, Keynes is looking forward to a society that would overcome the love of money as a guiding principle for economic decisions.

When money is celebrated, accidents are bound to occur. A case reflecting such a celebration of money occurred when the safety committee at Ford Motors decided not to fix the defective gas tank on the Pinto automobile because committee members saw no problem with saving money rather than human lives.<sup>14</sup> Placing money as a moral value above human life creates an unethical situation in which the lead producers (humans) find themselves exploited by their own creation (money). The irrational reality of money being more significant than human life wields the potential of eliminating a human life. Pernille states that,

“a major obstacle in quantitative finance theory is the theoretical simplification of the belief that more monetary wealth is always better. This is the essence of the rational value-maximizing paradigm. Qualities such as fresh air and human well-being are soft intangibles with no role in a quantitative financial model.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pavlovic. P (2017), p.111

<sup>14</sup> Ethical Decision Making and Behaviour, p.236

<sup>15</sup> Pernille .J (2012) p.356

## **Ethics: a Need or a Deed**

What if money were considered to be greater than ethics? Money would fall under the consequentialist fold with a focus on the happiness and satisfaction it would generate, hence being a significant part of humanity. Huslmann argues that the most widespread monetary fallacy is probably the naïve belief that economic growth is possible only to the extent that it is accompanied by a corresponding growth of the money supply.<sup>16</sup> He notes,

“Suppose the economy grows at an annual rate of 5 percent. Then according to that fallacy, it is necessary to increase the money supply also by 5 percent because other-wise the additional goods and services could not be sold.”

In this, it is realized that there are certain attributes that are brought into play, in which money determines everything. Yet, one would look back to the time when barter trade existed and it was about an exchange of value as well as of quality. Then there was also the value of human capital. In the biblical story of Jacob (Genesis chapters 29 and 30), Jacob worked for Laban and in turn, received sheep and wives. The value of his labour was rewarded. However, when all is put under the monetary scale, even good labour can be undermined.

When brought before an Athenian court for a sentence, Plato pointed out that Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. The examination mentioned founds the crux of ethics. According to Christopher Bennett in the study of ethics we take this perspective of standing back from our habits and gut reactions to ask; what to do, what goals to pursue, what ideals to aspire to, and also what to avoid.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Huslmann Guido Jorg (2008) *The Ethics of Money Production*, Ludwig von Mises Institute, Alabama p.60

<sup>17</sup> Bennett Christopher 2015 p.xiv



## *40 Who Cares About Ethics?*

Money, on the other hand, holds the potential of clouding judgment with regards to what is to be done, goals to be pursued, ideals needed, and what to avoid.

In the quest to attain a good life, ethics becomes a necessity focusing not on what would bring happiness to an individual, but on how the individual accounts for their actions to others, for it is in others that an individual finds the standard of conduct. Christopher Bennett explains:

“Ethics starts not with the individual trying to decide for herself, but rather from the need to justify or explain ourselves to others. Human beings are accountable to one another in the sense that they continuously ask one another why they acted in such and such a way, particularly when the action was unusual or unexpected or brought about significant consequences.” (Bennett, 2015, xiv)

Thus the utilization of money attains the desired end that yields a good. However, how that end is attained begs to be studied, if the greater good is to be observed. Ethics strives to bring out the best in human action and inaction, based on scrutinizing given behaviour to prescribe how humanity ought to conduct themselves. The essence of money and life prioritization is among the things ethics will examine, and hinges on universal principles benchmarked on what enables humanity to attain an ideal outcome.

## **Reflections from Uganda**

Finance happens because humans found it useful as a conduit for legal transactions, and thus should be guided to serve that purpose without deviation. Fernández asserts:

“Ethics must be the cornerstone of finance – not vice versa – and must be based on two pillars: respect for human dignity and the

moral standards of the natural order. If one or the other is lacking, ethics loses its essential quality, leaving behind only the label.”

Having policies and laws as symptoms of the order may not put off the disorder unless an ethical sense is upheld.

### **COVID-19**

In Uganda one of the biggest debates has been how the Coronavirus (COVID-19) demonstrated a split in service-driven action and money-driven action. At the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic scare, in addition to all the international loans and donations the government solicited, Ugandans also made financial contributions so that the effects of the lockdown brought about by COVID-19 would be mitigated. Based on the scrutiny given of the implications of the lockdown, everyone favoured contributing or acting towards service-driven action. Then suddenly, there was no proper account of the contributions and corruption cases of embezzlement began to emerge starting with the Prime Minister’s office.<sup>18</sup> Even when stickers were issued to what were termed as the vehicles of ‘essential workers’ still some people took advantage of the existing frame of corruption to bribe and get stickers.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, COVID-19 guidelines continue to be broken, and underlying it all is the capacity to tilt the system with money. Therefore there is a population that is pervaded with risk, animosity towards corruption, and yet still eager to abuse the whole situation by anxiously waiting for the opportunity to be tipped or to tip.

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<sup>18</sup> Athumani, Top Ugandan Officials Arrested in COVID-19 Purchasing Scandal, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/top-ugandan-officials-arrested-covid-19-purchasing-scandal>, April 2020

<sup>19</sup> Ochwo Alfred, Monitor Newspaper, Vehicles with Forged and Expired Stickers to be Confiscated Says Museveni, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Vehicles-with-forged-expired-stickers-confiscated-Museveni/688334-5529104-1sqp27/index.html>, April 2020

### ***Environmental Degradation***

Bugoma forest has faced the most ambitious test that only money can attract. The forest, which is said to be home for 500 chimpanzees, 201 recorded bird species and a special species of primates called the Ugandan mangabeys, has recently been sold off to Hoima Sugar Factory by the King of Bunyoro Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Twenty-two square miles of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve will undergo deforestation so that sugarcane can be grown as a cash crop for the sugar factory. Two parties stand to benefit: the King who is selling; and the factory, which shall produce a cash crop. Meanwhile, the subjects grumble because the forest has been a source of local revenue from tourism and it contributes to a good climate. Many other natural resources face similar threats. The Lake Victoria rain forests have been encroached upon, as have most of the wetlands in the country. The moral behind the unregulated acts against nature is population growth, the need for strategic spots for settlement, and a money-hungry enforcement order that will look the other way or float the system to allow the irregularities.

### **Conclusion**

When the struggle for existence is equivalent to a struggle for money, then the highest bidder wins at the expense of all. This would be moral since a situation is created to enable it. However, when put under scrutiny and rational inquiry, when we step aside from our quests and look at the holistic view with a meta-ethical lens, then there is more to the struggle for existence than money; money should not be the end but a means. Humanity is important, life is precious and the environment is invaluable. Therefore, to prevent a lapse in judgment based on a

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<sup>20</sup> Observer Newspaper, Protests over the Plan to Cut Bugoma Forest, <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/60636-protests-over-plans-to-cut-bugoma-forest>, May 2019

monetary spell, enforcement of ethical examination and the institution of ethical principles becomes urgent in every action that would have significant consequences for others.

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## WIN-WIN: THE ETHICS OF PARTNERSHIP

*Christine Housel*<sup>21</sup>

### **Trust as the Condition for “Win-Win” Partnerships: an Ethical Key**

Partnership is on the agenda today. Leaders in all domains and fields of work have been pushed by our current environment to recognize that cooperation is needed for success in our work and to successfully tackle the many challenges ahead of us — environment, health, poverty, education, the need for meaningful work, and on and on... all of which have been heightened by COVID-19. How do ethics matter when we think about partnerships?

We live in a world where profit is often put before people, where competition outweighs cooperation and often leads to not fighting fair and thus we can find ourselves in a defensive, self-protective posture, personally or organizationally. However, there are consistent voices calling for something better. Some of our philosophers and theologians ask us to recognize the dignity and worth of all human beings as something grounded in the nature of reality and to reject any tendency to commoditize one another. Interesting also is that there are leaders among business professionals who make the pragmatic case that creating

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<sup>21</sup> Christine Housel, Donor Relations and Strategic Partnerships, Globethics.net.

scenarios where all benefit is in the long run more sustainable for the business (as well as for the world) and creates better results.

Where the ethics of partnerships can be under-emphasized or engaged only as a legal formality on paper, an ethical approach is one that seeks a truly “win-win” scenario and is characterized by fairness and justice, mutual respect, good will, and trust. Trust seems lacking in many relationships, communities, and partnerships today, and I would like to suggest that trust-building is the key to making partnership work and is well worth the effort it takes.

One of the phrases that is often used in negotiating partnerships of different kinds is that we are seeking for a “win-win” scenario, an outcome where both parties – or all parties if there are more than two – benefit from the deal and the resulting partnership.

What comes to mind when we hear the phrase “win-win”? Are we convinced that we will really win through partnership? And perhaps even more important, are we committed to our partners winning too? Do we have a sense of confidence that the values of the potential partners include honesty and genuine care for all parties and that the ethics of the agreements being made are sincere and strong? Or does past experience put us on guard for fear of the motivations of the potential partner in front of us and the prospect of being ultimately disadvantaged?

My personal commitment to creating partnerships of trust began through my work with youth. Youth have a highly developed radar for disingenuousness and little tolerance for it. They can feel if we have their best interests in mind, care about them, respect them, and treat them fairly, and they respond to authenticity coming from us. We will not get very far in working with them unless we build trust.

When I began working in the NGO sector, I began to see the need to apply these hands-on lessons to the formal work of partnership building between organizations. Partnership on many levels and across sectors is now more and more urgently needed, and increasingly embraced as

such. As thought leaders and all kinds of different actors have been realizing for many years now, the world is getting smaller and moving faster and the challenges we face are large and inter-connected and cannot be solved by groups isolated from one another. It is true in discrete sectors — education, business, faith communities and civil society, government — and it is clear that establishing fruitful public private partnerships and other forms of cross-sectoral partnership is the way forward.

## **Partnerships for Shared Goals**

One of the clearest current examples that partnership is now accentuated as both a strategy and a goal is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015. This shared blueprint for “peace and prosperity for people and planet” is centred around 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 17<sup>th</sup> of which is “Partnership for the Goals”.<sup>22</sup>

“The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals require all hands on deck. It requires different sectors and actors working together in an integrated manner by pooling financial resources, knowledge and expertise. In our new development era... cross sectorial and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships will play a crucial role for getting us to where we need by the year 2030.”<sup>23</sup>

While on the one hand there is a growing consensus that now it is more important than ever to take partnership seriously, and to build ethical partnerships, a lot of work remains to make this a reality. As we

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<sup>22</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>23</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/multi-stakeholder-partnerships-and-voluntary-commitments>



know, building relationships and working together requires a large investment and is hard work. It can be easy to treat “partnerships” lightly in order to get the money or up the numbers or get the job done or bolster reputation. If we define partnership broadly as working with others on a common goal, we are all connected in many partnerships, but to prioritize partnership as a core strategy, develop the skills and competencies needed to build positive and productive partnerships, and choose to invest the time, energy, and money to make it work is another matter.

Where can the motivation for the level of investment needed be found? People and organizations are already stretched, even more so now with the appearance of COVID-19 on the scene. One reaction we are seeing is a retreat back into familiar, insular circles or to focus on finding a way to get one’s own work done. On the other hand, the emergency solutions needed in response to COVID-19 have encouraged others to work together with increased collaboration.

A new creativity develops when partners really do bring their varying perspectives and expertise together, which is energizing and therefore motivating. New paths are discovered or created, solutions are found, successes experienced, relationships built, all of which brings satisfaction. And it develops community. People and institutions are inter-dependent and when we experience this reality with all its positive potential, new visions for partnership emerge.

## **Conclusion**

Trust building happens in working out the nuts and bolts of partnership in conversation and action with integrity. It depends on clear communication about roles and responsibilities. It is founded in a genuine desire to see the partner succeed as well as yourself and a common vision and values.

One reason trust building is an ethical key is that the process of building trust and the resulting relationship is as much a result and outcome of the partnership as is the explicit mutual goal. In the same way the SDGs depict partnership building as both a strategy for achieving the common goals articulated in the other 16 goals as well as a goal itself, it can be helpful to understand trust-building as both the core strategy for creating “win-win” partnerships and a goal in itself. Such an approach is already building something transformative and is sorely needed in the world. In building trust, we build the foundations for flourishing work and flourishing people.



## ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN A SOCIAL CYBERWORLD

*Meera Baidur*<sup>24</sup>

### **Introduction**

This chapter attempts to bring ethical questions about the online world to the discussion in order to answer and explore some important themes around the prolific world of social media. While most ethicists worry about the presence of the media itself, and suggest that these platforms are somehow detrimental to the human spirit, this essay is an attempt to look at some of the unique problems of content, particularly those that don't attract the attention of the mainstream philosophers. Instagram for instance is less subjected to the moral gaze as compared to Facebook, which has had a negative or positive impact on real life events. I posit that there are issues of ethical interest even within the visual photographic posts of Instagram.

This essay also attempts to use some ethical principles from non-western thought (Indian Philosophy) to discuss the ethical theories. It is hoped that this chapter will stimulate the interests of serious scholars as well as community leaders to understand and study this phenomenon as a significant part of social life now and in the future, and not to dismiss these platforms as mere distractions or addictions of a younger generation.

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A while ago, with the coming of the television, scholars and intellectuals remarked on the phenomenon that brought the world into the living room, an invasion of public events that was transmitted into the heart of our family space, into our homes. A similar transformation has occurred gradually in contemporary times, with a huge influx of what is popularly known as social media content that is generated and shared by individuals who create ‘posts’ on these platforms. In a sense, people are putting their ‘living rooms’ into the world for consumption. These types of content are also shared, re-shared and discussed in platforms that allow for instantaneous judgements, of ‘likes’, ‘comments’, and, sometimes, ‘dislikes’ and ‘censure’. There are new forms of social collectives wherein dissent, retaliation, and expression are formed requiring us to reimagine the ideas of justice, ethical paradigms about opinions and private information. Standard paradigms can evaluate textual posts that are opinions or articles and also evaluate ethical agencies of actors who write them.

While traditional discourses of media ethics can be applied to some forms of content, say posts on current issues and appeals for justice, hate speech and trolling, some innocuous posts such as “good morning” posts, photographs of vacations and food and artwork, jokes, memes, and poetry also dominate these platforms that seem too banal to be scrutinized as moral issues. A private life displayed on the screen is entertaining for others, blurring the line between public and private, between geographies and nations, between real and the fictional, and moreover it has consumed all aspects of our lives.<sup>25</sup> In this essay I will use some examples of Instagram posts, focusing on visually dominant social media posts to understand the ethical implications of this

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<sup>25</sup> Popular web statistics reports indicate that there were about 26.9 million users of Instagram in the world in early 2020 and every month more people are joining in. In India over 280 million are registered on Facebook and it is the most popular social media network in the region.

phenomenon. I will refer to a system of ethics prevalent in Indian philosophy that seems to capture the moral framework of this virtual world.

## **Ethical Questions Related to Social Media in General**

Two main factors contribute to the ambiguity of ethical interests in the space of social media, in particular those that show considerable opinion sharing like Twitter or Facebook. Firstly, the internet can support content that has uncertain origins. So, people do not feel causally related to originating unethical content, they are just passive transmitters of such information. Most of this transmission is ‘click bait’ or sensationalized news and posts. Most of these posts have no original author and are just forwarded or reposted. Sometimes original authors do raise an objection and claim ownership but as the image circulates, notions of copyright fade and there is no actual discernible origin that can be held accountable for the content, especially those that proffer advice or are unverified images. Guru and Sarukkai (2019) refer to the “authorless authority” of social media. According to them, a non-agential authority is a form of authority that does not have a specific agent as the authority figure. Traditions are one form of this agentless authority. They posit:

“There is no agent who can take responsibility for wielding authority and thus this authority also has no obvious notion of responsibility that is available.”

Furthermore, they suggest that rumour and gossip, such as those transmitted in the social media also have a similar lack of an agent. “Rumour and gossip really have no authors, nobody who can be held accountable. It is dispersive and generates power in its retellings.” They further recount that social media functions like rumour and gossip and that it, “attempts to legitimise itself and begins to function as a form of

social authority through a similar mechanism.” So, we find that content on social media ends up in a public space with almost no authorship responsibility.

The second issue with social media posts is that people do not perceive the consequences of their action in a concrete and relatable manner. The sites of agency, particularly in the virtual world are separated remotely from the sites of affect in the real world, and so in the case of phenomena such as cyber bullying, trolling, and fake news. The areas of affect are far removed from the perpetrator in terms of physical space. On the other hand, for agents who perceive themselves as ethical, hypervigilance about posting content on the internet has also become a common phenomenon. People judge the posts for appropriateness rather than actual social action. This appropriate perspective is commonly called “wokeness” and has again resulted in a lot of backlash on people who are regularly present on social media platforms.<sup>26</sup> In case of violence of language in comments or trolling in the virtual world, sometimes the only way people can get free of their online abusers is by isolating themselves from the social media or blocking communication from people that they perceive as a threat. People privatize their social media account, limiting their feed to friends and their select group, which again has an impact on their lives.

Instagram however seems to slide into a different kind of category among social media platforms. On Instagram, people want to be heard and seen and recognized as authors of content. Therefore, most accounts are public and most casual surfers do enjoy seeing the recognized posts in what we can term as a virtual public space. Let us look at some

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<sup>26</sup> An opinion piece on “The Problem with Wokeness” by David Brooks in the New York Times (June 7, 2018) states, “But wokeness jams together the perceiving and the proposing. In fact, wokeness puts more emphasis on how you perceive a situation — how woke you are to what is wrong — than what exactly you plan to do about it. To be woke is to understand the full injustice”.

phenomena and experiences associated with this platform to have a discussion on engaged ethics. I begin with describing a common ‘selfie’ phenomenon, on Instagram.

## **The Virtual Life on Instagram**

Ragini (name changed) my young university graduate friend adjusted her camera filter on the phone and she has clicked over twenty five photographs of herself. Then and after selecting one and adding a cute filter, she posts it on Instagram and co-shares it to her stories and her Facebook page. She types the text below the picture: “Hello there, y’all, good morning!”, followed by a ‘kisses’ emoticon symbol. She follows this with listing hashtags that include about 20 themes including #earlymorningface, #nomakeup, #sleepyhead, #sleptlate, #beforebreakfast, #readyfortheday, and finally #feelingpositive. This picture will show up on the scroll feed view of about 500 followers that she has. Within minutes around 30 people have seen her stories and about 20 people have liked her post. She is anxious and keeps checking her account until she has got about a hundred likes on this post. Then she relaxes into her routine. The picture itself is a private window into her life: it shows her getting up in the morning and clicking a selfie shot on her bed. But in reality, she was up for an hour earlier and had spent time on hair and makeup creating a pillow-face look, messy hair styled to perfection. After clearing away the actual mess of books and laptop on her bed and, artistically laying out her bed sheet with the creases in the correct place so that the shadows do not fall in the wrong places, she had positioned herself on the pillow her hair tucked into its place with invisible hairpins. She had a bedside lamp positioned to catch the best features of her face and then has edited and selected one out of the many pictures she had clicked. For those not familiar with Instagram posts who are wondering what the fuss is about, #sleepyface has about 24.5 thousand posts of sleeping people and sleepy cats and a typical image



posted in public with a followed hashtag, may garner anywhere between 500 to 12,000 ‘likes’, which means that so many more people have seen the photograph.

It is easy to understand the ethical restraints that are imposed on organizations that telecast news and media into our living rooms, but the kind of ethical and moral reasoning required to understand the public availability of privately generated content requires a re-examination of questions of justice and morality that can be applied to this phenomenon. Concerns around the idea of individuals being both generators and consumers of content require that we examine the new forms of ethical reasoning required for a disembodied affect.

In the next few sections, I intend to analyse the different ethical questions with respect to the social media posts from two perspectives. Firstly, the moral question of social media itself, perceiving time spent on the internet, particularly on these platforms as a vice. Deriving from an ethical tradition of Greek philosophy, which insists that a virtuous life that leads to the flourishing of human life. The second question relates these virtual presentations of the self as diminished experience, and also posts about oneself in the virtual world encourage self-deception or a projection of an inauthentic, isolated self. In this chapter, I will also describe a few case examples of ethical conflicts and issues that came up during my own participation in the Instagram community and discuss the ethical implications of each using some new multicultural forms of ethical concepts.

## **The Virtual and the Real**

A few years ago, even as I joined the online gaming community by playing multiplayer virtual reality games, I was soon addicted to playing these games. It was like a hobby addiction. For me, this addiction was something like being a part of a ‘gang’ or a fan group. After an eight hour almost continuous stint on a Sunday chasing online villains and

upgrading my character from level 12 to level 24, I was left with a headache, a wrist strain and a painful realisation that I had lost time for rest and relaxation. My game partners from different parts of the game were there with me the whole time, some of them were not sleeping in the night. We had virtually spent 8 x 10 person-hours chasing a fictional villain in a world where you were an avatar with superpowers. The physical exhaustion of working at a desk and the adrenaline rush were the after effects of this marathon playing, but as to the quality of my time, I cannot deny I did derive as much pleasure from it as say watching a movie marathon, spending time on a long match in a spectator sport like cricket or football, or going to an all-night party. My body was sore but mentally I had one of the most interesting times of my life.

Most interaction of communities on social media is evaluated for its consequences related to possible self-harm or in terms of the consequences it has on the reduced experience of life. The argument for this comes from the idea that, somehow, we lead a less than enriched life on the virtual platforms and so our digital interactions are but pale shadows of a richer multi-sensorial experience. For example, a discussion on Facebook is less fulfilling than a gathering of friends talking in a café. On the other hand, writing about the experience of immersion in the net, Thieme (2004:22-23) suggests that cyberspace is a territory of immersive social exploration:

“The Internet is not so much a set of skills as it is a culture. Guided by mentors, learning like wolves to hunt together, we learn how to hang in the medium. The images on our monitors are icons, windows disclosing possibilities far beyond our home planet. Inner and outer space alike are explored by tele-robotic sensory extensions, revealing the medium in which we have always been swimming.”

Cyberspace or the virtual world on social media is not an individual experience. It is as social as our exploration of new territories. It is also a continuous learning space. Learning is informal and mediated by mentors of different kinds: technological mentors or content mentors or even group mentors (a social group that sometimes even takes on the name of “tribe” or “instafam” even if everyone is just a ‘virtual’ friend).

Why do the older generation view digital media with suspicion? This generation gap has resulted in surprisingly negative theorising about the digital world, paying less or no attention to its significance as a valid social experience. This is perhaps because the people evaluating and theorising about social media, (such as me) live in a transitional phase of moving to a digital society. This is perhaps because, the people doing theory (including ethics) are not as adventurous or familiar with the social media platforms as younger people, who are very familiar with the various platforms, and younger people are still not old enough yet to begin theorising about their participation. Sometimes academics studying social media are almost anthropologists studying a tribe of people who are so different from them that within the interpretations of what it is to be a virtual self, there is already a bias about these forms of engagements.

In this context, Roache (2019:138) argues that the ideal of friendship that is being used to judge friendships and community on the social media is real world friendship. Critiquing a position that social media friendships are inferior compared to friendships in the actual world, she argues that, for people who have had real friendships and time to hangout in their neighbourhoods, the substitution of a virtual friendship seems like a cost to intimacy and that makes virtual friendships only of value if they are an added extension of real-world friendships. On the other hand, young people seem to have no problems with friendships on social media; they see virtual friendships as being as valuable as friendships in the real world.

The other assumption is that all experiences of the real world are sensually rich and yield value to our life. Modern ways of living, in most people's everyday lives are still lacking stimulation for our senses and unless one makes the effort to create enriching experiences in the real world, a computer screen game experience is no different from a regular visit to a football stadium. However, in the absence of an actual opportunity to play a game, even a sports spectator has no experience. It is likely that an interactive virtual game may be equally engaging for a netizen. A friend on the internet may provide better support and be more available or more relatable to, than a friend who lives next door. Many 'netzians' feel closer to the community of online people who are more like themselves and seem to resonate with their own values, ideas and opinions.

If social belongingness is given by inter-subjectivity, the immersive technologies of these platforms seem to create genuine spaces for interactions to take place. We are capable of occupying physical spaces with other human beings and yet not experience belonging. Social barriers like caste, gender, that of differently abled people, race and even nationalities create a lack of diverse social experiences in the public physical space. The problem is again that in continuously comparing the virtual world to the standards of a real world, we forget to account for the diversities of experience in the real world. There are possibilities of exclusions and lack of true friendship and companionship in the real world as much as there is that possibility in the virtual world. The only difference is that the tactile senses are absent, the body is absent in a real way. In cultures where the body plays an important role in affiliations, the virtual world will diminish the quality of experience. In cultures where touch is already mediated by strict social rules, I suggest that the lack of tactile feedback seems to matter less.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In India perhaps it is most evident because of social barriers to touch and hugs in most communities. In fact, sometimes a hug may be viewed as a violation of

It may seem to an observer that a young person who is hanging out with a phone or a computer, is not interested any more in actual friendships or in hanging out with the family. Similar ideas prevailed with the coming of the television and of the internet. But on these platforms is the individual truly isolated? It is also possible that the person is engaging intentionally with her group of friends on Facebook or arguing fiercely with a group of dissenters on Instagram. Unlike the television and the newspapers, through the medium of these platforms it is not so much that the social media comes into the individual space but rather that the individual places themselves into the social media intentionally. Physically represented, an individual is putting up a notice board for others to see, a display cabinet that represents them and the feelings, opinions and images that she wants to convey.

I also want to add a note on the physical experience from a gender sensitive perspective. In many cultures physical public spaces including playgrounds, streets, and restaurants are unsafe for women. Even within the domestic space, for instance, non-social media time is not about improving quality of life or relaxing. The time offline is filled with domestic chores for most girls and women. They are already isolated in some sense. We have had cases of “bored housewives” who use the internet as an escape from their everyday reality. Until the time that we can provide real world alternatives, social media belongingness may not be such a bad thing for women.<sup>28</sup>

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personal space particularly for women. I had to teach final year college students how to shake hands firmly with the opposite sex as a part of their placement orientation.

<sup>28</sup> An article in the media refers to these numbers among women users of the internet:<https://www.indiatvnews.com/business/india/housewives-use-maximum-internet-iamai-report-18792.html>. The article points out that about 26% of women who are homemakers surf the web and many of them have also used the virtual world to start businesses and work from home. Though actual

## **Is There a Separate Fake Virtual Self?**

The most censure of social media posts has to do with the genre of photographs called selfies. Katz, J., & Crocker, E. (2016 Katz, J., & Crocker, E. 2016) suggest that not only has the act of taking selfies been condemned but the act of studying them also has come under criticism. “Selfie” posts thus become the central stereotype under which forms of fake-self projection and self-advertisement face censure.

So now, we begin to address the second question. Does participating in social media diminish our authenticity and sense of the self? Are we engaging in deceit when we post our lives on social media? When we look at Ragini's presence in this virtual world or check her posts on Instagram, we find we know her interests, what she enjoys eating, the books she reads. It seems to archive her life almost like a diary. From the comments on her posts, we can gauge who her friends are, who they love to hang out with and what TV series they love watching. But the question that seems to bother us is simple: is this her “real” life or is she “faking it”?

The reason we feel that Ragini is faking her life on these posts is because we find her selectively sharing her moments on Instagram. Unlike a sensational autobiography written to reveal all aspects of life, good and bad, we feel that there may be fictional or untrue elements in her posts. She may not own the jewellery she wore on a post or the pretty beach may have an overflowing dustbin just out of the reach of the camera angle. She might have used a filter to make the image brighter, neater, and more vibrant. As we have seen in the example above, she has modelled a sleepy face, which is not actually her sleepy face.

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digital penetration in India is low, among those who can access networks and technology, housewives form a large segment of users.

Speaking about the projection of oneself online, Child (2011:18) discusses the nature of a body project in the virtual world when people create avatars or digital identities.

“Since these environments enable interaction between people to be conducted entirely online, the absence of direct visual and (usually) audio contact and the flexibility. The technology provides for creating digital representation, enables users to adopt new identities without physical constraints, becoming an idealised ‘body project’.”

Even so, plagiarising content or photo-shopping yourself in locations you have never visited are more easily seen as instances of “cheating” or “deception...”. Advertisements in a sense are also a form of deception, but we are less annoyed because we do not hold advertisers to account for honesty. The authenticity question becomes more important when commerce or profits are attached to it. Sponsorship has to be declared in the posts.

## **The Microcelebrity Problems**

Researchers working on social media platforms have begun to examine what they call attention economy. When a social media presence garners many followers, the person becomes an influencer, otherwise referred to as a microcelebrity.

“Microcelebrity is defined as a set of practices where in a user’s audience is viewed as a fan base with whom they constantly engage to ensure continued popularity. Presenting the self must be specially constructed and managed for consumption.” (Bishop, 2019:35)

One of the problems with microcelebrity accounts is the problem of their position as public influencers or as public figures. Some internet

celebrities have an exceptionally large fan following. A professional golfer turned influencer has over fifty-nine thousand followers on Instagram in 2018, one of the top ten that year. Companies approach the influencers with gifts and free products and feel it is a good way to approach direct marketing. The moment I hit 500 followers on Instagram, I was approached by several brands of beauty products and clothes, (never mind that my posts were all book reviews) to endorse them in exchange for free products.

The ethical position of influencers, even if they are not brand ambassadors is seen as unethical, particularly if they do not keep up with the popular social causes. Fans who give these people their time and attention demand that these celebrities represent the opinions of their fans. With increasing awareness of social issues on Instagram, social influencers find themselves unable to respond quick enough to social pressures and being “woke.” Like celebrities, they are under pressure to be socially responsible, promote brands ethically and associate themselves with the right people and participate in community building. Failure to do so draws censure and sometimes even threats. As influencers, the ethical responsibility increases as their accountability increases. In Indian philosophy, the people who are influencers are called the *Shrestha*, (lit. ‘Significant’). The people who are significant have a public responsibility to behave in proper ways. In fact, a verse in the Bhagavad-Gita text says: “Whatever way a great person behaves, people behave the same way. By whatever standards he acts, the entire world follows that.”<sup>29</sup> The implication is once someone becomes significant in society, they are to be responsible for the kinds of action they participate in.

We have seen this phenomenon of self-presentation in celebrity life as represented in the media. Celebrities are called on by their professions to continuously project themselves in how they want people

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<sup>29</sup> Translation by the author



to see them, not necessarily how they are. In fact, there are many professionals who are coaches in makeovers and presentation. In turn we have a new generation of microcelebrity called influencers on social media who do have the power to sway people towards an opinion or a product. More than a thousand people follow their accounts and they are not celebrities in real life. Is my friend a celebrity or is she trying to imitate a celebrity, is she being aesthetic in projecting herself as someone who's just woken up, or is she acting out a role of a model?

## **Community and the Virtual World**

This sense of a diminished self that is projected somewhat inauthentically comes from a presupposition that one must be honest about one's nature, and not misrepresent or exaggerate one's position on these platforms. The question here is, is there an authentic self that one should project even in the physical world? In social gatherings is it not common that we put on fake smiles and graciously congratulate the hostess even when the food is terrible? What is the authentic self that has been diminished in an Instagram post that has been prearranged and curated? If we cannot apply the moral grounds of honest self-expression to Instagram, then would not that be a very a social space? Wouldn't it be a place where 'anything goes'? One could say that understanding the self as being always fluid, projecting and not permanent is a better position to stand in than some authentic self, limiting our being to a particular set of characteristics and its expression as unmediated in the real world. A part of this also confronts the idea that a camera is a truthful 'eye'. This in itself is a flawed premise.

In such a case, how do we to begin to understand the moral phenomenon around these posts on social media platforms? I suggest that a good moral framework for understanding these phenomena would not be sufficient using our traditional ethics of media and censorship,

but would require us to work through an ethics of art aesthetics or think through an ethics of curatorship.

Ragini's behaviour may even seem narcissistic and totally irrelevant to many people who have not experienced the pressures of belonging to a virtual world. As I discussed Instagram with some of my older colleagues, they were dismissive. "It's just self-obsessed behaviour and addiction. They had better read a good book or do something useful with their time." Yet others described it as a part of the affiliation need of younger people, an addiction to being popular, reprehensible as "a waste of time." However, for Ragini and many others like her, Instagram is a serious part of their community life. Their sense of belonging is defined by the numerous online groups and virtual friends they belong to. The belongingness of a virtual life is actually a real experience, a part of the social make-up of a netizen.

This brings us to the first ethical issue that underlies people's engagement with social media, the vice of self-harm. While people who engage with social media for some purpose are judged by their purposiveness—to market a home-made product, to call attention to a social problem, to share tips for a crafts project, a book, a reader's discussion forum and so on, a non-purposive voyeuristic use of social media is frowned upon as non-virtuous. People of my generation born in the seventies, or before (including me) are sometimes apologetic about using Facebook or Instagram.

Most of my posts on Instagram are around book reviews. I became aware of a conflict in my reader community on Instagram about a post of a book image. A community of book readers on Instagram call themselves "bookstagrammars". Bookstagrammars not only review books, but they stage the book along with other objects creating a visual panorama. Sometimes publishers may have sent them a copy of the book but mostly they are readers who love the aesthetics of their books. In this case, one reader wanted to post the review of a book so she just used

a screenshot of an original book displayed on a bookstagrammer's public account, reposted it without credit and wrote her review. According to her she was just "using an image" of the book that she had, the content and her reading were genuine. When this second image began to circulate widely, the original creator noticed her photograph being used without credit and called out the "plagiarism" in public. The community broke into an argument over this and lots of schisms appeared in this community. The original creator spoke about the 'labour' and creative input that she had spent on setting up the image. The original creator considered a screenshot without acknowledgement as an insult to that artistic effort.

So, what is the moral standing of the person who reposted? If we look at the post as an aesthetic project rather than an intellectual one, we can compare it to art imitation. If someone copies the Mona Lisa work of art, an expert or even a lay person knows it is a copy and it is a 'fake', but in case of a digital media it's possible to exactly recreate the curation, imitation is simpler. Professionals use copyrights and ownership claims. If a boss takes credit for an employee's work or a daughter passes off her mother's art as her own, these issues become more complicated. In recording this seemingly banal protest about the wrongful use of a photograph, there is something nuanced that comes into play here that is so foundational to the social that one does not actually consider it as a 'moral' rule. Therefore, we need a nuanced combination of ethical principles that highlight the context of these reposts. Are they recreations or copies?

Furthermore, we could discuss the ethics of community inclusions and exclusions within the framework of these posts that are meant for the consumption of a group or a community, and then it is bound by the rules of that particular community. This is not a universal consequential ethics but a normative position or what I would choose to call as contextual ethics.

The theory we can use appropriately to understand this social form of ethical behaviour is perhaps virtue ethics. As flourishing of oneself is aided by following virtuous action, which is not to copy. But virtue is context independent and such ethical dilemmas are what we can call as context dependent. In these online communities, an implicit set of rules that are expected to be followed are present. These implicit rules within the community create social norms, a 'code of honour' if we can call it that. The idea of a moral code given by one's place and standing comes from the concept of *Dharma*, the moral code in Indian philosophy. Unlike a list of virtues that are good or bad intrinsically, dharma is given by context, and following any type of code has its consequence, (intended or unintended) that is popularly known as 'karma'.

The code of dharma for any person is based on where one wants to be and who one wants to be, given by a being's relationship to the world around them. For instance, if one wants to be a 'mother', under the mother's code of *dharma*, one can make excuses for a child's criminal behaviour, it is the right code of conduct because a mother's dharma is to protect. The same person as an upstanding citizen, following the code of a patriotic citizen may give up her child to the police if she so desires. Both these actions are right within their own contexts; both are wrong when viewed from the other context. So, if the person who reposted considered herself a bookstagrammer, she is wrong to have used the image, it was her 'dharma' to acknowledge the original, given that she accepted she belonged in the community. Since the space she used to post this was a part of the community's or of the tribe's, she was bound by these implicit rules. So, the community decided that she had lost their trust and she lost the support of many followers within a day, a kind of a social boycott by the community that punished her.

## **Judging a Social Media Post: Beauty not Truth**

But what kind of moral framework or agency would be appropriate for the people who post on Instagram like my friend Ragini? Can we even begin to judge such an action of posting a selfie from a moral framework? Is it just an innocuous act of self-projection, an advertisement of the persona, or of the good life one is leading? Most people seem to think so. Psychological problems associated with seeing other people in unrealistic situations or having unrealistically happy or curated lives has also led to a movement of hashtags that would say #reallife, #nofilter, #thisisreal, #authenticselfie, #AsIam and so on.

Culture and geography seemingly transcended in the cyberspace are a very influential part of the moral frame of representation of oneself. Capurro (2013:212) writes:

“We are still far from a global digital culture of mutual respect, validation and appreciation based on trust with regard to such cultural differences. Trust is engendered by an understanding of the otherness of the other self/selves, enabling new forms of interplay between personal and socio-cultural who-ness and opening new spaces of freedom to show ourselves and our selves off and also withdraw from such self-display in both the Cyberworld and the physical world”.

We know that there are three main streams of ethics that can be used to understand most conceptions of moral behaviour traditionally, they are: Aristotelian virtue ethics; deontological ethics; and consequentialism. While virtue ethics focuses on action that is right because it cultivates values and virtues and an action is wrong when it cultivates vices, deontology explains ethics with reference to duties and moral rules. Consequentialism of course, judges an action with reference to the consequences of one's behaviour.

The nature of the projected post if seen as a presentation of the life of the person uploading the post is in some sense autobiographical; we may be required to judge the intention or the motive of the post. I posit here that this intention has to be considered but the category of motive must be much more similar to the intention of an artist, and not that of a person under oath to reveal the truth and nothing but the truth.

Artists do not paint the world as it is. They paint the world as they would like other people to feel it or see it. They colour and curate the visual and the text through their imagination. In that sense, Ragini is creating a piece of art that is digital, even if she does not declare it so. Her photo is performative, and it affects her followers as a performance would. The effect is perhaps the very reason why her followers read and follow her posts. The act of such a social media post is the creation of virtual art, performative, textual, oral, or digital. Thus, the social form of the posts, particularly the ones that cannot be actually against the law or a deliberate threat must be seen as art. Created and shared on an ephemeral medium no doubt, but still art.

On a study of Instagram posts by a specific community, Haynes (2016) writes of the curation process on Instagram:

“For many users worldwide, this is the appeal of Instagram – turning the ordinary into the nostalgically beautiful. It allows for the curation of a set of photographs that displays the artistic sensibilities of the user, the beautiful places they have visited, their stylised selfies and their clever eye for finding interesting compositions among the ordinary moments of life.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Haynes, Nell. 2016. *Social Media in Northern Chile*, London: UCL Press, p.72, <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/83112>

## **Conclusion**

What kind of aesthetic ethics can be applied to digital art? If we go by Tolstoy's claim that art should have a purpose, then most of the posts on Instagram cannot be considered as 'art'. Some of these captured photographs are "time pass" or ways of overcoming boredom. If we consider that art is a representation of an artist's vantage point, then perhaps we could raise ethical questions about representation itself or about the voices or objects that are represented.

Here I bring to the discussion my second case study, based on the idea of concealment, some things that were inadvertently shared by someone and then lead to issues and problems for other people. This is the fall out of a peculiar principle where one can "repost" other people's images and feed on one's post and popularize the feed, but as discussed in the earlier post, it has to be acknowledged with the name of the original "handle". In this case, a person posted something on her private account, an image of her drinking. She was careful to keep this account private from her family as her parents did not support women drinking alcohol. Another friend, in all innocence wanting to wish her happy birthday, screenshot the image of her friend, and made a virtual post in her account that was public. The family were notified, and there were repercussions for the girl breaking a family rule.

Véliz (2019:152) discusses in detail the notion of privacy on the internet and comments about the dangers of loss of privacy and its consequences. We know that non-consensual sharing of other people's information causes both individual and collective harm. So perhaps the extra curation is meant to extend this notion of privacy to a kind of a barrier that conceals the real. The act of a curated digital representation of one's life is an attempt to show yet not reveal one's private spaces and life unconsciously. Candid photos of people, unless having voyeuristic value, tend to be posted less. Therefore, what we see as in concealing the authentic may actually be derived from the idea of "do no

harm”, the ethical value of *ahimsa* or nonviolence. While nonviolence is normally used in a sense of bodily harm, the principle in theory applies both to expressed communication and unexpressed intention. A kind of ethical censorship or self-censorship becomes then a resolution of the moral guideline for posting. Similar practices like that of a trigger warning about graphic content, or that something is inappropriate for children are now used.

If we consider social media posts such as those on Instagram or its video cousin, Reels (also TikTok) as mediums of popular art like graffiti or banners, we can look at the ethical framework through which we evaluate art. Larger questions of truth and authenticity or even social accountability may not be suitable for the context of a beautiful image of a breakfast plate. In fact, even its edibility may not be validated, the picture stands for what a food photo can be, not what it should be as a food item. Rather than subject social media posts to norms or to the moral gaze of ethical righteousness, we could allow for the generosity of creative expression and flexibility that is allowed by the digital medium. Given that Instagram is as valid as a public social space, the community seems to also self-monitor and correct itself; people who are new learn the ropes and then join the community as initiates and learners.<sup>31</sup>

## **Netzian Vocabulary Guide**

*Clickbait:* content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page.

*Social Media Platforms:* social media applications such as Facebook and Instagram, other discussion vlogs that allow visual posts

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<sup>31</sup> Acknowledgements: I acknowledge the contribution of my Instagram groups on social media (my planner and crafty friends) who have been my mentors and co-inhabitants in the virtual world. They not only taught me how to hang in there, but I have developed deep and lasting spaces of friendship there.



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to uploaded for viewing and comment by others. Loosely the term has begun to incorporate WhatsApp and other 'text messenger' platforms that allow for group posts too.

*Instagram Handle:* Your account name on Instagram, your cyber address/ identity that can be tagged with the @ sign.

*Feed:* A feed is a set of notifications that show up on the screen on social media when new content/comments or likes are posted by someone. Your feed usually shows up as a series of unread posts on your personal home page of the application.

*Hashtag: the symbol #:* This symbol is used to connect the post under topical tags that allows it to show up easily on searches. Multiple hashtags ensure that a book, for example, can show up under reviews, the author name, the genre, reading recommendations, or even your personal preference for reading. These also help follow one's interests and search for new handles to follow.

*Influencers:* People who have more than a thousand followers and a fan base on Instagram (also called Microcelebrities)

*Groups:* collection of individuals that gather around a theme. Say a fan following of some author, a crafts group, etc. Instagram and Facebook have pages for groups. Also used by commercial establishments as a visitors' page to announce products and create a personal interaction with their customer base. Bookstagram, foodgram, travelgram and so on are all topical hashtags and communities that follow themes.

*Instafam/tribe:* Words used to describe a closely knit group on Instagram. People refer to each other as part of "my tribe" on Instagram.

*Stories*: Temporary videos or photos that stay on your profile for a limited time. More instantaneous and ephemeral than posts, stories are mini films or slide shows.

*Followers/army*: A group of people who follow you on your feed. If your feed is public, you can have strangers following your stories and posts.

*DM*: Acronym for a direct message.

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## ETHICAL PROBLEMS OF THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

*Ondji'I Toung*<sup>32</sup>

### **Introduction**

What are the ethical problems related to the pharmaceutical industry? How can they be addressed? Is a balance possible between ethical and industrial, as well as commercial and economic considerations in the pharmaceutical industry sector? How can the social and economic utility of medicines be reconciled with the moral and ethical values of societies? The social, economic and ethical utility of the industry needs no further proof. It is thanks to this activity that populations have access to medicines and are able to regain their health and improve their lives. Hence, the pharmaceutical industry is at the service of the common good. However, its practices such as the commodification of humans for example, driven by the frantic and rapid search for higher economic profit, weigh down the reputation of this enterprise. There is an urgent need to mediate between the economic, social and ethical interests through the criterion of relationality, which makes justice to the human according to Arthur Rich's terms.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Ondji'I Toung, Globethics.net National Contact Cameroon.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Rich, *Éthique économique*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1994, p. 91.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where therapy and prophylaxis against the disease are at the heart of debates between researchers, investors and public authorities,<sup>34</sup> dealing with the ethical problems of the pharmaceutical industry entails expressing the need to emphasise ethical issues that arise in this sector of economic and social activities framed by legal rules. According to Marc Mentre, “In scientific research, it is not the answer that matters, but the question”.<sup>35</sup> This chapter aims to balance moral or ethical concerns with economic and commercial ones, both of which are in competition within the pharmaceutical industry. This approach focuses on highlighting their positive or negative interaction. Such an interest is more generally expressed by Philippe Fouchard who thinks that

“...the relationships between law and moral, which is a recurring issue, present a certain level of specificity and of topicality in international trade, with the expansion of all sorts of international trafficking: war weapons, drugs, human organs and influence.

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<sup>34</sup> Philippe Froute, « Course au vaccin contre le Covid-19 : la recherche du “bien commun” n’a jamais semblé aussi loin » Université Paris-Est Créteil Val de Marne (UPEC), March 30, 2020. Here the author highlights oppositions of economic and political interests, particularly between the governments of Angela Merkel of Germany and Donald Trump of USA. The controversy between Didier Raouf and the French scientific community surrounding Chloroquine as a treatment base for the disease and the antagonistic interventions of the Malagasy and World Health Organisation (WHO) authorities on the discovery of the drug against the virus in question can also be known here.

<sup>35</sup> Marc Mentre, « Y a-t-il une éthique propre à la recherche pour le développement ? », Theme of the first international seminary on development ethics held on May 27, 2005 at the Collège de France, by le Comité consultatif de déontologie and d'éthique (CCDE) de l'Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD): <http://www.ast.s.asso.fr/site/art.php?id=325>, August 10, 2020, 23:26.

Faced with a positive law, whose sources are diverse (statal and transnational), only universal values can intervene.”<sup>36</sup>

What universal values could actually be involved in arbitration or mediation between ethics and the pharmaceutical industry for example? How can they be implemented? Besides, what are some of the common practices in the pharmaceutical industry? What are the motivations, the effects and how could the responsibilities be shared? This work is at the crossroad of microeconomics, macroeconomics in open economy, law and economics ethics. In fact, pharmaceutical enterprises do not evolve outside profitability, which underlies firms’ actions in general. Also, most of them are multinational companies, which interact with foreign, private, and public entities in order to improve the health of populations. This work is built around two principal points, namely: an outline of the practices observed in the pharmaceutical industry; and an analysis of these practices in terms of motivations, effects and responsibilities.

## **Practices of the Pharmaceutical Industry**

### *A. Good/Ethical Practices*

The pharmaceutical industry is not completely closed to all ethical concerns. A minimum level of ethics is indeed taken into consideration by this industry, which seeks to ameliorate the access of populations to medicines.<sup>37</sup> Here, ethics has a dual source: the external source, that is

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<sup>36</sup> Philippe Fouchard, « Droit et morale dans les relations économiques internationales », in : Ahmed El Kosheri (Dir.), *L'éthique dans les relations économiques internationales*, Paris, Pedone, 2006, p. 4ff.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, « L'éthique et l'industrie pharmaceutique : un difficile équilibre à trouver » in *L'éthique dans les relations économiques internationales*, Paris, Pedone, 2006 ; idem., pp 67-109.

the intervention of states in this sector; as well as the internal source, which is controlled by the enterprises themselves.<sup>38</sup>

### *1. External Source of Ethics in the Pharmaceutical Industry*

The external source of ethics in the pharmaceutical industry falls under multilateral commercial law following two criteria: the criterion of convergence between ethics and multilateral commercial law; and the criterion of inclusion of ethics within multilateral commercial law.

#### *a. Convergence between Ethics and Multilateral Commercial Law*

The facilitation, by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later on by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), of free international movement of medicines as essential commodities for humans, is a determining asset in the supply of medicines to populations. Thus, the complete elimination of tariff measures on pharmaceutical products and medical equipment also leads to a decrease in the import price of medicines. Emphasis here is made on the convergence between the interests of international trade and those of public health. As a matter of fact, and according to Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, there is a convergence in the different purposes of laws: while multilateral commercial law seeks, for economic reasons, to encourage access of products in markets through removal of custom duties, international public health law instead seeks to encourage the access of populations to medicines for public health purposes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In France for example, the Agence nationale de sécurité du médicament et des produits de santé (ANSM), *Guide des bonnes pratiques de fabrication*, Paris, 2019, states in his introduction (p.10), that the pharmaceutical industry of the member States of the European Union (EU) is at a high level of quality management in the development, manufacture and control of medicines.

<sup>39</sup> However, Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier paradoxically note that some countries, in particular developing countries that are not

*b. Inclusion of Ethics in Multilateral Commercial Law*

The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the WTO dedicates, at the international level, the principle of patent protection “for every invention of product or process, in all technological fields”.<sup>40</sup> This Agreement thus makes the protection of new pharmaceutical products and processes obligatory, thereby enabling their manufacture through patent rights, for a minimum duration of 20 years. In reality, the WTO through the TRIPS Agreement achieves an integration of health protection within the objectives of multilateral commercial law, which plays a role in the protection of non-market values at the international level.<sup>41</sup>

*2. Internal Source to Pharmaceutical Enterprises or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Pharmaceutical Industry*

The need for an enterprise to be classified as a “citizen” requires it to be able to internalise social ethics values. Actually, the expectations of public authorities, consumers, investors, and to society in general lead enterprises to adopt an ethical behaviour with rights and duties.<sup>42</sup>

Among its duties, a modern enterprise must particularly assume its social responsibility. CSR is a voluntary commitment by an enterprise to promote standards that go beyond constraining legal standards, of legal and contractual origin (national and international), in the fields of the environment, human rights or health protection. This is a commitment to

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signatories to the WTO agreements, which most need to promote access for their population to medicines, continue to maintain sometime very high costs.

<sup>40</sup> Article 27 g 1 of the TRIPS Agreement.

<sup>41</sup> For more information, cf., Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *idem*. The authors specify that provisions are made in the WTO and in its Declarations on this subject, allowing states to take measures those infringe patent rights on public health grounds. However and in particular, the Doha Declaration does indeed allow States to issue compulsory licenses to third parties, that is to say, to companies which are not those that hold the patents.

<sup>42</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid*.



act in an ethical manner and to contribute to economic development, while improving the company's overall quality of life.

The pharmaceutical industry is not left out of this movement, instead, ethics, even though non-formalised,<sup>43</sup> is primarily extended in this sector in terms of access to medicines and hence, access to health care for a large population of patients all over the world. Generally, and according to Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, ethics is understood as the involvement of less developed countries in health programmes. It takes the form of donations or partnerships, which reflect an awareness of the existence of health problems. This is the case of Aventis or Sanofi-Synthélabo who donate medicines often distributed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). However, these actions are limited and can sometimes be interpreted as a means of establishing a relationship of trust with consumers, with investors, and with public authorities who tend to regulate this sector. Ethics appears here as a marketing tool. One could say that such an ethics is more pragmatic than moral, far from an ethics of conviction.<sup>44</sup>

Whether such ethics is pragmatic or moral, formalised or not within self-regulatory documents, it is understood in terms of access to medicines. It therefore appears as a growing concern of pharmaceutical enterprises.<sup>45</sup> However, at a time when biotechnology has profoundly

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<sup>43</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier nevertheless note that most of the time, the ethical commitment of companies is formalised in an internal document that may take various forms: code of good conduct, ethical charter, code of ethics, principles of behaviour, principles of business conduct, corporate principles, guiding principles, etc.; and question the building nature of these internal company initiatives.

<sup>44</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> See, also, Valérie Gateaux, Jean-Michel Heitz, « L'accès aux médicaments : un défi pour l'industrie pharmaceutique », *Humanisme et Entreprise* 2008/1 n° 286, pp. 13-28. Here the authors note that, through the concern and challenge for

changed the nature of medicines, the content of ethics cannot be limited to this issue.

## **Problematic Practices**

There are practices in the pharmaceutical industry that raise ethical concerns. As part of this work, commodification and the use of human beings, as well as fraud and their influence on the medical profession will be examined.

### *A. Commodification and the Use of Human Beings*

Commodification is the transformation into a thing which is moving, dynamic or a simple mental representation. In this concern, and because of the progressive transformation of medicines under the effects of biotechnologies, Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier think that medicines have turned into protean assets and the pharmaceutical market into a biopharmaceutical market.<sup>46</sup> For the authors, medicines derived from living organisms, particularly human beings have transformed the human body into raw material thus, an object at the service of the pharmaceutical industry.

### *B. Fraudulent Practices Aimed at Disguising Side Effects*

In an article entitled “Practices of the pharmaceutical industry denounced”, Ghislain Martel takes up Gwen Olsen’s testimony

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pharmaceutical companies of access to medicines, ethics and profitability are compatible, the particular interest is reconciled to the general interest, which in this case is the right to life.

<sup>46</sup> See Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid.* Here the authors point out that the expression of protean seems the most appropriate ; the actual or promised metamorphoses of the drug make a part of its future almost undetectable, and with it the consequences of this “commercialisation” of humans on humans themselves. The authors condemn cloning and the use of human genome.

mentioned in his book, “*Confessions of an Ex Drug Pusher*” where the author gives his observations and criticisms of the dishonest practices of multinational medicine companies.<sup>47</sup> Martel reports that after a lucrative career of more than 15 years as a sales representative within great enterprises of the pharmaceutical industry such as Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Abbott Laboratories, Gwen Olsen became an implacable voice for all victims of the abuses committed by these companies and for the hundreds of thousands of patients they have taken to their graves. She states that, when a medicine is marketed, “...less than 50% of the side effects associated with the medicine are reported, or even known”.

A twofold economic and ethical problem arises here regarding the usefulness of medicines, and the satisfaction of customers, who are consumers of pharmaceutical products.

### *C. Influence on the Medical Corps and other Stakeholders*

Ghislain Martel argues that Western health care systems, and increasingly education systems, are being manipulated by the pharmaceutical industry, which controls and indoctrinates the medical corps through institutions, medical journals and certain charities.<sup>48</sup> This influence of the pharmaceutical industry on other stakeholders in the sector is corruption.

## **Motivations, Effects and Responsibilities Related to the Pharmaceutical Industry**

Firstly, the motivations of the pharmaceutical industry and the effects of their products will be examined. Secondly, the responsibilities

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<sup>47</sup> Ghislain Martel, « *Les pratiques de l'industrie pharmaceutiques dénoncées* », <https://advitae.net/articles-sante/2.Medicine-et-societe/Les-pratiques-de-lindustrie-pharmaceutique-denoncees>, March 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Ghislain Martel, *ibid.*

of different actors will be established with a view to achieving equity in the sector.

*A. Motivations and Effects*

First of all, it will be a question of exposing the motivations of industrialists in the pharmaceutical sector before assessing the effects of pharmaceutical products.

*1. Motivations*

*a. Good Motivations*

The pharmaceutical industry is driven by noble goals, namely: the search for health and life of humans, as well as easy access to medicines by people, particularly in the poorest countries, within the framework of international common good.<sup>49</sup>

*b. Motivation Deemed to Be Bad*

The pursuit of greater economic efficiency or of higher profits is an important point that weighs down the reputation of the pharmaceutical industry. This is motivated by the spirit of the contemporary capitalist economic system which is the frantic and rapid search for maximum material profit.

*2. Effects*

*a. Positive Effects*

The positive effects of products of the pharmaceutical industry are remarkable on the lives of individuals and societies.

*Actual and Expected Therapeutic and Prophylactic Benefits*

There is no doubt that medicines and vaccines are important for humans. Considered as goods in international trade, they make it

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<sup>49</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid.*

possible to regain one's health and sometimes to stay alive.<sup>50</sup> Medicines are factors of actual and expected therapeutic and prophylactic benefits. In the name of a certain philosophical conception of health and ethics, the access of populations to pharmaceutical products in sufficient quality and quantity appears to be a legitimate objective.<sup>51</sup>

*Actual and Expected Economic Benefits*

It goes without saying that pharmaceutical industries provide several jobs and are a source of revenue for states and enterprises dealing in that sector. They cover a vast global market and mobilise huge financial resources for investment in the domain of research and development.

*b. Negative Effects*

Some of the negative effects include the considerable number of victims of the undesirable effects of drugs, the torture of patients by medicines, dependency on medication, depression and side effects affecting different body parts, and patients' behaviour, for instance violence, school dropout, suicide, etc.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, an increase in the number of diseases and that of patients is observable.<sup>53</sup> Also, given the fact that the pharmaceutical industry controls and indoctrinates the medical corps, the consumption of medicines increases drastically. Ghislain Martel points out that in recent years, the consumption of medicines has never been so high in the history of humankind. He notes that one person out three is taking or has taken psychotropic medication.

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<sup>50</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Agence nationale de sécurité du médicament et des produits de santé (ANSM), p. 13. Here in particular, the share of spending by pharmaceutical industries was decisive in overall global health spending between 2002 and 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Ghislain Martel, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Ghislain Martel, *ibid.*

Patients no longer take one medicine, but two, three or four simultaneously or sometimes even more!<sup>54</sup>

In addition, there are the environmental effects of the pharmaceutical industry. The US Green Technology states that:

“Pharmaceuticals in some form date back to the Middle Ages, but in modern days there are hundreds of prescription and over-the-counter medications available. Not only do humans consume pharmaceuticals, but livestock consumes millions of doses, as well. The global pharmaceutical market continues to grow year by year, and with it environmental concerns pertaining to not just production, but also consumer waste and disposal”.<sup>55</sup>

### *B. Responsibilities*

The notion of responsibility basically refers to a three-tier relation: the person who is responsible; the domain of responsibility (duties, actions, attitudes, nature); and the body to which one is accountable (for instance a court, the people affected by a decision, personal conscience and God).<sup>56</sup> Given that the domain of responsibility has been widely highlighted above through practices and negative effects, this part will focus more on the people who are responsible and the object of their responsibilities.

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<sup>54</sup> Ghislain Martel, « Le profit: une dynamique plutôt risquée pour la santé », <https://advitae.net/articles-sante/5.Sante-et-actualite/25-faits-detudes-sur-les-derives-pharmaceutiques-et-la-vaccination.177.htm>, Dec. 2014.

<sup>55</sup> See *The Environmental impact of the pharmaceutical industry*, in <https://usgreentechnology.com/the-environmental-impact-of-the-pharmaceutical-industry>

<sup>56</sup> Otfried Höffe (Sous la direction de), *Petit dictionnaire d'éthique*, Cerf, Fribourg, 1993.

*1. The Responsibilities of Public and Multilateral Authorities*

With a view that public authorities strengthen regulations, one of the emergencies is that international public authorities found a principle that prohibits or restricts the use of human organs as “raw material” in pharmaceutical industries.<sup>57</sup> Generally, normalisation and quality control of medicines should be done more rigorously by competent authorities. Moreover, in this sector public authorities should make CSR mandatory. In fact, its application is so far voluntary and implemented according to marketing purposes.

*2. The Responsibilities of Pharmaceutical Companies*

A part from the duty to make medicines available to as many people as possible, pharmaceutical enterprises should respect humans’ lives and dignity. They should do so by complying with the various legal and regulatory provisions relating to the manufacture, marketing of medicinal products, and the various commitments made within the framework of CSR for instance.

*3. Consumers’ Responsibilities*

Consumers are basically the category of people who should be the most active in the chain of regulation of the pharmaceutical industry sector. In effect, the consumer is the final recipient and the judge of the quality and efficiency of pharmaceutical products. This role of judge should be fully assumed within the framework of organised structures for the defence of consumer interest. Such structures include national consumer associations and consumer trade unions.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Isabelle Moine-Dupuis and Clotilde Jourdain-Fortier, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> In Cameroon, for example, there is a Cameroonian Consumers Foundation.

## **Conclusion**

The ethical problems of the pharmaceutical industry require the use of dialectics, especially Arthur Rich's criterion of liability. In fact, according to Arthur Rich, the criterion of relationality focuses on the fair use of ethical values which stem from human experiences.<sup>59</sup> Thus, concerning the pharmaceutical industry with its motivation for economic profitability on the one hand, and populations' easy access to appropriate medicines on the other, one could suggest the implementation of a consensus. This consensus is operated within mixed structures made up of public and private authorities and consumers for a better mediation between economic, social and ethical profits. Such relationality could be better achieved in public-private partnerships (PPP) including private consumers organised in structures to defend their interests.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur Rich, op.cit., p. 194.

<sup>60</sup> Agence nationale de sécurité du médicament et des produits de santé (ANSM), op.cit., p. 12.



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## ETHICS IN THE DIGITAL HEALTH ERA

*Nefti Bempong-Ahun*<sup>61</sup>

The right to health is a fundamental human right, yet many lack access to essential medicines and services. The goal to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages” remains key in progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>62</sup> The recent proliferation of digital technologies offers great potential in achieving this goal, and improving global health interventions and outcomes. In the more recent years, there has been a growing trend in utilising Artificial Intelligence (AI) in health. The use of technologies is especially evident in infectious disease outbreaks, where technologies have provided more rapid diagnostics, more precise predictions and estimations, increased knowledge transfer, and raised situational awareness through mHealth and social media platforms<sup>63</sup>. Additionally, within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a greater use of telemedicine has been

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<sup>61</sup> Nefti Bempong-Ahun, Assistant Editor and Communications Assistant, Globethics.net.

<sup>62</sup> The Right to Health factsheet 31. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/factsheet31.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Bempong, Nefti-Eboni et al. “Precision Global Health - The case of Ebola: a scoping review.” *Journal of Global Health* vol. 9,1 (2019): 010404.

observed than never before.<sup>64</sup> Many physicians and health professionals have been conducting consultations and appointments online, to minimize the risk of transmission.<sup>65</sup> Digital technologies have been utilised in many ways, including drones for the delivery of essential medicines to remote areas,<sup>66</sup> and training and capacity building to strengthen community health worker programs. New concepts have also been founded to support the use of digital technologies in health, such as ‘Precision Global Health’, which,

“...leverages life sciences, social sciences, and data sciences, augmented (AI), in order to identify transnational problems and deliver targeted and impactful interventions through integrated and participatory approaches”.<sup>67</sup>

There is no doubt that digital technologies offer great potential and many opportunities, however one must also ask the question: whom are these technologies serving? Do these technologies respect the fundamental principles of causing no harm? Many have argued that root problems, such as strengthening the social determinants of health, improving health literacy and addressing the inequities within the global health workforce must first be addressed,<sup>68</sup> before the introduction of

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<sup>64</sup> Telemedicine: opportunities and developments in member states. Report on the second global survey on eHealth. Last accessed 10.12.2020: [https://www.who.int/goe/publications/goe\\_telemedicine\\_2010.pdf](https://www.who.int/goe/publications/goe_telemedicine_2010.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Monaghesh, Elham, and Alireza Hajizadeh. “The role of telehealth during COVID-19 outbreak: a systematic review based on current evidence.” *BMC public health* vol. 20,1, 1193. 1 Aug. 2020, doi:10.1186/s12889-020-09301-4

<sup>66</sup> Zipline: how it works. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://flyzipline.com/how-it-works/>

<sup>67</sup> Flahault, Antoine, et al. "Precision global health for real-time action." *The Lancet Digital Health* 2.2 (2020): e58-e59.

<sup>68</sup> Anyangwe, Stella CE, and Chipayeni Mtonga. "Inequities in the global health workforce: the greatest impediment to health in sub-Saharan

new technologies can have a true impact. Beyond health system strengthening, specific challenges associated to the use of digital technologies also exist. Within the current pandemic, the psychological determinants should also be carefully examined, pertaining to the effects of lockdown and state of uncertainty. Key issues such as: access, infrastructure, digital literacy, the widening of the gender gap, and mutual understanding and respect for the data sharing principles still exist and must urgently be addressed.

## **Digital Divide**

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the digital divide can be defined as,

“...the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities”.<sup>69</sup>

The digital divide is not exclusive to health, but has also posed a challenge in the education sector, as many higher education institutions transitioning to online learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main causes of the digital divide can be attributed to education levels, income, geographical restrictions and digital literacy.<sup>70</sup> The latter refers to the ability of an individual to use digital technologies and platforms.

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Africa." *International journal of environmental research and public health* 4.2 (2007): 93-100.

<sup>69</sup> OECD Glossary of Terms. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/index.htm>

<sup>70</sup> Digital Divide Council. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <http://www.digitaldividecouncil.com/what-is-the-digital-divide/>

The digital divide can be sub-categorised into two main types, namely: the gender divide and the access divide.<sup>62</sup>

### *Access Gap*

The question of equitable access remains, especially with connectivity to the Internet. Whilst mobile phones had huge success in terms of reach, with Africa growing mobile social users by 17% in 2018,<sup>71</sup> it is in fact 45% of the population that are connected in developing countries, and with only 20% of the population connected in the very least developed countries.<sup>72</sup> Most connectivity in developing countries has been established through mobile phones, most likely due to technological leapfrogging. An exemplary case to describe the phenomena is Ebuddi. The latter is a training programme, which was implemented in Liberia during the Ebola outbreak to facilitate training of local health workers.<sup>55</sup> The prototype was initially launched on personal computers (PCs), however it quickly became apparent users were unfamiliar with the use of computers, and the program was adapted for use of mobile phones.<sup>55</sup> In the Western world, it is common for children to be exposed to the use of computers in school, however in developing regions mobile phones remain the main source of technology. This reflects that the evolution to technological literacy is different between regions, and such considerations must be taken into account during planning and design. The quality of connectivity also varies between urban and rural areas, with Internet usage being three times slower in the latter.<sup>59</sup> Access to connectivity is the first step in ensuring technologies can be harnessed for capacity building. However, access is not limited to connectivity alone of course; access to resources, infrastructure, equipment and knowledge must also be ensured. Actors

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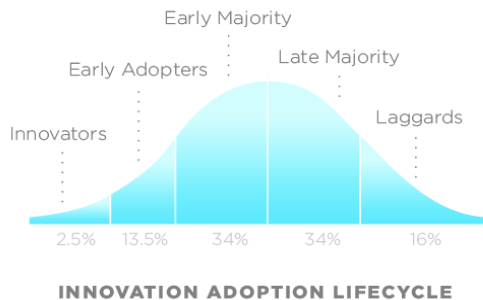
<sup>71</sup> Sheath, Danny, et al. "Precision global health: a roadmap for augmented action." *Journal of Public Health and Emergency* 4.5 (2020): 1-12.

<sup>72</sup> Flahault, Antoine, et al. "Precision global health for real-time action." *The Lancet Digital Health* 2.2 (2020): e58-e59

must come together to achieve this, and a more recent example of this is the COVID19 Clinical Research Coalition. The coalition aims to accelerate research in resource-limited settings, to ensure the most vulnerable communities are not forgotten with regard to treatment, expertise and further development.<sup>73</sup>

### *Gender Gap*

Unfortunately, the gender gap also rears its head in the context of digital technologies, with males in low-income countries being 90% more likely to own a mobile phone than women.<sup>62</sup> One of the main factors underlying this gap, is illiteracy. It has been reported that the proportions of illiterate women is higher when compare to men, which often translates into lack of comfort navigating technologies.<sup>74</sup> Women have been reported to exhibit higher levels of ‘technophobia’, and have also been described as ‘laggards’ - slower adopters to newer and more innovative technologies when compared to men.<sup>75</sup>



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<sup>73</sup> COVID19 Clinical Research Coalition. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://covid19crc.org/about-us/>

<sup>74</sup> OECD report: Bridging the digital divide. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <http://www.oecd.org/digital/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Kotze, Theuns G., O. Anderson, and K. Summerfield. "Technophobia: Gender differences in the adoption of high-technology consumer products." *South African Journal of Business Management* 47.1 (2016): 21-28.

*Figure 1: Diffusion of innovation graph*<sup>76</sup>

In the context of health emergencies, males reported increased use of digital technologies compared to women during the Ebola outbreak in 2014.<sup>55</sup> This most likely occurred due to socio-cultural condition, referring to the reduced access to education and domestic roles of females, specifically in developing countries. The OECD ‘*Bridging the Digital Gender Divide*’ report found that in India and Egypt, around one-fifth of women believed the internet was not suitable for them, due to cultural reasons.

The digital divide is thus a major obstacle to unleashing the full potential of digital technologies. An international and coordinated response is required, driven by a human rights approach to overcome the existing inequalities with innovative solutions. More recently, Google’s sister company launched Loons, which are solar powered balloons providing 4G Internet coverage in rural areas. Loon partnered with Telkom Kenya to provide commercial service, and Kenya has already estimated 39 million out of 48 million people online.<sup>77</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) is also currently drafting a global strategy on digital health,<sup>78</sup> and it is of most importance that we overcome the challenges, working together.

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<sup>76</sup> Figure 1: Diffusion of innovation. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:DiffusionOfInnovation.png>

<sup>77</sup> “4G internet balloons take off over Kenya” BBC News. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53321007>

<sup>78</sup> WHO Global strategy on Digital Health. Last accessed 10.12.2020: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/g4dhd2a9f352b0445bafbc79ca799dce4d.pdf?sfvrsn=f112ede5\\_58](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/g4dhd2a9f352b0445bafbc79ca799dce4d.pdf?sfvrsn=f112ede5_58)

## **Data Sharing Principles and Open Science**

The increased use of digital technologies has created more data, and it is important that data utilisation does not harm individuals or breach patient's privacy. Many hospitals have become targets of cyberattacks, mostly via ransom ware attacks.<sup>79</sup> These attacks are in violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, and can threaten patients' health, especially if attackers are able to control and manipulate health devices. Strict procedures and safeguarded structures must be applied to ensure data remains safe and is not misused.

### *Data Sharing Principles*

Data access and sharing in global health is a frequent challenge, mostly due to ambiguous data ownership and privacy concerns.<sup>59</sup> A way to overcome such issues is to ensure researchers adhere to mechanisms, which promote the data sharing principles. The Australian Government issued the following as data sharing principles in their 'Best practices guide to applying data sharing principles':

- "Projects: Data is shared for an appropriate purpose that delivers a public benefit.
- People: The user has the appropriate authority to access the data.
- Settings: The environment in which the data is shared minimises the risk of unauthorised use or disclosure.
- Data: Appropriate and proportionate protections are applied to the data.

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<sup>79</sup> Argaw, Salem T., et al. "The state of research on cyberattacks against hospitals and available best practice recommendations: a scoping review." *BMC medical informatics and decision-making* 19.1 (2019): 1-11.



- Output: The output from the data sharing arrangement is appropriately safeguarded before any further sharing or release”.<sup>80</sup>

### *Open Science*

Open Science aims to make scientific research dissemination to all levels of societies, removing obstacles such as pay walls from more traditional academic journals. This year’s Open Access Week focused on promoting equity and inclusion, a red thread when considering ethics in the era of digital health.<sup>81</sup> Open Access Week is an important catalyst in prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion in governance structures, as well as encouraging Open Science and promoting practice truly reflective of the data sharing principles. More recently, UNESCO, WHO and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights made a call for action for Open Science. The joint declaration acknowledged “the power of scientific cooperation and diplomacy to unite nations”.<sup>82</sup> Globethics.net is a champion of open access, and most resources can be accessed and downloaded for free from its website portal and digital library repository from [www.globethics.net](http://www.globethics.net).

## **Conclusion**

Whilst digital health brings about many opportunities, it also brings its share of associated challenges. We must overcome the digital divide

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<sup>80</sup> Best Practice Guide to Applying Data Sharing Principles, Australian Government. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://www.datacommissioner.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/data-sharing-principles-best-practice-guide-15-mar-2019.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Open Access week theme blog post. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <http://openaccessweek.org/profiles/blogs/2020-theme-announcement-english>

<sup>82</sup> UNESCO, WHO and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights call for “open science”. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-who-and-high-commissioner-human-rights-call-open-science>

and existing socio-economic disparities, in order to ensure equitable and fair access to digital technologies for all. With regards to data, we should aim for open access and open science, to ensure all members of the population have access to the latest research, and enable and support evidence-based decision-making. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research recently launched a digital health programme, with the primary aim of promoting responsible digital health.<sup>83</sup> This is to ensure that technologies are used to their full potential, that the right beneficiaries benefit and that progress towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 is made.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> UNITAR Digital health. Last accessed 10.12.2020: <https://unitar.org/sustainable-development-goals/people/our-portfolio/digital-health-initiative>

<sup>84</sup> Acknowledgments: I would like to thank my husband, Michael Ahun for his encouragement and support.

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## **YOU SHALL NOT LIE: FROM COVID-19 FAKE NEWS TO TRUTHFULNESS**

*Christoph Stückelberger*<sup>85</sup>

Speaking truth and lies, gossiping and rumours, giving information to guide people, as well as spreading disinformation to misguide people are as old as humanity. In times of crises like war or a pandemic, trustworthy information is even more vital than in normal times as fake news can kill lives. Gossiping and sharing rumours are a form of entertainment in which the person who shares a rumour gets attention on whether he/she is a good storyteller (with a bit of exaggeration) to get even more attention and prestige. However, in a traditional village or in oral tradition, gossiping was shared with a few friends or limited group, while nowadays gossips are shared through social media with millions of people causing numerous effects.

### **COVID-19: Fake News Can Kill**

In the contemporary world, gossip can be spread with a single click of a button to thousands of Twitter or Facebook ‘friends’ around the world. Furthermore, sharing news is no more the privilege and responsibility of newspapers, radio and television alone. Indeed,

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<sup>85</sup> Christoph Stückelberger, President and Founder of Globethics.net.

everybody can now be a little news creator and distributor. Therefore, we can choose to distribute true and verified information, or distribute fake news, knowing or, in many cases, not knowing that it is fake.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic - as I am writing this in August 2020, it is far from being over. Modern communication technologies such as public and private print as well as electronic media (newspapers, radio, TV) and social media play a very important role, both positively and negatively in informing and misinforming the public. For example, whilst the quick release of information from governments about protective measures (e.g. lockdowns) saved millions from being infected, the slow and contradictory information or propaganda of unproven treatment methods exposed lives to infection and even lead to death in some cases.

As an additional example, US President Trump has used Twitter for the last twelve years as his main communication tool, and now has 80 million followers. It is documented that he sent out many lies through his tweets, but on 27 May 2020, for the first time in history, Twitter reported a tweet of President Donald Trump as a lie and added a sentence that the information is wrong. As a result of this, the President became furious and threatened the ban of Twitter. Behind is the debate of the responsibility of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

## **Ethical Questions of Truth, Lie and Responsibility**

The ethical alternative seems simple: you tell the truth or you lie. However, the ethical reality is more complex as the following questions show that in times of crises, it is very difficult to get full information because nobody has a full picture but only pieces:

- Is sharing information, which is not yet verified or is incomplete, part of the process of fact finding, or is it manipulation or even a lie?
- Do social media just offer a technological platform or do they have an editorial responsibility like a publisher or a journalist?
- As for individual users: what is their ethical responsibility to forward a message without fact checking? Are they just a postman transmitting news, or do they have a responsibility for the forwarded content like a journalist has for what they publish?
- Time and speed matters in a crisis like a pandemic. Is delay in information just laziness, a crime or responsible behaviour, if information is checked before sharing? What are ethical criteria for lie and truthfulness and all the grey zones in between?

## **You Shall not Lie: Simple Ethical Commandment?**

Let us focus here on a simple globally accepted ethical commandment: you shall not lie. It exists as an ethical value in all religions and value systems. The Ten Commandments in the Bible are so to say the basic ethical codex for the Jews-Christian, and essentially the Islamic world. The eighth commandment says “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour” (Ex 20:16). In short: You shall not lie. It is repeated in different forms in various biblical texts, e.g. “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness” (Ex 23:1). The precise context this commandment refers to is the judiciary. Indeed, in its early existence of developing independent judiciary, truth is key for a fair trial. False testimony can kill lives, as a person may be accused with false accusation and sent to prison or receive a death penalty as a result.

In the New Testament of early Christianity, the focus is on the community: “Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to

his neighbour, for we are all members of one body” (Eph 4:25). Lies and gossiping do harm for the community and can destroy it in short time because it undermines trust. Trust is an essential condition to reach community. You shall not lie thus became a general ethical rule, essential for all human relations.

The Bible includes impressive openness regarding many stories about lies and deceptions: from Abraham towards his wife Sarah, up to Peter who denied knowing Jesus three times, as he did not have the courage to tell the truth that he was a disciple. The Bible shows that lying is part of human existence, and thus, the ethical benchmark to overcome it is needed.

In Islam, the Quran has similar benchmarks declaring that lying is against the will of Allah, but also of self-deception. “They think to deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive no one but themselves and perceive it not” (Quran 2:9). The truth will finally win over the lies: “Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars” (Quran 29:3). “Truthfulness leads to the paradise” (Quran 5:119). In the Jews-Christian holy texts, the commandment for truthfulness is emphasized because of the daily reality of lies.

## **Half Truth, White Lie, Deception, Conspiracies: Complex Realities**

These commandments look simple and straightforward. Yet, the above mentioned ethical questions and daily realities show that it is often not so easy to draw a clear line between lie and truth. Four examples:

We all know situations where we tell only *half of the reality/truth*. Is this a lie if we tell only half of the truth and are silent about the rest? It can be ethically wrong because it is a form of deception. However, it can also be justified e.g. in order to find the right moment to tell the full

truth. A medical doctor or a pastor may have to choose the right moment and the right way to tell the truth about the deadly cancer. The Swiss author Max Frisch (1911-1991) wrote the famous sentence: “One should hold out the truth to the other like a coat that he can slip into – not wrap around his head like a wet cloth.”<sup>86</sup> This is a pastoral approach to communicating the truth.

Even more painful is the question of the *white lie*. Lies kill lives, as we said. However, white lies can also save lives. Many families during the Second World War who hid Jewish people in their houses denied this to Gestapo. They lied in order to save lives. In ethics, white lies are justified by most ethicist, under the condition that it is used for very rare and restricted situations, mainly in order to protect lives.

*Deception and Cunning* is also a widespread form of lie. The goal of this form of lie is to get a commercial advantage (the product declaration does not correspond to the true quality of the product), an ideological dominance (to stipulate the superiority of the own ideology over the others), and most prominently in intelligence services and in war, strategies. The often quoted famous book “The Art of War” by the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu,<sup>87</sup> written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, shows strategies to win a war mainly through deceiving the enemy. There are numerous books which apply it to business strategies, especially in dealing with Chinese partners. Ethically speaking, deception is mainly considered as a vice, as it undermines truthfulness and trust. At the same time, it is broadly accepted and justified as a means to defeat an enemy. In politics, it can be an instrument to get a political majority or influence a decision.<sup>88</sup> In secret services, it is a

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<sup>86</sup> Very often quoted, but original source not found.

<sup>87</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, New York: Norton & Company, 2020. See also: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Art\\_of\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War).

<sup>88</sup> The life-long politician and Minister/Federal Councillor of the Swiss Government (1995-2010) analysed the dilemma of honesty and lies in politics is in a transparent and ethical way: Leuenberger, Moritz, “Honesty – Lies and



major means to collect information. As long as secret services are ethically justified, deception is also justified. This is one among many reasons why I plead for dismantling secret services for ethical reasons, knowing that it is a radical position far from ‘Realpolitik’.<sup>89</sup>

*Conspiracy theories* are also a widespread phenomenon in times of crises such as a pandemic, for various reasons: lack of information and clarity, as well as the complexity of a catastrophe means lack of security.

This is then compensated by:

- Reducing complexity by focusing on a simple answer by giving one reason for the tragedy, e.g. the Jews as in the Plague in middle age or the Chinese as in COVID-19;
- A scapegoat as result of this simplification ;
- An external enemy to unite a nation and distract from internal issues in dealing with the catastrophe.

## **Ethical Principles for Truthfulness in Times of Social Media and Cyber-Speed**

The cyber world kicked the issue of truth and lie to global level, due to the many years unregulated communication.<sup>90</sup> As a key instrument of

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Politics”, in Stückelberger, Christoph/ Fust, Walter/ Ike, Obiora (Eds.), *Global Ethics for Leadership*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016, 225-222.

<sup>89</sup> Stückelberger, Christoph, “Secret Services: Can they be Ethical?”, in Stückelberger, Christoph/Duggal, Pavan (Eds.), *Cyber Ethics 4.0*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2018, 427-438.

<sup>90</sup> These five points are similar to the publication in Stueckelberger, Christoph, “Ethical Responses to Fake News and Conspiracies During and Post-COVID-19 Pandemic”, in Vassiliadis, Petros/Demacopoulos, George (Eds.), *The Church in a Period of Pandemic. Can the Present Pandemic Crisis Become a Meaningful Storm for Renewal in our Churches?* Thessaloniki: CEMES and Fordham Publications, 2020, Chapter 24, 122-126 (124f).

globalization and free market, every person can act as journalist and editor and spread whatever news they want into the world. Of the 2 billion people on this planet, every fourth human on this planet, has a Facebook account. Facebook majority owner Zuckerberg is much more powerful than the Greek Emperor Alexander the Great on the peak of his Empire, at the age of 33. Election campaigns and the COVID-19 pandemic made this influence and responsibility of social media very visible. Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, WeChat, WhatsApp groups and other social media have a great influence.

*Ethical principles* to handle news and fake news are:

- The Golden Rule of reciprocity as universally accepted rule in all world religions and philosophies: Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Or in the positive version of the New Testament: “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Mt 7:12).
- “Do not lie” as mentioned above. Lies undermine trust, destroy relations, are short term but cannot survive in long term, and contradict the virtue of honesty, and the value of justice and fairness.
- “Do no harm”. Fake news and lies can destroy the reputation of persons, groups and institutions and heavily affect communities.
- “Do not kill”. Fake news can kill lives. Not only that they push young people, e.g. in case of bullying or false accusation, to suicide. In the pandemic, spreading news about non-proven or clearly false accounts against the corona virus can lead to deadly consequences.

*Practical measures* against fake news are needed at all three levels of ethics: individual, interpersonal and institutional.<sup>91</sup>

On *individual level*, the right to information includes also the responsibility to be informed, which means to collect information from different sources.

On *interpersonal level*, it includes caution in sharing information. If the information is shared, then it is important to first think twice if it can be true and if not sure, do not share or add a remark for caution. But fake news, even fake videos with image manipulation (e.g. of personalities) are aided by Artificial Intelligence tools to achieve a high level of professionalism, which makes it difficult for lay persons to distinguish lie and truth.

On *institutional level*, media education and training in critical analysis and thinking have a special responsibility in higher education.<sup>92</sup> Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon (the GAFA companies, whereas in China it's BAT: Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent) are big data collectors, and with their global social platforms they have a duty to filter fake news, and the regulators have to oblige them to do it. It is of course a sensitive effort as it can violate the freedom of expression and freedom of press. Classical media outlets have clear rules and regulations which should also be adopted by these new platforms. Facebook has already employed ten thousands of staff, whose daily task is to clean the platform and get rid of fake news. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a clear increase of information through the public. In times of threat like a virus, reliable information is crucial. More and more volunteer-led initiatives, often

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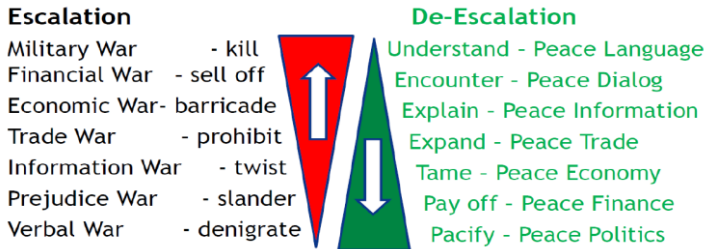
<sup>91</sup> See also, Christoph Stückelberger, *Globalance. Ethics Handbook for a Balanced World Post-Covid*, Geneva: Globethics.net, August 2020, 513-522 on media.

<sup>92</sup>I thank Dr. Simon Stückelberger, lecturer in political science, for his inputs on this part.

compromising of younger academics, journalists, and non-profit NGOs offer fact checking services and news literacy trainings.<sup>93</sup>

## **Infodemic Escalates towards War, Truthfulness De-escalates towards Peace**

Fake news, lies and conspiracies escalate conflicts and are part of war language. Serious factual information, truthfulness and empathy de-escalate conflicts and are part of peace language. War and peace do not happen from one day to the other, but are a process as the graph shows.



*Figure 1: Spiral of conflicts by author*

The vicious spiral of conflict escalates towards war (red in the graph), and the virtuous spiral points towards the de-escalation towards peace (green in the graph). Both spirals start with how we communicate and how we deal with information. They either fuel the conflict or calm it down. These steps can be observed in many conflicts, currently observed in the conflict between the two superpowers; USA and China, who are both tackling the pandemic.

*Escalation* starts with soft verbal war, with denigration of the enemy and is linked to prejudice war, where collective guilt of people, race, nations etc. is produced and lead to an information war. This then builds the climate for justification and acceptance of trade war, e.g. by prohibiting import or export of products, be it consumer goods,

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/>

technologies or medical equipment as urgently needed during a pandemic. This prohibition can easily lead to sanctions and barricades as economic walls. The financial war e.g. around dominance and access to currencies like USD and RMB can lead to a strangulation of an economy of a country, which then provokes military response to escape or avoid.

*De-escalation* also starts with soft measures of contributing to mutual understanding, listening and facts-based information (peace language). Direct encounters between humans are an important element and can even happen online, to communicate and build peace dialogues. Peace information leads to a deeper understanding, which does not mean to accept the actions and attitudes of the other sides, but at least look for a fair judgment and treatment, based on the Golden Rule. Trade relations contribute to peace, under the condition that the trade conditions are fair and lead to mutual benefits. If trade is unfair, it can increase a conflict. A more general peace economy which does not only include trade, but the whole production chain from resources to production, consumption and recycling can substantially tame conflicts, be it social, economic, political, religious or cultural. Peace finance in terms of the macro-economic measures is equally important. How to deal with the trillions of new debts accumulated due to COVID-19 without laying the ground for future political and even military conflicts related to indebtedness is a crucial challenge. Peace politics means to include de-escalation of conflicts instead of escalation in all decisions=. The pandemic shows the need for balancing fair information, fair sharing of the economic burdens of the pandemic and fair, assertive political leadership. Leaders, including religious leaders, have great responsibility to ensure fair and transparent information as much as possible. This builds the integrity and trustworthiness of leaders.

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## SHORT REFLECTION ON THE HEART HAS ITS REASONS, WHICH REASON KNOWS NOTHING OF...

*Manasa Britto-Pais<sup>94</sup>*

Is your conscience ethical? How? Why? The inner you! The juggle inside you for right and wrong. What is the maths between your mind and heart accompanying with various sorts of emotions, feelings and reasons. To what extent can it be manipulated?

I was wondering about the actions of my conscience. Conscience is a living force that illustrates the material body. It puts your mind into situations, one that is right and the other that is wrong, our voice within guides us through these situations. But is that our heart or our reason?

Emotions play a key role in this game of conscience. Good emotions, bad emotions and mixed emotions. These emotions are controlled by conscience and reason. If a human body is compared to a computer, than the mind and intelligence are like software programmes. The conscious soul, or the actual person, is the observer and doer. Usually we use our knowledge and intelligence to decide what is right or wrong, but conscience is not a function of intelligence or our capacity to reason

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<sup>94</sup> Manasa Britto-Pais, Administration and Human Resources Manager, Globethics.net.



about things. We just know, “this is right, and I must do it”, or “this wrong, I shouldn’t do it”. Conscience is not rocket science; it is within us and our upbringing. For example, vegetarians avoid eating meat because their conscience tells them it is right to not commit violence against poor animals.

Conscience is our protector, but is our protector ethical?

Conscience is shaped by education and experience, which help us know our world, ourselves and act accordingly. Ethical decision-making is our ability to make practical decisions, walking in the path of ethical values and principles. By making oneself aware about their values and principles, they can be used to judge whether or not our actions are ethical. The surroundings around us are very important. What we read, watch, eat, breath, observe, and who are our friends and family are all play a key role in shaping our conscience into good or bad, ethical or not ethical.

Children are like clay, we need to mould them. Today, the main aim of schools cannot only be limited to imparting education, but it should include the comprehensive development of students. This also implies to development at home.

As they say, “the future lies in your own hands”. It applies to your conscience as well. Your actions are the result of your conscience, we call them reasons for actions.

## **WHO CARES ABOUT MORE WELL-BEING?**

*Meggy Kantert*<sup>95</sup>

### **Do All People Care About More Well-being?**

Well-being is something sought by just about everyone. Don't you want to experience more health, happiness, and prosperity including having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress? Many studies show that well-being also benefits those around us, our social environment, our families, workplaces, schools, and society at large. When we are feeling well, we are better relationship partners, more kind and helpful in our communities and more productive in our workplaces—all of which may be useful in your life and all of which can be enhanced by ethical behaviour.

### **Is Ethical Behaviour Culture-related?**

When travelling and working in a variety of cultures, I found that ethical behaviour is indeed culture-related. That does not mean ethical behaviour is more or less important depending on the culture, it means

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<sup>95</sup> Meggy Kantert, Globethics.net Ethics Expert and Globethics.net Academy Teacher.

that definition of ethical aspects like values and virtues differ significantly.

My esteemed colleagues at Globethics.net present it like this:

Virtues are ethical norms for individual behaviour such as honesty or modesty. Such core virtues are common in all cultures, religions and value-systems since they build the basis for all human relations. But their contextual implementation and prioritisation can differ a lot.<sup>96</sup>

In Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu tradition the virtue concerned in this paper is described “as a central message”<sup>97</sup>.

Is it possible to arrive at a shared definition, or is there simply too much individual and cultural diversity in conceptions of virtues? And what about well-being? I want to challenge the inclined reader with a universalist perspective on well-being aspects pursuant to which a common virtue can support collective well-being.

Join me in a universal downwards and individual upwards experiment.

## **Are the Desired Effects Universal?**

A remarkable amount of psychological studies show that the virtue we will be talking about has some impressive effects. You are invited to choose desired aftermaths according to your personal definition of well-being<sup>98</sup>. Grab a pen and mark your favourites:

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<sup>96</sup> Stückelberger et al. (2016). *Global Ethics for Leadership. Values and Virtues for Life*. Geneva: Globethics.net, p.10.

<sup>97</sup> Stückelberger et al., 2016, op. cit., p.290.

<sup>98</sup> Wood et al. (2010). “Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration”. *Clinical Psychology Review* 30 (7), 890–905.

***Physical and Mental Health***

- Mood and life satisfaction
- Less stress
- Greater subjective sleep quality and sleep duration, and less sleep latency and daytime dysfunction
- Confer resilience to depression in a period of life transition
- Significantly lower risk of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, phobia, nicotine dependence, alcohol dependence, and drug “abuse” or dependence
- Post-traumatic growth
- It appears to improve body image

***Character***

- Positive social functioning; emotional warmth, gregariousness, activity seeking, trust, altruism, and tender-mindedness
- Higher openness to (other’s) feeling, ideas, and values (associated with humanistic conceptions of well-being)
- Robustly relating to both positive relationships, and the characteristics needed for their development and maintenance
- Correlating with autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, covering most of the terrain of eudemonic well-being
- Relating to willingness to forgive, which is associated with the absence of psychopathological traits, and is integral to positive functioning
- Relating to low narcissism
- Seemingly strengthening relationships and promoting relationship formation and maintenance, as well as relationship connection and satisfaction
- May promote conflict resolution and increase reciprocally helpful behaviour

### ***Career***

- Greater competence, dutifulness, and achievement striving
- Academic and social success
- Wider network, more social life
- Openness to advice and feedback

### ***Children/students***

- Positively related to many of the same emotions found in the adult research, such as hope, forgiveness, pride, contentment, optimism, inspiration, and global positive affect
- Positively related in response to aid, providing emotional support, and satisfaction with school, family, friends, community, and self; negatively related to physical symptoms
- Greater perceived peer and family support

## **How Can Ethical Behaviour Improve Well-being?**

Do any of the above mentioned effects resonate with you? Would any of those improve your well-being? Would you want to see more of those effects in the people around you or your social sphere? And do you think it would improve their well-being too?

You are invited to cultivate virtues in your life starting exemplary with a universal virtue capable of improving your well-being and happiness. It exists in all cultures and is seen as positive in all cultures. All languages have at least one word for it, some many. Everyone can feel it, express it, appreciate it and most of us have learned what it means and how to handle it when we were children. The lack of it upsets us and if given generously it makes us happy.

The virtue capable of improving our well-being, mental and physical health, even our sleep as well as our career is:

*Gratitude*<sup>99</sup>

Personally, I have many reasons to be grateful but I want to share only one particular story with you.

Some years ago, a person I hardly knew saved my life. I would not be writing these lines if not for this generous and selfless individual who decided to dedicate his life to save others. I am entirely grateful and this gratitude has enriched my existence in many aspects - some of which already before Common Era Marcus Tullius Cicero put like this:

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”

Some decades earlier, his favourite Greek philosopher Socrates went even further and added gratefulness to “unwritten law” given by the gods and valid universally,<sup>100</sup> whereas the German philosopher Pieper adds gratitude to justice.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The British researcher and psychologist Woods and his colleagues define gratitude as follows: Within the field of gratitude research, there is a lack of agreement about the nature of the construct. In part, gratitude is an emotion which occurs after people receive aid which is perceived as costly, valuable, and altruistic. Gratitude in this case may have arisen from such sources as appreciation of one's abilities, or of a climate in which such successful work was possible. We suggest that at the dispositional level, gratitude is part of a wider life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive in the world. Cf. Wood, *ibid*.

<sup>100</sup> Afflerbach et al. (2014). *Lust auf gutes Leben: 15 Tugenden neu entdeckt*. Gießen: Brunnen.

<sup>101</sup> Pieper, J. (2006). *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik – Das Menschenbild der Tugendlehre*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, p. 110. „Gerade der Gerechte, ... je mehr er sich als ein Beschenkter, ein vor Gott und den Menschen Verschuldeter weiß – allein der gerechte Mensch wird sich bereit finden lassen, auch Ungeschuldetes zu leisten. Er wird gewillt sein, dem anderen etwas zu geben, das zu geben niemand ihn zwingen kann. (...) Dank zu sagen ist, obwohl natürlich nicht-erzwingbar, eine eigentliche Gerechtigkeitspflicht. Dennoch ist ‚dankbar sein‘ und ‚danken‘ nicht dasselbe wie ‚bezahlen‘ und ‚entgelten‘“

Numerous other philosophers wrote about gratitude but also reflected on the effects of ingratitude. Ungrateful people do not live life to the fullest. They cannot be satisfied or really be happy. They miss the past *and* they miss the future.

“The wise man, on the contrary, takes delight in living and also rejoices in having lived. Gratitude (charis) is this joy of memory, this love of the past – it neither suffers over what no longer is nor regrets what has been but joyfully recalls what was. It is time regained – the past recaptured...”<sup>102</sup>

I can only concur with these facets as gratefulness has changed my approach towards others and the things occurring in my life. It opened my eyes to see and focus on the positive things around me, all the good things happening in my life and all the wonderful people I am grateful to know. It also helps me to cope with things not so positive or people just not so wonderful.

## **How Do I Change my Behaviour to Be More Ethical?**

The discussion around gratitude might sound trivial but as the French philosopher André Comte-Sponville warns us: “Gratitude is the most pleasant of all virtues; though not the easiest.” He later adds, that “there is humbleness in gratitude, and humbleness is difficult.” But nonetheless finally summarises that gratitude is “the most pleasant of virtues and the most virtuous of pleasures.”<sup>103</sup>

Guardini limits gratitude as follows:

“Gratitude can only exist between an “I” and a “thou.” As soon as the consciousness of the personal quality disappears and the

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<sup>102</sup> Comte-Sponville, A. (2001). *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

<sup>103</sup> Comte-Sponville, p. 132, op. cit.

idea of the apparatus prevails, gratitude dies. Gratitude can exist only in the realm of freedom. As soon as there is a “must” or a claim, gratitude loses its meaning. Gratitude can exist only with reverence. If there is no mutual respect, gratitude perishes and turns to resentment. Anyone who gives assistance to others should think about that. Only the assistance which makes gratitude possible really deserves the name”.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless no matter how you personally define gratitude, or how it is defined in your culture, it is a learnable attitude for people at any age and the effect of true gratefulness is universal.<sup>105</sup>

### ***10 Strategies to More Ethical Behaviour***

As we continue our experiment, you are invited to ponder on each question, write the answer down (if you want the experiment to be sustainable) and add one or the other strategy to your daily rota (if you want one or the other effect to improve your well-being short *and* long term as well as influence others positively).

- Who is the person you should show more gratitude to?
- List three to five things for which to be grateful (daily)
- Think of the last time someone else has shown gratitude to you
- List 5 things you did during COVID-19 crisis that you are grateful for
- Ponder on why you have been grateful for those things
- What is stopping you from showing more gratitude?
- Consider the last time you have honestly been grateful
- Go on a “gratitude visit”

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<sup>104</sup> Guardini, Romano (2013). *Learning the Virtues*. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press.

<sup>105</sup> Frey, Dieter (Hrsg.). (2016). *Psychologie der Werte. Von Achtsamkeit bis Zivilcourage – Basiswissen aus Psychologie und Philosophie*. München: Springer.



- Write a letter to a benefactor thanking them (and bonus: read it to the benefactor in person)
- Reflect on which effect gratitude can have on your well-being

### ***Act Accordingly***

If you like people smiling around you, generously distribute appreciative gratitude to people around you. As you will experience the effect is immediate and in many cases sustainable.

## **How Can I Help Others to More Well-being Through Ethics?**

You may now choose effects you desire in others:

- Choose from the list above (desired effects)
- Less angeriness, aggress and hostility
- Less depression
- More frequently experiencing positive emotions
- Orientating towards higher thankfulness following help
- Being more generous
- Being less envious
- Being less materialistic<sup>106</sup>
- Improving on openness towards advice and feedback<sup>107</sup> as well as improving social responsibility in organisations<sup>108</sup>
- Generating upstream reciprocity (which is helping an unrelated third party after being helped)

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<sup>106</sup> McCullough et al. (2002). “The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (1), 112–127.

<sup>107</sup> Gino, F. et al. (2008). “Blinded by anger or feeling the love: How emotions influence advice taking”. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 103 (2), 1165-1173.

<sup>108</sup> Andersson, L. et al. (2006). “On the relationship of hope and gratitude to corporate social responsibility”. *Journal of Business Ethics* 70 (4), 401-409.

- Gratitude may lead to a chain/network of upstream reciprocity and strengthen the structure of organizations<sup>109</sup>

Trusting us being ambassadors for gratefulness now, we can have an influence on up to 60% of indifferent people around us just by being a role-model (unfortunately up to 20% of the others might be leisure-oriented instead of well-being oriented).<sup>110</sup> If we show gratitude and appreciation to people around us, they are highly likely to show more gratitude towards others<sup>111</sup> (unfortunately not necessarily towards us though).<sup>112</sup> We can nurture a culture of gratitude and in addition build trust by offering help without obligating to help at the same time, because transcending the ego naturally leads to more gratefulness.<sup>113</sup>

## Why Do We Need to Care About Ethics?

Allow me to leave that to influencers from different perspectives:

*True asking and giving, true receiving and thanking are fine and are human in the deepest sense of the word. They are based upon the consciousness that we stand together in our need. Accidentally here and now one person has something, the other*

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<sup>109</sup> Chang, Yen-Ping et al (2012). “Pay It Forward: Gratitude in Social Networks”. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Volume 13, 761-781. The emotion of gratitude generates upstream reciprocity (which is helping an unrelated third party after being helped) by broadening the beneficiary’s perspective toward others and thus making the beneficiary represent the benefactor and newly encountered strangers in the same social category. Furthermore, by inducing one upstream reciprocity after another, gratitude may lead to a chain/network of upstream reciprocity and strengthen the structure of organizations.

<sup>110</sup> Frey et al., 2004b.

<sup>111</sup> Dieter Frey (Hrsg.), 2016, op. cit.

<sup>112</sup> Chang et al., 2012, op. cit. “The recipient of gratitude may not reciprocate directly back, but in turn, may lend a favour to a third party”

<sup>113</sup> Dieter Frey (Hrsg.), 2016, op. cit.

*does not; one person can and the other cannot. Tomorrow it may be the other way around. . . .*<sup>114</sup>

I hate ingratitude more in a man than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness, Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption Inhabits our frail blood.<sup>115</sup>

You can find reasons to care for gratefulness in ancient as well as recent sources, e.g. in the Talmud, the primary source of Jewish religious law, we read that “ingratitude is worse than theft”. Chesterton reflects on gratitude as follows: “I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder”. He continues, “When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas time. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?” This is where atheist perspectives hit clear limits as Chesterton noticed, mentioning further that the worst moment for an atheist is feeling grateful and not having anyone to show gratitude. Gratitude can trigger moments of purest joy humans can ever encounter. All goods seem better to us when regarded as gifts.<sup>116</sup>

See for yourself: If you are reading these words now you obviously open two gifts every morning you can be grateful for; your eyes.

## **Conclusion**

It is astonishing that gratitude is not a universal matter of course. Frequently expressed, true gratefulness can improve everyone’s well-being in various aspects. It is commonly appreciated and makes us happy, it

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<sup>114</sup> Guardini, 2013, op. cit.

<sup>115</sup> Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night, Or what you will*.

<sup>116</sup> Chesterton, 1927, op. cit.

“...prolongs the pleasure that precedes and occasions it, like a joyful echo of the joy we feel, a further happiness for the happiness we have been given. Gratitude: the pleasure of receiving, the joy of being joyful.”<sup>117</sup>

Surprising is not the effect but the difficulty. Gratitude is a mystery not because of the effects, but because of the difficulties we must overcome to feel and to show it. Gratitude takes nothing from us, it is a gift given in return. Be inspired by Mozart, who made it possible to listen to gratitude in his music:

“What happier and more humble virtue, what easier and more necessary grace than that of giving thanks with a smile or a dance step, with a song or with happiness itself? The generosity of gratitude.”

Gratitude is a learnable attitude towards life and the others around us.

“Here is where we go from a purely affective gratitude (to use a Kantian term) to an active gratitude, from joy in return to action in return.”<sup>118</sup> “It is pleasure upon pleasure, happiness upon happiness, gratitude upon generosity.”<sup>119</sup>

“When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”<sup>120</sup>

Thank you very much indeed.

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<sup>117</sup> Comte-Sponville, 2001, op. cit. p. 132.

<sup>118</sup> Comte-Sponville, 2001.

<sup>119</sup> Comte-Sponville, 2001, *ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Chesterton, *ibid.*

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**B**

**ETHICS: THE QUEST FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPECT**





# GANDHIAN ETHICS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*Jose Nandhikkara*<sup>121</sup>

## **Introduction**

The UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 adopted a Resolution (70/1) with a Charter of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 Targets to be achieved by 2030 for People and Planet, Peace, and Prosperity. The Resolution calls for Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development: “We resolve to build a better future for all people, including the millions who have been denied the chance to lead decent, dignified and rewarding lives and to achieve their full human potential.” It is a united global response to the cry of the People and the Planet. As the Resolution reminds:

“We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives.”

Sustainable development was defined in the Brundtland Report, 1987: “... development that meets the needs of the present without

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<sup>121</sup> Jose Nandhikkara, Regional Director, Globethics.net India.

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability is a comprehensive notion for people living in peace and prosperity on the planet, and the SDGs are a transformative agenda with the conviction that our individual, collective actions and partnerships will transform our world –People and Planet – bringing Peace and Prosperity for all.

After five years, though progress has been made, the world is not on course to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Even though the global industrial developments contribute to an impressive growth of GDP, the gap between the rich and the poor, people and planet, and peace and prosperity also continues to widen. Referring to the technocratic paradigm and market driven economy, Pope Francis on 27 March 2020 during his prayer for the world in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic said:

“We have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste.”

It is a sad fact, and an ethical issue that unjust inequalities exist, and continue to increase, with the disadvantaged groups suffering disproportionately from the disastrous effects of market driven development. It is therefore a moral imperative that we develop an action plan, bringing together all the fields of knowledge and economic and political powers, providing an antidote to the culture driven by market economy and short-term politics. We need an ethical approach to our policies and action plans; our efforts to achieve economic and material prosperity will result in the suffering for people and planet, peace and prosperity. As moral agents, human beings are caretakers of the earth, and all who are living in this common home should live in collaboration and solidarity with all. It is here that the vision proposed

by Mahatma Gandhi,<sup>122</sup> that is, *Sarvodaya* (uplift of all) through *Anthyodaya* (uplift of the last), shows us an ethical path to true sustainability. Sustainable societies are ethical societies, and only ethical societies could be sustainable; a society is sustainable to the extent that it is ethical.

Announcing Gandhiji's martyrdom on 30 January 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, in his address to the nation said: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere." He added, however,

"The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts."

Mahatma Gandhi, who led India's freedom movement, remains a beacon of light in the contemporary moral darkness of the world, which is driven by the brute force of military and the abusive powers of money and media. As Albert Einstein wrote,

"The moral influence he [Gandhi] had on the consciously thinking human being of the entire civilised world will probably be much more lasting than it seems in our time with its overestimation of brutal violent forces. Because lasting will only be the work of such statesmen who wake up and strengthen the moral power of their people through their example and educational works. We may all be happy and grateful that destiny gifted us with such an enlightened contemporary, a role model

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<sup>122</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2 October 1869—30 January 1948) was the leader of the Indian Independence Movement and is honorifically called Mahatma (Great Soul) Gandhi.

for the generations to come. Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood”.

Gandhiji indeed had a great “moral influence ... on the consciously thinking human being of the entire civilised world.” Though, contrary to Einstein’s hope, Gandhian influence is diminishing as the world is still run “with its overestimation of brutal violent forces”. Gandhiji is “a role model for the generations to come.” It is my conviction and claim in this chapter, that we all should learn from his life lessons in our journey to transform the world through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Gandhiji wrote in his “Message to Shanti Sena Dal” on September 5, 1947: “My Life is my Message.” Let us learn from his life a vision and mission for sustainable societies. He considered himself as a devotee of Truth (Truth is God, for Gandhi) and a votary of *ahimsa* (non-violence), which he practised consistently for realising *swaraj* (self-rule) in moral, economic, and political life. “I will not sacrifice Truth and *ahimsa* even for the deliverance of my country or religion,” Gandhi said (*Young India*, 20-1-1927: 21). The Gandhian path of *ahimsa* and truth that transformed his own life and played the leading part in the successful Indian independence struggle against two centuries of British rule, shows us a path to transform the world into Sustainable Societies. For Gandhi, the path to peace and prosperity is always moral, established in truth and *ahimsa*.

## **Experiments with Truth and Practice of *Satyagraha***

Devotion and dedication to Truth characterise Gandhi’s life, vision, and mission:

“I claim to be a votary of truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayerful search gave me the revealing maxim ‘Truth is God’, instead of the usual one ‘God is

Truth'. That maxim enables me to see God face to face as it were. I feel Him pervade every fibre of my being" (Harijan, 9-8-1942: 264).

He was like a monk in his experiments with Truth,<sup>123</sup> however, he did not go to the Himalayas, but to the people and experimented with truth in the life situations wherever he was. In his words, "I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity" (*Harijan*, 29-8-1936: 226). Gandhi joined the political field as a way to do social work, which, in turn, resulted from his religious quest.

"Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth. For me, God and Truth are convertible terms" (Young India, 18-6-1925: 214).

His political struggles resulted from his religious quest and moral struggle to be a votary of Truth, to achieve moral and social progress. Indeed, according to Gandhi, religion should pervade every one of our actions. Gandhi was eager to clarify that by religion he does not mean any particular religion or sect.

"It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. ... This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality" (Harijan, 10-2-1940: 445).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Gandhi's Autobiography is titled *My Experiments with Truth*.

<sup>124</sup> Gandhi was a devout Hindu whose Hinduism included the best of all religions. Early in his life he was moved by the religious stories told by his mother, especially which of Harichandra, who never lied in his life and to fulfil his promise he renounced his throne, sold his family, and agreed to be a slave. He was also influenced by Hindu Bhakti saints, and the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The *Gita* and the *Sermon*

For Gandhi, “religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath” (*Harijan*, 2-3-1934: 23), and his political mission was to establish the Ramarajya, the Kingdom of God.<sup>125</sup> In his view, “politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned” because as a votary of Truth, his politics is “inextricably bound up with non-violence and truth” (*Young India*, 1-10-1931: 281). Without non-violence and truth, societies would become oppressive as they would be guided by ‘brute force’ (physical/material power) and not ‘soul force’ (moral/spiritual power) characteristic of humanity.

Gandhi was a votary of Truth, completely dedicating his life in pursuit of Truth and called his movement *Satyagraha* (holding on to Truth). In the words of Gandhi,

“Satyagraha teaches us the art of living as well as dying. Birth and death are inevitable among mortals. What distinguishes the man from the brute is his conscious striving to realize the spirit within” (*Harijan*, 7-4-1946: 74).

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*on the Mount* guided him in his lifelong experiments with Truth. During a train journey to Durban, Gandhi read John Ruskin’s *Unto this Last* (1860) and it gripped him profoundly. In his words, “I saw clearly that, if mankind was to progress and to realize the ideal of equality and brotherhood, it must adopt and act on the principle of *Unto This Last*. It must take along with it even the dumb, the halt and the lame” (*Harijan*, 25-8-1946: 281). Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894) and Henry David Thoreau’s *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1849) were also very influential in Gandhi’s life, message, and struggles. Living contact and conversation with Raychandbai, a Jain poet, also influenced Gandhi for his religious and spiritual vision and mission (*Autobiography*, 65).

<sup>125</sup>Though Gandhi was devoted to Rama from his childhood, he clarified in *Young India* that, “By Ramarajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ramarajya Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of truth and righteousness” (19-9-1929: 305).

*Satyagraha* is a personal, national, and global pilgrimage, with economic, political, moral, and religious dimensions of human life. For Gandhi, “*Satyagraha* first and *Satyagraha* last” (*Harijan*, 15-9-1946: 312).

‘*Satyagraha* first’ refers to its personal and universal application, making "no distinction between kinsmen and strangers, young and old, man and woman, friend and foe." (*Young India*, 23-2-1930: 340). The education and training for *Satyagraha* is meant for all, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-political status, religion, or nationality (*Harijan*, 17-3-1946: 45). According to Gandhi, *Satyagraha* is part of human nature and is upheld by all traditions and religions. It is personal, social, and global. Beginning with oneself, it is to be extended to family, village, circle of villages, nation, and the world at large (*Harijan*, 31-3-1946: 64). *Satyagraha* as ‘universal force’ is “the introduction of truth and gentleness in the political, i.e., the national, life” (*Young India*, 10-3-1920: 3). He declared: “There is no other or better road to freedom” (*Harijan*, 15-9-1946: 312). Gandhi gave certain qualities for a *Satyagrahi*:

- He must have a living faith in God, for He is his only Rock.
- He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and, therefore, have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering.
- He must be leading a chaste life and be ready and willing, for the sake of his cause, to give up his life and his possessions.
- He must be a habitual Khadi-wearer and spinner. This is essential for India.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Gandhi presented spinning wheel as a symbol for the realization of his goal of swaraj. Khadi is home-spun cloth. More than the boycott of imported clothes, it was conscious preference indigenous and local products for survival and wellbeing of all.



- He must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.
- He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules or discipline as may be laid down from time to time (Harijan, 25-3-1939: 64).

In his *Autobiography* Gandhi clarified the law-abiding character of the Satyagrahi:

“A Satyagrahi obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position of judge as to which particular laws are good and just and which unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him of civil disobedience of certain laws in well-defined circumstances” (347).

In fact, a Satyagrahi is always following human nature and thereby obeying God’s law that is heard in the conscience of a morally upright person as God’s voice, which is superior to all other laws. That is how Gandhi understands *Satyagraha* as ‘soul force’ and a universal ethical practice, which today would contribute humanity’s agenda for transforming the world into sustainable societies.

‘*Satyagraha* last’ refers to non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Gandhi first developed the praxis of ‘civil disobedience’ while he was in South Africa, learning from *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau, and applying it to lead the Indian population in their agitation against the discriminatory rules by the colonial rulers in South Africa. Extending the vision and mission of *Satyagraha* for the Indian independence movement, Gandhi tabled a ‘Resolution on Non-cooperation’ in September 1920 before a session of the Indian National Congress. *Satyagraha* refuses to use ‘brute force’ against the oppressor and uses the ‘soul force’, to eliminate the enmity

between the oppressor and the oppressed. He gave three conditions necessary for the success of *Satyagraha*:

“(i) The Satyagrahi should not have any hatred in his heart against the opponent. (ii) The issue must be true and substantial. (iii) The Satyagrahi must be prepared to suffer till the end for his cause” (Harijan, 31-3-1946: 64).

‘*Satyagraha* last’ often involved fasting, and sometimes, fasting until death. This, indeed, is the last resort:

“Since *Satyagraha* is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a Satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to *Satyagraha*. He will, therefore, constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to *Satyagraha*. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him and launches out upon *Satyagraha*, he has burnt his boats and there is no receding” (Young India, 20-10-1927: 353).

According to Gandhi, “a fast has to be based on unadulterated truth and *ahimsa*” (Harijan, 28-7-1946: 235). For personal life and national life, Gandhi declared: “I have no policy in me save the policy of Truth and *ahimsa*” (Young India, 20-1-1927: 21).

## **The Path of *Ahimsa***

Gandhi connected *Satyagraha* with *ahimsa* (non-violence), a fundamental principle taught by all religions and moral traditions:

“The word *Satyagraha* is often most loosely used and is made to cover veiled violence. But, as the author of the word, I may be

allowed to say that it excludes every form of violence, direct or indirect, veiled or unveiled, and whether in thought, word, or deed. It is breach of Satyagraha to wish ill to an opponent or to say a harsh word to him or of him with the intention of harming him” (Harijan, 15-4-1933: 8).

It is vindication of Truth, and not by infliction of pain, not on the oppressor but on one's own self and a *Satyagrahi*, one who holds on truth, is pledged to non-violence in thought, word, and deed (*Autobiography*, 345).

*Ahimsa*, like truth, is species-specific to human beings. As animals, we use physical force for the survival; when resources are scarce, only the fittest survive. “It was only when he rose from the state of a quadruped (animal) to that of a biped ([hu]man) that the knowledge of the strength of *ahimsa* entered into his soul” (*Harijan*, 25-8-1940: 261). As a species-specific character, *ahimsa* is “to be practiced by everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practiced in all departments, it has no practical value” (*Harijan*, 2-3-1940: 23). For Gandhi, *ahimsa* is the same as love, and is the life force of the people and planet, and that alone would give peace and prosperity. Though it is natural, as a force unique to human beings, we need to practice it knowingly and willingly. *Ahimsa* is to be cultivated in all walks of life, individually and socially: “The precious grace of life has to be strenuously cultivated, naturally so because it is uplifting” (*Harijan*, 14-12-1947: 468).

Gandhi followed *ahimsa* with devotion and dedication as his religious practice. He said: “*Ahimsa* is my God, and Truth is my God. When I look for *ahimsa*, Truth says ‘Find it out through me’. When I look for Truth, *ahimsa* says ‘Find it out through me’” (*Young India*, 4-6-1925: 191). “Truth is my religion, and *ahimsa* is the only way of its realization” (*Harijan*, 30-4-1938: 99). Truth and *ahimsa* are inextricably connected in theory and practice. They are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. He saw *ahimsa* and Truth as his two lungs,

and declared, "I cannot live without them" (*Young India*, 21-10-1926: 364).

"My love for non-violence is superior to every other thing mundane or supra-mundane. It is equalled only by my love for Truth, which is to me synonymous with non-violence through which and which alone I can see and reach Truth" (*Young India*, 20-2-1930: 61).

Though inseparable, Gandhi made a distinction between truth and *ahimsa*: "*ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later" (*Yervada*, 12-13). As the means for achieving Truth, we need to practice *ahimsa* in our everyday life, and by extension in humanity's journey towards sustainable societies. "It is *ahimsa*, therefore, that our masses have to be educated in. Education in truth follows from it as a natural end" (*Harijan*, 23-6-1946: 199). *Ahimsa* serves as the basis of the search for truth (*Autobiography*, 203).

Gandhi clarifies that *ahimsa* is the virtue of the brave, not a cover for cowardice. It is the cowards, according to Gandhi, who use physical force and weapons to resist oppression or to oppress the weak. Use of brute force by human beings is below human dignity and is unethical. Non-violent life requires more courage and power than that of 'brute force'; it requires moral power, 'soul force.' Cowardice is wholly inconsistent with non-violence (*Young India*, 12-8-1926: 285), and the path of true non-violence requires much more courage than violence (*Harijan*, 4-8-1946: 248-249). According to Gandhi,

"The minimum that is required of a person wishing to cultivate the *ahimsa* of the brave is first to clear one's thought of cowardice and, in the light of the clearance; regulate his conduct in every activity, great or small" (*Harijan*, 17-11-1946: 404).

“The votary of *ahimsa* has only one fear that is of God. ... God is the shield of the non-violent” (*Harijan*, 1-9-1940: 268). One who practices *ahimsa*, “must have a living faith in God. Mere mechanical adherence to truth and *ahimsa* is likely to break down at the critical moment” (*Harijan*, 20-7-1947: 240). According to Gandhi, without God’s grace and religious commitment, one cannot willingly undertake self-suffering for a noble cause. We will use ‘brute force,’ physical power and weapons, to overcome oppression and to defeat the oppressor. *Ahimsa* is using the ‘soul force,’ moral power, to make the oppressor a collaborator for the welfare of all. As a votary of Truth, Gandhi is convinced that

“Ahimsa is one of the world's great principles that no power on earth can wipe out. Thousands like myself may die in trying to vindicate the ideal, but ahimsa will never die. And the gospel of ahimsa can be spread only through believers dying for the cause” (*Harijan*, 17-5-1946: 140).

It is the practice of *ahimsa* always and everywhere, by all that will lead to *swaraj*, self-rule of the person, family, village, and the nation.

Though *ahimsa* is to be the way of life of all people, Gandhi believes that

“...it is woman’s mission to exhibit ahimsa at its highest and best ... For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa... For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute” (*Harijan*, 5-11-1938: 317).

He calls woman as ‘the incarnation of *ahimsa*’ and draws attention to the pangs of labour and the self-sacrifice of woman in childbearing and child-rearing. His advice to women is

“Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man’s lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker, and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar” (Harijan, 24-2-1940: 14).

The world stands badly in need of the wisdom and compassion of feminine genius and women leadership, in building up sustainable societies with Peace and Prosperity for People and Planet.

Often, it was thought that *ahimsa* could be practiced only by individuals at the personal morality, and that society needs ‘brute force’ for survival and development. Gandhi committed himself to show that *Ahimsa* is not only a personal characteristic of a *satyagrahi*, but also a necessary attribute of political societies. Gandhi wrote,

“I hold that non-violence is not merely a personal virtue. It is also social virtue to be cultivated like the other virtue to be cultivated like the other virtues. Surely society is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings. What I ask for it an extension of it on a larger, national and international scale” (Harijan, 7-1-39: 417).

Truth and *ahimsa* must incarnate in societies, which will not be reached by any other means (*Harijan*, 20-7-1947: 240). “To convince people of this truth is at once my effort and my experiment” (*Harijan*, 25-8-1940: 261). What is possible for individuals, Gandhi argued, is possible socially. We already practice, by and large, truth and *ahimsa* in families, and he argued, “What is true of the family must be true of society which is but a larger family” (*Harijan*, 3-12-’38: 358). According to Gandhi, human survival and well-being also show that *ahimsa* and truth are natural to human beings, and individuals and societies survive only if majority of people practice truth and *ahimsa*.

Use of brute force would lead only to violence and destruction, not life and sustainability. Though the Gandhian agenda to transform the world begins with individuals experimenting with Truth, practicing Ahimsa (non-violence), and achieving Swaraj (self-rule) and it extends to *Swasraya* (self-reliant) village and self-reliant and self-governed nation, and ever-widening ‘oceanic circle’ of societies – individuals, villages, nations, and a peaceful and prosperous people and planet.

### **Gandhian Swaraj and Sustainable Societies**

According to Gandhi, “The word *Swaraj* is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means” (*Young India*, 19-3-1931: 38). It is self-discipline, which demands voluntary continuous self-sacrifice (*Young India*, 27-8-1925: 297), avoiding injury on the usurper (*Harijan*, 3-3-1946: 31). In *Swaraj* based on *ahimsa* duty comes first; rights flow from the due performance of one's duties. Even these rights are to be exercised for the service of society, not for themselves. *Swaraj* of the people is constructed when citizens perform their duties as votaries of Truth. As self-disciplined individuals who are ready for self-sacrifice, citizens perform their duties to the best of their abilities for the common good and the welfare of all (*Harijan*, 25-3-1939: 64). “To achieve *Swaraj* through truth and non-violence, gradual but steady building-up from the bottom upwards by constructive effort is the only way” (*Harijan*, 18-1-1942: 4) , and it is “maintained only where there is a majority of loyal and patriotic people to whom the good of the nation is paramount above all other considerations whatever including their personal profit” (*Young India*, 28-7-1921: 238).

Under *Swaraj*, based on non-violence, there are no enemies, no oppressors and the oppressed, everybody makes their contribution to the best of their abilities for the common goal. Gandhi envisions the *swaraj* of the poor and “It should not happen that a handful of rich people

should live in jewelled palaces and the millions in miserable hovels devoid of sunlight or ventilation” (*Harijan*, 30-12-1939: 391). Gandhi, who wanted a minimum military force, wanted to build “a very large army of self-sacrificing and determined workers”, to ensure the welfare of the masses, without which *swaraj* is a utopia. “Progress towards *Swaraj* will be in exact proportion to the increase in the number of workers who will dare to sacrifice their all for the cause of the poor” (*Young India*, 24-6-1926: 226). According to Gandhi,

“it is essential that desired results are achieved by the collective effort of the people. It will no doubt be good to achieve an objective through the effort of a supremely powerful individual, but it can never make the community conscious of its corporate strength” (*Harijan*, 8-9-1940: 277).

*Swaraj* of a people, whether family, village, or nation, is given by the sum total of the *Swaraj* of individuals involved (*Harijan*, 25-3-1939: 64).

Gandhi envisioned a village *swaraj*, self-disciplined and self-ruled individuals committing themselves to work to the best of their abilities for the common goal, as the basic unit of self-ruled and self-reliant nation. “My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary” (*Harijan*, 26-7-1942: 238). A village *swaraj* is self-sufficient for their basic needs – clean water, nutritious food, locally made clothes, locally available medicine from nature, and basic education, which is compulsory for all. The village will have its own school, theatre, and public hall. These are to be achieved, as far as possible, on the co-operative basis. The village *swaraj* follows the swadeshi policy, preferring products from their village to other goods. Though Gandhi favours division of labour in the society, he is against the caste system



with their graded untouchability. He wanted everyone to do at least one hour of manual labour. In the village *swaraj*, farmers have the uppermost voice, and they hold power in all matters including political power. The village is governed by a Panchayat of five persons, elected for one year by the adult villagers, with the necessary legislative, judiciary, and executive powers. Gandhi does not foresee punishments, as usual in a criminal system, as the individuals are self-disciplined and self-governed. Both the individuals and the societies are votaries of Truth and *ahimsa* (*Harijan*, 26-7-1942: 238).

Gandhi extends the principles of the individual *swaraj* and village *swaraj* to India as a democratic nation:

“In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it” (*Harijan*, 28-7-46: 236).

This model could be very well used for constructing sustainable societies, rather than separately striving to achieve the 17 SDGs.

Though Gandhi called his ideal for India as *Ramarajya*, he clarified that it is not “the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. To me Hind *Swaraj* is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice” (*Young India*, 16-4-1931: 78). There is room for all religions and all schools of honest thought. “My Hinduism teaches me to respect all religions. In this lies the secret of

Ramarajya” (*Harijan*, 19-10-1947: 378). Gandhi wrote in the *Young India* in 1929,

“Whether Rama of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of Ramarajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under Ramarajya” (*Young India*, 19-9-1929: 305)

. He was emphatic: “There can be no Ramarajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat” (*Harijan*, 1-6-1947: 172). Ramarajya of his vision is “sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority” (*Harijan*, 2-1-1937: 374), and he wanted a large army of votaries of Truth and ahimsa who are self-disciplined and ready to make sacrifice for the common good, for the realisation of this vision. In a market driven, pleasure and power seeking, consumeristic contemporary world, the message of Gandhi is all the more relevant.

## **Conclusion**

Gandhi advocated *Anthyodaya* (uplift of the last) for *Sarvodaya* (uplift of all). It is through uplifting of the poor and the weakest the welfare of all is sought. He wrote in the *Harijan*,

“I stand by what is implied in the phrase, 'Unto This Last'. That book marked the turning in my life. We must do even unto this last as we would have the world do by us. All must have equal opportunity. Given the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth” (*Harijan*, 17-11-1946: 404).

The modern emphasis on GDP and military might are antithesis to Gandhian path to sustainable societies. Sustainability is impossible unless resources are shared by all. The weakest should have the same

opportunity as the strongest and manual labour is cherished as much as the intellectual labour. Once the Gandhian *swaraj* is realized, “we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land” (*Harijan*, 18-1-1948: 517). Gandhiji through his words and life reminds us that the “pilgrimage to *Swaraj* is a painful climb” (*Young India*, 28-7-1921: 238); but it is possible for the votaries of Truth through consistent and committed practice of *ahimsa*.

Though *Swaraj* is the birth right of all, it is to be cultivated through education and self-discipline. It cannot be gifted or held back by anybody (*Young India*, 25-5-1921: 164). “*Swaraj* will be a fruit of incessant labour, suffering beyond measure” (*Young India*, 5-1-1922: 4).

“What we mean and want through Poorna *Swaraj* ... is an awakening among the masses, a knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest against the whole world, ... freedom from aggression from within or without, and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses” (*Young India*, 18-6-1931: 147).

As votaries of Truth and *ahimsa*, we should walk with Gandhi always and everywhere, giving first preference to the poor and the marginalised. To a friend, who was tormented by doubts, Gandhiji wrote a letter. The letter was mislaid, but on a later occasion the words were recalled to memory and transcribed:

“I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, try the following expedient: ‘Recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man whom you may have seen and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *Swaraj* or self-rule for the hungry and also spiritually starved millions of our countrymen?’

Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away” (“Gandhi Talisman”).

Gandhi saw democracy and military as contradiction in terms. In his view, “Democracy and dependence on the military and the police are incompatible. You cannot say it is good in one place and bad in another. Military help will degrade you” (*Harijan*, 12-1-1947: 489). This is true about sustainable societies. Since a true sustainable society will be

“...at peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting, nor being exploited ... All interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous” (Young India, 10-9-1931: 255).

There is no need for a military in a sustainable world. True sustainability “can only be an outcome of non-violence” (*Correspondence*, 1942-44: 143). Sadly, today, many of the modern societies are held together by military and money powers and not by people’s moral power derived from the practice of truth and *ahimsa*.

Gandhi criticised Western civilisation as one driven by “brute force and immorality,” contrasting it with his categorisation of Indian civilisation as one driven by “soul force and morality.” He wrote, “The peoples of Europe have no doubt political power but no swaraj” (*Young India*, 3-9-1925: 304). Gandhi captured the imagination of the people of India with his ideas about winning “hate with love.” Gandhi wrote: “There must be no impatience, no barbarity, no insolence, no undue pressure. If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one's cause” (*Young India*, 23-2-1930: 340). Civil disobedience and non-co-operation as practised under *Satyagraha* are based on the “law of suffering,” a doctrine that the endurance of suffering is a means to an end. This end usually implies a moral uplifting or progress of an individual or society. Therefore, non-co-operation in *Satyagraha* is in fact, a means to secure

the co-operation of the opponent, consistently with truth and justice (*Young India*, 16-6-1920: 396–399). Gandhi successfully used non-cooperation and *ahimsa* in the Indian independence movement “in order to evolve democracy” (*Young India*, 8-9-1920: 5), and today we can use profitably in our journey towards sustainable societies. Unless we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ethically, they will not be sustainable.

Gandhian path to *swaraj*, by extension today to sustainable societies, is “the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic, and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all” (*Harijan*, 27-5-1939: 143). To this effect, “every man and woman is taught to think for himself or herself” (*Harijan*, 14-7-1946: 220), and “the individual will is governed and limited by the social will which is the State, which is government by and for democracy” (*Harijan*, 28-9-1947: 350). Individual freedom is to be balanced by the limitations set by the common good and welfare of all. “Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member” (*Harijan*, 27-5-1939: 144). This is possible only when the policies and action plans for the realisation of SDGs is governed by ethics, rather than military and market, and the transformative agenda consciously responds to the cry of the People and Planet for Peace and Prosperity. Societies are sustainable only to the extent that people practice truth and *ahimsa* and strive for *swaraj*.

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## ETHICS IN CONTEXT FROM A VIETNAMESE VIEWPOINT

*Anh Tho Andres-Kammler<sup>127</sup>*

In my role as Globethics.net Coordinator of the "*Ethics in Higher Education for Teaching and Administrative Professionals (EHE-TP)*" global training program, I have come to understand more about the importance of ethics in the context of Vietnamese culture. I have gained further insight from the perspective of someone who is Vietnamese-born, and yet has lived in the West since early adulthood.

Over the years, Vietnam has changed from a traditional Confucian society to a chaotic society in a process of development, with increasing inequality and unrest among the population. Though we are perceived as one of the emerging economies with much potential, external and foreign analysts have expressed concern over the chaos attributed to its declining values.

My purpose in this chapter is to share, especially with our readers from non-Asian countries, the role ethics has played historically in Asian and particularly Vietnamese culture and society. I express my belief that ethics *does in fact matter* to Vietnam and is an integral part of the educational process.

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First of all, allow me to share a snapshot of the Vietnamese culture and tradition for newcomers to this part of the world, as necessary background for understanding the role of ethics in Vietnam.

Coming from the Confucian tradition, Vietnamese were naturally inclined to respect the social hierarchy, which is comprised of mainly four social classes, according to the Confucian definition. The social classes are categorised as follows: the intellectuals (*Sỹ*), the peasantry (*Nông*), the artisans (*Công*), and lastly, the businesspeople (*Thương*). From this list, ordered in terms of social importance according to Confucian thought, we can see that intellectuals occupied a primary role in the pre-modern Vietnamese society.

The Vietnamese belief system draws its foundation primarily from values and virtues based on the philosophies of *Buddhism*, *Confucianism*, and *Taoism* - considered as the 'triple religion' (*Tam giáo*) that are prevalent in the Vietnamese culture. However, Vietnam owes much of its belief system to folk tales and traditions. Therefore, Vietnamese people are not referred as belonging to one unified group of believers of any of these above-mentioned philosophical schools.

The main "religion" of the Vietnamese mainly consists of the three Confucian social relations (*Tam cương*) practiced by the Vietnamese people through the cult of ancestors (*Đạo ông bà*).

These three relations include that between the monarch with his subjects (*Quân thần cương*), the one between the father with his sons (*Phụ tử cương*), and one between the husband with his wife(s) (*Phu phụ cương*). The word 'cương' means 'reins', as in 'holding the reins', which signifies 'having things under control'. In this context, it would mean mastering the guidelines of the relations, the equivalent of our modern ethical trade term 'code of conduct'.

According to the three-word book '*Tam tự kinh*' of Taoism, the "monarch-subject" relation is based mainly on the virtue of loyalty *Nghĩa*, which means integrity also inclusive of the notion of justice and

fairness; the “father-son” relation based on *Nhân*, which means humanity, compassion and empathy; and the “husband-wife” relation based on *Lễ*, which means harmony or respect. The latter relation is translated in rituals in the worship of ancestors, the traditions of gift-giving that shows gratitude, or the protocol of social hierarchy due to seniority in age or in wisdom.

The leaders (i.e. monarch, father and husband) shall provide love, care and protection to their community members (i.e. subject, son and wife). In return, the family (subjects, wives and children) shall respect, love, obey, and live in harmony with the head of the nation, of the family or of the home. Across the lines, the underlying virtues of intelligence *Trí*, and trustworthiness *Tín* regulate all relationships in the Confucian society.

The five main virtues (*Ngũ thường*) include *Nhân* (仁), *Nghĩa* (義), *Lễ* (禮), *Trí* (智), *Tín* (信), which constitute the code of conduct for Vietnamese males. The three rules of submission (*Tam tông*) apply to the feminine gender, who must also practice the four virtues (*Tứ đức*), which include housekeeping skills (*Công*), cultivating beauty (*Dung*), keeping respectful speech towards others (*Ngôn*), and keeping ethical conduct through loyalty to her husband (*Hạnh*).

In the Vietnamese oral tradition, which played an important role in the education of the masses, we can still find many stories based on the Buddhist teachings. These teachings are combined with the Confucian upbringing, that emphasise the benefit of ethical conduct as part of the moral education (*Lễ*) and the *Law of Karma*.

As far as my generation is concerned, in the days of pre-communist regime when I was young (and even further back in the traditional Vietnamese society of the time of my parents and great grandparents), we were reminded of our duty and respect of the social order through these teachings. In this context, teachers, parents, priests or monks are

important stakeholders of a social system that evolves around the family as the nucleus of society.

In our education received at home, we were taught the rituals that show respect and loyalty to our parents and older members of the family. Such rituals included, practicing the cult of the ancestors by offering flowers and fruits on the altar, paying visits to our distant family members, or sharing our responsibilities among brothers and sisters. We were also taught to cultivate peace and harmony in our dealings with people around us, such as bringing gifts on special occasions to our neighbours or helping out poorer colleagues at work on the principles of solidarity, kindness and social harmony. In resolving conflicts, we were encouraged to do-no-harm to all living beings on earth, or keep our promises given to others based on the Law of karma.

However, the post-modern Vietnamese social context has been affected by wars and the ideological mutations of the Vietnamese perception, of what is considered moral values and system of beliefs. Looking through the loss of practice of these Confucian principles, I could witness a disintegration of families throughout the years, which is manifest through literature and everyday life.

In the North, Vietnamese people have undergone brutal disruptions of the society through centuries of war, but the utmost transformation of the social values was under the communist ideology, which abolished the Confucian tradition to replace it with Marxism by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a consequence, ideology that is foreign to traditional Vietnamese thinking was introduced, to replace loyalty to the Monarch to accountability to the Party. The abolition of the social relations of pre-war had been replaced by arguments favouring efforts of fighting against imperialism, in the name of anti-revolutionary partisanship. In the absence of religious practices or moral education, considered as a sleeping drug to the 'revolutionary spirit', there was a vacuum of moral

values that explains partly the disintegration of the family-based values and traditions.

In the South, Vietnamese people enjoyed a more liberal regime but were in a state of warfare, led by President Ngo Dinh Die, supported by America. The Diem regime was seen by external observers as a military dictatorship, but it has been remembered and recognized to be one of the most ethical governments, in terms of the values-based education and the quality of the people who were trained during this period. Indeed, in spite of the war, people were still free to choose and practice their religions and interact with the outer world. Foreign literature, foreign education from France and the United States were, for the most part, open to all social classes who could afford the high tuition fees. Public education taught in Vietnamese language was free and open to all. There was free press and a multi-party Parliament that allowed freedom of speech and thoughts, unlike in the northern part of the country which was closed behind the Iron Curtain.

As the Second Indochina War period ended in 1973, with the withdrawal of the American troops, “peace” was attained through the recapitulation of the southern government (Republic of Vietnam) to the northern government (Democratic Republic of Vietnam). This led to the re-unification of Vietnam and the birth of the Vietnamese Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN). The massive migration from the northern part, to the richer and milder southern way of life created another mutation among the Vietnamese population, through family separation, marriage, divorce, and other forms of social cohesion or disruptions effects from this “re-mix”.

In the early 1990s, after a period of post-war reconstruction through collectivism, the country was re-opened to foreign investments, and a form of liberalism with a socialist orientation was introduced. With this new business-oriented policy, more interaction with foreigners was allowed, and foreign education was once more open to Vietnamese

students onsite, online or through study abroad programs. While only a minority of the population could afford to benefit from the open policy, inequality gaps became more apparent due to the privatization and reduction of public services in the health, education, transport, and housing services. Due to the dichotomy among the social classes of the have and the have-not, the Vietnamese society was once more transformed into one with more materialistic values that overwrite the Confucian tradition.

In this context, the majority of the Vietnamese population has been confronted with a decline of ethical values in post-modern Vietnam. Teachers have been faced with many challenges in their role as educators, including the explosion of divorce, rise in domestic and street violence, and new challenges of economic survival.

For teachers, a main challenge was to comply with curricula conceived and designed by bureaucrats, leaving no room for autonomy to the teachers in their role as “educator”, thus also making the profession less attractive to younger teachers. As a history teacher shared his story: “The relationship between the “educator” and the “learners” is reduced to that of skills development, rather than the “formation of attitude” that is part of the education process”. Other teachers mentioned the concern of group psychology due to the disparities of social norms that were present in the Confucian society. This new social configuration makes it difficult for the teachers to maintain discipline in class, let alone to deliver their work as wished.

From the parents’ viewpoints, there is an overall perception of the declining sense of responsibility of teachers, which leads to the declining moral atmosphere of the whole society, attributed to the lack of “moral education” of the younger generations. With the privatisation of education, even at the kindergarten level, parents are now under financial pressure of paying higher tuition fees, to compensate teachers who require students to join their “private tuition class” after the official

school hours. Most parents assume that once they have fulfilled their duties of paying the tuition fees, they can transfer their educational duty to the hands of teachers.

As a result, teachers are left alone in their task of “educating the children”, and sometimes face the anger of parents when their children are punished or sanctioned for their misbehaviour in class, or failed due to their insufficient performance. Nonetheless, the biggest challenge is that the whole society—teachers, students, and parents included—are all under the pressure of maintaining the “political correctness” of the learning process, in line with the political agenda.

In my view, in any political system, the definition of *ethics* is adapted to the values defined by the belief system that is underlying organizational culture of that political system. It is therefore understandable that the Vietnamese definition of *ethics* follows the same tendency. Indeed, although the motto of education is about strengthening human values in the learners, that should be focused on the respect of ethics or *Tiên học lễ*, before proceeding to acquire the knowledge or *Hậu học văn* following the Confucian tradition. However, with globalisation and the privatisation of public services, post-modern parents and teachers are now under pressure to prepare their children/students to a professional life that is defined by other standards such as financial benefits and social advancement, in the absence of ethical consideration to others.

Therefore, the definition of ethics in the post-modern belief systems in Vietnam tends to follow the trend that we also observe in the globalisation era: a virtue such as loyalty to the organization is perceived as *corporate culture conformity* in a liberal capitalist society. However, in a totalitarian system, it means “loyalty to the ruling party” and more radically speaking, the “conformity to the prevalent religious norms” in a religion-based regime.

From my personal experience, interacting with different groups of teaching professionals coming from various backgrounds, I think that there should be a consensus between the three pillars of the social cohesion – the family, the school and the society – in defining what is needed to build an ethical and healthy education system. These groups should work together to make a viable environment where every stakeholder can benefit from the positive outcomes of a philosophy of education aimed at sustainability.

The education at home should prepare students to follow the rules at school, in terms of harmony and respect to others, especially to the teachers and the staff at school. The education at school is to prepare students to be a good citizen, while equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed for their professional life and their social integration. The education in society is to keep the Vietnamese values and traditions inspired from the *Tam giáo* to maintain harmony and social cohesion.

The lessons learned from our Vietnam training program on *Ethics in Higher Education for Teaching and Administrative Professionals* are conclusions that are similar to that of groups from Afghanistan or Africa who are facing similar challenges, although at a different level. The conclusions in all cases were that, for each group of stakeholders within the same cultural context, a code of conduct is needed, and should be practiced by the community involved. Therefore, there is a need of contextualization, such as conducting the course in the local language, and citing examples of ethical dilemma in context help learners to understand the importance of the teachers' role in disseminating ethics in their teaching.

My own take-away was inspired by the *VNTU Charter*<sup>128</sup> proposed by Michelle Duong, a veteran teacher who had experienced both the

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<sup>128</sup> Michelle Duong, *Charter for Global Federation of Vietnamese Teachers Unions*, VNTU Collection, Vietnam Hoc Institute Geneva, 2020. Link to English version: <https://nghiepdoangiaochuc.net/global->

benefits of the pre-war Vietnam education and post-war capacity building efforts as an overseas Vietnamese from the USA. In her proposal, she advocates a return to ethics based both on universal values and contextual values that are worth considering for adoption by teaching professionals from all countries of the world who are concerned about ethical education.

The Charter is composed of a preamble that explains the importance of ethics as foundation to all pedagogical approaches, based on the humanistic philosophy of Professor Luong Kim Dinh and the Vietnamese ethos (For whom, *Education* is a discipline that encompasses every other discipline as a noble mission). The preamble states that

“Recognizing children's individual development as the goal of education, teachers must respect students' freedom of thought and encourage students to develop independent and critical thinking. Attention should be given to early age education, as children and young people who are equipped with certain skills such as reading, writing, or counting are more likely to have a better future than their counterparts who lack these skills.”

The fifteen rules of the Charter are practical guidelines that constitute the Code of conduct of the Global Federation of Vietnamese Teachers Unions worldwide<sup>129</sup>. The founding members of the Vietnamese Teacher’s Union were the first to adopt the Charter in its by-laws as Mission statement.

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federation-of-vietnamese-teachers-unions/the-vietnamese-teachers-union-charter/

<sup>129</sup> Michelle Duong, *Charter for Global Federation of Vietnamese Teachers Unions*, VNTU Collection, Vietnam Hoc Institute Geneva, 2020. Link to English version: <https://nghiepdoangiaochuc.net/global-federation-of-vietnamese-teachers-unions/the-vietnamese-teachers-union-charter/>



This is understandable, because to the eyes of all Vietnamese parents and citizens, education is considered as the driving force for sustainable development, national construction and peace. The education profession places many responsibilities on teachers, and equally, these responsibilities require corresponding rights. Teachers should be empowered to have the right to freely exercise all civil and professional rights, which is not yet the case of post-modern Vietnam at this stage.

## MUSLIM RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

*Dicky Sofjan*<sup>130</sup>

### **Introduction – The Signs of God**

This chapter attempts to expound on religious ethics on environmentalism from the Islamic perspective. It delves into the various meanings of Allah’s Verbal (*ayatun qawliyah*) and Universal Signs (*ayatun kauniyah*). The author argues that Islam, as a religion, holds a steadfast and strong pro-environmental ethical stance. Many of the Holy Quran’s sacred verses, Prophetic traditions and religious ethical teachings are drenched with ecological vision and awareness about planetary consciousness, while instilling curiosity and love for the natural world. The article explains how Islamic precepts such as *khalifah* (steward), *amanah* (trust), *mizan* (balance or equilibrium), *tabdzir* (wastefulness) and *zuhd* (austerity) could be applied in day-to-day Muslim religious life and living to support climate change and sustainability.

To a Muslim (literally, one who submits), Allah is the Creator of all things. He is the “King of Kings” (*Malik al-Amlak*), who controls all

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<sup>130</sup> Dicky Sofjan, Globethics.net Ethics Expert.

dominions, and oversees the multiverse through his compassion and grace. He is the Sustainer (*ar-Rabb*) of life and holds up the sky with no foundations to stand on. Allah holds everything in the balance (*al-mizan*). He is known by many beautiful names and attributes, but the most cited ones are “the Beneficent, the Merciful” (*ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim*).<sup>131</sup>

Allah bestows His bounty, wisdom and blessings by appointing messengers and prophets. He reveals His signs (*ayahs*) through sacred Scriptures, through the sayings of prophets and sages, and by way of divine revelation and inspiration (*wahy*) through those who cultivate their hearts and souls. These are categorized as Allah’s ‘verbal signs’ (*ayatun qauliyah*). According to Islamic orthodoxy, the last of the chain of prophets appointed by Him was Muhammad ibn Abdullah in Mecca (now Saudi Arabia), and the last revealed verbatim Word of Allah is Al-Quran (literally, The Recitation), which among others is to affirm previous Scriptures and divine teachings brought by the long line of righteous messengers, holy prophets, virtuous saints and pious sages. In addition to the Quran as the Revealed Word, most Muslims consider the Prophetic traditions (*ahadist*) not only as a source of religious conduct for personal growth, but also a judicial reference.

Another form of God’s signs comprises everything outside the verses of Scriptures and wise speeches of the prophets, saints and sages. This is called the Signs of the Universe (*ayatun kauniyah*). One of the greatest mysteries of all time is creation itself. In Islam, every single creation is wholesome, beneficial and significant, and serves a certain purpose in the fabric of life and the constellation of the multiverse. One of the

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<sup>131</sup> The phrase “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful” is cited 114 times in the Quran in the beginning of all chapters, except one. Quranic scholars are still debating whether or not it is part of the Quran proper.

familiar verses from the Quran states: “On earth, there are signs for those with sure faith—and in yourselves too, do you not see?”<sup>132</sup>

Even as one scrolls through the themes and names of the chapters (*surahs*) in the Quran, one might be surprised to find many references to the natural world and the animal kingdom in the Islamic Scripture. As an illustration, some of the chapters in the Quran include: *Ar-Ra’d* (The Thunder), *Al-Hijr* (The Rock), *Al-Kahf* (The Cave), *An-Nur* (The Light), *Ad-Dhukan* (The Smoke) *Al-Ahqaf* (The Dunes), *Adz-Dzariyat* (The Winnowing Winds) and others. In addition to the above, references to the animal kingdom include: *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer), *Al-An‘Am* (The Cattle), *An-Nahl* (The Bee), *An-Naml* (The Ant), *Al-Ankabut* (The Spider) and *Al-Fiil* (The Elephant).

This is not to argue that the Quran could be equated with a book of science, or that it could be read as such. Rather, the Quran raises these natural objects and phenomena to get reciters to consider, wonder and ponder about the mysteries of the multiverse. Furthermore, the Quran unambiguously challenged its reciters to unravel them. On numerous instances, the Quran challenges its reciters, and ask: “Will you not reflect?”<sup>133</sup> Another verse laments as follows: “Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?”<sup>134</sup>

In this context, the humankind is part of Allah’s miracle and mystery. The Quran states that the humankind was created in a “perfect mould”.<sup>135</sup> In one of the most famous Divine traditions (*hadist al-qudsi*),<sup>136</sup> cited extensively among the Sufis and Muslim mystics, the God of Islam once claimed, “I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be

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<sup>132</sup> The Quran 51:20-21.

<sup>133</sup> The Quran 6:50.

<sup>134</sup> The Quran 23:115.

<sup>135</sup> The Quran 95:4.

<sup>136</sup> *Hadist qudsi* is a special category of *ahadist*. It is usually defined as a speech of Allah narrated by the Prophet Muhammad. It is therefore not part of the holy Quran and cannot be used in prayers (*shalat*).

known. So I created a creation [the humankind] so I may be known.”<sup>137</sup>

Thus, the humankind *does* play a central role in creation, at least in its perpetual attempt to seek for the True and Ultimate Reality, which is God itself.

This, no doubt dispels the accusation against anthropocentrism, which argues that creation was created solely *for* human beings to be exploited and utilized for their own selfish purposes, desires, whims and fancies. It is also *not* the predisposition of Islam, nor the Prophet Muhammad, that other species or lesser beings are relegated to secondary status, and therefore required to serve and fulfil the human civilizational project. It does, however, argue that the humankind *does* have an important role in the whole fabric of creation, and such a role is based on religious moral imperative and ethical responsibility.

This chapter attempts to give an overview of how the teachings of Islam provide a strong basis for environmentalism, and care for the planet and all the coexisting sentient beings.<sup>138</sup> It also provides clear guidance on how religious ethics on environmentalism, as enshrined in the Quran and Prophetic tradition, goes hand-in-hand with reason and intellect.

## **Human Stewardship**

It is evident, that both the Quran and the Prophetic tradition point to a particular purpose and function of the humankind on this planet, which is said to be the “steward on earth” (*khalifah fii al-‘ardh*).<sup>139</sup> To be able

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<sup>137</sup> For a complete overview of this theme, see the Ph.D. dissertation of Moeen Afnani (2011), “Unraveling the Mystery of The Hidden Treasure: The Origin and Development of a Hadist Qudsi and its Application in Sufi Doctrine,” Near Eastern Studies University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>138</sup> For a comprehensive overview on “Islam and Ecology”, see Foltz et al. (2003).

<sup>139</sup> The Quran 2:30.

to perform such function, human beings are bestowed by Allah ‘*aql*’ (reason or intellect) or the innate ability to discern his or her ecological surroundings. Such God-given potentiality and facility carry with them certain obligations from the viewpoint of universal morality and ethics. Being a quintessential servant of Allah (‘*abdullah*’), the humankind is expected to worship God. The Quran states: “And verily, we have not created the *jins* and the human beings, except to worship.”<sup>140</sup> This has been the main doctrine to which the humankind is bound by the need to worship Allah, and Allah alone. Thus, partnering Allah is akin to committing the gravest sin before the Omnipotent (*al-Jabbar*) and Ultimate Judge (*‘Aziz al-Hakim*).

However, contrary to conventional belief, even among Muslims, the term “worship” (*‘ibadah*) in Islam holds many meanings and carries with it multiple interpretations. In its most popular, yet restrictive meaning, worship denotes devotion, veneration and adoration toward God by way of prayers, supplication and engaging in benevolent acts to please Allah. Meanwhile, in its broadest and most progressive interpretation, the term encompasses any and all kinds of thoughts, actions and behaviours that are essentially good and/or beneficial to other humans or other species. The Prophet Muhammad famously once said, “The best of you is the best among you in conduct.”<sup>141</sup> Consequently, the beauty of Muslim conduct depends greatly on the benefit he or she brings to humans and other species.

As a steward on earth, Muslims are obligated to “enjoin good and forbid evil” (*al-‘amr al-ma’ruf wa al-nahy al-munkar*).<sup>142</sup> Islam therefore is not—as many might think it is—a deterministic religion, as the teaching emphasizes on human agency. Although the God of Islam is thought of as the Almighty and is capable of doing anything and

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<sup>140</sup> The Quran 51:56.

<sup>141</sup> Shahih Muslim, No.624.

<sup>142</sup> Among others, see the Quran 9:112 and 31:17.

everything, human action, or inaction, *does* matter, especially in relation to the world we live in. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad specifically teaches the principle of human agency, which sits at the core of Muslim ethics on environmentalism and other forms of progressive social agenda, by saying:

“Whosoever of you see evil [or destruction], let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest faith.”<sup>143</sup>

In light of the ecological crisis, Muslims therefore cannot sit idly, and it is forbidden to engage in wilful ignorance. It is the responsibility of Muslims, as other human beings, to mitigate the problem and not to resign to fate or determinism. The Quran states, “Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.”<sup>144</sup> While this serves as the main theory of change in Islam, it could also become an entry point for Muslim applied environmental ethics. Whereby to be a good Muslim, one has to care for the planet and all its inhabitants, and act upon the ecological crisis to mitigate the problem for Heaven’s sake.

In addition to the principle of human agency, Islam provides a fountain of wisdom on how to love and care for the planet and *all* of Allah’s creation. Stewardship in Islam entails not only passive co-existence with other species, but also the need to appreciate, respect and care for all the species that Allah has created on this planet and beyond. Here, the planet is considered as a trust (*amanah*) given by Allah to be cherished and looked after,<sup>145</sup> something that is obligated upon those who have reason, intellect and ecological vision. The real test and trial

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<sup>143</sup> *Shahih Muslim*, No.34.

<sup>144</sup> The Quran 11:13.

<sup>145</sup> The Quran 33:72.

as a steward is that we—as wise humans (*homo sapiens*) who were entrusted with the *amanah*, are unremittingly trapped in a state of forgetfulness.

The hasty desire and yearning for material gains and worldly pleasures have caused humans to forget their status as a *khalifah fii al-'ardh*, and therefore engage relentlessly in environmental exploitation, resulting in ecological destruction and degradation. What immediately transpires is the devaluation of the natural world, which in turn causes us to relinquish the teachings and wisdom of our own religious traditions.

The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad abound with respect to how Muslims should interact and engage the environment. For the Prophet of Islam, the whole earth is pure and sacred. “The earth has been created for me as a mosque and as a means of purification.”<sup>146</sup> Given the context of the barren desert where he grew up in Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad also has a penchant for trees and plants. He was reported to have said, “If a Muslim plants a tree or grow grains and a bird, a person or an animal eats from it will be counted as a charity for him.”<sup>147</sup> Another Prophetic tradition also relates to planting saplings as the Day of Reckoning unfolds. Prophet Muhammad said, “If the Resurrection were established upon one of you, while he has in his hand a sapling, then let him plant it.”<sup>148</sup> The significance of such teaching is that Islam is pro-life, and sees trees, plants, flowers, birds, bees and humans as a sharing community, where every party benefits. This is wholly consistent with the Quranic pronouncement that states:

‘There is not a living creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected

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<sup>146</sup> *Shahih Bukhari*, No.331.

<sup>147</sup> *Shahih Bukhari*, No.12.

<sup>148</sup> *Musnad Ahmad*, No.12491.



nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered.’<sup>149</sup>

When it comes to resources, Islam is very clear about its stance on extravagance or wastefulness (*tabdzir*). It also has legal implications in Islamic law, as wastefulness constitutes an impermissible (*haram*) act or behaviour, and is disliked by Allah. The Quran states the following:

‘He is the One Who produces gardens—both cultivated and wild—and palm trees, crops of different flavours, olives, and pomegranates—similar ‘in shape’, but dissimilar ‘in taste’. Eat from the fruit they bear and pay the dues at harvest, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful.’<sup>150</sup>

The Prophetic tradition also highlights the need to consume only what is needed and necessary, and forbade Muslims to engage in wastefulness. On the need to use scarce water in the desert, the Prophet Muhammad once said, “Do not [waste] water even if performing ablution on the bank of a fast flowing large river.”<sup>151</sup> Another one was narrated from ‘Amr bin Shuaib that a man came to the Prophet and said: “I am poor and I do not have anything, and I have an orphan (under my care). He said: “Eat from the property of your orphan without being extravagant, wasteful or keeping it as capital for yourself.””<sup>152</sup>

In contrast, Islam therefore views modesty and austerity (*zuhd*) as a key to happiness, and a way to prevent transgression of God’s laws and trust. The Prophet Muhammad once said, “Richness is not having many belongings, but richness is the contentment of the soul.”<sup>153</sup> Such contentment is often found in being grateful with what one has and

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<sup>149</sup> The Quran 6:38.

<sup>150</sup> The Quran 6:141.

<sup>151</sup> As recorded by Al-Tirmidhi.

<sup>152</sup> As recorded by An-Nasa’i, No.3665.

<sup>153</sup> *Shahih Muslim*, No.2247.

living a well-balanced life in perfect harmony with nature. Unfortunately, despite the abundance of evidences from the Scriptures, Prophetic traditions, interpretations and teachings,<sup>154</sup> many Muslims today still live in wastefulness, without due consideration for the environment and the extractive industries that feed on it. Ironically, based on data from food sustainability, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, two main Muslim majority nations, are the “largest food wasters”.<sup>155</sup> Saudi Arabia stands at 427kg, while Indonesia is at 300kg per person per year, followed by the United States and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>156</sup>

The intellectual challenge before us therefore is to reconnect the religious ethics with environmentalism. Some attempts have been made, but further outreaching and awareness building need to be done to ensure the message trickles down to the local communities. In 2015, for instance, Islamic faith leaders, scholars and environmental activists announced the “Islamic Declaration on Climate Change”. One of the things agreed upon by the Muslim leaders is “the scientific consensus on climate change” and the need “to stabilize greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate systems”.<sup>157</sup> They also committed themselves to “100 % renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible”.<sup>158</sup>

At the national level, Indonesian Muslims have probably been the most successful in terms of getting traditional religious authorities to highlight the need for greater sensitivity toward the ongoing ecological

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<sup>154</sup> See Magunjaya (2010) for a combination between principles and practice as experienced by environmental non-governmental organizations in Indonesia.

<sup>155</sup> For more on food sustainability, see: <https://foodsustainability.eiu.com/food-loss-and-waste/>

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> For more, see: <https://unfccc.int/news/islamic-declaration-on-climate-change>

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

crisis. The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), a representative body of local Muslim organizations, has issued seven *fatwas* (legal opinions) on environmental conservation.<sup>159</sup> Over the course of almost 40 years, the MUI has issued seven environmentally friendly *fatwas*, which cover the following strategic areas:<sup>160</sup>

- “Population, health and development” (1983)
- “Water recycling” (2010)
- “Environmentally friendly mining” (2011)
- “Conservation of rare species for a balanced ecosystem” (2014)
- “Waste management to prevent environmental degradation” (2014)
- “Utilization of alms, charity, donations and endowments for the construction of community water and sanitation systems” (2015)
- “Rule on burning forest and land and how to mitigate it” (2016)<sup>161</sup>

Now, whether or not the efficacy of these *fatwas* has any bearing on the country’s track record on environmental protection and conservation is a different question altogether. However, Indonesia is perhaps the most progressive Muslim country when it comes to connecting Islamic religious ethics and environmentalism. Furthermore, just recently in 2019, Indonesian Muslim environmental leaders also initiated the establishment of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, whose main goal is “to stop deforestation” and “bring the commitment, influence and moral authority of religions to efforts to protect the world’s rainforests and the indigenous peoples that serve as their guardians”.<sup>162</sup> Thus, it is without doubt that what the Indonesian Muslims did in this context is by far the

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<sup>159</sup> See Mangunjaya and Praharawati 2019.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> For more on MUI *fatwas*, see: <https://mui.or.id/fatwa/>

<sup>162</sup> See <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/>

most progressive compared to all other Muslim populated countries of the world.

Even in the Islamic Education Scientific Organization (ISESCO)—whose function is almost similar to the UNESCO but only for the members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)—the idea that religion could be a significant contributing factor in the protection and conservation of the environment had only recently been acknowledged. Among other things, ISESCO has been looking at the effects of climate change and ways to implement sustainable development programs and strategies for the Muslim countries. In early October 2019, during the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of Environment Ministers (ICEM), the ISESCO adopted the so-called “Rabat Declaration on the Promotion of Cultural and Religious Roles in the Protection of the Environment and Achieving Sustainable Development”.<sup>163</sup>

## **Muslim Religious Ethics**

As much as Muslim religious ethics is derived from the sacred Scriptures and Prophetic tradition, *‘aql* plays a central role in the development of human conduct and behaviour. Based on the exposition in the previous sections, Islam emphasizes stewardship and human agency in its environmental envisioning, which compel Muslims to apply the religious ethics of environmentalism or “green deen”.<sup>164</sup> In many ways, this is consistent with the notion of the Muslim “heart ware of ecological sustainability”, which emphasize the “inner dimension of the drivers of sustainability”, wherein

‘...it points to values, faith, religious convictions and spiritual practices in all the things beyond the materiality of ecology and

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<sup>163</sup> For more on the Rabat Declaration, see: <https://www.icesco.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/12/Rabat-Declaration-ICEM8-Environment.pdf>

<sup>164</sup> On the concept and application of “green deen”, see Abdul-Matin (2010).

the workings of ecological governance. It is based on the sense of spiritual interconnectedness and the heightened awareness of the role of human beings as “stewards on earth”.<sup>165</sup>

First, as a steward on this planet, human beings have been entrusted by God to safeguard the natural environment to ensure its sustainability and fulfil the functions that Allah has intended, which is to bring sustenance for both human beings and the other living species. The notion of stewardship entails that moral responsibility lies in the shoulders of human beings, who have been bestowed the faculties necessary to discern the signs of God better than other species, to care for the planet and all its inhabitants.

Second, the principle of balance or equilibrium (*mizan*) is the be-all end-all of Islamic environmentalism. In keeping with the Islamic tradition and ethos, Muslim environmental ethics envisions the world as a place of beauty and balance. Humans should therefore ideally work toward developing a planetary consciousness and sense of responsibility, as a being gifted with reason and intellect to discern and decipher the signs of God. This entails the need to enjoin work that benefits the preservation of the planet, protection of biodiversity and mitigation of species extinction and not against them. Such a stance would likely put environmentally conscious Muslims at odds with those who aspire to frantic development without due consideration for ecological sustainability.

Third, Muslims are morally compelled to perpetually assess their main purpose in life. This requires them to examine their everyday choices in life, particularly in terms of their mode of production and consumption. Should there be any contradiction between their choices in life and their commitment to Islam, some form of transformation would need to take place to ensure that the religious spirit and ethics of

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<sup>165</sup> See Sofjan (2020): 30-31.

environmentalism remain intact. Again, a life of austerity is the norm in Islam, if the Prophet Muhammad and his family are to be the standard bearer. *Zuhd* stands diametrically opposite to *tabdzir*, which could bring both suffering and invite Allah's wrath.

Fourth, if societal transformation were to take place, individual level ethics would have to be transposed to the collective realm. Both formal and non-formal education remains the most efficacious means to transfer the necessary knowledge and wisdom on ethical environmentalism. Religious education in schools and mosques (e.g. Friday sermons) should therefore include a constant flow of content to build awareness about the environment, to instil love, appreciation and wonder of the natural world as enshrined in the Quran and taught by the holy Prophet. In the absence such awareness and vision, Islam would be relegated to a religion of consumerism, and Muslims would be at lost without any meaningful connections with their surrounding environment.

Fifth, Muslims need to be engaged in climate action and practice sustainability, not simply because it is a global agenda or that global investments are pouring in to confront those challenges, but rather because Islam demands it. And our reason and intellect have confirmed the science behind climate change and sustainable development.<sup>166</sup> In other words, the realisation on the phenomenon of global warming and the need to place emphasis on sustainable development practices are observable facts that can be scientifically proven. In fact, the current ecological crisis, if true, has been foretold by the Scriptures and anticipated by the Prophet.

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<sup>166</sup> For more reading on "Islam and sustainable development", see Al-Jayyousi (2012).

The Quran states,

“Corruption has appeared on land and sea as a result of people’s actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back.”<sup>167</sup>

## Conclusion

For religiously committed Muslims, the Quran, the Prophetic tradition, and *‘aql* serve as the highest sources of truth and inspiration. They provide cues in life, and help Muslims make everyday life decisions regarding what constitute good or bad thoughts, actions and behaviours. As demonstrated, many Islamic religious precepts prove useful to infuse Muslim planetary consciousness and environmental awareness. In terms of the religious and spiritual resources, there are almost no limits to how Islamic religious ethics could contribute to the human understanding about their role as the *khalifah fii al-‘ardh*, whose moral obligation and ethical responsibility lies in mitigating, and not perpetuating, the current ecological crisis.

However, such a process cannot be accomplished as long as the self transformation and active social reforms do not take place. As Nasr (1989) reminds us:

“It is still our hope that as the crisis created by man’s forgetfulness of who he really is grows and that as the idols of his own making crumble one by one before his eyes, he will begin a true reform of himself, which always means a spiritual rebirth and through his rebirth attain a new harmony with the world of nature around him.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> The Quran 30:41.

<sup>168</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1968/1989). *Man and Nature*, p.9.

As such, Muslim religious leaders, scholars and environmental activists need to come to terms with the idea of reforming themselves, while revitalizing the minds and hearts of people, notably the young generation, to develop a deep, strong and genuine sense of the natural wonders of the multiverse. This in part could be achieved by further infusing curiosity about the multifarious intellectual challenges that the Quran presents, and how the Prophet Muhammad had led a life, which fully appreciated and respected all life forms on the planet and beyond. This, after all, was the principal reason why Allah had sent down the Prophet Muhammad as a “mercy unto the multiverse” (*rahmatan li'l'aalamin*).<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> The Quran 21:107 states, “We have not sent you [O Muhammad], except as a mercy unto the multiverse.”



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## THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN CHURCH HISTORY

*Mariam Kartashyan*<sup>170</sup>

### **Introduction**

Ethics plays a significant role in church history, and there are two main reasons for it. On one hand, church history is related to theology and thus it needs to address some of the challenges in the area of theological ethics. On the other hand, church history is related to historiography and hence it needs to justify itself also from the perspective of historical ethics.

In addition to this, ethics itself has its various dimensions and can focus on several aspects, dependant on the discipline it is meant for. In general philosophical terms, ethics can be defined as a doctrine of morality in the sense of guiding customs, habits and systematising, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour. The purpose of following chapter is to analyse the role of ethics in church history, in other words, to reveal whether church historians care about ethics. This will be done through highlighting the relevance of ethics in the process of church history, and the behavioural attributes which ethics expects from church historians. In the process, the

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<sup>170</sup> Mariam Kartashyan, Academic Programmes Assistant, Globethics.net.

character and the role of the church historians will be analysed. The results will be related to the main ethical questions and multi-layered challenges that church history deals with as a subject. Finally, it will be discussed, whether a code of ethics is needed for church historians to assist them in making their work and mission ethically sound and ethically motivated.

## **Non-Ethical Phenomena in the Field of Church History**

There are certain behaviours and situations which reveal that there are some ethical challenges and gaps in the academic and research fields of church history. One of them is the lack of academic freedom, which is not always easy to overcome. There are several reasons for the restriction of this freedom.

A large number of church historians work on specific topics in a certain institution funding their research projects. Their freedom is often related to the interests of those institutions, depending on the institutional policy, confessional/religious focus of the faculty and other aspects. The institutions pay as clients and set limits for the historical work, thus restricting the research opportunities. The criteria for such research are therefore not prioritised by its ethical value and relevance for humanity, but by the limited interests of the institution. Church historians are sometimes also obliged to avoid conflicts between the results of their work and the interests of their clients: the academic institutions they work for.

Further, it is not always easy for church historians to receive access to all church archives or to receive copies of all needed archival sources, which also hinders their freedom. In addition to this, church historians can meet challenges regarding the publication of their research. There are several formal criteria they have to meet, such as the obligation to receive permission for publishing a specific content (photos, letters etc.) from a church-archive, to form texts according to the specifications of

the publisher, to have content which is acceptable and interesting for the publisher etc.<sup>171</sup>

Church historians themselves can at times also cause difficulties for the further development of church history. Similar to all other academic fields, several ethical disorders can be found in the field of church history. Plagiarism, research falsification, cheating and others are all-too-common non-ethical behaviours. The functional strategies to avoid them usually consist only in strong measurements and control. However, they also require increased ethical awareness in church-historical departments.<sup>172</sup> For this purpose, the significance of ethics in church history should be introduced to church historians at the beginning of their research activity.

Finally, there is a common need to highlight the modern societal challenges for those who write church history. The latter should be challenged to ask themselves what responsibilities they have towards the society they live in. Someone can ask, whether it is more important to write church history that supports ethical values in the world, or to write church history for its own sake? The answer is: both are important. Our modern world certainly needs sciences' ability to meet its societal

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<sup>171</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church there was the need of an *imprimatur* (permission) from the church authorities before printing theological books until the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Today it refers only to publications and translations of Holy Scripture, liturgical texts, prayer books, catechisms, theological textbooks and compilations of church decrees or official documents. See May, G., "Imprimatur/Imprimi potest", in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2405-8262\\_rgg4\\_SIM\\_10323](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2405-8262_rgg4_SIM_10323) [Accessed 31.08.2020].

<sup>172</sup> Increasing the ethical awareness in all sectors of higher education institutions represents the goal of Globethics.net. See Globethics.net (2017), *Transforming Societies through Ethics in Higher Education*, Annual Report, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/170546> [Accessed 31.08.2020]; Id. (2018), *Managing and Teaching Ethics in Higher Education*, Report, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/170388> [Accessed 31.08.2020]; etc.

challenges. Church historians need to be aware that they are not only researchers; they also have an ethical mission in the world. The reasons for this are explained in more detail in the following section of this essay.

## **Competence and Holism in Church History**

Similar to history, the task of the church history is to discover, collect, memorise, interpret and present past events. However, being a part of theology, church history is first of all related to the history of the revelation of the word of God and the history of the churches.<sup>173</sup> In addition to this, church history implies also the research of the historical context, which includes the relevant church-political, social, economic, cultural and other developments. That is why; independent from the precision of their research field, the work of church historians is very challenging. They have a certain responsibility towards the sciences and towards humanity to accurately use multi-perspective historical sources, in order to achieve complete results. It is not enough for them to look only through a theological lens. They also have to be competent enough to conduct inter-disciplinary and multi-perspective research from time to time.

However, the major problem in the church historiography is that it is done mostly by researchers whose education is exclusively theological. Hence, difficulties can arise for them in analysing the complex contents related to politics, diplomacy, social sciences and other fields. These aspects are sometimes essential in church history and may not be excluded. For example, the history of the ecumenical council's shows,

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<sup>173</sup> Manfred Heim offers following formulation of Church History: Its subject is the church in its historical manifestations – churches and Christian communities – in its structures and in its theology. See Heim, M. (2008), *Einführung in die Kirchengeschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., München: C. H. Beck, 9.

that world diplomacy was decisive in making ecclesiastical decisions. It is similar regarding many ecclesiastical divisions: there were often fuelled by several political reasons.<sup>174</sup> Hence, church historians should be able to recognise them, because sometimes – in numerous church-historical sources – they are missing.

Despite the need of being open to the viewpoints of other disciplines with which church history is correlated in order to find the right path to the “truth”, church historians have also to set certain limits. It has to be constantly questioned: where does church history start and end? This is where another ethical challenge for church historians begins. They should be competent and have a wide spectrum of view, but they also need to set the right boundaries in order not to lose their mission of church history.

The need to show a holistic approach presents another important challenge to church historians. This can be achieved through researching micro histories, such as the histories of several small churches or denominations, and reveal their global importance to make them parts of global history. Similarly, historical church research on forgotten actors and forgotten authors from the past is able to highlight the holistic character of church history. This kind of work has high value, because the memory of many of those actors and authors, despite their importance, has faded over time for church-political or other reasons in the past centuries.

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<sup>174</sup> While conducting research for my doctoral thesis on the Armenian-Catholic Schism (1871-1879/81), I became absolutely certain about this acknowledgement. In my book, I demonstrate a classical example of the transformation of an ecclesiastical conflict into a political issue. Kartashyan, M. (2020), *Zwischen kirchlicher Reform und Kulturimperialismus. Die Bulle Reversurus (1867) und das armenisch-katholische Schisma in seinen transnationalen Auswirkungen*, Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World 35, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Finally, depending on the research topic, the church historians are obliged to select the right sources and literature. The question of how relevant, authentic and reliable these sources are and how to evaluate them belongs to the critical analysis undertaken by church historians and shows the value of their work. However, there are also some unavoidable challenges which can make their source research difficult. First, strong language skills (including old languages) are often expected in order to consider viewpoints from all related contexts. Additionally, for financial walls or other reasons, it is not easy for church historians to achieve access to all the needed sources.

## **Objectiveness**

Another important challenge for church historians is to keep their objectiveness in research. This need arises because sometimes they include authors and actors from different denominations who contradict to their own religious views or each other. When the sources from authors of their own church contradict the position of the authors from other churches, it is difficult for some church historians to stay loyal to the principle of objectivity because they feel loyal to their church. In addition to this, there is always a temptation for church historians to focus on the sources which support the position of their own church tradition. Sometimes, national or cultural aspects can also influence objectivity, especially if it is related to sensitive topics. However, it is substantial for church historians, being true scientists, to remain as objective as possible, to be self-critical and to give opportunity to several authors and actors to be understood through their works. Only an open and objective strategy makes it possible to write complete and true history. The criteria for the choice of sources should be the quality, as well as their relevance for the research topic. An authoritarian or exclusive approach from a single denominational/religious perspective is

neither competent nor holistic, and it hinders the achievement of scientific goals.

There are yet other factors that can pressure church historians to lose their objectivity. One of them is the question of how church history work is received by different groups, as this can be very controversial. If the work is critical about a certain church tradition – because its behaviour in history was influenced by non-ethical political, economic and other forces – it can cause discomfort during its reception among the members of that church tradition. However, everyone interested in church history must have the ability to keep the awareness that there is no other way for competent church historians, other than being objective.

Finally, another challenge to objectivity in church history is the question of the definition of truth. Regardless of how competent, holistic and objective the church historians are, and how reliable and multi-perspective of sources they use, their interpretations are always individual. Hence their interpretation and position on the truth is always different from the truth of the other church historians, as well as from the truth of their readers, which makes their objectivity uncertain.

## **The Empowering Character of Church History**

Despite all the challenges in its way, church history is an important source for empowerment. There are several ways in which church historians can play an empowering role. First of all, they have the ability to write history about minorities and small religious groups or denominations, which are not well-known globally. There are already numerous books on ethnic, language and religious minorities. The input of church historians as theologians in this field, contributing to make micro histories on local or regional levels parts of the global history is unique. In doing this, church historians empower minorities immensely.



The goal of church historians in this case, is to find the correct way of dealing with minorities, so that the sole research goal is not factual historical knowledge; it is also to stimulate empathy and tolerance towards minorities.<sup>175</sup>

From the perspective of empowerment, the church historical research about women is also very valuable. The role of women in church history has been hidden throughout many centuries. There are many theologians who are focused on this issue, and who therefore research biographies and historical episodes that shed light on the role of women in church history.<sup>176</sup> This scientific movement is very empowering, not only for female researchers but also for other women.

Another way of empowerment is to discover historical church connections and correlations between different churches and denominations. The acknowledgement of sharing the same history is able to build bridges between people worldwide, and through them, makes exchanges stronger. This can be very empowering, especially for those who are alone, weakened and are in need of relationship and collaboration with others.

While being empowering, there are some important challenges church historians need to consider. They have to follow a certain - historical church glossary,<sup>177</sup> as it has its peculiarities compared to other

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<sup>175</sup> Heidrun Dierk highlights the importance of this aspect in teaching church history. Dierk, H. (2004), *Kirchengeschichte elementar. Entwurf einer Theorie des Umgangs mit geschichtlichen Traditionen im Religionsunterricht*, Heidelberg Univ., Habilitation, Münster: Lit Verlag, 405.

<sup>176</sup> See for example Berlis, A. (1998), *Frauen im Prozess der Kirchwerdung. Eine historisch-theologische Studie zur Anfangsphase des deutschen Altkatholizismus (1850-1890)*, Beiträge zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte 6, Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.; Sohn-Kronthaler, M. / Sohn A. (2008), *Frauen im kirchlichen Leben: vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute*, Innsbruck: Verlag Tyrolia.

<sup>177</sup> There are several books on church historical terms: See for example Benedetto, R. et. al., eds. (2008–), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church*

research fields. Similar to other historians, they need to keep certain ethical and linguistic rules: not to be judgemental in their formulations, but instead to be neutral and loyal. However, there are some modern developments, where caution is important. For instance, there is a tendency in some languages (such as in German), to avoid collective nouns which include male and female genders, and instead of it to separate both genders, in order to be loyal to both genders and empower women by highlighting the female noun. In media, but also in research including church history, this has become a more and more beloved writing style. However, there are some important questions which require consideration. First, this linguistic development lets us ask: is there not a risk to cause strong separation and thus also estrangement between men and women through such moves? Secondly, what does this mean for church history itself? It is problematic to divide the collective nouns into two gender groups, because this means that the collective forms do not exist and those nouns are completely the property of the men. This can have dramatic consequences for church history. It makes it appear as if women were absent in the older historical sources, in cases where the feminised nouns are missing. This is a great loss for history and rather de-powering for women. Finally, if there are only two gender forms for nouns, how about the other gender minorities? Thus, considering all these aspects, it is recommended to re-think the role of collective nouns for highlighting the female forms while conducting research in church history and other scientific fields.

## **Codex of Ethics for Positive Transformation and Sustainability**

Probably, the most ethically valuable field in theology is ecumenism, as it aims to bring different churches and denominations together with the vision of unity and love.<sup>178</sup> However, it has to be noted, that church history is an important building block of ecumenism. First of all, church history represents the foundation, where churches learn about themselves and about each other. In addition to this, church history, which has Holy Spirit as driving force, is a research field which guarantees the continuity of the churches,<sup>179</sup> and the continuity of their relationship to each other. Finally, church history stimulates an important form of ecumenism in the academic context, through studying and teaching church history at different universities and having an exchange of knowledge with others, in building networks and in organising or taking part in international conferences, and collaborating through research projects on church history.

There are thus many ways for church historians to support the ethical vision of humanity to achieve unity and positive transformation. One of the central points is to acknowledge the value of ethics in their research. An ethically right attitude to church history can help highlight connections and relationships between churches, cultures and nations in a special way, thus bringing different churches closer to each other. Through showing numerous correlations, commonalities and differences

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<sup>178</sup> For more information on ecumenism in its different senses see: Kleinschwärzer-Meister, B. et. al, "Ökumene", in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2405-8262\\_rgg4\\_SIM\\_124171](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2405-8262_rgg4_SIM_124171) [Accessed 31.08.2020].

<sup>179</sup> Kantzenbach, F. W., "Ernst Benz, die allgemeine Kirchengeschichte und das Programm 'Kirchengeschichte in ökumenischer Sicht'", in: Flasche R. / Geldbach E., eds. (1981), *Religionen, Geschichte, Oekumene. In Memoriam Ernst Benz*, Leiden: Brill, 46.

in church history, as well as the bridge between micro-histories and global history from a church-historical perspective, church historians are able to make mutual understanding between churches easier, and thus stand up for one peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Sometimes church historians ask themselves: Is my topic wanted by the world? Can I become successful and useful through my research? How well will my book be received after its publication? These questions have higher chances to receive positive answers, if those church historians are driven by ethical values. For this purpose, they need to follow a special codex of ethics,<sup>180</sup> which can help them evaluate, what social mission their research has for positive transformation in the world. As already shown, this codex includes important values such as competence, a holistic approach, objectiveness, sustainability, and the ability to transform and to empower. These are the common principles that have to be adapted but may be prioritised differently by each church historian. This codex should not be understood as something completed. It is not a final destination, but rather a long road, which church historians should always examine, optimise, and then integrate effectively into their research field.

## **Conclusion**

This essay confirms that ethics plays a significant role in the field of church history, and that there are correlations between ethics and church history and historians. These correlations are multiple and diverse, hence, they open up multiple ethical challenges for church historians.

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<sup>180</sup> Since 2013, a specific codex of ethics has been discussed and prepared by the “Applied history – Public History”. See Brünger, S. (2017), *Geschichte und Gewinn: Der Umgang deutscher Konzerne mit ihrer NS-Vergangenheit*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 376. Also Globethics.net has developed its own code of ethics: See Globethics.net, Code of Ethics, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/165165> [Accessed 31.08.2020].

The most important challenge among them is the need to serve the good and benefit the world.

It is highlighted that church history includes contents influenced by several denominational, cultural, political, social and other factors. For many reasons, church historians have to justify their contributions from the perspective of ethics. Therefore, church historians are responsible towards the sciences and ethics for the sake of humanity. Church historians need to be competent and holistic, to stay away from misleading influences to achieve right results in their research, results that can also empower the world, making it sustainable and better. This means, that a certain codex of ethics is necessary in church history, which is based on ethical values. By applying these values, it is possible for church history to influence the world in a much more positive way.

All above mentioned aspects lead to the final conclusion, that yes, church historians do care and need to keep caring about ethics. The mission of good church historians does not only mean to be competent scientists. It also means to have a good background regarding ethics, to be aware of the ethical challenges in the modern society, and to consider them in church history.

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## VALUE SHARING FOR TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE: THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

*Chrisanthony Ndikani*<sup>181</sup>

### **Introduction**

Variety is the beauty of life, but misplaced values in diversity result in crisis and conflict situations in most parts of the globe today, especially in Nigeria. Ethical problems constantly reduce the quality of human relations, threaten human dignity, and breed societal unrest. Some of these issues are consequential to transmitted values. In Nigeria today, ethical issues in family, business, religion, leadership, and governance are becoming more problematic. Confusions arise regarding which particular value(s) operate in these entities. Are they of self-interests, ethnic interests, or agreed societal interests? Therefore no one cares about ethics, and struggles for survival by any possible means heighten moral and ethical decadence. This trend could also apply to other aspects of the global society, and leads to conflicts between communities, ethnic groups, and religious institutions. Crises of values also exist within/among the Church as the religious sector, witnessed both interreligious and intra-religious conflicts. Besides the well-known

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<sup>181</sup> Chrisanthony Ndikani, Research Fellow, Globethics.net.



Islam/Christianity conflicts, which have claimed many lives in Nigeria, denominational conflicts call Christians to a serious reconsideration of the beauty of diversity. Due the presence of many Christian bodies in Nigeria, there is the tendency towards the feeling of denominational superiority and contempt of others who may cherish different religious values and norms. Consequently, misplaced diversity aggravates conflicts because there is no proper sharing of values through dialogue. Therefore, this chapter examines how ethical value sharing could be effective for transformative dialogue in Nigeria. It argues that transformative dialogue is capable of engendering mutual learning, understanding and respect. It also highlights how transformative dialogue is organized, how it informs the praxis of dialogue, how contemplative ethics - from the soul to the senses - can enhance dialogue, and also nurture needed values. Finally, it proposes a recent ethical approach in ecumenical engagement known as Receptive Ecumenism, which involves a process of ‘explicit ecclesial self-critique’ as a possible disposition for transformative dialogue in Nigeria.

Jürgen Moltmann observes, that “we live in troubled times,” and he asks

“...what are the roots of our troubles, and what might be the realistic basis for hoping that we can surmount them? How can we, as Christians [and relational beings], frame an honest and theologically tenable world-view to guide our lives and work in this perilous context?”<sup>182</sup>

This observation describes current conflict situations in some parts of the globe, traceable to the tension of misplaced values. Ethical problems have constantly reduced living standards in many sectors:

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<sup>182</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope in These Troubled Times* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2019), vii.

education, politics and economy. For instance, most leaders and teachers in the educational system normalize various forms of malpractices in pursuit of students' excellent performance in examinations. Some students engage in several forms of moral misconducts to obtain high scores in internal and external examinations. Consequently, they become lazy with their studies, disregard hard work, play away their precious time, and indulge in truancy. There are other negative phenomena, which are common in the school system such as "decline in moral values, intolerance, increasing trend of hostility, violence and vandalism."<sup>183</sup> These and more ethical issues are also consequential to the values transmitted to the youths and children, even from the grassroots in family settings.

These ethical dilemmas also reflect at the leadership and government sectors. It is difficult to decode the underlying ethics behind the values that some leaders pursue in government. Is it self-interest, ethnic interest or agreed interest of the people? The result is a clash of values in political leadership. The Nigerian society in particular experiences clashes of norms and values due to misconstrued cultural and religious pluralism. In most cases, modern civilization and globalization tend to worsen the situation by undermining contextual ethical considerations. Currently, in the field of politics and economy, Nigeria as a nation lacks value-driven leadership and, consequently, a disoriented economy, which inflates the level of poverty for the masses and unemployment for the youth. In this "rough road" situation, who cares about ethics?<sup>184</sup> Every strategy for survival seems welcome; hence, values are either

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<sup>183</sup> Chidiebere Onyia, "Training of New Teachers and Students on Ethics," in *Ethics in Higher Education: Foundation for Sustainable Development*. Obiora Ike and Chidiebere Onyia (Eds.), Geneva: Globethics.net, 2018, 591.

<sup>184</sup> Padmasiri de Silva, "Ethics for the Rough Road: Exploring New Dimensions for Interfaith Ethics," in *Sharing Values: A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics*, Ariane Hentsch Cisneros & Shanta Premawardhana (Eds.), Geneva: Globethics.net, 2011, 101.

being misplaced or stand the danger of going extinct. In addition, our elders always worry about the rate at which the younger generation are drifting away from instituted traditional values and norms, embracing values that clash with original, cultural value systems. Some young people condemn local languages and ways of life to embrace newer or foreign ones. This is applicable in virtually all other aspects of Nigerian culture. This trend has led to conflicts involving communities, ethnic groups and religious institutions.

The sphere of religion has also witnessed its share of conflicts. Crises of values are felt within and among churches in Nigeria. Apart from the Islam-Christian conflicts, which have resulted in massive loss of lives and properties, denominational conflicts in Nigeria call for effective sharing of values through dialogue. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Reformed/Presbyterian, Baptist, Pentecostals and African Instituted Churches exist in Nigeria with different religious values and norms. There is tendency for conflicts caused by denominational superiority and contempt for others. While we believed diversity to be a gift from God, it provokes conflict if we do not share our diverse values properly. Even when people engage in dialogue, more tensions and difficulties evolve owing to misconceptions and wrong/inappropriate approach.

This is where religion fuels conflict as discovered by Globethics.net third International Conference participants in Nairobi, Kenya January 2009. They discovered that many conflicts around the world are related to religious differences. According to Ariane Cisneros and Shanta Premawardhana,

“While most agreed that religion can substantially contribute to global ethics, some felt that religion is itself a problem. However, since many conflicts are in some way related to religious

differences, the organizers felt that special attention needed to be given to religions.”<sup>185</sup>

This means that Globethics.net sets out to address social, political and religious conflicts through sharing values in dialogue. They identified different types of dialogues in ethics to include grassroots, institutional and academic dialogues. They specifically stressed a form of dialogue that is transformative to enable pragmatic shifts for peaceful coexistence and good neighbourhood.

The aim here is to state, through these stories, why ethics is important and relevant for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. On the rough road of ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts, contemplative ethics is important in dialogue because it brings about change of attitude and enhances positive disposition towards difference. Therefore, this chapter will examine the need for transformative dialogue in Nigeria, explores the values needed to be nurtured and shared for such dialogue, as well as means of sharing such values. This chapter will also discuss religion as the honey-comb of African ethics and values.

## **Understanding Values in Global and Contextual Ethics**

This section will focus on the clarification of concepts applicable to this chapter. The concepts used here are mostly global and contextual; they are also progressive in application from etymology to present time understanding of different terms in context. The description of concepts here may not be exhaustive; however, they indicate how they are useful for modern ethics. We will explore concepts like ethics, global and contextual ethics, values and value sharing, dialogue and transformative dialogue.

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<sup>185</sup> *Sharing Values: A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics*, 2011, op. cit., 29.

### **1.1 Ethics: Global and Contextual**

Ethics are simply the principles of right and wrong values/norms. Values and norms are fundamental to global and contextual ethics. Both global and contextual ethical issues require certain values and norms. As Ariane and Shanta put it, “Global and contextual ethics are two poles that challenge each other and inseparably belong together..., [and] are based on values and norms.”<sup>186</sup> However, while global ethics concerns common binding values based on the interdependent nature of the cosmos (for example, the universal consensus on human rights), contextual ethics focus on values located in specific contexts that are not global. Both contribute to each other and are drawn from values and norms.

### **1.2 Meaning of Values**

Ariane and Shanta describe values as

“Fundamental, long-term benchmarks of orientation, rooted in and justified by specific worldviews [while] norms are mid-term applications of values to specific contexts.”<sup>187</sup>

Understanding that various ways of behaviour or actions that stem from particular worldview is important for addressing differences cutting across cultures. When a particular behavioural pattern crops up in any society, it is seen as a norm having been in place for some time. However, when it stays for long time, it becomes the value system of that society. Hence, the norm of honesty becomes a value when people exhibit honesty for some time in their daily lives. According to Lumen, “Values are abstract concepts that certain kinds of behaviours are good, right, ethical, moral and therefore desirable. In the United States, one

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<sup>186</sup> *Sharing Values*, *ibid*, 31-32.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

value is freedom; another is equality.”<sup>188</sup> Therefore, whatever is judged to be good constitutes values in any context. The meaning of ethics and values could be clearer from the differences between them. Some of these include the fact that:

- Ethics is a moral stance that helps society decide what is right and wrong. On the other hand, value is a perspective by which someone assesses the importance of everything
- Ethics is professional while values are personal
- Ethics is global or general while value is contextual or particular
- Ethics means set of moral principles, especially one relation to affirming a specified group, field or form of conduct. On the other hand, values are principles or standards of behaviour<sup>189</sup>
- Different professions, organizations institutes, etc. influence ethics, while family background, culture, religion, community, etc. influence values<sup>190</sup>
- Ethics can vary according to professions; values can vary according to individuals<sup>191</sup>
- Ethics determine what is right; Values determine what is important. Ethics is concerned about the correct action; values ask what to achieve.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Lumen, *Cultural Anthropology*, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com>, accessed 12 March, 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Hasa, “Difference between Ethics and values,” in *Epediaa*, 2016, Available at: <https://pediaa.com/difference-between-ethics-and-values/> Accessed 1 August 2020.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

### **1.3 Dialogue: Formal and Informal**

The term ‘dialogue’ comes from two Greek words, ‘*dia*’ and ‘*logos*,’ (*dialogos*), which means ‘to converse.’ Following this, Miriam Webster Dictionary defines dialogue as “an exchange of ideas and opinions” between two parties (individuals or groups). This term is widely used today especially within conflict situations. In that sense, it refers to the way of resolving conflict. As Cornelius Omonokhua describes it, “Dialogue is one of the many ways of achieving peace and managing conflicts.”<sup>193</sup> He identifies several components of dialogue to include intra-personal, intra-community, and inter-religious dialogue. Globethics.net sees dialogue as sharing values in both formal and informal ways. Formal dialogue involves well-organized, inter-religious, and intercultural value sharing, while informal dialogue happens in daily life as people engage each other in discussions.<sup>194</sup> This means that dialogue refers to communication of one’s values whether in formal or informal ways.

### **1.4 Value Sharing**

Having established that values are long-term ways of behaviour informed by a particular worldview, value sharing simply means exchanging those ways of behaviour with others. The group report of Globethics.net’s Nairobi Conference describes value sharing as means and methods of academic and non-academic discourses. It explains that effective value sharing must move from idealism to realism, meaning moving from academic discourse to other means like theatre, music, dancing, poetry, art, etc.<sup>195</sup> So, as behaviours are exchanged

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<sup>193</sup> Cornelius Omonokhua, *Dialogue in Context: A Nigerian Experience*, Kaduna: Virtual Insignia, 2014, 9.

<sup>194</sup> Globethics.net, *Globethics.net Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2012, 3.

<sup>195</sup> “Group Report from the 2009 Nairobi Conference” in *Sharing Values*, op. cit. pp. 375-93.

academically or through music, art, poetry and so on, value sharing is taking place.

### ***1.5 Transformative Dialogue***

This is a form of dialogue in which values are sought and identified, appreciated and respected, and shared for peace, tranquillity and justice among groups and individuals. Transformation is one of the goals of dialogue. It is a form of value sharing in dialogue, which aims at transforming both our values and other people's values or beliefs. According to Ariane and Shanta, "Such sharing can be most fruitful when the dialogue is intended to be transformative."<sup>196</sup> By this, they mean that value sharing in dialogue should push participants beyond where they are to new understanding. In modern scholarly parlance, it is called a pragmatic, programmatic or paradigm shift. This shift is important if we hope to make progress in our dialogue and interactions. Hence, transformative dialogue is that which helps parties involved to shift grounds and embrace new values, or modify their values based on richer information or understanding. This is the main focus of this work as we explore ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues. We shall examine the value of dialogue and religion as providing changes in the quality of people's interactions.

## **Religion and Value Sharing in the Context of Transformative Dialogue**

This section examines how religion influences values to some extent. Most elements of our value system come from religion. Religion has an enormous effect on social life. In African context, for instance, John Mbiti had earlier referred to African people as religious people. He describes the entire facets of African life as highly influenced by

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid. *Sharing Values*, p. 34.



religion. Their language, norms, beliefs, music, arts, marriage, festivals, etc. are influenced by religion.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to examine religion, and the influence it exerts on values before exploring dialogue as a tool for value sharing in subsequent sections. To achieve this, this section will simplify the meaning of religion, critique religion as well as expose how religion constitutes a root/source of values.

### **2.1 Meaning and Definitions of Religion**

This is one concept that can be difficult to define or explained due to its nature of subjectivity. Let me present only five definitional perspectives here:

- 1. “[Religion is] the belief in Spiritual Beings” (Edward B Tylor, *Primitive Culture*)
- 2. “By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life” (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*).
- 3. “[Religion is] the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.” (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)
- 4. “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” (Émile Durkeim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*)

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<sup>197</sup> Mbiti, John *African Religions and Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, 391.

- 5. [Religion is] “the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary, and a concern that in itself provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence.”(Paul Tillich)<sup>198</sup>

## ***2.2 Critique of Religion: A Double-edged Sword***

Some researchers have come to conclusion that religion seems to be a double-edged sword. This is so because in their findings, it is said that the same religion that helps humans to find solace in God, also serves as avenue for perpetrating conflict, injustice and violence. Studies have shown that religion is at the base of most violence in the world. This is not only applicable to Christianity, but also other religions. As Ross Lee puts it

“Besides Christianity, all world religions appear connected by the seeds and common threads of male patriarchy: a hypothetical social system based upon the absolute authority of the father or an elderly male over the family group.”<sup>199</sup>

He was referring to the domestic violence supported by religions of the world. Along this axis is another critique of religion by the German Socialist, Karl Marx. It was a passing remark he made in 1843 which has become a celebrated dictum: that religion is the “opium of the people.” Here, Marx argues that

“Religion plays a significant role in maintaining the status quo by promising rewards in the after-life rather than in this life.” In this way religion “works to calm uncertainty over our role in the

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<sup>198</sup> “Some Definitions of Religion” in <https://www2.kenyon.edu>. Accessed 13 March, 2020.

<sup>199</sup> Lee Ross, “Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword,” in *ResearchGate*, 2014, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300369732\\_Religion\\_and\\_Intimate\\_Partner\\_Violence\\_A\\_DoubleEdge\\_Sword/link/5bb38ba192851ca9ed34107d/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300369732_Religion_and_Intimate_Partner_Violence_A_DoubleEdge_Sword/link/5bb38ba192851ca9ed34107d/download). Accessed 14 August 2020.

universe and in society.” With this observation, he sees religion as “...a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misguiding followers”.<sup>200</sup>

The above critiques present the not-so-good side of religion, because it gives the people who practice it an illusory happiness that seldom lasts. Another practical example from the Nigerian context is the divide between and among Christians, and the deep-seated fundamentalism perpetrated by the Boko Haram Islamic sects. The religious conflicts in Nigeria, which result in several forms of killings by this religious group, contradict Islam’s belief as a religion of peace.

If values are drawn from religion, it follows that one must examine such values critically for ethical considerations. This exposes the need for transformative dialogue among religions. Another edge of religion is the fact that it serves as a harvest of values.

### **2.3 Religion – A Honey-comb of Values**

The definition and practice of religion by scholars and adherents presents it as an embodiment of values. According to Obiora Ike, religion is that “which helps humans to realize themselves in their search for truth, peace, happiness and meaning beyond the immanent realities of the material world.”<sup>201</sup> It is a tool through which the human person relates with the unseen and ‘Transcendental Other’ in order to find fulfilment in life. From this, we deduce that religion is a foundation for

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<sup>200</sup> “Karl Marx and the ‘Opiate of the Masses: Abolition of Religion as the Illusory Happiness of the People,” in 14.4A: Marx and the “Opiate of the Masses”, *Social Science*, LibreText Libraries, (updated June 2020). Available at: <https://socialsci.libretexts.org>

<sup>201</sup> Chukwu Chinedu, *Obiora Ike in His Own Words: A Shot at Immortality, Thought on Culture, Ethics, Society, Religion and Politics*, Enugu, Nigeria: BuildingEwealth Info-Tech, 2016, 96. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166559>

ethical values. Ekwunife Anthony defines religion from the context of African tradition as

“...those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africa which are the result of traditional Africans” response to their believed revealing Superhuman Ultimate and which are rooted from time immemorial in the past African religious culture, beliefs and practices that were transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths, and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings, names and oaths), sacred specialists and persons, sacred space, objects and symbols, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities”.<sup>202</sup>

From the African, traditional, and religious point of view, the principles and practical guide to life (for instance, the moral conscience), find their roots in the African communitarian ethics, embedded in African religion. ‘Communion’ in ‘Community’ is the umbrella that binds Africans together in their cultivation and practice of values, with the family as their take-off point. For instance, in his work, Ezekwonna Ferdinand discusses “some aspects of Igbo communitarian ethics as it relates to moral conscience and autonomy of the individual.”<sup>203</sup> For Ezekwonna, the *Igbo* culture and religion is the basis for the moral conscience and autonomy of the individual in that it showcases ethical values such as “the community model...that fosters good moral values, individual freedom and autonomy and...makes

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<sup>202</sup> Ekwunife, Anthony O., *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Jet Publisher, 1990.

<sup>203</sup> Ezekwonna, Ferdinand, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for the Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual: Igbo Culture as a Case Study*, Bern: Peter Lang: 2005.

human beings more human.”<sup>204</sup> Other values that sprang from this include truth and honesty, integrity, responsibility, love and respect for the individual, etc., which later spread wider to become ethical norms for human rights and social justice. The point here is that the Igbo (Eastern Nigerian) culture is an example from the African context, of rich values shared in communion with one another and with the community and other cultures. During this period, there is an aura of peace, tranquillity and harmony in the society.

Christianity, the religion of the followers of Jesus Christ, is another basis that harvests numerous gospel values. The highest value that Christians are enjoined to emulate is the meekness and humility of Jesus, their model. Other Christian values include compassion, patience, mercy, peace, tolerance, self-control, forgiveness, and above all, brotherly love (Matt. 5; 11:29ff; Col. 3:12-16). In fact, the Holy Bible is regarded as the Christians’ moral code for living ethically even on this planet earth.

Other world religions have one value or the other that mark their common grounds with other religions. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in her *Declaration on the Church in her Relation to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate, 1965)* enumerated certain values that the Roman Catholic Church admires, appreciates and respects, and has in common with other religions. According to the council, the Church, “in her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations...considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”<sup>205</sup> The Council recognizes other religions as a “community of all peoples,” with God as their “one

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Church in her Relation to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate*, 1965, no. 1. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html). Accessed 14 August 2020.

origin and final goal... who provides and manifests his goodness and saving designs to all men.”<sup>206</sup> Common motives stimulate the practice of all religions as the council observes in the following lines:

“Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?”<sup>207</sup>

Among these religions, there is also common “recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.”<sup>208</sup> The declaration pays particular attention to the commonalities between Christians and Muslims, despite their many years of quarrels and hostilities:

“The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the Day of

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., no. 1.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., no. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., no. 2.

Judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.”<sup>209</sup>

Although religion is criticized as a double-edged sword, this essay focuses on the positive side to highlight the values inherent therein. It is these values, which cut across cultures that people, groups, and other religions seek to recognize, appreciate, and share when they embrace dialogue organized in praxis. It could be a model for peace and coexistence among Nigerian Christians, and between Christians and other religions, like Islam.

## **The Praxis of Dialogue as a Means of Sharing Values**

Dialogue is about value sharing. This chapter presents practical ways of sharing values for transformative dialogue. It will examine how transformative dialogue is organized, the idea of contemplative ethics, as well as value needed for transformative dialogue. It will show the relevance of ethics or value sharing in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

### ***3.1 How to Organize Transformative Dialogue***

Scholars have suggested practical ways of organizing transformative dialogue. Kenneth Gergen et al suggest a bottom top approach. According to them, “Rather than working "top down" - with high level authorities or abstract systems laying out the rules, ethics or practices for all - let us proceed "bottom up." That is, let us move to the world of action, and specifically to cases in which people seem to be wrestling with problems of multiple and conflicting realities, and doing so without

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., no. 3.

strong commitment to either rationalist or realist premises.”<sup>210</sup> This shows that flowing from people’s realities makes the dialogue practically transformative. On their part, Ariane and Shanta outline some ways of organizing a transformative dialogue to include the following:

- Cultivating strong personal relationships
- Establishing an innovative methodology of preparation
- Creating a safe zone
- Interrogating self-understanding
- Exploring the self-understanding of the other, hence, clarifying misconceptions.
- Providing adequate time and space
- Organize gender-diverse dialogues
- Engaging between religious and non-religious ethics<sup>211</sup>

If these steps are properly followed, transformative dialogue could be achieved.

### ***3.2 A Contemplative Ethics: From the Soul to the Senses***

The concept of contemplative ethics was coined by a Catholic Theologian known as Dennis J. Billy. He was concerned about the relationship between catholic spirituality and moral theology. According to him, while contemplation concerns inner reasoning, ethics focuses on practical principles of daily life. Hence, both terms could seem contradictory, but the idea is that they relate in what could be described as moving from the soul to the senses. Billy puts it this way,

“Contemplation, for me, is a wordless, thoughtless pondering of an object in childlike wonder....Ethics has to do with a focused

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<sup>210</sup> Kenneth Gergen, S. McNamee and Frank Barrett, “Towards a Vocabulary of Transformative Dialogue,” in *International Journal of Public Administration* (2001): 24, 697-707.

<sup>211</sup> *Sharing Values*, *ibid.* 36-37.



application of concrete principles to daily life.... contemplative ethics describes the ultimate relationship between Catholic spirituality and moral theology.”<sup>212</sup>

It could be seen as the process of transferring the interior gaze of the soul on the divine goodness to practical human action. Our spirituality would not be complete without corresponding ethics and morality. Hence, Padmasiri de Silva admonishes that,

“In developing a contemplative ethics, we have to confer a sense of majesty and clinical sacredness on our routine lives – the moment-to-moment flow of life that comes within the range of mindfulness practice.”<sup>213</sup>

### ***3.3 Values Needed for Transformative Dialogue***

One of the Scholars deeply concerned with values to be nurtured for transformative dialogue was Dr. Ada Gonzalez. She describes it as transformative conversations. For her, dialogue is a special kind of conversation that permits and invites change. It is impossible to engage in it and come out the same. Effective dialogue transforms because of its dynamic, interactive, and inclusive nature, and creates deeper understanding and meaning. Gonzalez explains that a transformative conversation allows you to see the world in new ways and to make better sense of it. It helps to shape the present and future reality through the connection and collaboration of minds. It can lead to unprecedented transformation for you, your partner, and your business. She listed values needed as follows:

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<sup>212</sup> Dennis Billy, *Contemplative Ethics: An Introduction* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>213</sup> Padmasiri de Silva, “Ethics for the Rough Road...”, 106.

- Create a culture of open communication.
- Conduct effective meetings with actionable results.
- Implement and facilitate change effectively.
- Interact better with international colleagues.
- Create the future instead of reacting to what happens.
- Have more collaboration through the organization.
- Increase productivity and revenue.
- Connect with colleagues, direct reports, and customers, increasing your influence.<sup>214</sup>

When we apply these values in any dialogical conversation, it brings transformation. However, the above values may not only be global, they can also be contextual. They do not exhaust the list of values needed for transformative dialogue. Ariane and Shanta added to the list values such as honesty, deep listening, walking in the other's shoes, suspending judgment, appreciating others' beliefs and values, being self-critical of one's own beliefs, as well as acting in openness and transparency.<sup>215</sup>

### ***3.4 Application to the Nigerian Context***

The application of the above discourse to the context of Nigeria is the purpose of this sub-section. How would Nigeria as a nation approach dialogue for transformation? What contemplative ethics could Christianity and other religions in Nigeria apply to achieve this goal, especially amidst tension and fear that is looming therein now? On average, most Nigerians suffer more from religious-political, ethno-religious, and politico-economic crises than from the current global COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown of activities has become an opportunity of secret preparations for another religious conflict between Christians and Muslims, and between the Northern, Western and South-

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<sup>214</sup> Ada Gonzalez, *Transformative Conversations: The Heart of the Leadership Journey*, Lisbon: Logos Noesis, 2015, 24.

<sup>215</sup> *Sharing Values*, *ibid.* 34-36.

Eastern regions of Nigeria. This, coupled with political and economic imbalance, heightens the agitation for independence by some sections of the country (for instance, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, IPOB). For the average Nigerian, the fear of being killed in the name of religion is much graver than the anxiety of surviving the pandemic.

This being the case, how does one introduce the form of dialogue that could possibly enhance peace, justice and harmony as fruits of transformation in a nation heated up by confused tension? It is confused between interplay of religion and politics. In the religious sphere, Christians are not united within, among and between themselves. Divided by theological, doctrinal and liturgical differences, it is difficult to come together for dialogue in a country often torn between intolerance and religious dogmatism. As a saying goes, ‘charity begins at home.’ There is urgency for Nigerian Christians to come together as one, in unity and ecclesial communion. For this to be possible, we re-echo the call for strengthening of the spirit of ecumenism, that is, the promotion of Christian unity. Thus united, they can create successful dialogue with Islam, in a way that may promote peaceful coexistence and understanding. Unfortunately, the ecumenical situation in Nigeria calls for a reconsideration of the purpose of ecumenism. As Daniel Ude Asue observed, “although the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was formed to promote unity among the various Christian denominations in the country, it has not been able to achieve its goal.”<sup>216</sup>

An ecumenical approach that could be helpful in addressing Nigeria’s current situation is that which a Catholic, Systematic Theology Professor, Paul Murray calls Receptive Ecumenism. It is another dimension of moving from the soul to the senses.

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<sup>216</sup> Ude Asue, D. (2016), “Ecumenical Tensions among Nigerian Christians”. *International Review of Mission*, 105: 306-320. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12152>

This is “a fresh ecumenical methodology emphasizing receptivity, learning, and listening. It is about learning from other Christians in order to learn about ourselves. It is a process of conversion, and openness to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>217</sup>

In this approach, each dialogue group (or church tradition as the case may be) focuses more on *learning* or *receiving from* rather than *teaching* or *convincing* the other. It follows a ‘receptive learning’ process, using a tool called ‘explicit ecclesial self-critique.’ According to Antonia Pizzey, Receptive Ecumenism is “an approach which seeks to make ecumenical progress by learning from our partner, rather than asking our partner to learn from us.”<sup>218</sup>

The central idea of Receptive Ecumenism is the unrealistic nature of the full visible unity of Christians. The core concern is that too often, churches approach dialogue with an instinctive, default question: “what do our various *others* *first* need to learn from us...?”<sup>219</sup> Hence, the fundamental principle is that churches and groups who engage in dialogue make a pragmatic shift by reversing the question into “what can we learn from others...” The basic assumption and underlying conviction about this alternative dialogue approach is that, if all churches and dialogue partners asked the question of what to learn from, rather than what to teach others, then ecumenical progress is possible. Receptive Ecumenism is a strategy of renewed disposition in which churches make a shift from former ‘*self-defending*’ and ‘*convincing-the-*

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<sup>217</sup> Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, “What is Receptive Ecumenism?” (2017), available at: <https://about.csu.edu.au/community/accc/projects/2017-conference-receptive-ecumenism/conference>. Accessed 20 May 2020.

<sup>218</sup> Pizzey, Antonia. *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement: The Path of Ecclesial Conversion*, Boston: Printforce, 2019, 208.

<sup>219</sup> Murray, Paul. “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*. 7.4, 2007, 279.

*other'* positions to an *open-minded readiness and less argumentative stances*. It has a positive outlook on ecclesial differences. In Receptive Ecumenism, the ecclesial, theological and other differences that divide churches become mutually recognized, respected, admired and received as gifts to enrich, rather than diminish ecclesial identity. This changes the dictum from 'better to *give* than to *receive*' to 'more dignifying to *learn or receive* than to *give*'. Therefore, it encourages the spirit of learning and of receiving gifts.

The approach of Receptive Ecumenism was implemented in a recent bilateral dialogue known as Third Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III); to explore in what ways this approach could possibly promote and enrich ecumenical engagements and dialogues. In the first Agreed Statement of ARCIC III titled *Walking Together on the Way, Learning to be the Church-Local, Regional, Universal*,<sup>220</sup> the participants of the Anglican Communion and Roman Catholic Church applied the receptive learning process of 'explicit ecclesial self-critic'. In this process, they discovered their commonalities and respective internal tensions, and considered potentials for receptive learning from one another. This shows that Receptive Ecumenism could be useful in bilateral dialogues.

Apart from the challenges of religious and ethnic pluralism, Christian churches in Nigeria need the self-critical receptive learning strategy of Receptive Ecumenism for inner conversion and growth, in a transformative ecumenical dialogue. This involves emphasizing the need for ecclesial repentance, openness and conversion.

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<sup>220</sup> Third Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be Church-Local, Regional, Universal*; An Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission London. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 2018. Available at: <http://www.prounione.it/dia/arcic/Dia-ARCIC-17-III-walking.pdf>. Last accessed May 21, 2020.

Another basis is that this new dialogue approach is an

“...ethical strategy which represents a “way of ecumenical ecclesial conversion and growth that is both remarkably simple in vision and remarkably far-reaching in potential.”<sup>221</sup>

Because it involves change, we need to understand that change is not easy to come by, and so need certain basics and core values to curb the mind-set of Nigerian Christians and pre-dispose churches, individuals and groups towards learning and reception.

This also calls for a formal reception of ARCIC documents in Nigerian Anglican-Roman Catholic levels of communion, especially at local communities;<sup>222</sup> mutual receptive learning through explicit ecclesial self-critique; possible application of ARCIC III recommendations,<sup>223</sup> and some practical suggestions where each party can learn from the other even at the grassroots. This could enhance ecumenical disposition, strengthen ecclesial communion, and unite Nigerian Christians for a successful and peaceful dialogue with Islam.

Finally, we recommend receptive ecumenism for Nigeria both as a type of contemplative ethic, and also as an ecumenical disposition and attitude that could enhance the sharing of values in a transformative dialogue. It disposes churches to develop positive attitudes towards their differences, and to cultivate values for their basic ecclesial needs. This disposition must begin with mutual recognition of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ despite differences and obstacles. Receptive Ecumenism’s journey inside out re-motivates, re-energizes

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<sup>221</sup> Paul Murray, cited by University of Stockholm, in “About Receptive Ecumenism: The Basic Idea,” last accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.ehs.se/receptive-ecumenism/about-receptive-ecumenism>.

<sup>222</sup> For a full list of the Agreed Statements of ARCIC, visit [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/angl-commdocs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20050516\\_mary-grace-hope-christ\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-commdocs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_mary-grace-hope-christ_en.html).

<sup>223</sup> ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, no. 103.

and redirects the churches' ecumenical enthusiasm. It is a disposition, with patience and courage, to take the rough path and the road less travelled. It is a disposition of stooping low in humility to address ecclesial tensions in the face of the other. Receptive Ecumenism's conversion process disposes churches to take the Gospel imperatives seriously, to cultivate the positive 'attitudes' of the Beatitudes, and emulate Christ in his humble *kenosis*. In this self-emptying, they die to ecclesial superiority, self-sufficiency and criticism of the other, and rise up to ecclesial dignity, growth, development and renewal. This dialogue model is recommended, not only for Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Nigeria, but also for all Christian traditions, and other religions, especially Islam. If the tenets of Receptive Ecumenism is applied in and by Nigerians, peace will return, and differences seen as values to share with one another.

According to Vatican II Fathers, "religions...have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language."<sup>224</sup> This is where we differ from one another, in context, and in the use of concept and language. In themselves, these religious groups have values to admire and appreciate. However, unless we come close to one another through dialogue, we cannot recognize these values.

Therefore, a reverberation of the exhortation of the Vatican II Fathers could suffice here,

"...that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 2.

This could bring some level of transformation in Nigeria. This calls for discipline and maturity to overlook my partner's weakness, and in a self-critical examination process, focus on my own shortcomings.

## **Conclusion**

This work has argued for sharing of values in dialogue for transformation in the Nigerian context. It is now clear that ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can adopt certain values and value sharing means and methods to make them transformative. For dialogue to be transformative, the values of honesty, openness, respect for other's beliefs, not being judgmental, being self-critical, and so on are needed. These values come from religion and must help to transform us and others. Therefore transformative dialogue can happen in formal or informal forms. Yet, the aim will be to push us to a new understanding, knowledge, and practice based on a renewed worldview. Value breeds value when it embraces, and allows itself to be sharpened by ethics, thereby becoming no longer contextual but global ethics. Ethical values of responsibility, listening, discipline, receptive learning, and courage, openness, and accepting shortcomings are indispensable for disposing Nigerians towards attitudes of reception and learning from one another in dialogue. These are the contemplative ethics for the rough road of economic and political crises, championed by religious fundamentalism and dogmatism. Nigerians are called to interior conversion in an inward journey, and for Christians especially, a journey that leads to ridding to whatever does not approve of peace and justice, and rising to tolerance and coexistence in a 'live and let live' environment. For this reason, Nigerians need to care about ethics, since ethics enhances navigation for peace and justice. If this is done, there is a dignified future for Nigeria.



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## NIHIISM, ETHICS AND THE CHALLENGE OF TRUTH

*Obiora Ike*<sup>226</sup>

“Eziokwu bu ndu” – “Truth is Life”

*African - Igbo cultural wisdom*

“In a time of universal deceit,  
telling the truth is a revolutionary act” *George Orwell*.

“You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free”

*Jesus Christ*

“In fidelity to truth lies human dignity.” – *Michael Novak*

### **Is Truth Dead?**

In the post-truth era, there are schools of thought, lifestyles, opinions, philosophical systems and teachers who tell their young the following:

“There is no such thing as truth or Ethics”. “Truth is bondage”.

“Live as you like”. “Believe what seems right to you”. “Follow

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<sup>226</sup> Obiora Ike, Executive Director, Globethics.net.

your feelings”. “Do as you please”. “Get in touch with yourself”.  
“Do what is comfortable”.

Truth is considered relative. Integrity and credibility are foreign vocabulary.

Are these not the language of the age? And are those who teach the young to live thus not preparing them for jails ahead within the various countries and nations? And are we not near to the conclusion that such teachers who undermine the truth perform the work of tyrants? Fallacious reasoning, when it reaches a critical mass, becomes a mass delusion, for “*those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad*” as the every logic of destruction is preceded by delusion. It does seem that the age-long understanding of right and wrong, of duty and neglect, of shame and pride and of many certainties are now challenged by nihilism and extreme forms of relativism.

The famous American *Time Magazine* on 3 April, 2017 took to the stage to describe the state of truthfulness in America. It gave a caption for its cover edition titled: “Is Truth Dead?” focusing on the serial lies of its incumbent President Donald J Trump as an example (article by Michael Scherer, pp. 20ff). The newspaper settled on the conclusion *that deliberate and strategic lies to control the national debate undermined the roots and foundations of society* – helping it to a faster precipice. Aware that most societies placed a high value on truth and honesty, in modern societies, people cannot seem to resist falsehoods, from little white lies to vast conspiracy theories.

There were times, when people were sure of their beliefs and the customs of their heritage. They depended on traditional sources of ethical illumination that assured their actions were based on certainties concerning what was good or bad. Today, we live in very confusing times. Our age is confronted by decisions, which previous generations did not have to face. The new socio-technological and pluralistic environments make many look at the old certainties as not really

applicable to modern situations. It is fashionable to question everything under heaven, including oneself.

Traditional answers to thorny questions seem redundant and to make matters worse, widespread misinformation and bias in the fake news era and complete disregard for metaphysical reality makes it even more difficult to distinguish between a lie and a truth, or even between virtues and vices. Such situation is a reflection of something gravely wrong in society – a crisis of values and moral uprightness perpetuated by untruths. It is indeed clear that people wrong about metaphysical and transcendental realities concerning their origin whom we call God, must surely be wrong about physics, the immanent and the ecological domains where humans inhabit.

In the light of the moral diversity and proliferation of ethical dilemmas confronted in every sector and nation, people are not forced to ask the question about what must remain central to humanity. Nothing? Something? What? Could legislations cover these ambiguities of life? Are any ethical principles universally applicable? Which are these? And how do we cope with the contending characteristics of our age, evident in cultural pluralism, rapid social changes, linguistic distrust of authoritarian and centralistic claims?

Each day, media reports inundate readers across the globe with bad news that describe crisis after crisis found in each country, region and sector. These crises are financial, ecological, climatic and technological. They are also rooted in cultural and spiritual, mental and social, political and economic disruptions. It is becoming clear to many that the planet has entered a state of emergency, with an unprecedented risk of damage to humanity and the environment. Global warming and the collapse of biodiversity are having consequences on an exponential scale. These crises are also present in the global governance structures and more substantially, in the family and spiritual domains including fields of

religion and education. Whole regions and groups of the population feel left behind.

Of course, these dilemmas and uncertainties concern people and many are asking:

“...what can be done? What solutions are available to us that will solve these crises? How can we bring about the practice of virtue, ethics, common sense and adherence to common human values, already inherent in various cultures and traditions that can help people in modern life create the better society of our dreams?”

## **Focus of Philosophical Reflection**

This paper addresses issues concerning the absurdity of the philosophy of nihilism. It explores the essence and central need for ethics and considers the challenges of seeking and standing to the truth, even in a post-truth era. The contribution explores the original essence of philosophy, borrowed from the Greek meaning: “*Philos*” (Love) and “*Sophia*” (wisdom) that has remained a science to provide the intellectual and rational grounding upon which life, thinking and human are grounded. This love of wisdom and search for meaning helps people reflect.

Our conclusion is that even for those unsure whether there is a God, a truth is different from a lie. Vulgar relativism and its subjective culture undermine even the culture of liberty and knowledge which they seek to protect. It is preferable to take a position on an issue than to remain neutral. Indeed, as history records show, neutrality is a betrayal for it allowed slavery, fascism, poverty and various forms of socio-political and cultural stagnations to continue. Therefore, even under conditions of nihilism, fidelity to truth is better than cowardice.

The reflection posits that inner liberty is obtained by remaining faithful to the truth. It underscores the thesis that dictatorship is empty.

That torturers can twist your mind, even reduce you to a vegetable, but as long as retain the ability to say yes or no as truth alone commands, they cannot own you. By accepting torture in the face of its alternative, we have such great names in history, such as Nelson Mandela, Maximilian Kolbe, Patrice Lumumba, Andrew Sakharov, Vaclav Havel, Julius Nyerere and all the great Saints of the religions and the uncountable good names in history books.

It is unarguable that the modern age is confronted by the belief in individual and autonomous freedom, which often leaves little space for social responsibility. Many ideological and philosophical deconstruction theories question everything, making all things relative, while offering few answers or solutions that can guarantee certainty. There is an offer of liberty devoid of adequate duty, of rights and privileges with indefinite quest to have more for the purposes of self-fulfilment. Previous generations did not have to face these situations in this manner.

The 1960's and the de-constructivist theories in philosophy, referencing the works of the Frankfurt school led by Herbert Marcuse, Juergen Habermas and Max Hockheimer continue to influence modern thinking. The tensions experienced globally with a growing lack of certainty on virtually every item of discourse has created a big gap to the much desired inner and external peace which people seek, thus the mountainous problems facing humanity.

The observation remains that the origin of the problem is that much of contemporary society is so confused at accepting or finding orientation, having denied any certainties or truths. The consequences of course are noticeable in the growing forms of nihilism, desperation, depression, unhappiness, doubts and of disorientations prevalent everywhere.



## **The Philosophy of Nihilism**

Nihilism is a word culled from the Latin “Nihil” – which literally means “nothingness”.

It is the “...denial of any objective and real ground or state of truth. The theory that nothing is knowable. All knowledge is illusory, worthless, meaningless, relative and insignificant. No knowledge is possible. Nothing can be known”

(Peter A. Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy*).

The Greek philosopher Gorgias who lived before Christ had propounded an extreme form of scepticism, sometimes referred to as nihilism, which denied the possibility of any knowledge and doubted whether anything existed as nothing can be said to exist. The stronger nihilistic version is that nothing exists. “*If anything did exist, we would not be able to know it, and if we were able to know it, we would not be able to communicate it*” (Peter Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy*; p. 25). Scepticism ranges from complete, total disbelief in everything to a tentative doubt in a process of reaching certainty.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century spent much of his time researching and living this idea. His books influenced the period of the Post-Enlightenment in Europe, an era which sought for liberation from religion, authority, traditions and the establishment of the autonomous individual into a freedom “from” but not “for”. The works: *Beyond Good and Evil*; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; *The Will to Power* and *Ecce Homo* remain best sellers even to this day. Nietzsche contested the belief in any truth with a philosophical hermeneutic, arguing that the philosopher should not seek the truth but instead the metamorphoses of the world in the human being. Nietzsche eventually advocated the thinking of suicide as a way to deal with

nothingness<sup>227</sup>. By doing so the person could freely think to end one's life, – without in fact acting so, but on the contrary, postponing every day the same dreadful project, he/she considers the power of a radical hope, the affirmation of life and eternal return to our life.

In a more trivial sense, nihilism in ethics simply refers to the theory “*that moral values cannot be justified in any way; not by reason, by God, by intuition, by consciences or by the authority of the State or Law*”. It is therefore equivalent to a psychological and philosophical state in which there is a loss of all ethical, religious, political and social values. In fact, nihilism, perhaps equivalent to anarchy (which it is still not), corresponds to the sceptical denial of all that is regarded as real or unreal, knowledge or error, being or non-being; illusory or non-illusory. In the philosophy of nihilism,

“...moral values are: expressions of arbitrary and capricious behaviour; expressions of loose feelings and reasonless social conditioning: and they are worthless, meaningless and irrational”.

In an earlier work on Friedrich Nietzsche at the International School of Postgraduate Studies in Dubrovnik (which I published later), I distinguished in philosophy between two types of nihilism – metaphysical and political<sup>228</sup>.

Metaphysical nihilism is a theory that states:

- The universe is meaningless and without a purpose;
- Human Life and activities are of no value or significance
- Nothing is worth existing for.

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<sup>227</sup> Editor Note: Nietzsche had a mental breakdown at 44 ending in a dementia with total physical dependence due to stroke. He died at 56 from pneumonia.

<sup>228</sup> Obiora Ike: “Cultism versus Freedom and Learning in Educational Institutions”, in *Development is about People, Business is about Ethics*, Obiora Ike (Ed.), CIDJAP, 2003, pp. 97-98.

Political nihilism is the belief that social organisation is so corrupt that its destruction is desirable, sometimes coupled with a form of anarchism's whereby no constructive alternative forms of organisations are advocated. It is my firm conviction that aberrations persistent in our societies owe their origins to these forms of both metaphysical and political nihilism, which extends to the lack of any standards. If only the wise words of Richard John Neuhaus were taken seriously by nihilists: that "culture is the root of politics and religion is the root of culture". One point that many ardent souls of our time most passionately disseminate is what I call "*vulgar relativism*" or "*nihilism with a happy face*". For them, it is certain that there is no truth. Only opinion or point of view matters: my opinion, your opinion. They abandon the defence of intellect. There being no purchase of intellect upon reality, nothing else is left but preference, and will is everything. They retreat to romance of the will. Vulgar relativism is an invisible gas, odourless, deadly that is now polluting every free society on earth.

Nihilism would not be as acceptable as a way of life or even an option. Thus, the further reflection on what is known as reality and naturalism, and whether they were enough to constitute the whole truth about existence and meaning is the challenge for ethics and the truth.

## **Reality and Real?**

We focus on the much used word reality. What is reality? Is it just the personalist or naturalistic view of the physical world, the world of biology, chemistry, and physics? Is reality only matter and energy, space and time? Could we further question if everything in human experiences is just effects of the physical universe, illusions generated by our neural activity?

Naturalism says, yes, that is it – the default explanation for everything we refer to as real, actual, and factual. For within naturalism's worldview, all human beings are merely biochemical

things, despite our consciousness, our consciences and our rational capabilities. All beings are merely things, biochemical things. Nothing more.

Within a naturalistic philosophy, morality is nothing more than custom, a product of historical consensus, which may be amended to suit contemporary tastes and preferences, as is necessary and expeditious. Also, in the absence of fixed moral truths, each person is deemed to be the primary definer of morality for any and of every area of living, in the private domain and in many areas of public life. For if science is the only way to know truth of any kind, that assertion can only be proved with scientific investigation and empirical experimentation. Some people stop with relating truth only to that which is measurable, empirical and real. How do we, who so explicitly and implicitly accept the rationality inherent in the scientific method, miss the certainty inherent in simple rational proofs and arguments?

For example, a tacit tenet of contemporary culture is its implicit relativism — the belief that beyond the sciences all other statements of meaning and value are matters of personal perception, not matters of fact. This point of view implicitly rejects reason’s rightful role in formulating ideas, developing arguments, and elaborating opinions to sound conclusions. Dr Cronin, F.X makes this argument in his article, published in the *Catholic World Report* in 2020 where he writes:

“For the nature of reason and its subordinate science open up reality’s true clarity and its deep sophistication to the eager seeker and the sound thinker, to the true lover and the fearless learner. For true reality is a cosmic and contemporary adventure of exploration and application, a temporal and timeless divine gift, an opportunity to live life fully with a joy and a passion that arises not from personality, but from the very nature of reality’s truth, its promise and its purpose ”. (Cronin, F. X; *The Triumph*

*of Truth*; <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/10/28/the-triumph-of-truth-restoring-reality/>)

Cronin argues that

“if the only reality is the physical one, then there is no way to explain our consciousness or our rational thinking, except to see those as illusions of logic and thinking generated by our brain’s neural activity. And this means that reason, so elemental to the conduct and application of science, is nothing more than a mere neural sensation. And that inherent and unavoidable contradiction is absolutely fatal to the assertion that the physical reality is the only real reality”.

Other aspects of human nature and experience move toward a more objective designation and a more certain actuality. If we would just think about morality or beauty as some form of objective truth, we would understand generally what was meant by the partner in a dialogue. This was the thinking of the well-known German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In his two master works: *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, he argued that transcendental philosophy alone was the sure path to knowledge but needed practical application. This lead to truth as knowable but grounded in practice through an Ethics of Life, beyond simple transcendental speculation. In recent times and arising from the hegemony of science, both of these dimensions have been remanded to the realm of personal perception and preference in the wake of relativism’s dominance and the foundational belief in naturalism. But is this really the total truth about reality? The answer for the purposes of this debate is that it is not. It is not even close.

## **Critique of Naturalism**

“*Homo homini lupus*” – “*man is wolf to fellow man*”, so wrote Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan*. As modern “*naturalists*,” some blindly believe only science can give us real truth – practical and demonstrable truth. Truth, in naturalism, is confined to the realm of physical things alone. Consequently, all other truth claims of an intangible nature, be they metaphysical or moral or even aesthetic, are relegated to the realm of raw belief with no possibility of real proof. This belief in science’s dominance is so silly and irrational, it is hard to find softer and more sensitive ways to describe it. For this belief in science as the sole source of truth is founded on a flagrant and fatal contradiction. For if science is the only way to know truth of any kind, that assertion can only be proved with scientific investigation and empirical experimentation.

Yet, our modern epistemological and metaphysical mind-set is wrong to such a degree and with such frequency, it is all but astounding we miss the scale and substance of it. For the assertion of science’s complete hegemony over truth cannot be demonstrated scientifically. This assertion of science’s sole explanatory power is grounded not in the scientific method, but in rational argumentation and deductive reasoning of a faulty and flawed nature. When we understand the fatal contradiction of naturalism, reality no longer is mere mechanics, the grinding reduction to physicality of our many human powers and principles. Once we shed naturalism’s narrow and false assumptions, reality is liberated from the error of its mechanistic materialism.

In his *Essay on “The Triumph of Truth: Restoring Reality*, F. X. Cronin arguably states that

“under naturalism, love and reason and everything else we know and value become neural events of no significance or meaning”.

Under naturalism, love isn't love. It's just biochemical activity, an illusory sensation generated by the matter and energy in our brains. Love and reason and everything else we know and value become neural events of no significance, devoid of content, importance, reality. Naturalism means everything is either matter or energy. That's it. *Cronin maintains that*

“real REALITY, – the reality we know from science, reason and our consciousness and common sense – is a symphony of truths. It is a harmony of truth, physical and metaphysical truth, moral and relational truth, theological and teleological truth. Life has an abundance of truth of a depth and breadth that is intriguing, intelligible and inspiring”. (Cronin, F.X; *The Triumph of Truth*, *ibid.*).

Under a naturalistic philosophy, however, all these virtuous traits inherent to our deepest relationships, and even our superficial ones, are mere social conventions or products of some form of negotiated arrangement between the individuals engaged in such relationships. That is because there truly are no real virtues, no real moral truths, no real reality beyond the physical plane for naturalism's solitary plane of matter and energy within the space and time of the cosmos.

With this new rational grounding, differences of opinion now must be argued and proved – not merely asserted and accepted. All opinion must be subject to the laws of logic and sound evidence. No longer is the individual opinion above evaluation or outside critique. The power of truth moves from the sovereignty of each person to the laws of logic, reason, and common sense. Reason's power is once again the arbiter of truth, not the individual's preference, perception or politics.

Once the single truth of naturalism which is self-refuting is dismissed and reason begins to assume its rightful role in reality, a whole spectrum of truth presents itself for our inquiry and discovery. Because reason is freed from naturalism's singular and limited focus,

logic, reason and common sense can once again uncover timeless truths and find new nuances of understanding and application for these many truths. With the demise of naturalism, our rational capacities also take on their appropriate authority and certainty, without diminishing the nature and role of the scientific method and the truths of the various sciences. Now reason's abilities and applications present enticing and intriguing opportunities to discover truths of many types – and not just more physical truths.

Individuals may have opinions about morality and beauty. But reason now plays a significant role in ascertaining the truth in these broad areas and to the many specific questions comprising them. For once reason is released and restored to its epistemological prominence; our path to truth becomes clear. Not only are our deductive powers acknowledged, but our common sense and our intuitive senses become viable paths to moral truth too. Our many characterological virtues and relational truths such as love and fidelity, sacrifice and generosity, honesty and understanding, honour and commitment provide real standards and sophisticated judgement and application.

Yet the case for science's supposed singular source of truth can only be made with reason, not with empirical experimentation. In light of this fatal contradiction, science's limitations are clearly circumscribed. Science is our way of knowing how the physical world works—its many laws, its order, its dynamics, and its composition. In this realm, it is the predominant method, a powerful path to the truth about the physical world. Understand that science isn't really a separate way of knowing, despite our tacit modern assumptions. It is a composite way of knowing that relies on the order of the physical universe, the reliability of our human perceptual senses, and our rational abilities.

Now, we know we are truly human in the fullest sense. For our full humanity is only ours if we are more than just biochemical machines, more than just an accidental composition of mere matter and energy. For



correcting our faulty epistemology changes everything, and that everything includes all the aspects and areas of life that make human life truly human and magnificent.

## **Ethics - the Constant Basic Need and Rational Moral Compass for Meaning in Life**

The poet and literary giant T. S. Eliot had asked the question a century ago:

“Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in Knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

To respond comprehensively to these questions, one must need to bring into the answer the domain of ethics.

Ethics is about life. It is the study and discipline for rational beings to know the distinction between good and evil. Ethics is about doing the right thing, making the right choices, protecting the common good, promoting good behaviour and avoiding harm. Ethics helps to promote collaboration and community coexistence, and is a subject taught within the family, in schools and higher education institutions. Through ethics, young people and adults reconnect with a moral and ethical compass for life by practicing virtue. It is indeed clear that without ethics and values based education, a better world is not possible. Our common challenge therefore is to integrate ethics in education so that people think ethically, govern ethically and act ethically.

Ethics is the rational compass for moral behaviours and for doing good, which is innate. Indeed, rational beings have this capacity. Human beings according to Aristotle are “*animalis rationalis*” – “*thinking animals*”. They have the ability to think, and to do good. They can also do evil because they are free to decide with their freewill. Freewill and enlightened conscience can help people choose between right and

wrong. Ethics is the moment that helps build togetherness with a rational platform because of humanity's ability to think. It doesn't have to be a clash of cultures or religions, but rather a search for harmony.

In the 21st century, ethics challenges us to reflect the reality of children who go hungry at night without food, without water, without basic health care and education in a world that can afford basic needs to all. Why should babies in Africa die of Malaria, knowing that we have enough medication to cure the disease? They can't be cured because some people have taken money that belongs to the common good and kept it for themselves alone. The culture of corruption is not sustainable. Ethics teaches us to imbibe principles of solidarity, respect for human dignity, regard for the common good and promotion of all life. When we learn the principles of respect for my own life and the lives of others, we learn to integrate diversity and inclusion. There are challenges to being ethical, especially where vice and lack of knowledge are precedent. But the learning process helps reduce fanaticism. People who do not know tend to be inward looking, holding only to the things they know and resisting such great ideas that open up to a universal human family, irrespective of colour, creed, language and social class.

As is widely known, humanity stands at the crossroad on a global scale. There is this disparity and disconnect due the lack of ethical ingredients in the way human beings think and do things. We seem to have reached a dead end with unethical behaviour and practices leading to dysfunctional societies, climatic disasters, economic-declines and political gridlocks. We see these dead ends in the world of business and politics, in commerce and industry, governance and education, religion and culture, in technology and social behaviours. Thus the confusion, the disorientation and the lack of happiness is noticeable everywhere. We are aware that the centre is not holding any more.

Modern society has brought much noticeable progress to the fields of arts, medicine, agriculture, sciences, longevity, technology and

lifestyles. Yet, people are not happy, and many seem not to find orientation towards ethical values or some rational meaning in anything. Modern society unfortunately has continued to build walls of racial and class distinctions, gender bias and ideological contradictions, which distort a better world for everybody. In the past, people lived on specific values; they knew what to hold onto. There was a difference between a truth and a lie, and children were cultured accordingly. Currently, there is urgent need to re-discover such sustainable values. This disconnect happens when the past is disjointed from the present; when the present is disconnected from the future; when intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values are not happening.

Ethics is the glue that binds humans and their communities with the supernatural realities. In the past, people held onto God. Religion and its values helped orientate communities. Religion remains a traditional domain of the divine guiding communal and individual behaviour. In a growing secularised world, religion is pushed to the margins and even manipulated, thus the gap. There is therefore need to bring consensus around life and around ethics as a moment of unifying focus. This is necessary, because religious, philosophical, educational, traditional and cultural traits contribute to making life meaningful, and thus ethical and valuable. Ethics is a rational moment.

Humans can say yes or no. Ethics helps us do so based on rational thinking. Due to the lack of constant rational reflection before action, or even because of it, people fail sometimes to take a moment to ask: 'why am I doing this?' "What consequences does it have on others?" The market drives you to buy something for the sake of buying something. At such times, passion and the urge to buy drives you. Ethical reflection could help to slow down the act before you act.

Ancient wisdoms teaches that thought and action go together, thus "*sow a thought and reap an act, sow an act and reap a habit, sow a habit and reap a character, sow a character and reap a destiny*".

The first is the thought. If the thought was values-based in the first place, the end product which leads to destiny shall be values-inclined also. If the thought was faulty in the first place, the consequential action would lead to bad habit.

Education has added value by integrating ethical thinking in the young as they shape the future. The idea of the autonomous individual, which is a philosophical debate in modern society is fanciful but is not compelling. Likewise, current debates promoting de-constructivism as a theory fail to show a human being as tabula rasa. One is always born in a community of others and as the African wisdom teaches: “*UMuntu Ugabantu Mgamuntu*” meaning – “*A human being is human through other humans*”. In the rich words of Professor John Mbiti, “*I am because we are; since we are therefore I am*”. This wisdom is applied across life. For example, Arithmetic is a subject teaching the use of numbers, while ethics applies this knowledge to connect humans and all life in the world. The transformation of society through ethical education elevates the quality of education that has values. When we negate ethics, we increase the potential for global crisis.

Thought leadership is the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It needs leaders with rational thinking, moral integrity and ethical standing who work to create a world for everybody.

## **The Challenge of Truth**

African wisdom is known as ancient and primary. The continent is the origin of humankind with the oldest civilisations. It is here that the “*homo erectus*” and the “*homo sapiens*” emerged on planet earth and found their first home. The Igbo culture in modern Nigeria shares wisdom as African heritage and defines Truth as “*Eziokwu bu Ndu*” – “*Truth is Life*”. In its extensive meaning, therefore, truth in various African cultures refers to a community attribute which is shared by the

community “Ubuntu”, is knowable; touchable, thinkable and even metaphysically imaginable, and serves life in its entirety. To be true is to be both real in the natural and transcendental dimensions. For the African cosmology, which is indeed cyclical (past-present and future), sees the human being as made up of body and mind and soul.

Aristotle’s well known definition of truth is found in his *Metaphysics* 1011b25:

“To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that is not, is true”.

The famous philosopher Thomas Aquinas who dominated and influenced Western philosophical thought over centuries with his scholastic method of logic defined Truth as

“adequatio mentis et rei” – meaning the “correspondence of the mind and the thing”. It is a “transcendental aspect of being, which means that everything that exists is true”.

In other words, truth is coextensive with being and convertible with being. Yet truth does not add anything to being, in the way an accident (such as colour) adds something real to substance. It is clear therefore, that truth refers to reality, to nature, beyond nature and to transcendence.

The opening lines of the scholastic philosopher and theologian St Thomas Aquinas in *De Veritate*<sup>229</sup>, where he quotes Muslim thinker Ibn Sina asserts:

“What the intellect first conceives as most evident is Being.  
Knowledge of truth begins with ordinary sensible perception.

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<sup>229</sup> The questions on truth, disputed by St. Thomas during his first period of teaching in Paris (1256-1259) are found in the scientific editions by A. Dondaine: *Sancti Thomae De Aquino Opera Omnia*; 22-23. *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, 22, Vol. 3, Fasc. 1, Roma, Editori di San Tommaso, 1970-1976, 3 vol.

God in his wisdom made perception of things, as first principle our universal starting point for acquiring knowledge and truth. Whatever knowledge we may infer through reason it must correspond with its basis in the perceivable world. That is especially true for ethics” (St Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*).

The Russian Alexander Solzhenitsyn had this insight in 1970 upon receiving the Nobel Prize and in his address said:

“One single truth is more powerful than all other weapons in the world: Communism advancing everywhere, truth would prevail against the lie and that those who clung to truth would overturn tyranny”.

He was correct and less than twenty years later, it happened with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Given the many technological and scientific advances over the last two hundred years, it is startling to consider the stupefying malaise and paradoxical plague that prevents so many of us from seeing the obvious truths of living.

Truth is not merely subjective, not something we make up, or chose, or cut to today’s fashions or to tomorrows pragmatism.

“We obey truth. We do not “have” the truth. Truth owns us, truth possesses us. Truth is far larger and deeper than we are. Truth leads us where it will. It is not ours for mastering. Truth is the light of God within us. In obeying truth, a human being becomes aware of participating in something greater than oneself, which measures our inadequacies and weakness”.

How do we, who so explicitly and implicitly accept the rationality inherent in the scientific method, miss the certainty inherent in simple rational proofs and arguments? How do we, who properly employ science to find and apply the truths about our physical world, miss the use and power of our rational and logical capacities, to find truth in the

realms of metaphysics and human nature, in morality and in culture? Such is the inversion and perversion of our modern times.

As someone has said elsewhere:

“...the real plague besetting modern times is not the many problems occupying our political and cultural discourse. Nor is it class and race, gender and identity, or even liberal and conservative. Our primary problem is simpler than most of us may surmise and more foundational than we may suspect. Yet, it is so obvious, it is a wonder we overlook it”.

Our modern problem is a solitary and severe one, yet a simplistic and superficial one. It is a self-inflicted crisis of knowing—an epistemological crisis, a crisis of truth. Derivative from this epistemological crisis, many moderns live with a malignant metaphysical confusion.

But in the realm of the intangible – like our human mind, its rational powers, its common sense, its intuitions, its pre-conscious components – science cannot really help us to determine truth. Truth about life’s inherent meaning and ultimate purpose, about morality and beauty, must be pursued through a different method, a different epistemology than science. Truth about human love and brotherhood, about courage and sacrifice, and about justice and freedom can only be found with a more human and humane way of knowing, a more realistic and rational way. For these truths are only known through reason and human experience.

We are challenged to awaken from nihilism and allow the restoration of reality, which is the triumph of truth. Thought and servant leadership with impactful civic engagement, based on honest engagement, with the search for truth and social impact for positive change necessary can make this happen. In an Essay presented by Michael Novak at Westminster Abbey on 4th May 1994, the twenty fourth recipient of the Templeton Prize for Progress in religion wrote:

“to obey the truth is to be free, and in certain extremities, nothing is more clear to the tormented mind, nothing more vital to the survival of self-respect, nothing so important to one’s sense of remaining a worthy human being, no one’s log, part of no one’s machine and register to death against the kingdom of lies – nothing is so dear as to hold the truth”

## **Conclusion – Why Ethics Matters for Life and for All – Globally and Urgently**

I conclude using the thoughts of James Madison, the fourth President of the USA who died in 1836 to ponder on such questions which bear repetition here:

“Could there be a free society among citizens who habitually lie, who malign, who constantly cheat, who do not meet their responsibilities, who cannot be counted on, who bribe or corrupt or shirk difficulties, who flout the law or who prefer to live as serfs or slaves, content in their dependency, so long as they are fed and entertained”.

Human beings are not the only creatures on earth that do not blindly obey the laws of their nature, by instinct, but are free to choose to obey them with a loving will. Only humans enjoy the liberty to do what we ought to do or not to do it. It is this critical adult liberty that lies at the living core of the free society. This liberty is not the freedom to do what you wish, but the freedom to do what you ought.

In the wearying journey of human history, we have discovered that free societies have been astonishingly rare. Freedom requires the exercise of conscience. It requires the practice of those virtues which we describe as ethics. These are many, but some of them are courage, courtesy, ingenuity, fairness, respect for individual choice with a patient regard for hearing evidence on both sides of the story. The ecology of



liberty is more fragile than the biosphere of earth. Freedom needs clean and healthy habits. Freedom needs particular, entire, rain forests of little acts of virtue, tangled loyalties, fierce lives, and undying commitments. Freedom needs particular institutions and these in turn need people of particular habits of her heart. In the thoughts of Michael Novak,

“The question for our millennium is whether we can survive the most insidious and duplicitous attacks from within, from those who undermine the ethics and virtues of our people, doing in advance the work of the “father of all lies” – the devil. If one hundred million inner police officers guard a people composed of one hundred million citizens – that is, by hundred million self-governing consciences, then the number of police officers on its streets may be few. For a society without inner police officers, on the contrary, there are not enough police officers in the world to make society civil” (Templeton Prize Speech, London).

It is the liberty of self-command, a tolerable mastery over ones passions such as bigotry, ignorance and self-deceit. It is the liberty of self-government in one’s own personal life. For how can people incapable of self-governing in private life prove capable of it in public life? If they cannot practice self-government over their private passions, how will they practice it over the institutions of the republic? *This is why ethics matters, and it matters for all people globally and urgently.*

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## HOMESICKNESS: AN UNSETTLING WORD

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ECOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ETHICS OF CARE

*Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué*<sup>230</sup>

“Home is memory and companions and/or friends who share the memory. But equally important as the memory and place and people of one’s personal home is the very idea of home.”

*Toni Morrison*<sup>231</sup>

“À force de regarder les arbres, je suis devenu un arbre..”

*Aimé Césaire*<sup>232</sup>

### **Introduction: Homesickness, an Unsettling Word**

*Where are we at home?* This question may lead us to an enquiry of ourselves, of our roots and stories. In brief, it may open the field for an

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<sup>230</sup> Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué, Academic Dean, Globethics.net.

<sup>231</sup> Toni Morrison: *The Source of Self-Regard: Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019: 17.

<sup>232</sup> Aimé Césaire: *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983 (original 1939): 28.

investigation into identity: who is human, what defines humankind and where can human history be located? This sequence of queries describes the classical epistemological trajectory associated with reflecting upon self-understanding, emerging from being/feeling at home. There has always been an intellectual consciousness for the frailty of this association. What defines human identity cannot be restricted to a location, to a place called *home*. Human history rather, hints to innumerable instances of *dislocation* – physically leaving one’s home or cognitively questioning the unity of being at home and at ease with oneself. This is stimulated by external situations and internal processes, contributing to such an exploration into the meaning of human existence and self-understanding in the world. Thus, more often than not, it may rather be the contrary experience of *not* being/feeling at home, which allows tapping into deeper existential dimensions of who we are as human beings – individually, together with others, and with what surrounds us in the world.

In these recent times, the notion of home has revealed its complexity at even more differentiated levels. Confined at home during the pandemic lockdown, people became sensitive for the ambiguity of being/feeling at home in the world. This disruptive experience not only led to re-arrangements at a phenomenological level, but also in family, work, cultural, economic and political life. More significantly, it created a new consciousness for relationships and modes of connection in a world that suddenly revealed its vulnerability. This is not to say that this vulnerable state of the world is a new phenomenon. The critique of lifestyles, production and consumption modes, and in general, of living consciously in this world, is first and foremost a critique of human action and agency to the detriment of a sustainable life of all created living beings. However, the novelty of the current situation may reside in the simultaneity of a disruptive experience of dislocation for all people – the world may no longer be called home, at least not in the

classical sense of the understanding. It seems that the global health pandemic has contributed to a paradigmatic shift. People's particular experiences of being/feeling at home (and their contrary), often disconnected and exacerbated by the deferment of historical phases, are now made visible, and more clearly seen as interconnected. The stories we narrate about our longing to be/feel at home somewhere, and in relation to others have become the stories of all. Humanity interrogates itself afresh: *where are we at home?*

Against this background, homesickness can be read as an unsettling word. It may not solely designate the longing for a specific and physical location, nor a sentiment associated with such a real or inner journey, which may render a person or a group sick. Rather, it may gain relevance for an exploration on how the world as a home has become *sick*. In other words, the world has become impaired and imbalanced, requiring more thorough methodological investigations on how humans can contribute to healing the world through restored relationships.

This chapter aims at providing a framework for these methodological investigations, in the context of an ethics of care. The motivation for such a contribution arises from the observation of frequently sharp juxtaposed categories, criteria and domains. The actual situation also helps unveiling some of these misleading contrasts: anthropology and ecology, safety and quality of life, freedom and protection, to name a few of them by way of illustration.

In this chapter, we will first embark on exploring the revisited notion of homesickness as a theoretical and practical terrain for an ethical investigation from a holistic perspective. In three consecutive sections the theme will further unfold. First, the question of being/feeling at home in the world will be examined, before the meaning of eco-vulnerability in its double bind of ecological and societal imbalance will be deciphered. The last two parts will be dedicated to offer contours of an ethics of care, which reposes on the understanding of the world as

both a non-spatial metaphor for home, and a method to engage the multifaceted eco-vulnerability.

## **Revisiting Homesickness as a Theoretical and Practical Field for an Embodied Ethics**

What is homesickness? It is traditionally anchored in psychology<sup>233</sup> and medicine,<sup>234</sup> where it is perceived as a state of mind characterised by a longing for a place, which procures stability and a sense of belonging. Absence from this place is accompanied by a series of symptoms, ranging from sadness, to melancholy and depression. Empirical studies situate homesickness mostly to individual experiences of detachment and up rootedness after migration, and undertake to frame it as a psychosocial phenomenon. Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets and Van Heck develop the definition of homesickness as “the commonly experienced state of distress among those who have left their house and home and find themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment.”<sup>235</sup> In their study, the researchers point out the particularity of the experience and the way it manifests in various forms of mental health states. These are exacerbated by encounters with new societal, cultural and linguistic environments, thus simultaneously providing the seedbed for different processes of acculturation, ‘culture shocks’ and coping mechanisms. Life sciences take the real situations of displacement and their effects on

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<sup>233</sup> See Dieu Hack-Polay: “When Home isn’t Home. A Study of Homesickness and Coping Strategies among Migrant Workers and Expatriates”, *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 4, 3 (2012): 62-72.

<sup>234</sup> See Miranda A. Van Tilburg, Ad J. Vingerhoets and G.L. Van Heck (eds): “Homesickness. A review of the literature”, *Psychological Medicine*, 26 (1996): 899-912; S. Fisher: *Homesickness, Cognition and Health*. London: Erlbaum, 1989; Marjorie Baier/Martha Welch: “An Analysis of the Concept of Homesickness.” *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 6 (1992): 54-60.

<sup>235</sup> Miranda A. Van Tilburg, Ad J. Vingerhoets and G.L. Van Heck, *ibid.*, 899.

individuals seriously, and lead inquiries on how homesickness can impact personal wellbeing and state of health among specific strata of the population. It is important to highlight the value of these investigations for the understanding of home from within a defined contextual experience, which gains more and more attention in an age of global migration and forced displacement.

The vested interest of this contribution is to offer an alternative reading of homesickness, which neither denies the validity of these experiences, nor of the aforementioned scholarly interpretations. However, it endeavours to propose a critical re-lecture of homesickness, in order to stimulate an ethical debate of actual relevance. The current global COVID-19-related situation may not only be understood narrowly as a public health challenge, but more so as a systemic crisis unveiling fundamental deficiencies in thinking of, and acting in the world. Confronting and emerging from this crisis will therefore require a threefold approach: First, the concept of the world as home will have to be spelled out afresh.<sup>236</sup> Secondly, it will have to imply a critical introspection into human agency and, ultimately, a new anthropological definition, which includes the relationship between human and non-humans. Last but not the least, such a revisited understanding of homesickness may serve as a propitious lens for anchoring the ethical debate in times like these anew. The world becomes a home in a non-spatial and non-ideological sense, not in the sense of the *one world* metaphor, which blurs the disparities for the benefit of a totalising and harmonising ideal of human cohabitation. What we propose here aims rather at developing a methodological category, opening the space for moral re-imagination of how people can live together under disparate

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<sup>236</sup> See Michael Jackson: *At Home in the World*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1995.



conditions and environments,<sup>237</sup> and how they can create and restore relationships within and beyond the human realm.

The working definition of homesickness we propose reposes on the assumption that homesickness creates – the genuine state of distress – is not so much related to the feeling of the loss and the longing for a home that renders an individual sick, but more so to *the world as home that has become sick*. With this approach, home is decidedly not taken as synonymous for a place or a location of cultural and societal belonging. What we endeavour to stress is the pedagogical, political, ethical and creative dimension of the world as home. Furthermore, it is about the permeability and mutual enrichment of different discourses and practices, contributing to normative negotiations about what holds life and the imagination about future life together at local and at international levels.<sup>238</sup>

Framing the understanding of home and homesickness in this manner brings about a critical shift in perception and opens a new terrain for theoretical considerations. Home is not bound to exclusive spatial connotations, nor does it become vulnerable for subtle ideological intrusions. Home in this sense becomes a discursive and relational category, withstanding the temptation of any domestication. It genuinely stands for the ambiguity and the non-coercive character of life and of being alive. It remains impossible to think of life in a compartmentalised way, now more than ever before. Life led in one part of this globe is entangled with life in another region even if the form, the cultural inventories and conditions may differ. We may investigate

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<sup>237</sup> See Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London/New York: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>238</sup> Achille Mbembe has coined the term of ‘world archives’ for such a circulating, international process of mutual consultation and negotiation on knowledge, meaning and interpretation. See id. : “The Power of the Archive and its Limits”, in: Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris et al. (Eds.): *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2002: 19-26.

home as a methodological continuum, which offers us new lenses for the understanding of other aspects and serving as hermeneutical key for interpreting our current situation of entanglement. The following focal threads may serve as a starting point, not as an exhaustive list of such theoretical anchoring points, but for further reflection.

***Focal Thread 1: Living on the Brink – The Fragile Home***

The first paradigm of the ‘fragile home’ leads us to consider homesickness as related to dealing with the uncertainty of time and place, without falling into the pitfalls of idealism and inward-orientation. Considering the world in which we live as a ‘fragile home’ means realising the disparities – the real contrasts in living conditions, the injustices and the diverse forms of exclusion, which render life unliveable for large portions of the world population. Homesickness in this context of understanding takes a concrete shape: it manifests itself as “plural and performative bodily resistance”<sup>239</sup> of those who do not feel at home, because they are denied fundamental rights of social and political participation, are exposed to structures which denigrate their bodily existence, and per extension, their rights to fully enjoy and benefit of societal integration. *Living on the brink* seems to describe these forms of experience, of being alive and yet considered less. It is a radical expression for telling a story with a double bind. Living on the brink of poverty, or unemployment, or sickness, means living with the constant fear of its full realisation, which inhibits and hinders creativity. Simultaneously, it encapsulates a glimpse of inner resistance,

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<sup>239</sup> Judith Butler: *Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance*, 2016: 4. <http://bibacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Rethinking-Vulnerability-and-Resistance-Judith-Butler.pdf> (Accessed 20.07.2020); See also: Idem, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London/ New York: Verso, 2004.

perspective and hope that things may not come or remain as they are foreshadowing.<sup>240</sup>

### ***Focal Thread 2: Living in Transition – The Mobile Home***

The second theoretical anchor we propose here is that of the mobile home.<sup>241</sup> Homesickness introduces us to the acceptance that home is not denoting a permanent but a transitional location and place of dwelling. Homesickness does not assist in restoring what was once lost or what may be the object of a sentiment of longing. Homesickness provides a framework for living in transition, which means accommodating changes, and integrating the paradoxical dimensions of our existence. This also has an influence on the formation of identity and self-assertion. How does the human recognise herself/himself? The response to this question may be found less – or not in its entirety – in what humans recognise to be in a certain place, under certain circumstances and at a particular time, but in the ‘space-in-between.’<sup>242</sup> Homesickness, in this perspective, would also bear a significant ethical meaning. It would consequently hint to necessary spaces of normative negotiations: *how and on the basis of which values do we want to live together? How can we create a home as spaces of ethical imagination?* Julia Kristeva

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<sup>240</sup> Brother John of Taizé: *Life on the Edge. Holy Saturday and the Recovery of the End of Time*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017: 17, spells this out in the context of a compelling theological comment on the Easter narrative and reflects expressively: “Are we still in the time of waiting, or have we already crossed over into a new age? The apparent indeterminacy and hiddenness of this ‘time out’ suggests that there may be more here than meets the eye.”

<sup>241</sup> I wish to recognise Upolu Luma Vaai for inspiring me to develop this focal thread through his reflections on the ‘portable home’ in the context of a Pacific ethics of relationality. Communication at Globethics.net Conference Building New Bridges. Strengthening Ethics in Higher Education after COVID-19, 25 June 2020.

<sup>242</sup> See Hans Blumenberg: *Beschreibung des Menschen*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2006: 253.

unfolded a scenario of “an emerging paradoxical community”<sup>243</sup> in modern-day multicultural societies, in which people who identify themselves as essentially strangers to one another, learn to practice and cultivate an ethics of mutual respect and solidarity in the face of their “radical strangeness.”<sup>244</sup>

***Focal Thread 3: Living in Expectation – The Creative Home***

The third focal thread brings to the fore the dimension of homesickness as *living in expectation*. We identify, here in particular, existence, a ‘being-at-home’. Reflection on this being-at-home includes an unending meaning-making process, not the conclusion or the nostalgic reference to home as a category of achievement and perfection. This viewpoint can be unfolded in two main directions. First, it constitutes an important ethical stimulation to think of home as something to be created. It would represent a kind of permanent construction site, which demands the perpetual efforts of all. This common creativity, to carve out the contours of what it needs to live together, would be coupled with a compulsory layer of the unexpected. The home, according to this understanding, will have to be built over time and space, in recognition of the fact that a missing piece, a complementary part will be added apart and beyond the individual and collective efforts. Homesickness in this perspective orients us towards what *may be*, rather than to what *is* or what *has been*.

The second direction this focal thread may take us is into the area of what Jeffrey Alexander so poignantly developed in his theory of cultural

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<sup>243</sup> Julia Kristeva: *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2017 (First Edition: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1988): 290.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

trauma.<sup>245</sup> He states about the importance of trauma, not only as psychological but as cultural category whereby

“...social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but ‘take on board’ some significant responsibility for it.”<sup>246</sup>

He stresses by assuming this moral responsibility people would be able to “define their solidary relationships in ways that ...allow them to share the suffering of others.”<sup>247</sup> He touches upon sensitive areas of how communities constitute themselves in the wake of experiencing violent disruptions, and of communities reacting and responding to traumatic histories in their midst, which includes all shades raging from denial, silence, repression, to interrogation and affirmation of these occurrences and deep-seated experiences. This is so critical to recognise in the reflection of homesickness as it expands the traditional notion of longing for a home, linked to the formation of identity within a specific community. It is the beginning of posing the question, as per Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be, societies expand the circle of the we.”<sup>248</sup>

*Living in expectation* as a theoretical thread for revisiting homesickness hints therefore to the need for deepening our analytical perspective, also with regard to what makes the home unliveable. This is opposed to a unilateral concentration on the defining home, and the individual and collective reference to home on the harmonious and liveable dimensions.

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<sup>245</sup> See Jeffrey C. Alexander: “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma”, in: Id., Ron Eyerman et al. (eds): *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, 2004.

<sup>246</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

***Discussion: A Plea for Locating Homesickness in the Context of an Embodied Ethics***

If these aspects constitute valid entry points for explorations on home in the context of a world that poses challenges and offers methods of enquiry at the same time, it would also bear significance for the understanding of homesickness. It would move it away from a strictly psychological to a more political-ethical notion, which describes an ‘in-between-status’, and values it as critical for unleashing the full creative potential towards changed relationships and structures. Homesickness is thus not denoting the inner mental state of individuals in search of restoring identity through longing for a home – new or old – ,but rather the bewildering realisation that the home as space and notion is elusive and is subject to a fundamental characterising frailty wherefrom there is no escape. Embracing the tension that arises from this diagnosis, and developing avenues on how to deal with it, represents a task of an *embodied ethics*. An ethics that takes both the epistemological, meaning the knowledge and thought-creating, and the political-active challenges of our times seriously.

An *embodied ethics*<sup>249</sup> means recognising the real presence of bodies as legitimate locus for the formulation of criteria of engagement with the world. As an analytical approach, it is both conventional and non-conventional. Conventional because it takes the existential dimension seriously – being in the world can primarily only be experienced by way of physical encounters, or at least the realisation of being physically existent. At the same time, it is a non-conventional approach, as it disrupts the human tendency to rationalise being-in-the-world as aiming

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<sup>249</sup> Embodied ethics, as proposed here, goes beyond an ethics of the body as, for example, Margrit Shildrick and Roxanne Mykitiuk (Eds.): *Ethics of the Body. Postconventional Challenges*. MIT Press, 2005, suggest insofar it evokes an ethics that takes the body not only as subject area for ethical investigation, but endeavours to build a methodological framework at the intersection of reflective and applied ethics.

at being in an ideal status. Homesickness understood not as a longing but more so as the discovery, that brokenness and strangeness belongs to a genuine human experience is a profoundly ethical discovery. It unveils that the true ethical solicitation consists in offering a non-invasive response to ‘the Other’ (the created and non-created), by way of establishing a relationship that seeks complementary rather than harmony and uniformity.

### ***Some Practical Considerations***

After these more theoretical explorations, it will be necessary to highlight selected practical considerations. What are the salient questions homesickness invites us to pose? One of these, undoubtedly, takes us into the heart of the current public debate on what it means to be human and to being alive. This question can be articulated in at least three different versions –cultural, political and a societal. The cultural version of the question addresses the complexities of human existence at the intersection of experience, ideology and representation. The facets of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender constitute, depending on the ideological and academic standpoints, constructions or real life locations of asking *what it means to imagine oneself inside and in-between bodies?*<sup>250</sup>

Another area of practical application of our considerations is related to the question of *who we are and who we want to become?* It is tied to the identity politics and the way they play out in political representation. This applies not only to the political parties, but to all spaces, also in civil society. People seek to articulate their claims of belonging (cultural and national identities) and of economic and political participation

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<sup>250</sup> See Brian Bantum: *Redeeming Mulatto. A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016 (first 2010), for a specific disciplinary contribution on this topic. For a broader, practically oriented discussion, see Anneliese A. Singh: *The Racial Healing Handbook*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2019.

(cultural, social and economic rights) in the given society and in the world at large. Homesickness – in a distinct ethical perspective of feeling a caring responsibility for a common home that has become unbalanced – will help to revisit the fallacy of a worldview that antagonises global and local concerns. It will assist to redress the interrelation between the preoccupations and experiences in the regions and broader, universal concerns.

Last but not the least; homesickness constitutes an urgent interpellation to revisit the constructed boundaries between the spaces of all created beings, and to accentuate their eco-relationality,<sup>251</sup> their interrelation. Homesickness contributes to refocus the attention on overlapping spheres of responsible care for all life, not only human life. Home denotes in this line of interrogation the non-spatial location of the moral imagination to be reflected upon and put into practice in acts of mutual consideration around the question of *how do we want to live together without jeopardising the future of the generations and species to come*.

### ***A Provisional Working Definition***

Homesickness emerges as a radical, subversive notion. It can be described as a rebellious word, which disrupts the comfort of convenient images, thoughts and representations. Homesickness challenges the conventional perspective of wanting to restore something lost for the benefit of reimagining something new from within a bodily experience, which incorporates nuances of in-between and strangeness, an ethos of expectation, which warrants creativity and moral imagination. At the same time, it stands for a permanent invitation to develop a practice of

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<sup>251</sup> See Upolu Luma Vaai: “*We Are Therefore We Live*” *Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Change Story*. Toda Peace Institute, Policy Brief No. 56, October 2019. [https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb\\_56\\_upolu-luma-vaai\\_we-are-therefore-we-live.pdf?v=0](https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb_56_upolu-luma-vaai_we-are-therefore-we-live.pdf?v=0) (Accessed 10.09.2020).



caring responsibility for all life and for relationships with all who are created.

## **Unveiling Eco-Vulnerability: A Home That Has Become Sick**

Against the background of this provisional working definition, we shall now embark on reflecting how homesickness can be indicative of an eco-vulnerability, a vulnerability of an eco-system, which can be translated at an initial semantic level by *a home that has become sick*. However, we have to ask in which manner the world as home has become sick, and consequently, what impact this has on the understanding of relationships on earth. What are the possible attitudes and actions to address it, if at all, and repercussions on the ethical fabric and the moral imagination.

I shall begin with a vignette from one of the most recent and fascinating research contributions in the field of the human plant interface, and the ethnography of the other than human.<sup>252</sup> William Ellis' empirical research on milkwood trees (*sapotaceae*) in Southern Africa<sup>253</sup> reveals mostly unrecognized connections between plants and humans that are highly instructive for an investigation in eco-vulnerability. Ellis studies trees not as objects, but as living subjects and co-creational elements bearing amnesic capacities in a colonial context. He writes in reference to a tree on which the indigenous *Khoisan* people were once lynched by the Dutch settlers taking their lands:

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<sup>252</sup> See Jane Bennett: *Vibrant Matter. A political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

<sup>253</sup> William Ellis: "A Tree Walks through the Forest. Milkwoods and other Botanical Witnesses." *Catalyst*, Issue 5,2(2019):1-4. <https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/32837/25425> (accessed 15.08.2020).

“I imagine the excrement of the executed and how their urine and faeces at the roots nourished the tree. Thus, the essences of the dead, the unnamed colonial dead, are still with us in the flesh of a tree that is a witness to their deaths and a site for their remains.”<sup>254</sup>

William Ellis’ observations and interpretations of milkwood trees as a “vast rhizomatic, vegeto-neural network that discursively, symbolically and epigenetically retains events and evidence,”<sup>255</sup> may direct our thinking on eco-vulnerability in three main directions.

First, one of the salient contributions of this research resides in the attention for the agency of the other than human species at the intersection of human and vegetal history. The cognizance of the evolution of milkwood trees, whereby young trees are growing from within the trunk of collapsed, old trees, supports the hypothesis of a kind of connection and continued bearing of witness in these trees through the ages. The example of the milkwood trees introduces us to one facet of eco-vulnerability in the sense of a dual-way permeability: the suffering of human species finding a commemorative repository, an ‘authentic monument’ or a ‘marker of a curated outside’, as William Ellis names it, in the trees, and the plants in turn are no longer vegetal substance and functional essence alone, but genuine bearers of a double identity.

The second learning on eco-vulnerability in the context of homesickness prepares for a greater attention to the definition of vulnerability itself. There is an observable shift in the humanities from understanding vulnerability as human characteristic of being at risk to external influences.<sup>256</sup> Such as environmental and other structural

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<sup>254</sup> William Ellis: *ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> William Ellis: *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> See Daniel Engster: “Care Ethics, Dependency and Vulnerability”, *Ethics and Social Welfare* 13,2 (2019): 110-114; *Id.*: *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics*

factors, to a broader semantic meaning, this entails resilience, and hence accentuates agency over against a passive bearing of an incident. Martha Albertson Fineman's contribution<sup>257</sup> on vulnerability as a constitutive of the human condition has been widely and controversially discussed. Can we speak of vulnerability as a universal human trait without sacrificing the recognition of individual and particular experiences of vulnerability? The question is neither comfortable nor straightforward. Albertson Fineman discusses vulnerability in the context of legal considerations and public responsibility, and proposes to understand vulnerability as an "enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and State responsibility."<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, she states that "vulnerability initially should be understood as arising from our embodiment, which carries with it the ever-present possibility of harm, injury and misfortune...",<sup>259</sup> and draws our attention to the insight that: "Understanding vulnerability begins with the realization that many such events are ultimately beyond human control."<sup>260</sup>

Perhaps this constitutes our third dimension of reflection, one of the lessons to be learned from the experience with the invisible coronavirus. It escapes our control, despite the attempts to regulate societal interactions and to provide adequate measures of public health and protection at national and international levels. This is not to say that humanity has not been exposed to large-scale viruses before, and has survived despite major losses, but more so because it calls for a radical

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*and Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; see also Estelle Ferrarese: "Vulnerability: A Concept with Which to Undo the World As It Is?" *Critical Horizons*, 17,2 (2016): 149-159.

<sup>257</sup> Martha Albertson Fineman: "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition". *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20, 1 (2008): 1-23. <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol20/iss1/2/> (Accessed 10.09.2020).

<sup>258</sup> Martha Alberston Fineman, *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>259</sup> Martha Albertson Fineman, *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

shift in perspective. Realising that our home, the earth, has become sick is not a diagnosis that calls for a symptomatic cure. Intervening at the level of the symptoms would mean in the actual situation we live in the confirmation of a status quo. This status quo originates, and has been perpetuated over generations, from an anthropocentric perception, which holds the human at the centre of the ecological system. Intertwined into this perception is the asymmetry of relationships within humanity leading to incessant patterns of domination and subsequent disparities. Being vulnerable can therefore constitute a crucial disposition, an attitude through which this anthropocentric perception can be critically engaged. Eco-vulnerability is therefore not merely part of an environmental ethics, but needs to be elevated to a transversal perspective that allows investigating critically the different domains, in which we experience that our home has become sick.<sup>261</sup>

The current global pandemic may be read against the background of such an approach to vulnerability, which carefully unveils it, not in relation to a stigmatising categorisation of specific groups or individuals, but as a systemic lens by which the human existence is understood within an ecological system of relations. An existence that is characterized by being-related-with and not one of being-in-isolation.

## **At Home in the World? On the Semiotics of Knowledge and the Pedagogy of Being-Related**

Revisiting the understanding of homesickness cannot be restricted to the materiality of the world as whole inhabited earth, but needs to take

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<sup>261</sup> See Ernst M. Conradie: *An Ecological Christian Anthropology. At Home on Earth?* London/New York: Routledge, 2016, who has spelled such an approach out for theology. His explorations are valid contributions on a methodological level, beyond the discipline of theology, as he emphasizes the necessary dual perspective of critiquing the cultural habits leading to environmental destruction and the ecological critique of the worldviews and religious traditions.

into account how the inhabitants of a home in misbalance can engage in conversation on new relationships to be built. This entails language and languages, and the manner knowledge is created, shared and transferred. Thus it relates to the semiotics of knowledge (meaning to which areas in the real world knowledge refers to, and from what kind of cognitive or bodily experiences knowledge is created), and to a pedagogy of being-related as a form of laying the foundation for an ethical conversation.

Why is this relevant? Habitually, language conditions human experience of the world, and vice versa, human experience of the world conditions what can be expressed through language. Given the plurality of existing discourses on how the world is experienced and how meaning and knowledge is created. It seems to be crucial not to assume the same lenses and to prepare an ethical conversation, by way of laying accountability to one another about the different frameworks of plausibility in which ethical reflection and action is embedded.

This is also valid, as we have previously seen with regard to the way home and homesickness is conceptualized. Home cannot be reduced to a geographical location. It is a notion that has to be carefully guarded against the subtle intrusions of ideology, against the construction of home as an exclusive sphere, and against the “politics of home”, as Rosemary Marangoly George states, and to endeavour

“...to read more than the domestic into representations of the home, to keep the location from being reduced to a geographic place on the map and politics from being reduced (or elevated) to nationalism.”<sup>262</sup>

In realizing this conditionality, the contours of an applied ethics needed for times like these are drawn: thinking, believing and/or

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<sup>262</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George: *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 3.

imagining, and acting at the intersection of how the world as home *is* and how it *ought to be*. Thinking, believing, imagining and acting are not neutral and distant modes of engagement with the world as home. They expose us to more than the plurality of experiences and discourses. The disparities of our living conditions are a constant reminder of the asymmetries and hierarchies that influence relationships, at global and regional levels. The habitual societal stratification categories of ethnicity, class, culture and religion are only one aspect related to this observation. In this context, the postcolonial and de-colonialist discourse offers us ample discussion points. Walter D. Mignolo has asked poignant questions with regard to racism and epistemology, and remarked that: “Geo-politics of knowledge goes hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing.”<sup>263</sup> He advocates vigorously for an epistemic de-colonial, de-linking from Western patterns of knowledge creation and as a consequence, as per Mignolo, from the definition of what is considered as human.<sup>264</sup> It is necessary to gain deeper insights on how our living in the world is shaped and informed by ways in which we articulate these experiences, and are able to create knowledge and share it with others. Haifa S. Alfaisal has contributed to a critical engagement with postcolonial proposals for an epistemic de-linking. Alfaisal commented on the fallacies of the latter by pointing to the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies in postcolonial theory, based on a lack of self-criticism and the adoption of an underlying and totalising modernity and colonialist pattern, which in itself would deserve to be decolonised.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Walter D. Mignolo: “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27, 7-8 (2009): 1-23: 2.

<sup>264</sup> See Walter D. Mignolo: *ibid.* 3.

<sup>265</sup> See Haifa S. Alfaisal: “Indigenous Epistemology and the Decolonisation of Postcolonialism.” *Social & Political Thought*, Vol. 19 (2011): 24-40; see also Linda Tuhiwai Smith: *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London/New York: Zed Books; Marie Battiste: *Reclaiming Indigenous*

What needs to be made fruitful for our endeavour to revisit home and homesickness from this debate is the attention to how knowledge is created and transferred, and how this informs ethical reflection, discernment, decision-making and practice. It appears to be of a paramount importance to liberate knowledge creation from its ideological entanglement, and to encourage and advance a debate on how dispositions, attitudes, in brief, an *ethos of learning* can be fostered within a broader understanding of human existence in relation to all living. Such an ethos of learning would be part of a pedagogical framework of being-in-relation- with others human and the other-than-human. It is important to underline that this pedagogy of being-related has not to be comprehended from an exhortative standpoint, nor a prescriptive stance. The imagery and the explorations of a deconstructed homesickness lend themselves to create awareness for the need to anchor what we know about the world, in the different manners it emerges, into modes of how we can share about it in mutual respect of the intrinsic value and dignity of all life. Homesickness thus becomes a way of turning to the other, beyond the self, in an attitude of creative imagination for a home, the world, to which all belong.

### **Caring Responsibility: A Transformative Perspective on Ethics of Care in Unusual Times**

The *ethos of learning* and *pedagogy of being-related* consequentially leads to a reflection on the internal and external implications for applied ethics. Both internally and externally, an ethos of learning will help to prevent tendencies of domination and foster a much needed qualitative approach to an intercultural ethical conversation. As long as humans are

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*Voice and Vision*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000; Deepika Bahri: *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

disposed to learn, they will recognise their limitation, their potential of growth, and their dependency on co-creation of knowledge together with others. This would constitute a methodological starting point of thinking of ethics as an ethics of care based a non-invasive, non-dominating value of caring responsibility. A caring responsibility would have to be thought in a framework of reciprocity, that prevents perceiving care/caring as an asymmetric act vis-à-vis others. It is not so much about the care *for* others, but the care *with* and *about* one another that has to be brought to the fore of ethical thinking and practices.<sup>266</sup>

The unusual times of the current COVID-19 era may offer us various fields of practice in which this caring responsibility can be exemplified and tested.<sup>267</sup> The restriction of space, the velocity of changing and diverse models of political responses and public health measures will leave a deep mark on societal life, including the economy, health care, education, research, culture and religion.

These times, deemed unusual, are decisive in terms of clarifying foundational approaches and attitudes to human life in a wider web of relationships. In this sense, the unusual times will become transformative, in as much as they unescapably invite to reflect upon acquired and habitual patterns of practice and cohabitation. Up until this historic juncture, the anthropocentric vision of humankind directing and exploiting the earth has remained deep-seated and dominant over against local counter currents proposing more sustainable life-styles. Richard Sennett with his trilogy around craftsmanship, cooperation and urban design and living, proposes what he calls the ‘homo faber project’, that

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<sup>266</sup> See for this crucial distinction: Nel Noddings: *Starting at Home: Caring and social policy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

<sup>267</sup> See the instructive contribution of Esteve Corbera, Isabelle Anguelovski, Jordi Honey-Rosés, Isabel Ruiz-Mallén: “Academia in the Time of COVID-19: Towards an Ethics of Care.” *Planning Theory& Practice*, Vol. 21, 2 (2020): 1991-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146449357.2020.1757891> (Accessed 10.09.2020).



”does have an ethical centre, focused on just how much we can become our own masters.”<sup>268</sup> Sennett’s preoccupation as sociologist is to observe and to describe how people cohabitate, cooperate and, more precisely, develop skills for “...responsiveness to others, such as listening skills in conversation, and on the practical application of responsiveness at work or in the community.”<sup>269</sup>

Written a few years prior to the current pandemic situation, one would like to make Richard Sennett’s contribution fruitful for reading the signs of the time as period of re-arranging, refocusing and learning of new ways of cooperation and being related. Perhaps his emphasis on cooperation demanding skills (*techne*) and skilfulness leads into a possible misinterpretation of a technocratic mastery. However, the proposition of looking more closely into what it takes to live, work and create together is relevant in an ever polarizing and broken world, not only with regard to human relationships.

The perspective of an ethics of care could assist broadening the understanding and practice of living together, as well as its ethical underpinnings. The ethics of care has first been brought into the ethical conversation by Carol Gilligan as a ‘different voice,’<sup>270</sup> juxtaposing moral thinking around the self and the relationship with others, to

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<sup>268</sup> Richard Sennett: *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2012: 8 (hereafter: Together); The other two volumes of the trilogy include: Id.: *Craftsman*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2008; Id.: *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2018 (hereafter: Building).

<sup>269</sup> Richard Sennett: *Together*, 7.

<sup>270</sup> See Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Harvard University Press, 1982; See also Nel Noddings: *Caring, a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; and revised edition: Id.: *Caring. A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press, rev. 2 2013.

deontological and consequentialist approaches that accentuate universal standards and their general applicability.

Carol Gilligan's assumption of ascribing women and men different moral views or different approaches to moral thinking may be debatable from an empirical standpoint and challenged in its attempt to simplify gendered ethical reasoning and discernment. However, rethinking normative ethics from the standpoint of relationships and responsiveness to vulnerability constitutes a worthwhile intellectual and practical endeavour, against the background of our reflections on homesickness and the ethical solicitation of a world perceived as *a home in need of care*. It may be a valid entry point for an intercultural conversation on such experiences for the world as our home in relational, non-dominant ways and on the values that may support and sustain related thinking and practices. As per Virginia Held,

“... the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility.”<sup>271</sup>

It seems that a constructive bridge could be built between an ethics of care and the classical ethical schools, by relating care/caring with universal norms and value sets such as justice and responsibility.<sup>272</sup> A caring responsibility as an ethical perspective could come to bear in a series of practical fields of high societal and political relevance: the

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<sup>271</sup> Virginia Held: *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2006: 10.

<sup>272</sup> See, among others, particularly Michael Slote: *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007; and also Deane Curtin: “Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care.” *Hypatia*, Vol 6, 1 (1991): 60-74; and the seminal work of Ivone Gebara on eco-feminism, see id.: *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Fortress Press, 1999.

ability to build peace *on* earth and peace *with* the earth, or the capacity to deal with plurality and living with differences.

Furthermore, an ethics of care could offer a transformative perspective by way of an opportunity to outline not only fields of ethical application, the external dimension, meaning how norms and values can be applied to a situation, but also contribute to deepening methodological considerations. How do we achieve an ethical conversation in a world marked by diverse living conditions, experiences, worldviews, and approaches? A question which links back to the aforementioned pedagogical task of creating spaces of awareness for caring relationships and attitudes.

## **Conclusion**

*Where are we at home?* This was the initial question the present contribution posed. The starting point of this investigation was the deconstructive assumption that homesickness, if detached from its narrow psychological and psychosomatic context, would offer a valid avenue for the development of an ethics of care that takes both account of the normative grounding in universal standards and rights, and of caring and responsible relationships.

Homesickness is presented in this contribution as an unsettling word in as much as it allows to spell it afresh – in contrast to a restorative and nostalgic understanding of regaining a lost or imagined location – as a longing for being in relationship with others, human and other than human. We proposed to decipher home as fragile, mobile and creative, and therefore as more adequate paradigms of understanding life in relationships, also against the background of current experiences in the global pandemic.

This chapter also constitutes the modest beginning of developing a conceptual framework, in which my attention to human life is connected with a kind of *ecology of meaning-making*. It is about asking questions

on how sense, meaning and orientation in human existence can be experienced and articulated in relation to *all living*, transcending the habitual boundaries of human/non-human, nature, culture and history. This *ecology of meaning-making* relates to my proposal to describe the contours of a contemporary, embodied ethics not so much from the perspective of its *contents* (i.e. the normative prerogatives), but more so from the perspective of *form and methodology* (i.e. what it enables to perceive in view of arriving to an informed ethical response).

My explorations on homesickness and an ethics of care were guided by the insight that overcoming the divisions in our in many ways broken world would not entail glossing over the differences (by way of an universalizing approach), nor to understand ethics as a possibility to develop a kind of blue print for globally applicable solutions. Rather, as per our proposal, the recognition of the simultaneity of vulnerability , and dignity of all life at the root of all ethical reflection and practice would lead into a non-invasive, and non-dominating considerateness for all life, human and other-than-human, from within an ethos of care and empathy.

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## RESPECTING NATURE: FOCUSING ON VALUES AND REASONS

*Ignace Haaz*<sup>273</sup>

### **Introduction**

Everyone is aware that it is good, even a duty to protect nature. Doing ethically right could mean to accept the imperative of respecting or protecting our natural environment.

Caring about ethics could mean caring about nature, and anyone who cares about nature would be concerned about ethics. These are two similar, but also different propositions. How is it that we have come to form a double implication between these two propositions?

From a philosophical and *meta-ethical* point of view, it would be ethical and responsible to protect nature, as an absolute duty, if there were an absolute duty of existence inherent to nature. Nature in this sense could be considered an unconditioned being, which means a being without dependence on anything else. On the other side, coming back from philosophy to concrete life, awareness building around the environment, which assures that a sound message trickles down to concerned communities, respecting the nature means to implement specific values. Can we say that our duty of responsibility towards

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<sup>273</sup> Ignace Haaz, Managing Editor, Globethics.net.



nature is total and absolute or rather a reason among others? Should we balance among other reasons for ethical action an *eco-centric* view?

The object of this chapter aims to question a universal community with nature as *bio-* or *eco-centric* view, and engage by reasoning and philosophical understanding of values concerned by the environment. Caring about ethics implies caring for a *meta-ethical* level of understanding of the terms of environment related propositions. We shall see that a possible solution to an excessive or absolute duty to care about nature could be to say we should care mainly about the divine or “common earth”, “the ecological future of modern theology”, in a *theo-eco-centric* view (Moltmann, 2019; Stückelberger 2016, 2009)<sup>274</sup>. A philosophical approach to duty in times of ecological crisis invites us to reflect on some key notions such as: *respect*, *values* and *reasons* for action, concerned by the setting of some foundation to our ethical norms.

As a possible way of tackling the general interrogation “Who cares about ethics?”<sup>275</sup> a straightforward answer could be: any person who cares for the respect of other persons. In real life, things are in some cases not so simple. Due respect to individuals can be part of a choice of different set of values. As when we have to decide between focusing on the value of the creation of employment, economic growth and wealth

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<sup>274</sup> Moltmann, Jürgen (2019): *Hope in These Troubled Times*, transl. by M. Kohl and B. McNeil, WCC Publications, 33ff. We should mention Christoph Stückelberger’s important work on faith and applied ethics driven environmental ethics (2016: *Global Ethics Applied: Environmental Ethics*. Vol. 2, Reader Series No. 2, Geneva: Globethics.net). His work on food and water ethics, based on an ethical and theological foundation of a human rights based approach shows the importance an *eco-theologico-centrist* view of responsibility (2009: *Das Menschenrecht auf Nahrung und Wasser: Eine ethische Priorität*, Geneva: Globethics.net).

<sup>275</sup> See Globethics.net Foundation’s project *Who cares about ethics*, 2020, <https://whocaresaboutethics.com/>

on one side, and on the other the preservation of natural species and of natural territories, the possibility of accessing lake shores and natural parks, and pursuing recreational activities in the nature (Singer, 1993).<sup>276</sup>

Should we respect nature? The answer to this question is simple if we aim at a slightly different proposition: “Should we not give an overall positive value to nature as nature is condition for life?” Understanding the question of caring about ethics as respect for nature, which is source of life, resonates as rhetorical question, in the framework of the emotional debate around the inequality of natural resources necessary for life. Two examples can be presented as obviously underlining the weight of eco-centric views. The first, (a) concerns the question of a general access to drinkable water. Isn’t it obvious that if 800 million persons around the world don’t have access to drinkable water (OMS, 2011),<sup>277</sup> hydric inequality, and the duty to assure access to drinkable water is an important issue? Drinkable water for all human beings cannot be done regardless of the water footprint of locally tapped water, and of goods grown with quantities of water and exported between regions, sharing different water scarcity (Globethics.net, *Water Ethics*, 2020). A value-oriented focus on water could be a vector of restoring the logical equivalence between self-respect, respect of others and in due consideration, respect for the value

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<sup>276</sup> Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, Ch. 10: The Environment, Second edition, Cambridge: UP, 1993.

<sup>277</sup> This OMS statistics and the corresponding and very complete analysis of the applied ethical implications of good water management, as focusing on extraction, allocation and recycling, all related to water scarcity, see: from : Fiechter-Widemann, Evelyne, *Droit humain à l’eau: justice ou imposture ? Éclairages juridiques, philosophiques et théologiques du nouveau droit humain à l’eau*, Genève : Éditions Slatkine, 2017, p.23. Girardin, Benoît / Fiechter-Widemann, Evelyne (Eds.), *Blue Ethics: Ethical Perspectives on Sustainable, Fair Water Resources Use and Management*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2019.

of the nature. We see with this example, that as a whole *nature* is not only condition for individual life, it may be considered as life *tout court*: as a multidimensional integrity based ecosystem, aiming at the survival of the whole (Taylor, 1986).<sup>278</sup> If we consider bio-centric or eco-centric views, which place the world or nature in the centre of a system of values, our assumption supposes from a practical ethical point of view, implementing an eco-centric system of rights, which should not be disorganized or unplanned. From the perspective of practically taking common good seriously there are no reasons why a human rights based approach should not work for plants and animals, provided ‘we’ recognize the importance of the good, including a collective view. Our second example shows the importance of managing rights in the context of natural environment based ethics of public goods.

International efforts to control the implementation of human rights in the field of nature conservation constitute our second example. It has been reported that some government rangers in remote landscapes abused their authority, tolerating questionable partnerships with paramilitary forces to fight poaching. To protect plants and animals

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<sup>278</sup> Life could be understood as a *biocentric* view with Taylor’s book *Respect for Nature*, 1986. Life should be accepted as the criterion of moral standing considering that all living beings aim toward ends, they have goals (telos) including the preservation of their own life, constituting a good for each living being as a good on their own or *intrinsic good*. Life could be seen as ecological collections as ecosystems, habitats, species and populations in an *ecocentric* view. Preserving the ecosystems as survival of the collective integrity of each system is viewed as more crucial than protecting lives of individuals or members of the ecosystem. Distinguishing between non-intentional goal orientation, intentionally-directed attitudes as spontaneous choices without clear reason and reason-based deliberate moral decisions may help us to answer to the challenges of the view considering all living beings and ecosystems as equally valuable normative poles for further reflections on normative foundation and metaphysical priority. Taylor, Paul Warren, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton: UP, 1986.

entails to prevent risks and harms but should not justify to contribute to the infringement of human rights as retaliation attitudes against those who do not respect nature<sup>279</sup>. There ought to be an equal respect for the value and claim of distinct rights as the rights of indigenous peoples for instance, since any rights holders deserve equal respect. In practice, the projects affecting indigenous peoples' lands or resources should be done along accepted standards and benchmarks in relation to indigenous rights<sup>280</sup>. Ultimately building interactions with remote local communities should be always related to the idea of forming an *informed consent*. Engaging with values as part of a consent-based scheme of collaboration is important as “promoting”, “communicating” and “engaging” are referring to different activities, the semantic of these terms needs theoretical scrutiny. The establishment of *rights based due-diligence* processes, including remediation of adverse rights affects the ensuring of a special attention to the rights of the *most vulnerable*, entails a focus on the priority of some rights or some grounding ethical principles. The special attention given in many cases to the local communities in relation to activities natural conservation organisations support shows one of the cultural challenges in conceiving ecology, as simply eco-

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<sup>279</sup> We think at the recent work of the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), which on the one hand shows the value of a rights based approach, as historically the organization has been initiator to embrace human rights principles, and gradually moved to embed human rights in conservation, with constancy and clear determination. There has been on the other hand, as the WWF's “Independent Review” notes explicitly, some hard cases in the implementation of these rights, across a wide eco-centric system. “Report of the Independent Panel of Experts of the Independent Review of allegations raised in the media regarding human rights violations in the context of WWF's conservation work”, *Embedding Human Rights in Conservation: From Intent to Action*, WWF, World Wide Fund For Nature, 17 Nov. 2020.

<sup>280</sup> As the International Labour Organization (ILO) *Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples* and the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP).

centric<sup>281</sup>. Balancing different ethical principles should not only be seen as a practical ethical matter, although normative ethics, applied ethics, soft laws and international conventions are the usual instruments. Theoretical reflections on rights are important because they investigate the priority and foundational layers of a set of norms, they set method of knowledge of values and, ultimately, invite to question the very (metaphysical) nature of our values and respect for nature.

In a nutshell, we can see from our previous examples that an absolute duty to care about nature is problematic (see also Stanguennec, 2014; Serres, 1995; Jonas, 1985).<sup>282</sup> Rights-based approaches are important, but should never be considered as the unique point of reference of all ethical norms. Caring about ethics concerns an ethical and moral reasoning on our decisions toward the way we value nature. Reason based motives should bring clarity in the way we are considering ourselves parts of the nature, and value nature as collective goods. Respecting nature is finding the balance of a good life, including the

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. “Recommendation 8. Be more transparent”, WWF Report, *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> From an absolutist point of view: it would be ethical and responsible to protect nature, as an absolute duty, if there were an absolute duty of existence inherent to nature. Nature would in many ways be an unconditioned being, without dependence on anything else. This type of reasoning that we find at the basis of the ethics of responsibility of H. Jonas, is very similar to the classical Cartesian argument that we find in Spinoza's work, for example, as the basis of our dependence on a completely perfect being and necessary God/Nature. A critical reading of the absolutist view as not constituting a *prima facie* answer to the anthropocentric dominant view can be found in Stanguennec (2014). Stanguennec, André, *L'humanisation de la nature*, Paris : Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2014, see p. 132ff. on Jonas, p. 147ff. on Serres. Serres, Michel, *The Natural Contract*, transl. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, Michigan Press, 1995 (orig. Ed. François Bourin, 1990). Jonas, Hans, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985 (German: *Das Prinzip der Verantwortung*, Insel Verl. 1979).

preservation of values, and the protection against life threatening risks, which is built on an autonomy-based approach. By focusing on the socio-economical availability of *decent options for actions*, we will try to show views proposed by Raz's philosophy of values: engaging with values, respect and reason for action (Raz, 1978, 2001, 2017).<sup>283</sup> To stand up for rights to protect our nature and to share ethical principles in the way we do so, is not possible without an understanding of how we engage with values and move to action, and the advantage of reason based actions over overriding comparative motives.

## **Caring for the Other, Caring for Nature? A Meta-ethical Approach in Five Steps**

Looking closer to this answer shows five possible perspectives from which respecting or caring for the other and for nature may be described and understood:

- Conceptual (real values by opposition to half realized but intended values)
- Metaphysical (foundation and priority of values compared to reasons – or the other way round, namely reasons founding our options for actions)
- Epistemological (method based description, hierarchy of methods)

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<sup>283</sup> Raz, Joseph, (2001): *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, Cambridge: UP. Raz, J. "Intention and value", *Philosophical Explorations*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. S2, pp.109–126, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1356357> Raz, J. *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford: UP, 1986. Raz, J. "Duties of Well-Being" in: *Ethics in the Public Domain, Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics*, revised edition, Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1994/1996. Raz, J. "Reasons for Action, Decisions and Norms", in: *Practical Reasoning*, Ed. by Joseph Raz, Oxford Readings in Philosophy, Series Editor G. J. Warnock, 1978, Oxford: OUP, pp. 128-152.

- Semantic (linguistic, cultural, identity based or universal, real)
- Psychological (motivation, desire, affect, object based facts)

1) *The conceptual perspective*: Following a conceptual line, we think about the concepts around the term “value” and see that respect is a property of valutors. I owe you some respect, as I know we both have some understanding of values. Being able to assess values entails having some value related concepts. For example, if I give you this book for your birthday, not only would you keep this book, but you may also offer commentary on the book to showing that you read it, as the value of the book is derived from the text printed in it. The concept of the value of a book, which passes through a process of discovering its content, is therefore very different from many other concepts such as doing a physical activity, listening to a musical work of art, etc. Any form of activity entails the subject’s capacity to enter into different practices such as to swim or to run, all requiring methods of engaging into some value-oriented activity. This is true with regards to some objects placed in the universe of natural things, and for which we say there should be a respect for the environment. There is value in mountains, in discovering a lake, in the lake’s shore, its water, the value of taking care of plants in our garden, or walking in a natural reserve. There are many different conceptual methods of engaging with natural environmental values, all dependent on the practice, as they differ. If I cannot approach the shore of a lake, not to speak about entering and feeling the joy of swimming in the water, I am not engaging with the value of a lake. Therefore, even though I may recognize that a lake has value, I don’t know the value, only that there is a possible value. This would be similar to not opening the book which I gifted you in the earlier scenario. I may have some indication of the existence of

something, without being able to attest of the value of the thing.<sup>284</sup> To say we are norm driven beings doesn't mean that we all agree on all values, as there is diversity and universality, nor are we perpetually experiencing life positively as active persons. Our character may be structured in such a way that we might have strong tendencies toward specific sets of values, as most are emotion-driven values (philosophers call the way we develop dispositions based on some tendencies 'vices' and/or 'virtue'). Hence, to be exposed to doing physical activities in nature shows some disposition for being active and for caring for the environment. On the contrary, one may refuse to give access to waterways part of a property, which is touching a lake or a river, as owners often refuse access to the public arguing for risks on wealthy home properties.<sup>285</sup> In remote places, such as natural parks and mountain regions, the issue is the opposite; the problem is the abandonment of human presence, socio-economic desertion of the production and residential abandonment (as in the Italian Apennines). The very notion of engagement with the value of nature entails the assessment of the growing presence of human activity. In the case of abandonment of these regions, the impoverishment of mountain settlements is observed, and attempts to limit the phenomenon don't seem to have appreciable effects. A normative focus on values and reasons for action shows a way

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<sup>284</sup> There are places in the world where the value of a lake doesn't depend directly on the practice of swimming into it, but lakes and lake shores have always been one of the main sources of food and the favorable conditions in the development of human civilization. Possible objections to the concept and value associate more universally with lakes related to swimming are possible. We shall return to the cultural dimension of the same, as semantical dimension on values under our fourth approach listed below.

<sup>285</sup> According to the Swiss spatial planning law, "all lakes and rivers in Switzerland belong to the public. What's disputed, however, is whether that includes riverbanks and lakeshores. In 2001 the federal court said waterways and banks were an "inseparable unit"". Cf. Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung ARE.



in which education can contribute to sustainable mountain development, focusing on first world development as an important means for achieving the SDGs.<sup>286</sup>

2) *The metaphysical perspective:* The action of a subject engaging with some specific values, may in part only be value-oriented. As when we spontaneously decide for eating salad for lunch instead of taking the hot meal at the canteen, or taking a blue shirt instead of a green one, or listening to French music on the radio instead Anglophone pop, it is because we know both are good options. In these cases, we don't have a better reason to choose one over the other, but leave it as it comes, on a first-come-first-served basis. Preferential reason based actions are also likely to happen. An exemplary case is when a police car appears in our rear view mirror while stopping at the gasoline station. In this case, we know that the police car may stop to buy cigarettes, and not stopping to ask us about speeding, having the correct tyres, or reminding us of the importance on having our driving licence with us at all times. All of these are good reasons, and we may need to be prepared to answer the police officer in a polite and a reason focused way. The primacy or founding character of reasons over values, or on the contrary of values over reasons for actions, concerns *a metaphysical* dimension of the question "Who cares about ethics?" which also applies to the respect of nature and the environment. If *first-order reasons* for actions are equivalent to spontaneous and impressionist values (which we select on first-come-first-served basis), applying rule of the thumb, such as a 'balancing of interests in presence', may not be precise enough to explain why some reasons deserve particular attention. Let us see an example and draw the relation to the environment. We ask small primary school children to promise not to leave trash after eating their

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<sup>286</sup> See concrete cases and current research done in mountain development including the role of education in this process, published in *Mountain Research and Development* (MRD) journal. <https://www.mrd-journal.org/about/>

ice-cream. After all, agreeing that ‘I will throw my trash away and pick up trash when I see it’ cannot be gradually realized. Either, I refuse to pick up trash (and even shamefully litter), because I know that sweet liquid could attract wasps and there are no bin in sight, or, I follow my promise and don’t leave trash anywhere. We shall see below that promises should not be considered as simple *first-order reasons*, and that deciding to preserve the environment requires a particular and closer analysis of reason-based engaging with values – a metaphysical focus on reasons and values.

3) *The epistemological perspective*: Looking closer to the meaning of the proposition “Should we respect nature?” we might need to address a slightly more fundamental question. ‘How are nature and the environment part of a broader set of practical reasons for action and/or of a natural collection of valuable things? ‘This question can be addressed from the perspective of how we know, experience, and learn about this relation between values and reasons, from an epistemological perspective. In the following lines, we add the semantic analysis relates to the linguistic meaning of each word and sentence.

4) *The semantic and cultural perspective*: In different contexts, we might be considering the beauty of the rose, or the particular charm of the Swiss or Italian Alps, the sounds and impressions of African forests by dawn, the choice of attending the next ice-hockey match of my favourite team. I have better reasons to go and watch my team, than rather eat Hungarian food with my Hungarian relatives, or have a holiday in winter in the Swiss Alps. However, refusing to take these options is not wrong. My action may be weak-willed, lazy, and unwise, but not wrong as there is no normative exclusionary reason not to go to the most exciting sport, as there is no similar normative reason for eating Japanese, or visiting Paris during my annual leave. Taste, a strong identity attachment to my childhood and defining Hungarian culture, loyalty toward the particular hockey team of my children, my love of

African nature discovered during a travel, all these attachments present some normative common denominator. They are part of emotion based constituting values; they are not moral directive reasons for action. As Raz puts it in perspective, with the moral, psychological, and even religious dimension of self-overcoming and liberation:

How “we mature by transcending the particular and moving toward the universal; as we, individually, and as a species, grow up our horizons broaden, we come to understand more aspects of the world, and to understand better our situation in the world... We realise that there are other people like our parents, others like ourselves... We come to recognize and to submit to the inescapable power of reason. It is a hard but necessary lesson to learn that we are not entitled to anything just because we are we, and our loved ones are not special just because they are ours. But reason also liberates us from the narrow confines of our birth. It opens the world, enabling us to move within it, free citizens of the universe, whose rights of passage are recognised by all those likewise possessed of reason.”<sup>287</sup>

The semantic layer of our values concerns the recognition, engagement with, and liberating factors of many positive aspects of life, asking the question: “what is wrong with the dream of a universal culture of high achievement?” Why should Hungarian Árpadian monuments not be considered aspects of a culture which are of intrinsic value, and not only instrumentally valuable? The archaeology of this historic and cultural area should be taught, if it has intrinsic values, not only in this particular country (Hungary), because Árpád was the head of the confederation of the Magyar tribes in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. Our identity and attachment makes us who we are, and our identity is not identical

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<sup>287</sup> Raz, J. Attachment and uniqueness, *Value, respect, and attachment*, p. 13-14. Op. cit.

with our intrinsic value, but we are also the results of our free choices. I am a father, an editor, a philosopher, the son of two Hungarian immigrants, but I am also a citizen of both Hungarian and Swiss nationalities. Applied to the natural environment, some may say that “eating meat, or chicken bones is wrong”, when he/she actually means that eating “meat or chicken bones is surprising” in some countries in the global North, although very familiar in some countries in the South or on the African continent. Culinary habits are as diverse as cultural traditions and countries. Some vegan persons may think eating meat disgusting, but express the proposition: “eating meal is wrong”.

In similar cases, we may not use the language in an appropriate way, or have a different moral *semantic* understanding of the property of being wrong, which expresses *my relation to the object*, instead of describing a certain *reality of the object* (Desmons et alii, 2020).<sup>288</sup> It seems that associating historical or archaeological interest opens a historical and hermeneutical dimension to the value we attribute to nature. This informs how we teach and educate on the existence and importance of the development of remote areas, such as mountains, sacred rivers or water sources, etc.

“Rivers never run alone. Every river as a watershed where it supports human life and interacts with the totality of living things. Every river is a kingdom. Rivers are where legends, religions and civilizations are conceived and flourish. They tell a story.”<sup>289</sup>

5) *The psychological perspective*: From a psychological point of view, if we come back to looking at the difference between values and

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<sup>288</sup> Desmons, Ophélie, Stéphane Lemaire and Patrick Turmel, Qu’est-ce que la métaéthique? In *Manuel de métaéthique*, Ch. 1, p. 13, Collection « L’avocat du diable », Paris : Édition Hermann.

<sup>289</sup> *The Spirit of the Rivers*, Geneva: Editions Agora, Calendar of Religions, Sept. 2020-Dec. 2021.

reasons to act in ways positive to the environment or nature, we should start by looking at reasons as either internal or external. There is no general consensus about what *internal reasons* might be, but they are nearer to our psychological perception of reasons to act. We could understand them as *motivating reasons*, reasons naturally respectable for us, reasons including *desires* (for desire-based theorists). These are different from *external reasons*, as ‘facts about the what’ the agent wants, properties of the object of value (Chang, 2004),<sup>290</sup> and in some cases it may include constraints. Should we not rather say then, that a valuable thing has a good-making-property, that it features which makes an action good *pro tanto*, but may also be subject of discussion.<sup>291</sup> We can therefore deduce that values are partially good, yet these values may still contain aspects, which do not conform to external reason. It can be assumed, for instance, to impose CO2 taxes on all heavily polluting cars, because we may expect better future prospects, as it is universally accepted and true that heavy CO2 emissions harm the environment. We might, on the contrary, say that there is a deliberative route, internal to the subject (called internal reasons), which balances reasons and values for paying CO2 taxes, considering the benefit and costs of pollution.

We cannot put aside the question whether and how far values are to some degree incommensurable and always depending on contextual social practices. For instance, paying 10 times the usual price of a bottle of drinkable water in a slum in India, as compared to the price on the

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<sup>290</sup> Chang, Ruth, “Can Desires Provide Reasons for Action?”, in: *Reason and Value*, R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, Michael Smith (Eds.), pp. 86-89, Oxford: Clarendon.

<sup>291</sup> *Pro tanto* means not good as a whole, but to some extent. A good value might be to some extent bad. The universality and diversity of values, the possibility of values to change in time show that it is normal to be attracted and committed to something valuable for some people, to some other much less, and others may even be indifferent. Cf. Raz, J. Introduction, *Value, Respect, Attachment*, Cambridge UP, p. 3.

street of most Western big cities is a great difference. Although water is seen in many great religions as an inalienable right, as water is necessary for life, the absolute goodness of universal access to water opens a set of further questions, namely that no resource is there without some cost.<sup>292</sup> Looking at the question of the goodness entails relations between a good in the nature, and our reason to praise such thing. Water: a) is a public good and has economic market value; b) has a political dimension, and therefore brings reasons for conflict of interest regarding water access; c) has governance issues in regulation and management. Finally d), water has religious and spiritual dimensions and enters in dialogue and tension with values related to autochthon communities and their rights, which should not be neglected.<sup>293</sup>

The normative position, which defends a certain definition of the good at the foundation of reasons for action (Moore, 1903) constitutes a distinct philosophical position. This metaphysical point of view is contrary to the 1) which denies the importance of the primacy of the good over reasons (Scanlon), or 2) positions as Raz's which focus on a wide range of values, instead of a thinner perspective on the good. Although values have some priority over reasons, as in emotion related actions, we can deny that moral reasoning, as a perfectionist point of view, is happy about a factual priority of emotions over reasons. Only a minority of our reasons for action may be based on reasons as exclusionary reasons, to do or not to do a certain other action, i. e. reasons in the most solid sense of the word, reasons such as promises, second-order reasons, etc. Such ways of tackling the issue of the metaphysical relation, between reasons and the good, put values or the

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<sup>292</sup> Shafer-Landau, Russ, "Moral Reasons", in: *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, Ch 24, Blackwell Publ. Oxford: UP, p. 313.

<sup>293</sup> We refer in this taxonomy to the different headings of the booklet *Water Ethics: Principles and Guidelines*, approved by Globethics.net Board, accessible for free in English, Spanish and French from: [www.globethics.net/texts-series](http://www.globethics.net/texts-series)

maximum of good at the foundation rather than one absolute good, which remains conceivable as a universal value.<sup>294</sup> If reasons should always be a matter of belief and choice, values may not. We may not choose to believe or not to believe certain values. Raz highlights that claiming for a wide range of life styles, which may well move from one set of values or norms to others, evolve partly in deterministic ways.<sup>295</sup>

On the other hand, a very pragmatic way of looking at the relation between reasons and the good, such as Thomas Scanlon's analysis, affirms the primacy of reasons over values, eventually reducing values to reasons (the so called "buck-passing-account of values").<sup>296</sup>

The advantage of normative reasons to favour or to act positively towards nature (as in the proposition respecting nature), can be defined as always requiring values with Raz, a property of being favourable or respectable in nature. Values are helping to constitute our life, by better understanding and carrying activities, in what we believe is good for us, and can embrace such notions as 'well-being', 'character', and even our own perception of ourselves as 'active persons' following Raz:

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<sup>294</sup> There are some prudential values, or values related to our well-being, but these values are denied the capacity to constitute our main overall reason for pursuing our goals for those who think the primacy of the good over reasons, which does not entail well-being having no more subjective kind of importance: Raz, J. *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford: UP, 1986, 316.

<sup>295</sup> Such type of axiology or hierarchy of values could be seen as self-developing from an unconscious side of the psyche, and be well embraced by Schopenhauerian philosophers such as E. von Hartmann. See our work: Haaz, Ignace. *The value of Critical Knowledge, Ethics and Education*, Ch. 5 (Geneva: Globethics.net: 2019), where we propose a structure of development of systems of values along similar lines.

<sup>296</sup> This orientation has also a long history including F. Brentano, R. Chisholm. See: Rossi, Mauro (2020): Primauté des raisons ou des valeurs? In *Manuel de Métaéthique*, Dir. O. Desmons, S. Lemaire, P. Turmel, Paris : Ed. Hermann, p. 308.

“Well-being and personality or characters are the two most basic (and deeply inter-connected) dimensions by which people understand and judge themselves and others. How good and successful we are depends on who we are (character) and what sort of life we have (well-being). Evaluation of people’s well-being involves judgments about their lives, or periods of their lives, and the degree to which they do or did do well, were good or successful. In large measure, our well-being consists (1) in the whole-hearted and (2) successful pursuit of (3) valuable (4) activities. (...) the definition of well-being sees life as active.”<sup>297</sup>

Raz says in substance, that values or “morality” “is concerned with the advancement of the well-being of individuals”.<sup>298</sup> To climb or walk on a mountain, instead of simply contemplate it without entering in some social practice, is the right way of engaging with such a natural thing as a mountain. Knowing that values relate to concepts means grasping the concept of a mountain as a tri-dimensional object and to distinguish mountains from paintings, which are bi-dimensional objects. Our engagement with things depends on the concept, or our capacity to perceive the reality of our object of experience. The preservation and respect of unanimated tri-dimensional things such as mountains are interconnected to the ways we engage with them:

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<sup>297</sup> Raz, J. “Duties of Well-Being” in: *Ethics in the Public Domain, Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics*, revised edition, Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1994/1996, p. 3. See also p. 5 for clarification of what whole-hearted means: “to contribute to one’s well-being one’s engagement in one’s activities has to be whole-hearted. Many activities require certain attitudes [understood as whole-hearted], for successful engagement in them. But not all do. [...] A good and dedicated teacher may hold himself in low esteem for being a teacher. The condition of whole-hearted engagement with one’s life is meant to exclude self-hatred, pathological self-doubt, and alienation from one’s life as they undermine well-being.”

<sup>298</sup> Raz, J. *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford: UP, 1986, 267.



“I have reason to engage with things of value in the appropriate way and reasons of respect, which serve to preserve the conditions of ‘engaging with’ (remember: recognition, preservation, non-destruction). And there is the entailment claim: every reason statement entails either a relativized or non-relativized ought statement, where a non-relativized ‘ought’ statement is true, just in case there is no defeating reason to do something else.”<sup>299</sup>

We shall not enter in details and expose views presented by Scanlon (Kraut, 2012), on the priority of normative reasons<sup>300</sup>. It is enough to mention that normative reasons can be logically both grounding relations and/or priority relations. Clarity in the use of the terms and related concepts of practical reason are important, as it enables us to show a philosophical method applicable to the part of human life which is concerned by our relation to our environment and the nature.

“Practical thought is reflection on, consideration of questions about what to do, how to live, about the point or value of objects or activities, or people etc. The aim is not to answer such questions but to understand their nature, what could count as answers to them and what vindicates such answers. More broadly, the aim is to understand the place and role of practical

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<sup>299</sup> Heuer, Ulrike, “Raz on Values and Reasons”, in: *Reasons and Values, Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, Edited by R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, Michael Smith, Oxford UP, p.141.

<sup>300</sup> Kraut, Richard, “Scanlon’s Buck-Passing Account of Value”, in: *Against Absolute Goodness*, Ch. 11, Oxford: UP, 2011/2012, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199844463.003.0011

thought in the life of people and other beings who can engage in it.”<sup>301</sup>

There are different layers of dimensions to the question why practical reasons for actions may be considered as central for us. Most of the layers are related to the idea that nature may be considered as valuable, eventually that many things and living beings part of the natural reign deserve our engagement, and some deserve an unconditional recognition of value or ‘respect’. Let us distinguish the elements of the ethical vocabulary about practical reasons with precision. Again, we might follow Raz’s realist account of values and practical reasons, and deny the contrary view that the values are only relays towards reasons:

- “(Political, ethical, aesthetical, taste-related) normative thinking is essential to our being: we are norm driven beings, but some parts of our life, which are norm related are passive, and other parts are active; choice: freedom as precondition of choice, or determinism? Action, motivation, intention
- Nature of practical reason based activity needs to be understood: notions such as conflicting reasons, the place of the will, desires and attachments with regard to reasons, interest. The notions of responsibility and integrity as response to thought and conduct
- Values, their objectivity, ontological perspective on values, pragmatism as reduction of values to reasons for actions. Gaining knowledge and understanding of values.
- Assessment and response to human thought and conduct (responsibility, negligence, blame)” (Raz, *Syllabus*, *ibid.*)

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<sup>301</sup> Raz, J. Syllabus of the course L9094 in History and Philosophy of Law, Title: Foundations of Practical Thought, Fall 2018, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/academics/courses/23520>

The value of life and the place of nature, within a set of values or reasons for action, should be adapted in order to precise the meaning of the expression “respecting nature”. We should slowly read, word by word, each term used in these propositions and ask ourselves, if our semantic is precise enough? Raz’s analysis of the term “respect” is both very comprehensible and profound, reminding us of some the key distinctions that will bring clarity and build these notions closer to their conceptual layers, which is precious in order to see what respecting nature means.

Raz shows “reasons of respect” are (...) “reasons to preserve what is of value”.<sup>302</sup> To preserve what has value entails to engage with it, not necessarily to promote it. We shall first explain the difference between these two attitudes, and show why one may be mandatory for the experience of understanding, in the right way, the value of a thing (or a person). Engaging with the value entails not to harm this thing we call valuable, as gaining the rights, knowledge, and experience of what we value entails some preservation of it. The nature of what is of value in itself, shows that “the valuers are of value in themselves” (158), as “they don’t play the role of being of value in themselves in relation to goods which are good for others, but that they actually are of value in themselves”, “their good doesn’t matter simply because it is a good for someone or something else”. “People may be of value in themselves, even if they are of value to others, so long as their value or the value of their life is not due solely to the fact that they are of value to others” (156). Shared good is derived from this recognition of how we engage with value, and of what we do is valuable. Engaging with values is possible only for valuers, who do so by recognize that they are things that they good for them. There are counterexamples to the assumption that evaluative thoughts always entail a dependence to valuable things and creatures, which would have an intrinsic value. Reading a document

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<sup>302</sup> Raz, J. *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, Cambridge: UP, 2001, p. 162.

could lead to the assumption that I recognize the realisations of value, but we need to engage with valuable things in the right way to arrive to this result (154). A document which is unread has only a potential for value.

“Goods whose value is realised are not wasted goods. [...] paintings are there to be seen and appreciated, novels to be read, oranges to be eaten, mountains to be looked at, or climbed, etc.” (ibid.).

This realisation of value entails attention and understanding, and the absence of some negative emotions (envy, resentment). “In climbing a mountain much more is involved than just recognition”. (Ibid.)<sup>303</sup>

To have some concept about a value, and not only an intention is a second aspect of the question. Children or animals, which have intentions, might lack adequate perception of value, even though they engage nevertheless with values (Raz, 2017).<sup>304</sup> Since engaging with nature entails many different concepts of nature, for instance with regards to our attitude toward animals and food, we might intend to avoid harming nature, without a simple concept about what it entails not to harm nature.

A radically non-anthropomorphic view on animal life, as an exemplary case is called *anti-speciesism*. It pertains to not harming animals in a particularly wide sense. Anti-speciesism adopts the view, which considers the unjust and wrong treatment of individuals, with more or less care according to their species. Anti-speciesism might be seen as somehow extending intrinsic value to animals, which would be granted unconditional value (respect), and which would entail to find measures to efficiently protect animals against each other. Provided a

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<sup>303</sup> Raz, J. *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, pp. 154, 156, 158, ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Raz, J. “Intention and value”, *Philosophical Explorations*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. S2, here p. 110, pp.109–126, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1356357>

great part of animal suffering comes from other animals (predators, parasites), some prevention against particularly cruel forms of parasitism, provide intervention is done in a consequent manner, follows a logic of natural conservation, conceived as wider than only the conservation of wildlife. Interventionism would be justified only if it would do more good than evil. We should “assist the animal regardless of whether the victim is a victim of a congener or a predator, a parasite, hunger, thirst, disease or weather conditions” (Jaquet, 2019).<sup>305</sup> From this perspective, “for every member of a given generation” we would need to make sure that, “one member of the next generation reaches reproductive age.” (ibid.)

We ought to respect people unconditionally, but respect for nature seems depending on the value of each of the parts of what we recognize as nature, and thus depends on particular methods of engaging with nature.

## **Comments and Application: Common Good and Decent Options for a Good Life**

The respect of the environment should not be seen as proposing neither a return to the Stone Age, nor any unrealistic dream projects that nobody really wants. Stone Age is not the excellence of a simple way of life, which is caring about the correct engagement with nature in a complicated and fast changing world. The simple ways of life (as Diogenes of Sinope’s refusal of a sophisticated but superficial lifestyles, or Rousseau’s “return to nature” as Romantic preference of feelings over thinking, emotions over calculation, imagination over intellect) might capture some ecological aims. Escaping a state of constant flux on this

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<sup>305</sup> Jaquet, François « Faut-il intervenir dans la nature ? », *Antispéciste, Plateforme suisse d'information sur l'antispécisme*, 2019, <https://www.antispéciste.ch/post/faut-il-intervenir-dans-la-nature>. Accessed Sept. 2020.

earth, by finding natural “resting places” as paths into happiness could be seen as actively using our freedom, as an active person (without this being necessarily part of a political liberal agenda).

If the concept of sustainability shows that ecology should not aim to disqualify certain principles of the current economic system, sustaining some collection of rights and values might also appear redundant, since a value by definition, is a good that we are engaged in an informed, and life transforming way. Secondly, ecology can appear as a distrust of personal freedom, in the sense that some see these notions as fundamentally incompatible, in particular because of neo-liberal tendencies, strongly embedded in many political economical practices. By affirming that, part of our life can be based on very careful choices as deliberate decision-making, including some values aiming at the conservation of the natural world, as they do not need to invite to isolation, individualism and alienation. In doing so, we certainly approach a virtuous way of looking at our relation to the nature, which should focus on the relation of sustainability to autonomy.

Answering the question “who cares about ethics?” might lead, if we emphasise the relation between sustainability and autonomy, to affirm that caring about nature entails caring about ethics. In this sense, progress towards the engagement and protection of nature cannot be concretely realized in respecting nature alone, but should also be indirectly linked by caring for human resources, for decent work conditions, and good environmental conditions for work and living a good life.

As we have seen, one of the autonomy based (liberal) ways of defining why respect of nature is important is to show that it is intimately related to the exercise of our autonomy. We find Raz’s defence of autonomy important if environmental conditions change dramatically (as we see in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic), or discreetly suspect new economic and social crisis are likely to happen. It

essentially entails the options for acting in autonomous ways, and presents it as the key political and social question (Raz, 1986, 204). Environment and nature here are understood as circumstances of the life of an autonomous person, distinct from the range of capacities a person needs to fulfil to become author of his/her own life, in the primary sense. Circumstances relate to a second sense of autonomy,

“...a person is autonomous if the conditions of autonomous life are present. These have partly to do with the state of the individual concerned (that he/she is of sound mind, capable of rational thought and action, etc.) and partly to do with the circumstances of his life (especially that he has a sufficient range of significant options available to him at different stages of his life)” (Raz, *ibid*).

Green shows that Raz supports a kind of “un-American, non-individualistic, pluralist, and perfectionist form of liberalism”, which challenges the notion of neutrality, and the so-called liberal anti-perfectionist “exclusion of the ideal”, as theory of limited government, or the narrow role of state. This latest may be distinct from wider public concern from non-state actors (Green, 1988, 318).<sup>306</sup> As we might expect more from liberal governance, non-interference from large corporations, bureaucracies, and mere security as early 17th century liberals (Locke) defined it. Governments “can create conditions which enable their subjects to enjoy greater liberty than they otherwise would” (Raz, 1986, 18). Liberal morality could be understood on non-individualistic grounds, against the view of moral individualism. The journey of the “I” implies a “we”, that is to say a notion of a group whose interests are common. The consideration of public goods or

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<sup>306</sup> Green, Leslie. “Un-American Liberalism: Raz's 'Morality of Freedom'.” *The University of Toronto Law Journal*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1988, pp. 317–332. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/825789](http://www.jstor.org/stable/825789). Accessed 9 July 2020.

collective goods, and a good definition of these notions are needed in order to shed some light on how respect of nature, as respect of nation entails large collective responsibilities.

There are broad ideals or conceptions of the good, which are excluded from political arenas, due to the doctrine of the neutral political concern, or the argument of the exclusionary doctrine, both acting as anti-perfectionist doctrines. Neutralist means that according to the principle of the neutrality of concern, “governments are to be even-handed between all rival moralities” (Raz, 1986, 135). Applied to the environment, neutrality would suspend any preference between “the model of excellence of life of the shepherd, living at close quarters with his animals, responding to the continuous changes in the natural world, providing his resolve and ingenuity in the face of many man-made and natural difficulties and crises” or the moral excellence tout court, as neither should be basis of government or collective public action. The exclusion of ideals concerns not only a veil of ignorance in the sense of suspending the judgment on two competing conceptions of the good (an ecologically committed spiritual life vs. living a prosperous life without much concern for the nature) but refusing that some of these conceptions of the good, become reasons for public action. But one thing is to say that there should be exclusion of forms of living in a society of a certain kind (devout, well-educated, prosperous etc.) as reasons for governmental action, ignoring that these are encompassing both private ideals (lots of leisure and sport, etc.) and societal conditions which contribute to them (general prosperity, general appreciation of the importance of physical activity, etc.).

We need not only a thin political and ethical definition on the line of the no harm principle, i. e. direct risks to health, as when we may suffer discernible health effects when pollution is important. On this line a Swiss initiative has been launched to revise the Constitution in order to reframe the definition of what a responsible business is in the art. Not



the respect of nature alone but “respect for human rights and the environment through business”. Companies should be obliged (if they have registered office in Switzerland, and principal place of business Switzerland, following the framework of the Swiss Initiative) to respect internationally recognized human rights and international environment standards, also abroad, including in companies under their control (Bueno, 2018, 12).<sup>307</sup>

Whether the conditions for my autonomy have really been significantly affected in such a case depend, in Raz’s terms, on whether my range of options has been reduced below adequacy. Recalling his formulation that the test of this adequacy is whether the available range of options is such as to “enable [me] to sustain throughout [my] life activities which, taken together, exercise all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop any of them”.

We could mention recent Glencore’s environmental disaster in Chad, reported in March 2020, where chemicals from the petroleum production have been poisoning a river. This caused large burn blisters on the skin of both children and adults and livestock perished.<sup>308</sup> If we were to apply Raz’s test based on autonomy options, and see how capacities are impaired, “and thus that my available range of options

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<sup>307</sup> Bueno, Nicolas, *The Swiss Popular Initiative on Responsible Business From Responsibility to Liability in: L.F. H Enneking. I. Giesen. RGH. Krisen, Accountability and International Business Operations: Providing Justice for Corporate Violations of Human Rights and Environmental Standards*, London, New York, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

<sup>308</sup> Under the Swiss Responsible Business Initiative (2020), companies would have been “legally obliged to incorporate respect for human rights and the environment” in all their business activities. Application of this mandatory due diligence would have been also part of Swiss based companies’ activities abroad. The Swiss initiative obtained the popular majority but failed to convince the majority of the cantons on November 2020.

was indeed likely to have been reduced below adequacy”, we may move beyond a classical harm principle against direct risks, as in many case of pollution of the environment (Hannis, 2016).<sup>309</sup> To look for legal action against those who deprive the individual of their *adequate range of options*, requires a little more than a principle of autonomy. “While autonomy requires the availability of any adequate range of options it does not require the presence of any particular option among them [provided they are] insignificant to the degree of autonomy enjoyed by that person (Raz, 410)”. Coercion may itself threaten the conditions for autonomy, but legitimate legal measures could be envisaged, with regard to environmental policy, as providing public goods by environmental legislation, and protection of autonomy as with clean air, water and epidemic prevention.

The concept of available decent options for good life is a valuable concept which allows to focus on life threatening issues as harming conditions. Drawing the attention to eco-centric phenomena which have ecological impact but which are not directly impacting human individuals’ autonomy, as zombie Tundra fires burning under the snow in winter, shows the need of some radical transformative principle.<sup>310</sup>

The transformative principle could redirect the burden of the action to a place, better aligned with interest of the most vulnerable persons. The problem with liberal principle may come from those in power, including the higher education system, a system which in practice

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<sup>309</sup> Hannis refers to Raz in many helpful ways around the concept of collective good and of decent options for life. Hannis, Michael, *Freedom and Environment, Autonomy, Human Flourishing and the Political Philosophy of Sustainability*, Ch. Freedom and Flourishing, Routledge Research in Environmental Politics, Taylor & Francis, New York: 2016, pp. 72-73.

<sup>310</sup> The term is related to Tundra fires under snowpacks: “zombie fires” [...] can burrow into the rich organic material beneath the surface, such as the vast peatlands that ring the Arctic, and smolder under the snowpack throughout the frigid winter.” *Washington Post*, Andrew Freeman, May 2020.

follows the profit motives present in education as in other social economic sectors. Hidden behind terms such as “vocation”, professional cooption contributes reproducing the contradictions the liberal economic system ensures. Letting a wide range of options open supposes being able to see and conceive such options. In our days, it means *something more than being incapable of seeing anything apart from the own interests* or options (what Nietzsche calls “convictions”, Gadamer: “prejudices”). The media, arts, industry, government, etc. all sectors are equally exposed to the same bias. It is precisely to embrace a wide range of options that they are constitutionally incapable. *Standing up* on behalf of others, if one does not want to merely advocate on the behalf of others (of the plants, the animals, the planet) is an immense task. Without standing up, engaging with values risk to permit the continuation of exploitation, i.e. business as usual.

## **Caring for the Nature and Standing Up for Others**

As Aristotle shows, in many cases reasons for action are not based on a criterion for good reasoning, but rather on our perception of facts and the commitment to avoid all excess:

“[...] up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, [...] that the intermediate state is in all things to be praised, but that we must incline sometimes towards the excess, sometimes towards the deficiency; for so shall we most easily hit the mean and what is right<sup>311</sup>.”

With Stückelberger’s ethical focus on a “globalance” (2020) the balance is deemed an important weight in the overall and perennial foundation of ethics. Ethics is defined by contrast to morality and other

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<sup>311</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 B.C.E), transl. by William David Ross.

values simply inherited from the tradition, without any explicit commitment to avoid all excess<sup>312</sup>. Ethics for Stückelberger refers to our proper reconstruction of our own values and norms, moderated by our own critical distance towards some of these collective values. Do we ever do what God approves as such, when we take a positive comparative approach related to the weight or relative strength of two or more alternatives? We should, and it is the case if we take a *theo-eco-centric view* on the respect for the nature. We go to church if we think that God would approve our way of implementing a divine perspective. Ethics is by definition in application, and we are by definition facing positive comparative alternatives.

The assumption of balancing alternatives can be done by analysing the way concretely we can find a solution in a context, it does not give us a constituting rule of the type: “Do what God would approve” (Jackson, Smith, Lord, Raz, 2016<sup>313</sup>). This distance between an implementation procedure and a first predicate of practical reason for doing something (Do what God...), shows that we should not assume that the value of options of this first kind constitutes the proximate reason for pursuing them.

In the following section we want to defend the idea that what God approves cannot be wrong for theism but theism can also consider reason based arguments, provided theism is based on a perfectionist account of ethics. In order to first 1) explain in terms of reasons for action precisely the critical power of ethics, which in order to be starting point and guiding reason by contrast to explanatory reason, entails some

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<sup>312</sup> Stückelberger, Christoph, *Globalance: Ethics Handbook for a Balanced World Post-Covid*, Globethics.net Focus Series No. 57, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2020.

<sup>313</sup> Jackson, Frank; Smith, Michael, “The Implementation Problem for Deontology”, *Weighing Reasons* Errol Lord and Barry Maguire (Eds.), Ch. 14, Oxford: UP, 2016, pp. 279-280. Also: Raz, J. “Value and the Weight of Practical Reasons”, in: *Weighing Reasons*, op. cite, Ch. 7, 141ff.

exclusionary reasons, called second-order reasons for action or refrain from action. Second 2) we would operate in the universe of discourse of environmental ethics and question, given the existence of exclusionary reasons for action their value for our proper understanding of ecology, not only as a kind of “imbalance”. If we say we want to answer to problems such as the “unregulated globalization”, the “trends to extremisms”, and see as plausible solution the correlation of a new virtuous “dynamic of world order and dynamic balances”, are we not missing the proposition of a constituting ground engagement with values? Balancing better comparative choices functions as ways of better implementing ethics, and this is what applied ethics is about after all. Engagement with respect and values, and standing up for others values is it not entailing an engagement, both deeper in our self-understanding and a transformative power, beyond a diplomatic dialogue between comparative options.

From a meta-ethical point of view, we focus on the constituting aspects of things, rules and actions. We position ourselves in a world where there cannot be any balance, because a balance entails always two realities, which are on the same level, whereas constituting rules and reasons evolve on different levels. There are conceptually two things that we call conflicting reasons, paraphrasing Raz’s views: 1) the way we try to resolve them, 2) the way in which such conflicts should/ought to be resolved.

In the first case, we are aware of conflicting reasons to prevent some ecological disaster, but these reasons simply override all other considerations. To qualify a reason as overriding reason, we are on the ground of applying comparatively sound options on one level, we don’t need to imagine different levels beyond or above these reasons. In the second case, conflicting reasons could also mean the way in which such conflicts *should/ought to* be resolved. Practical reasons for actions may concern *exclusionary reasons*, two levels of reasons instead of a simple

balancing of competing first order reasons to act<sup>314</sup>. If we say Paul resists the temptation of killing voluntarily animals, if killing is not necessary to his survival, Paul makes a decision which is based not only on the choice of considering a wide range of reasons for action, “as first order reasons to act” (Raz, p. 132), assessed by considering the “relative strength” or “weight of the conflicting reasons.”

Exclusion based reason is easy to present in a familiar example. If my judgement may be affected when I take a decision in such a way that I think my mental state doesn't allow me to simply decide between two conflicting reasons (Raz, 1978), it shows that I may well continue to correct my judgement without succeeding to make it better. In this case, the rule of the balancing of reasons does not apply. It is not the case that given two conflicting reasons, I am always in the position to say that one of the two reasons will end up being a conclusive reason for me to act in such and such way. When I think about the situation of being super tired and not knowing if I can rely on my judgement, *I am not any more in the position to base my choice on some reason*, on the contrary I have a reason *to disregard other reasons for action*. I form a reason based on exclusion.

Having the right reasons allows me to engage in value-based actions. A further difficulty is to understand and accept the next step, of *standing up for others rights or values*. Thinking again on what respecting nature means, and how vulnerable our world in ecological crisis has become, we would need a subversive power to change the world. To be honest with ourselves, we may realize that we lack by simply being engaged in the right set of values and respecting the right range of creatures some further capacities to empower large and partly unknown natural areas, on a wide scale. Probably the work of Illich and Žižek on “changing the

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<sup>314</sup> Raz, Joseph, “Reasons for Action, Decisions and Norms”, in: *Practical Reasoning*, Ed. by Joseph Raz, Oxford Readings in Philosophy, Series Editor G. J. Warnock, 1978, Oxford: OUP, pp. 128-152.

world” may give us the missing tools (Babich, 2017). To answer would entail a totally new research.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that without us becoming nature *à la Spinoza*, we need to make our promise to respect nature meaningful in comparison to other reasons for action. It is not possible to enter in pseudo-contractual relations with nature, as we do with our children when we ask them to keep good progress at school if they want to have nice options for further personal and professional development, or to have good walks during the vacations.

Raz’s comprehensive account of notions, such as value, respect, reason for action, second-order reasons, collective good, and decent options for decision are promising philosophical notions. These notions are adapted to meta-ethical, normative and applied ethical perspectives on nature and the environment. We might respect others’ values, respect others, value the environment for being an important part of our world of ethical valuator. From a semantic point of view, we should not “respect” nature, as nature cannot either enter in a social contract with us. Nature as partly unanimated is lacking a telos, reasons understood as second-order reasons for action, or refraining to act. We continue to be attached to the needs for natural resources, we love animated creatures, and study hidden threats and challenges regarding natural conservation. The more we can add an applied ethical and moral reasoning on the top of such experiences, the better we can serve and manage our environment, and address questions of social and economic justice on a global scale.

Not harming living creatures, protecting human beings from environmental risks, thinking corporate responsible attitudes imply first engaging with values, and gradually engaging with reasons in our practices, which are good basis for respecting values and others,

including nature as a whole. A further chapter of this research is unachieved: *standing for the values of others* qua non-autonomous beings. If we consider equally important to protect and engage in the conservation of all sorts of natural species, as *anti-speciesist* claim worth to do, we would need to move beyond self-engaging with values and reasons. If to protect the human being and to value the environment goes beyond what brings a collective good to humans, a new path needs to be discovered. The *anti-speciesist* evolution of our engaging with nature could entail, as we conclude, far more than what we attempted to demonstrate. Namely putting mother earth in the middle of our values entails *changing the world for the good*, and not only acting in a reasonable and consequent way, within the actual framework of the Anthropocene. It means decentring slightly the focus on *homo sapiens* and the *person* and placing some heavier attention to the natural conservation of species, at the crossroad of our main values.

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**ETHICS: HIGHER EDUCATION FOR  
ACHIEVING THE BEST OF ETHICS**



## **UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SUPPORT: HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

*Divya Singh*<sup>315</sup>

### **Introduction**

The changing context of higher education has realised a fundamental shift in the way universities think and operate. Budget constraints and the reduced government support for universities has caused some universities to become more commercially focussed, with growth and income generation as key strategic priorities. (Prisacariu and Shah 2016: 153) The focus on consumerism has placed increasing strain on the humanist approach of education for the common good. Ethical issues have been neglected or “tended to be redefined as essentially procedural issues rather than fundamental issues directly connected to the core mission of the university.” (Scott 2004: 439) It has led to students being treated as customers, purchasing a service with the concomitant neglect of the idea of the university being a safe space for student growth and moral development. In this environment, universities have lost their

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moral compass to guide their thinking. (Parker 2014: n.p.; Macfarlane 2012: n.p.) More scathingly, Scott (2004: 439) points out:

“If not a conspiracy of silence, at any rate a culture disinterest has become established. Instead of presenting themselves as value-laden institutions, universities now seem to wish to be regarded as technically contrived service organisations that willingly accept whatever values their key stakeholders... seek to impose”.

The wheel, however, appears to be turning full circle. Social impact is being increasingly highlighted as a lever in the transformation of higher education, and social democratic principles are once again recapturing their space, currently (and regrettably) occupied by neo-liberal values.

This was succinctly highlighted by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO (2009-2017) who points out that the world is changing, and education will have to change, too.

There is not a more powerful and transformative force than education – to promote human rights and dignity, to eradicate poverty and deepen sustainability. Education is required to build a better future for all, founded on equal rights and social justice, respect for cultural diversity, international solidarity and shared responsibility, all of which are fundamental aspects of our common humanity. (Unesco 2015: 4)

Aligned to this global movement, South Africa is on the cusp of a seismic shift in the national higher education quality regime. This is underpinned by *inter alia*, the need for relevant qualifications, and graduates who can (a) meet the demands of the twenty-first century workplace and (b) contribute to social and global sustainability. Corporate social responsibility is no longer a fiction, and as noted by Boulouta and Pitelis (2014: 349), the business world faces both moral and strategic pressure to improve corporate social responsibility. With this, has come the obligations of greater accountability on the universities to produce skilled graduates for the new workforce,

understanding that knowledge and professional requirements are inextricably interlinked with ethics and a responsible application of the social compact. This has resulted in an overarching reimagining of quality learning and teaching in universities. The new narrative of higher education is starting to challenge the traditional quality assurance approaches, and calls for a redefinition of quality that includes the drivers of ethics and moral values. Increasingly, there is an emphasis on quality seen through the lens of ethics - described by Halis, Akova and Tagraf (2007: 129) as the “total of principles, values, rules and customs that govern the relationships of people living in certain society with one another and institutions” - as one of the key agents of higher education transformation.

The draft Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) from the South African national quality assurance authority - the Council on Higher Education (CHE) – expressly reiterates this purpose, with specific references to the relevance and importance of social connectivity as a vector of quality, curriculum relevance, and graduate readiness.

Statements and commitments in the QAF include:

Describing the purpose of the Quality Assurance Framework:  
“... the QAF is intended to be used as a strategic lever to a) strengthen the responsiveness of HEIs to social, economic, environmental and justice issues in South Africa ....”

(CHE 2020: 15)

Describing the role of the university: University transformation stands on the pillars of “social equity, quality and fundamental institutional cultural and academic change.” (CHE 2020: 16)

Describing the mission of higher education institutions:

“A focus on HEIs [higher education institutions] as sites of personal, cultural, societal and political change so that students,

graduates and the institutions themselves have positive social and personal experiences that have a constructive impact and contribute to personal development and societal transformation.” (CHE 2020: 14)

Describing university strategy:

“The QAF recognises that institutions should develop appropriate approaches to social impact, social justice, and changes in their culture which are supported by appropriate plans, policies, structures and processes (fitness for purpose). (CHE 2020: 42)

Describing the academic project:

The QAF connects

“the quality of the academic project which includes learning and teaching, research and community engagement to the wider social purpose of building a sustainable and equitable social order in South Africa, while simultaneously ensuring global relevance.” (CHE 2020: 14)

Describing curriculum:

“The curriculum [must be] politically, socially and culturally connected.” (CHE 2020: 6).

Describing pedagogic value:

Learning and teaching includes the social development of students. (CHE 2020: 22).

The unambiguous product of the QAF is a sharper lens being focussed on the alignment between ethics and moral values as a factor of quality and institutional *fitness for purpose*.

As pointed out by Bosio:

A well-rounded, transformative, value-creating curriculum not only opens students’ eyes, but also sets the stage for them to

act in ways that are inspired by their course of study and driven by a desire to make difference locally, regionally and globally (2016: n.p.).

Prisacariu and Shah (2016: 162) also pointed to the reality of

“[a] person with a high level of education [being] expected [to] be capable of ethical judgement and active commitment for humanity in society.”

As a factor of graduate readiness, therefore, universities will now be expected to foster a culture of social consciousness that ensures that graduates are able to discharge industry expectations and responsibilities with high ethical standards. And so, we find higher education at a critical juncture that requires institutions, institutional leadership, and faculty to reflect upon what it means to be a socially responsible institution and their role and function in this setting.

## **The Research Project**

### ***The Study and Method***

Many have acknowledged the importance of instilling the values of social consciousness in university graduates, but equally recognised that up to now, it has hovered on the periphery of academic projects. A study was launched to firstly gauge students’ levels of social awareness; secondly, their perceptions of the importance of responsible citizenship; and thirdly, how, if at all, the university had influenced their thinking and behaviour.<sup>316</sup> The survey that was central to the study identified the personal and social responsibility of students, as well as their ethical values and standards. The aim was to focus on students’ awareness, while simultaneously requiring them to self-reflect on their participation

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<sup>316</sup> The student sample was drawn from students at a private higher education institution in South Africa.

in community activities and the importance of civic engagement. The project was of mutual benefit to both students and the institution.

The outcomes will be used as one of the standards to inform institutional and curriculum transformation, and to build a culture of ethics, values and social awareness that will prepare students for the new, exciting world economy.

A self-administrated web-based survey was distributed via an email invitation to students for self-completion. The survey instrument contained three sections related to responsible citizenship and behaviours that demonstrated a level of social consciousness. The survey aimed to rank the probability of students to act and think in a manner that may be deemed socially responsible. To enhance the credibility of the results, four of the sixteen agreement statements in the survey were 'reversed' to enable the researchers to better standardise the analysis. (They are Questions 2, 4, 5 and 11 in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 presented in the Discussion section.)

Students were informed that the survey dealt with democratic rights and responsibilities, differences among people, personal responsibility, and community mindedness. Respondents would be expected to answer the questions based on their own personal and study experiences. The survey remained open for a period of two weeks, and three separate reminders were sent to students to encourage participation. Information was collected from students anonymously, with no personal details of participants being recorded. Furthermore, students could withdraw at any stage of the survey. From a research governance perspective, it is also important to note that the Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) of the BMR approved the study prior to commencement.<sup>317</sup> At the closure time of the survey, just over 10% of the student

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<sup>317</sup> The survey instrument was developed by STADIO and rolled-out through the Bureau for Market Research (BMR), a Unit hosted at the University of South Africa (Unisa) based in Pretoria, South Africa.

population had submitted fully completed and usable questionnaires, although more than 40% of the students opened the online document. The low response rate was perhaps the first marker of concern highlighting an apparent disinterest from the student population to the issues under discussion. However, other contributing factors may have also significantly influenced the response rate such as timing (just prior to examinations), length of the questionnaire, and distrust from the students regarding the purpose of the survey. It was agreed that notwithstanding the low response rate, the data would be analysed to evaluate students' opinions at the point in time.

The student population comprises both school learners and adult learners, most of who are already in the workplace, and the descriptive analyses were conducted according to these cohorts.

### ***Results, Analysis and Discussion***

Students were requested to self-rate 16 statements related to responsible citizenship and social consciousness. The scale anchors ranged from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

Figures 1 and 2 present the outcome of these findings by gender and employment category.

Figure 1: Responsible Citizenship and social consciousness by gender

Statement	Rating	Male	Female	Total
Problems between people are best handled by working together to find a solution	Strongly disagree	1.70%	2.80%	2.4%
	Disagree	0.80%	0.00%	0.3%
	Neutral	3.40%	6.50%	5.4%
	Agree	31.40%	33.20%	32.5%
	Strongly agree	62.70%	57.50%	59.3%
I think about how my decisions will affect other people	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.50%	0.3%
	Disagree	0.50%	0.50%	0.6%
	Neutral	6.80%	14.50%	11.7%
	Agree	47.50%	41.60%	43.7%
	Strongly agree	44.90%	43.00%	43.7%
Students need to accept responsibility for their actions	Strongly disagree	0.80%	0.90%	0.9%
	Disagree	0.00%	0.50%	0.3%
	Neutral	0.80%	4.70%	3.3%
	Agree	32.20%	27.10%	28.9%
	Strongly agree	66.10%	66.80%	66.6%
I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view	Strongly disagree	9.30%	7.50%	8.1%
	Disagree	28.80%	31.80%	30.7%
	Neutral	28.00%	32.20%	30.7%
	Agree	28.00%	25.20%	26.2%
	Strongly agree	5.90%	3.30%	4.2%
South Africa is a better country because people from many different cultures live here	Strongly disagree	3.40%	3.30%	3.3%
	Disagree	7.60%	15.40%	12.7%
	Neutral	28.80%	31.30%	30.4%
	Agree	38.10%	31.80%	34.0%
	Strongly agree	22.00%	18.20%	19.6%
Other people's problems don't bother me	Strongly disagree	14.40%	22.00%	19.3%
	Disagree	44.10%	41.10%	42.2%
	Neutral	20.30%	26.20%	24.1%
	Agree	14.40%	6.10%	9.0%
	Strongly agree	6.80%	4.70%	5.4%
I base my decisions on what I think is fair and unfair	Strongly disagree	0.90%	0.90%	0.9%
	Disagree	1.70%	5.60%	4.2%
	Neutral	15.30%	15.90%	15.7%
	Agree	43.20%	47.20%	45.8%
	Strongly agree	39.00%	30.40%	33.4%
No matter how angry someone makes me, I am still responsible for my own actions	Strongly disagree	1.70%	0.90%	1.2%
	Disagree	0.80%	0.00%	0.3%
	Neutral	5.10%	7.50%	6.6%
	Agree	39.80%	34.10%	36.1%
	Strongly agree	52.50%	57.50%	55.7%

Figure 1 continued: Responsible Citizenship and social consciousness by gender

Statement	Rating	Male	Female	Total
All people should have equal chances to get a good education in South Africa	Strongly disagree	1.70%	1.40%	1.5%
	Disagree	0.80%	0.90%	0.8%
	Neutral	6.80%	4.70%	5.4%
	Agree	20.30%	20.10%	20.2%
	Strongly agree	70.30%	72.90%	72.0%
Problems like pollution and poverty are not important to me	Strongly disagree	48.30%	58.90%	55.1%
	Disagree	31.30%	31.30%	31.0%
	Neutral	12.70%	4.70%	7.5%
	Agree	2.50%	2.80%	2.7%
	Strongly agree	5.90%	2.30%	3.6%
Teenagers should find ways to help others in the community	Strongly disagree	0.00%	3.30%	2.1%
	Disagree	0.80%	0.90%	0.9%
	Neutral	15.40%	15.40%	16.3%
	Agree	50.80%	44.40%	46.7%
	Strongly agree	30.50%	36.00%	34.0%
I don't care about what's happening in politics	Strongly disagree	30.50%	37.60%	28.6%
	Disagree	44.90%	43.00%	43.7%
	Neutral	12.70%	18.20%	16.3%
	Agree	8.50%	6.50%	7.2%
	Strongly agree	3.40%	4.70%	4.2%
Teenagers have a responsibility to do what they can to protect the environment	Strongly disagree	0.00%	2.30%	1.5%
	Disagree	3.40%	1.90%	2.4%
	Neutral	8.50%	10.30%	9.6%
	Agree	42.40%	41.60%	41.9%
	Strongly agree	45.80%	43.90%	44.6%
I feel that I can make a difference in my community	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.90%	0.6%
	Disagree	4.20%	2.80%	3.3%
	Neutral	11.90%	15.40%	14.2%
	Agree	40.70%	38.30%	39.2%
	Strongly agree	43.20%	42.50%	42.8%
People should discuss social and political problems that affect the future of South Africa	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.90%	0.6%
	Disagree	0.00%	0.00%	0.0%
	Neutral	10.20%	13.10%	12.0%
	Agree	34.70%	38.30%	37.0%
	Strongly agree	55.10%	47.70%	50.3%
The world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for themselves	Strongly disagree	11.00%	14.00%	13.0%
	Disagree	21.20%	21.50%	21.4%
	Neutral	24.60%	28.00%	26.8%
	Agree	27.10%	24.30%	25.3%
	Strongly agree	16.10%	12.10%	13.6%

$N_{Males} = 118$ ;  $N_{Females} = 214$ ;  $N_{Total} = 332$   
 (continued)



Figure 2: Responsible citizenship and social consciousness by employment category

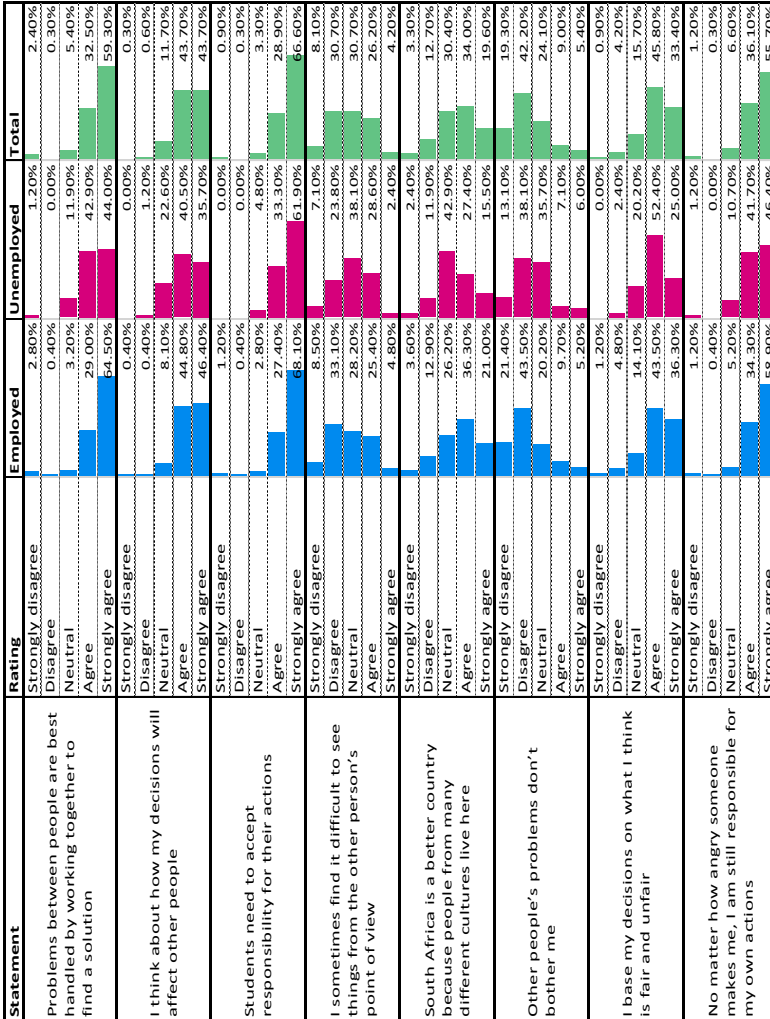


Figure 2 continued: Responsible citizenship and social consciousness by employment category

Statement	Rating	Employed	Unemployed	Total
All people should have equal chances to get a good education in South Africa	Strongly disagree	1.20%	1.20%	2.40%
	Disagree	1.20%	0.00%	0.90%
	Neutral	6.50%	2.40%	5.40%
	Agree	20.20%	20.20%	20.20%
	Strongly agree	71.00%	75.00%	72.00%
Problems like pollution and poverty are not important to me	Strongly disagree	58.10%	46.40%	55.10%
	Disagree	27.80%	40.50%	31.00%
	Neutral	7.70%	7.10%	7.50%
	Agree	3.20%	1.20%	2.70%
	Strongly agree	3.20%	4.80%	3.60%
Teenagers should find ways to help others in the community	Strongly disagree	2.40%	1.20%	2.10%
	Disagree	15.30%	19.00%	16.30%
	Neutral	45.60%	50.00%	46.70%
	Agree	35.50%	29.80%	34.00%
	Strongly agree	31.90%	19.00%	28.60%
I don't care about what's happening in politics	Strongly disagree	44.00%	42.90%	43.70%
	Disagree	12.90%	26.20%	16.30%
	Neutral	7.30%	7.10%	7.20%
	Agree	4.00%	4.80%	4.20%
	Strongly agree	2.80%	1.20%	2.40%
Teenagers have a responsibility to do what they can to protect the environment	Strongly disagree	10.10%	8.30%	9.60%
	Disagree	40.70%	45.20%	41.90%
	Neutral	44.40%	45.20%	44.60%
	Agree	0.80%	0.00%	0.60%
	Strongly agree	2.40%	6.00%	3.30%
I feel that I can make a difference in my community	Disagree	13.30%	16.70%	14.20%
	Neutral	35.90%	48.80%	39.20%
	Agree	47.60%	28.60%	42.80%
	Strongly agree	0.80%	0.00%	0.60%
	Disagree	11.30%	14.30%	12.00%
People should discuss social and political problems that affect the future of South Africa	Disagree	34.30%	45.20%	37.00%
	Neutral	53.60%	40.50%	50.30%
	Agree	14.10%	9.50%	13.00%
	Strongly agree	24.20%	13.10%	21.40%
	Disagree	25.00%	32.10%	26.80%
The world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for themselves	Disagree	23.00%	32.10%	25.30%
	Neutral	13.70%	13.10%	13.60%
	Agree	13.70%	13.10%	13.60%
	Strongly agree	13.70%	13.10%	13.60%
	Strongly agree	13.70%	13.10%	13.60%

The results by gender and employment tell their own tales. While there are some correlations, making it clear that students' responsible citizenship and social consciousness tendencies by gender and employment category are somewhat similar, there are overall essential differences that reflect a lack of maturity amongst specific cohorts of students regarding social consciousness and civic responsibility. The results further reflect that while students are socially conscious and aware, they are more prepared to act when it is a matter of self-interest. They find it difficult, however, to see things from the perspective of another and are less inclined to act in the benefit of third parties and/or the greater community. Bearing in mind the description of social responsibility presented by Al-Khoury *et al* (2015: 75) namely that it "constitutes the thinking and learning as well as behavioural pattern of people to focus beyond themselves and initialize caring attitude about the environment", the following further specific findings from the results are highlighted:

- There is a close correlation between the results by gender to the statement *I think about how my decisions affect others*, with an overall 87.4% agreement. Similarly, 79.2% of the respondents by gender and employment confirmed that their decision-making was based on perceptions of fairness.
- That said, almost one-third of the total respondent population (by gender and employment) admitted to sometimes *finding it difficult to see things from the other persons point of view*, which aligns with the finding that, on average, only 61.5% of the respondent sampled by gender indicated that they were *affected by the problems of others*.
- Employed respondents were more *conscious of and experienced concern for the problems of others* (64.9%), while only 51.2% of unemployed respondents agreed that they were bothered by the problems of others.

- Analysing the respondent sample by employment, while there was an overall similarity between employed and unemployed respondents to the statement about *people working together to find mutual resolutions to problems* (93.5% and 86.9% respectively), 64.5% of the employed respondents felt very strongly about this statement, while the ‘very strong’ sentiment was only expressed by 44% of the school-leaver (unemployed) group. Similar outlooks are identified regarding *community consciousness and the impact of one’s actions on others*.
- Regarding social awareness, women respondents rated more highly than their male counterparts. 78.8% of male respondents rated *concerns with poverty and pollution as important matters of concern*, and 20.2% were either neutral or did not see it as a matter of concern. On the other hand, 90.2% of the women respondents highlighted the issues as being of significance.
- 18% (almost one-fifth) of the respondents were either neutral or did not believe that they *could contribute to uplifting their communities*.
- While a significant proportion of the respondents agreed that *teenagers should be involved in community projects*, 16.3% were neutral to the idea. Similarly, 13.5% of the respondents were neutral or did not agree with the statement that *teenagers have a responsibility to protect the environment*. While not statistically significant, it is high enough to cause concern as one looks to the promise of future generations.
- Regarding political consciousness and civic responsibility, 24.6% and 29.4% of men and women respectively admitted to *not caring about what happens in politics*. Men also had stronger views about the *need for people to discuss social and political issues that affect the future of South Africa*.

- 75.9% of those in employment and 61.9% of those not employed have an interest in politics, with 26.2% of the latter group adopting a neutral view to politics. That said, 87.9% of the employed and 85.7% of the unemployed respondents agreed that people should talk about social and political issues.
- The study by Al-Khoury *et al* presented similar results leading them to conclude that possibly universities in Lebanon did not promote civic responsibility and encourage students' participation in politics, given the extreme "sensitivities around politics in Lebanon than in other parts of the world, like Germany or the United States." (2015: 79)
- With regard to the statement *South Africa is a better country because people from many different cultures live here*, it is interesting to note that women were generally less supportive of the statement than their male counterparts. 15.4% of women disagreed with the statement compared with 7.6% of the men; and 50% of the women agreed with the statement, while more than 60% of the men expressed agreement.
- 57.3% of the employed respondents agreed that the heterogeneity of South Africa was a benefit, while only 42.9% of the unemployed respondents (younger school-leaver respondents) believed that South Africa was a better country for the many cultures living together. Again, this finding is analysed looking at the effect of the finding on issues such as social cohesion and communal respect and responsibility.
- While specifically directed, the respondents' social awareness, responsibility and altruism ratings averaged at least 80%. However, in response to the final statement *the world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for themselves*, only 32% of the male respondents disagreed (with 11% strongly disagreeing) and 35.5% of the female

respondents disagreed (with 14% strongly disagreeing). 24.6% and 28% of the men and women respectively did not have a view and were neutral about the statement. On the other hand, 38.1% of the employed sample felt that *the world would be a better place if people could do what they wanted*, and only 22.6% of the unemployed respondents agreed to this statement.

While there are some striking differences, overall, the results showed that the responsible citizenship and social consciousness tendencies by gender and employment are largely similar. Across both academic cohorts, consistent patterns are notable from the index analysis. Topping the list of student inclinations in support of responsible citizenship and social consciousness are (i) equal chances to education, (ii) accepting responsibility for actions, and (iii) working together to find solutions. However, less satisfying is the finding that half of the respondent population admitted to being self-serving, and admitting that the world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for them. This correlates with the second finding, namely that students found it somewhat challenging to see things from another person's perspective. Being socially conscious and taking ethically responsible decisions requires making the choice that is both individually and collectively good. Therefore, when such a high number of respondents indicate that the world would be a better place if people can do what they want, self-interest clearly continues to trump the notions of collective good. Furthermore, the initial research presents a picture of respondents probably being more socially conscious than civically responsible.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 (on next page) set out the consolidated ranking of statements by gender and employment.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> An index score closer to '0' displays lower tendencies while values closer to "100" display higher tendencies towards responsible citizenship and social consciousness.

Figure 3: Ranking of responsible citizenship and social consciousness tendencies by gender

Statement	Male Index	Female Index	Total Index
The world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for themselves.	54.03	49.77	51.28
I sometimes do not find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view.	51.91	53.74	53.09
South Africa is a better country because people from many different cultures live here.	66.95	61.57	63.48
Other people's problems bother me.	61.23	67.41	65.21
I care about what's happening in politics.	72.67	70.56	71.31
I base my decisions on what I think is fair and unfair.	79.45	75.12	76.66
Teenagers should find ways to help others in the community.	77.75	77.22	77.41
I feel that I can make a difference in my community.	80.72	79.67	80.05
Teenagers have a responsibility to do what they can to protect the environment.	82.63	80.72	81.40
I think about how my decisions will affect other people.	84.11	81.54	82.45
Problems like pollution and poverty are important to me.	78.18	85.40	82.83
People should discuss social and political problems that affect the future of South Africa.	86.23	82.94	84.11
No matter how angry someone makes me, I am still responsible for my own actions.	85.17	86.80	86.22
Problems between people are best handled by working together to find a solution.	88.14	85.63	86.52
Students need to accept responsibility for their actions.	90.66	89.60	89.98
All people should have equal chances to get a good education in South Africa.	89.19	90.54	90.06

$$N_{Males} = 118; N_{Females} = 214; N_{Total} = 332$$

Figure 4: Ranking of responsible citizenship and consciousness tendencies by gender

Statement	Employed	Unemployed	Total
	Index	Index	Index
The world would be a better place if people were free to do what was best for themselves.	49.50	56.55	51.28
I sometimes do not find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view.	53.73	51.19	53.09
South Africa is a better country because people from many different cultures live here.	64.52	60.42	63.48
Other people's problems bother me.	66.53	61.31	65.21
I care about what's happening in politics.	73.08	66.07	71.31
I base my decisions on what I think is fair and unfair.	77.22	75.00	76.66
Teenagers should find ways to help others in the community.	77.62	76.79	77.41
I feel that I can make a difference in my community.	81.75	75.00	80.05
Teenagers have a responsibility to do what they can to protect the environment.	80.65	83.63	81.40
I think about how my decisions will affect other people.	84.07	77.68	82.45
Problems like pollution and poverty are important to me.	83.57	80.85	82.83
People should discuss social and political problems that affect the future of South Africa.	84.98	81.55	84.11
No matter how angry someone makes me, I am still responsible for my own actions.	87.30	83.44	86.22
Problems between people are best handled by working together to find a solution.	88.00	82.44	86.52
Students need to accept responsibility for their actions.	90.22	89.29	89.98
All people should have equal chances to get a good education in South Africa.	89.62	91.37	90.06

$n_{Employed} = 248$ ;  $n_{Unemployed} = 84$ ;  $n_{Total} = 332$



For section B of the survey, a total of 12 responsible citizenship and social consciousness statements were posed to students to anticipate how frequently they will act responsibly, given a range of predetermined activities. The scale anchor of the response options ranged from 1 ('no time') to 5 ('most of the time'). The outcome of these findings is presented in figures 5 and 6 by gender and employment, respectively.

*Figure 5: Anticipated social responsibilities behaviours by gender*

Activities	Response	Male	Female	Total
Try to be nice to other students when they are sad about something?	No time	0.00%	0.90%	0.60%
	A few times	4.20%	5.60%	5.10%
	Sometimes	26.30%	17.80%	20.80%
	Many times	37.30%	34.10%	35.20%
	All of the time	27.10%	35.40%	31.10%
Try to be quiet when others are studying?	Not applicable	5.10%	5.10%	5.10%
	No time	0.80%	0.50%	0.60%
	A few times	0.00%	0.90%	0.60%
	Sometimes	2.50%	4.70%	3.90%
	Many times	20.30%	16.80%	18.10%
Help other students when they have a problem?	All of the time	72.90%	73.40%	73.20%
	Not applicable	3.40%	3.70%	3.60%
	No time	0.80%	0.00%	0.30%
	A few times	2.50%	3.30%	3.00%
	Sometimes	15.30%	21.00%	19.00%
Think about how your behaviour in school will affect other students?	Many times	37.30%	38.30%	38.00%
	All of the time	41.50%	35.00%	38.00%
	Not applicable	2.50%	1.40%	1.80%
	No time	1.70%	3.30%	2.70%
	A few times	3.40%	3.30%	3.30%
Take the time to listen to other people's arguments, even when you think they are wrong?	Sometimes	13.60%	17.30%	16.00%
	Many times	35.60%	30.80%	32.50%
	All of the time	37.30%	34.30%	36.60%
	Not applicable	8.50%	6.10%	6.90%
	No time	3.40%	5.60%	4.80%
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	A few times	5.10%	7.90%	6.90%
	Sometimes	18.60%	25.20%	22.90%
	Many times	41.50%	32.20%	35.50%
	All of the time	29.70%	27.10%	28.00%
	Not applicable	1.70%	1.90%	1.80%
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	No time	6.80%	8.40%	7.80%
	A few times	11.90%	18.20%	16.00%
	Sometimes	35.60%	33.60%	34.30%
	Many times	17.80%	22.00%	20.50%
	All of the time	27.90%	14.00%	17.20%
Not applicable	5.10%	3.70%	4.20%	

Figure 5 continued: Anticipated social responsibilities behaviours by gender

Activities	Response	Male	Female	Total
Speak out when other students use negative language to talk about people from other cultures?	No time	2.50%	3.70%	3.30%
	A few times	8.50%	10.70%	9.90%
	Sometimes	22.00%	19.60%	20.50%
	Many times	30.50%	31.80%	31.30%
	All of the time	30.50%	31.30%	31.00%
Talk with your friends about government and politics?	Not applicable	5.90%	2.80%	3.90%
	No time	4.20%	10.30%	8.10%
	A few times	9.30%	15.90%	13.60%
	Sometimes	27.10%	2.20%	30.40%
	Many times	35.60%	27.60%	30.40%
Help neighbours or relatives when a job needs to be done?	All of the time	18.60%	12.10%	14.50%
	Not applicable	5.10%	1.90%	3.00%
	No time	0.80%	0.00%	0.30%
	A few times	5.10%	5.60%	5.40%
	Sometimes	23.70%	20.60%	21.70%
Talk to your friends about issues like world peace or global warming?	Many times	43.20%	41.10%	41.90%
	All of the time	25.40%	29.40%	28.00%
	Not applicable	1.70%	3.30%	2.70%
	No time	5.10%	8.90%	7.50%
	A few times	7.60%	18.70%	14.80%
Participate as a volunteer in a community organization or event?	Sometimes	37.30%	33.70%	38.90%
	Many times	27.10%	22.40%	24.10%
	All of the time	20.30%	8.40%	12.70%
	Not applicable	2.50%	1.90%	2.10%
	No time	17.80%	12.10%	14.20%
Talk to your friends about what is happening in other countries?	A few times	26.30%	25.20%	25.60%
	Sometimes	28.00%	29.90%	29.20%
	Many times	15.30%	20.60%	18.70%
	All of the time	11.00%	9.80%	10.20%
	Not applicable	1.70%	2.30%	2.10%
Talk to your friends about what is happening in other countries?	No time	3.40%	4.70%	4.20%
	A few times	5.90%	19.60%	14.80%
	Sometimes	24.60%	38.90%	32.50%
	Many times	38.10%	28.50%	31.90%
	All of the time	25.40%	9.30%	15.10%
Not applicable	2.50%	0.90%	1.50%	

Figure 6: Anticipated social responsibility behaviours by employment category

Activities	Response	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Try to be nice to other students when they are sad about something?	No time	0.40%	1.20%	0.60%
	A few times	2.40%	13.10%	5.10%
	Sometimes	21.80%	17.90%	20.80%
	Many times	35.10%	35.70%	35.20%
	All of the time	33.90%	31.00%	33.10%
Try to be quiet when others are studying?	Not applicable	6.50%	1.20%	5.10%
	No time	0.80%	0.00%	0.60%
	A few times	0.00%	2.40%	0.60%
	Sometimes	2.40%	8.30%	3.90%
	Many times	15.70%	25.00%	18.10%
Help other students when they have a problem?	All of the time	76.20%	64.30%	73.20%
	Not applicable	4.80%	0.00%	3.60%
	No time	0.00%	1.20%	0.30%
	A few times	1.60%	7.10%	3.00%
	Sometimes	14.90%	31.00%	19.00%
Think about how your behaviour in school will affect other students?	Many times	37.10%	40.50%	38.00%
	All of the time	44.00%	20.20%	38.00%
	Not applicable	2.40%	0.00%	1.80%
	No time	2.00%	4.80%	2.70%
	A few times	2.00%	7.10%	3.30%
Take the time to listen to other people's arguments, even when you think they are wrong?	Sometimes	12.50%	26.20%	16.00%
	Many times	31.50%	35.70%	32.50%
	All of the time	42.70%	26.20%	38.60%
	Not applicable	9.30%	0.00%	6.90%
	No time	5.20%	3.60%	4.80%
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	A few times	4.40%	14.30%	6.90%
	Sometimes	22.20%	25.00%	22.90%
	Many times	35.50%	35.70%	35.50%
	All of the time	31.00%	19.00%	28.00%
	Not applicable	1.60%	2.40%	1.80%
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	No time	4.40%	17.90%	7.80%
	A few times	14.10%	21.40%	16.00%
	Sometimes	35.10%	32.10%	34.30%
	Many times	21.40%	17.90%	20.50%
	All of the time	19.80%	9.50%	17.20%
Not applicable		5.20%	1.20%	4.20%

Figure 6 continued: Anticipated social responsibility behaviours by employment category

Activities	Response	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Speak out when other students use negative language to talk about people from other cultures?	No time	1.60%	8.30%	3.30%
	A few times	6.50%	20.20%	9.90%
	Sometimes	21.80%	16.70%	20.50%
	Many times	32.70%	27.40%	31.30%
	All of the time	33.10%	25.00%	31.00%
	Not applicable	4.40%	2.40%	3.90%
Talk with your friends about Government and politics?	No time	5.60%	15.50%	8.10%
	A few times	10.90%	21.40%	13.60%
	Sometimes	30.20%	31.00%	30.40%
	Many times	32.30%	25.00%	30.40%
	All of the time	16.90%	7.10%	14.50%
	Not applicable	4.00%	0.00%	3.00%
Help neighbours or relatives when a job needs to be done?	No time	0.40%	0.00%	0.30%
	A few times	4.00%	9.50%	5.40%
	Sometimes	19.80%	27.40%	21.70%
	Many times	41.90%	41.70%	41.90%
	All of the time	32.30%	15.50%	28.00%
	Not applicable	1.60%	6.00%	2.70%
Talk to your friends about issues like world peace or global warming?	No time	5.60%	13.10%	7.50%
	A few times	12.90%	20.20%	14.80%
	Sometimes	38.70%	39.30%	38.90%
	Many times	25.40%	20.20%	24.10%
	All of the time	14.50%	7.10%	12.70%
	Not applicable	2.80%	0.00%	2.10%
Participate as a volunteer in a community organization or event?	No time	11.70%	21.40%	14.20%
	A few times	25.40%	26.20%	25.60%
	Sometimes	31.50%	22.60%	29.20%
	Many times	19.80%	15.50%	18.70%
	All of the time	9.70%	11.90%	10.20%
	Not applicable	2.00%	2.40%	2.10%
Talk to your friends about what is happening in other countries?	No time	2.80%	8.30%	4.20%
	A few times	10.10%	28.60%	14.80%
	Sometimes	34.30%	27.40%	32.50%
	Many times	35.50%	21.40%	31.90%
	All of the time	15.70%	13.10%	15.10%
	Not applicable	1.60%	1.20%	1.50%

With the aim of consolidating the response categories of anticipated responsible student behaviour, figures 7 and 8 were constructed to rank the most apparent behaviours according to those most likely to manifest when encountering certain life events. For this purpose, an index method was once again applied, whereby scores closer to zero (0) display a very low probability while scores closer to ‘100’ display a very high probability that a student will perform in a socially responsible and conscious manner.

*Figure 7: Rankings of probability of performing social responsibility and consciousness by gender*

Life activities	Male	Female	Total
Participate as a volunteer in a community organization or event?	43.75	47.61	46.23
Talk to your friends about issues like world peace or global warming?	62.83	50.71	55.00
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	60.04	53.88	56.05
Talk with your friends about government and politics?	64.51	53.93	57.61
Talk to your friends about what is happening in other countries?	69.57	54.60	59.86
Take the time to listen to other people's arguments, even when you think they are wrong?	74.63	67.14	69.10
Speak out when other students use negative language to talk about people from other cultures?	70.72	69.59	69.98
Help neighbours or relatives when a job needs to be done?	71.20	74.40	73.61
Try to be nice to other students when they are sad about something?	71.99	76.23	75.08
Think about how your behaviour in school will affect other students?	78.24	76.49	77.10
Help other students when they have a problem?	79.78	77.13	78.07
Try to be quiet when others are studying?	92.54	91.99	92.19

Figure 8: Rankings of probability of performing socially responsibility and consciousness by employment category

Life activities	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Participate as a volunteer in a community organization or event?	47.53	42.38	46.23
Talk to your friends about issues like world peace or global warming?	57.78	47.02	55.00
Talk with your friends about how you can stop racism?	60.00	44.88	56.05
Talk with your friends about government and politics?	61.45	46.73	57.61
Talk to your friends about what is happening in other countries?	63.01	50.60	59.86
Take the time to listen to other people's arguments, even when you think they are wrong?	71.00	63.41	69.10
Speak out when other students use negative language to talk about people from other cultures?	73.31	60.37	69.98
Help neighbours or relatives when a job needs to be done?	75.82	66.77	73.61
Try to be nice to other students when they are sad about something?	76.62	70.78	75.08
Think about how your behaviour in school will affect other students?	80.56	67.86	77.10
Help other students when they have a problem?	81.61	67.86	78.07
Try to be quiet when others are studying?	93.75	87.80	92.09

Of all live situations tested, students appeared to be the least likely to volunteer to become involved in community organisations or events. In a similar study by Ahmad, Noor and Ismail looking at students' social awareness, they made a similar finding namely that while students had some awareness of social issues in their environment; they lacked exposure to actual activities. (2015: 288) Further, in relative terms, students appear to be less inclined to engage with difficult issues, such

as expressing their dissatisfaction with students who use offensive language when speaking harmfully about other cultures, or talking with friends about avoiding racism, or about world peace and global warming. What becomes clear is that as the world expands and societies become more globally inter-connected, it is simultaneously contracting with pockets of bigotry around race, culture, and religion and it is of concern that university students indicate a lack of preparedness to be more vocal about addressing such issues. Higher education should play a pivotal role in widening students' horizons, and exposing and helping them understand different experiences, as well as their own experience in the global world. "The intent of curriculum is to enable learning. However, the curriculum can restrict learning if it is too narrowly focussed." (Leask and De Witt 2016: n.p.)

Other difficulty that students currently experience is seeing things from another person's perspective. Issues such as world peace, global warming and voluntary involvement in community organisations or events were further highlighted by the study as prominent areas, in which students displayed relatively lower levels of consciousness and familiarity.

It was thus especially interesting to note - from the open-ended question asking respondents for 'any further comment' - that an overwhelming request from the students who participated in the survey was for the institution to provide more opportunities for students to be exposed to discussions and engagements on "ethical issues", either integrated as part of the curriculum, or through on-campus seminars and debates.

There is no gainsaying in the value of the data harvested from the project. The survey information provides a baseline for the institution from two markers of gender and employment, and indirectly a third marker of age. Responsive authentic curriculum development and institutional transformation will build on these findings.

## **Conclusion**

Chen, Nasongkha and Donaldson (2015: 165) describe university social responsibility as

“a philosophy or principle for social movement, which can be perceived as a philosophy of a university to use an ethical approach to develop and engage with the local and global community in order to sustain the social, ecological, environmental, technical, and economic development.”

It develops Marginson’s (2011) canvas of higher education as a public good, which includes human development and better-informed citizens, leading to improved democracy and more informed and inclusive society and knowledge.

Against these reflections, universities are called upon to re-envision their mission. The creation of universities invested with a mission of social awareness and responsibility

“requires new ways of thinking about ... teaching, learning and curriculum in today’s world; ways of thinking that are focussed on promoting, to quote the US philosopher Martha Nussbaum, a ‘humane, people-sensitive democracy’ through developing students’ ability to recognize fellow citizens as people with equal rights, regardless of differences in race, religion, gender and sexuality” (Leask and De Wit 2017: n.p.).

This will not be an easy task, as universities will have to grapple strategically with the difficult issues of diversity and inclusivity, ‘belonging’ and ‘otherness’, and operationalising the growth of an academic culture that shares strategic vision for the common good. More importantly, it will require an evolution of teaching roles and curriculum development to ensure that what is being taught is intrinsically relevant to the emerging world. Such a project would need to be much more than



merely involving students in a single module of community engagement.

“[C]urriculum reform will naturally involve integrating human rights education, peace education, socially responsible teaching and learning, university-community partnerships, inclusive leadership and integrating social and restorative justice into institutional leadership, governance, management and policy and strategy development” (Blessinger, Sengupta and Mahoney 2019: n.p.).

Some faculty will argue that it is not their job to produce good citizens, but as Bosio questions, “Why are we teaching and learning if not to enrich the lives of our students?” (Bosio 2017: n.p.) It is trite that the deepest motivation to change always comes from within, and as pointed out by Al-Khoury *et al* (2015: 82), if someone is not interested in participating in socially responsible activities, s/he will not be active no matter how many university courses are offered. The research by Ramos *et al* (2018) looking at the impact of a compulsory university module on social responsibility yields thought-provoking results. They note, specifically that the purpose of the module “is not to try to teach the value of social commitment but instead to help students ‘discover it themselves’.” (Ramos *et al* 2018: 25). They found that the module had a ‘definite impact’ on all students, except those in Business Management and Law courses. Discovering values, they noted, was highly reinforced amongst students in courses related to creativity, as well as those courses involving sport “where values play a very important role in the exercise of the profession.” (p.34)

However, notwithstanding the acceptance that students (like all people) are different with a will and volition to choose, it still behoves universities to tell their students about current issues and make them aware of it. (Al-Khoury *et al* 2015: 75) They also found that faculty played a significant role in students’ development and had a major

impact on students “to grow beyond themselves”. (Al-Khoury *et al* 2015: 81)

Universities are being exhorted to do the right thing. As highlighted by UNESCO on the eve of the twenty-first century, higher education:

‘... must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has event been required to undertake, so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic consideration and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality (1998: 2)’.

Far from excluding the integration of values and quality, education for the common good, the new knowledge economy is “brim-full with values” (Scott 2004: 446). The challenge to universities, individually, and higher education collectively, is to identify the scope and enable the changes within which faculty. Changes that can be innovative with curriculum design and content development, emphasising the continuum of authentic, relevant, responsive, quality learning and teaching.

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## CONCLUSION

This volume is the result of an invitation that was extended to many of those working day-to-day with and for Globethics.net at the Head Office and around the world to share their learning and their experiences. The chapters on the various topics have been chosen by their authors inspired by their individual reflections in answer to the question, “Who Cares About Ethics?”

While the content, tone and style of the contributions are diverse there are at the same time common threads that run throughout this volume. The authors share the experience of belonging to and being a part of the Globethics.net network and family and they have in common an interest in and a passion for ethics and in particular applied ethics. While world and faith views and professional formation, sectors and cultural and national identities and backgrounds may differ, all of the authors have had the courage to respond to the invitation and to state in black and white, “Who Cares About Ethics? I do! And what’s more I know others who care and this is where and how I and we and they express and show that care”.

This volume is gifted to you, dear reader, by the contributors who have each given of their time and experiences and wisdom to draw from within themselves their thoughts in answer to this question of “Who Cares About Ethics?” Their rich expositions covering a range of realms and interests have been prepared on matters that are important to them, which they believe are also of interest and importance to you and to others. You were invited at the outset to embark upon the journey of ethics, on a voyage of discovery, and one of the wonders and beauties of a compilation such as this one, is that you have been able to choose from

among the company those who you would like to listen to and when along the way. It has been a journey with fellow pilgrims and we have none of us yet reached our destination. The companionable march continues.

Some of the chapters and lines herein you will easily recall and come back to from time to time, while others linger a while then pass into forgetting. We trust, however, that you will have learnt something new, that something of the enthusiasm and energy of the authors will stay with you and that having listened you will feel inspired to respond to the invitation yourself to reflect on and answer the question, “Who Cares About Ethics?” and to share with others in turn.

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