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The Provenance and Development of a Global Ethic

Author: JAMES A. GAZELL

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The article examines the provenance and development of a global ethic, which over the last half century has received growing public attention as its importance has risen. In the Introduction, the phrase global ethic is defined. The central theme of the study is stated: Movement toward formulations of a global ethic originated a few years after World War II largely because of an already widespread concern for human rights. Further development took place as a consequence of a convergence of four increasingly strong forces: political, economic, environmental, and religious. To understand better the concept of a global ethic, the body of the article first explores five semantic issues regarding its use. Then it examines each of these four forces. The resulting proposals for a global ethic reflect a rising global consciousness and an emerging, broad consensus based on a still abstract, but sometimes concrete, set of precepts derived from the spirit of a golden rule (doing unto others as they would do unto you or mutually abstaining from harmful actions). The formulations embrace a chain of at least seven interlocking precepts: the primacy of human rights, a predilection toward representative government, a humane economic order, the maintenance of the planetary ecosystem, non-violent resolutions of disputes, a futuristic orientation, and the organic development of such an ethic. Continued progress within these dimensions is expected to yield a global ethos and eventually a global society broadly united in its adherence to these values, but still culturally and nationally diverse under this umbrella.

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