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# THE PROVENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF A GLOBAL ETHIC

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## Abstract

*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.*

## Introduction

By a global ethic we do not mean a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion overall all others. By global ethics we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, unconditional standards and personal attitudes. Without such a basic consensus in ethic, every community sooner or later will be threatened by chaos or dictatorship (Kung, 1997, p. 3).

This definition of the phrase *global ethic* comes from the theologian Hans Kung in a document on this subject, written by him and endorsed by the Parliament of the World's Religions at its meeting in Chicago in 1993. Furthermore, the definition is only a starting point for an explanation of this phrase and for an exploration of an increasingly salient topic. The central theme of this article is that movement toward proposals for a global ethic originated a few years after World War II largely because of an already widespread concern for human rights; developed as a result of the convergence of four increasingly strong forces (political, economic, environmental, and religious); and reflects a rising global consciousness and an emerging 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). An examination of this theme encompasses three subdivisions: 1) semantic issues regarding the global-ethic concept, 2) the forces pressing for it, and 3) a conclusion, which enumerates seven areas of a burgeoning consensus over the dimensions of a global ethic.

## Semantic Issues

To understand better the concept of a global ethic, one may first discuss five semantic issues regarding its use: 1) its relation of proximate concepts, 2) a propensity for the singular, 3) its positive and negative denotations, 4) its relation to universality, and 5) its connection to ethnocentrism.

First, one may note that the term greatly overlaps a spate of other proximate concepts such as universal values, inalienable rights, international law, cross-cultural standards, hyper norms, worldwide

principles, minimal criteria for humankind, as well as touchstones or benchmarks for transnational practices, morality, customs, and mores. A *global ethic* serves as an umbrella for these concepts. Furthermore, political scientist Stuart Nagel notes that the work "Global" does not mean that all countries of the world interact simultaneously, but rather that all countries of the world share the policy problems under consideration, or at least potentially share them" (Nagel, 1991, p. xiv). Although he used this definition in the context of explaining the meaning of the newly emerging field of global policy studies, it also applies to global ethics.

Moreover, Nagel subsumed the policy problems under three rubrics: "Trans-boundary problems," which involve people, goods, and pollution crossing international borders; "Common property problems," which encompass the atmosphere, the oceans, and Antarctica as common goods owned by nobody but in need of protection from the threat of destruction that would harm all nations; "Simultaneous problems," which embrace matters like education, health, and welfare where all nations can learn from one another. To Nagel, the concept of global was broader than the adjacent concepts of international and comparative. In his view, the former related to alliances, diplomacy, and conflict resolution; the latter, to the similarities and differences among countries (Nagel, 1991, p. xiii).

Second, in the plethora of writings on this subject, the concept of a global ethic is generally expressed mostly in the singular rather than in the plural. One may assume that the phrases *global ethic* and *global ethics* are interchangeable, but they differ. Theologian Leonard Swidler captured the difference when he observed:

I say ethic in the singular rather than ethics in the plural, because what is needed is not a full blown global ethics in great detail – indeed, such would not even be possible – but a global consensus on the fundamental attitude toward good and evil and the basic and middle principles to put it into action (Swidler, 1997, p. 6).

Swidler is far from the only one whom perceives the concept in this manner. One may cite several prominent illustrations. For instance, Rushworth Kidder, President of the Institute for Global Ethics, used the word *ethics*, although plural in form, as a unitary concept. In 1993, he delivered an address entitled *There's Only*

*Ethics*, in which he viewed the subject from this perspective. He stated that ethics could not validly be separated into public and private (or personal) spheres. Nor, in his opinion, could it be accurately divided into categories such as business ethics, education ethics, journalistic ethics, medical ethics, professional ethics, or work ethics. He said that the general public has abandoned such dichotomies, no longer accepts double standards in behavior, and regards people who act in such a manner as hypocritical (Kidder, 1998, p. 6).

Another who reflects Kidder's viewpoint is Michael Josephson, founder of an eponymous Institute of Ethics, who also implicitly views the achievement of personal ethics as a road to the eventual establishment of a global ethic (Josephson, 1999, pp.1, 5-6). Reflecting Kidder's and Josephson's outlooks, still another ethicist, Aviva Geva, commented: "Ethics is universal and the same for all. There is simply ethics, not national ethics" (Geva, 1999, p. 7). Thus Geva urged American corporations operating abroad to follow the same ethical rules that they obey at home. They should respect the rights of employees, refrain from bribery, follow local culture, and resist opportunities to impose American norms on local peoples (Geva, 1999, p 7).

Furthermore, the World Commission for Culture and Development, founded by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization) takes the singular approach by identifying a global ethic with a core of five principal ideas: human rights and responsibilities, democracy, protection of minorities, peaceful and fair negotiated solutions to conflicts, and equity within and between generations (World Commission, 1999, pp.2-7). For instance, the Commission observed:

Universalism is the fundamental principle of a global ethics. The ethos of universal human rights proclaims that all human beings are born equal and that they enjoy these rights irrespective of class, gender, race, community or generation. This implies that the basic necessities for a decent life must be the foremost concern of humanity. Universalism requires that in our anxiety to protect future generations we must not overlook the pressing life claims of the poor today (World Commission, 1999, p.7).

Moreover, management scholar Frances Burke suggests that consideration of the concept of a global ethic in the singular amounts to a search for the one set of standards analogous to scientific management with its emphasis on the one best way to perform a task and to manage, regardless of time, place, and circumstances (Burke, 1997, p.2).

Third, besides its usage in the singular, the term has positive and negative denotations. For instances, as Burke writes, an ethic is sometimes used as a management tool to deter waste, fraud, abuse, and other forms of corruption. However, it is also invoked as a decision making approach to create honest organizations (Burke, 1997, p. 4). By implication, a global ethic could then be seen either as a correlated set of proscriptions against violations of human rights, damage to the environment, and threats to world peace or as a declaration of principles to build a just world order, paralleling its use as a decision making approach to establish organizations of integrity. Josephson implies his support for a positive view of a global ethic when he invokes what he calls "Six Pillars of Character" (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship) to describe, in absolute language, laudatory human conduct (Josephson, 1998, p. 1). He assumed that a global ethic was a byproduct of countless praiseworthy individual characteristics and actions.

Fourth, the scope of a global ethic is narrower in scope than that of a universal ethic. If it were not, then it would really be just a new name for a concept that dates from Plato and Aristotle 2,400 years ago. However, the concept of a global ethic is redolent of natural law, a set of inalienable rights (for instance, life, liberty, and property) threatened by a mythical state of nature, a Hobbesian lawless realm, from which people sought to escape through the establishment of government for protecting those rights even at the risk of autocracy (Hallowell, 1950, pp. 74-75). To advocates of a global ethic, the world is a vast state of nature jeopardizing certain fundamental rights (such as the right to be free from the fear of nuclear catastrophe, human rights, the environment, a just economic order, and tolerance of cultural diversity), from which people want to flee through the creation of international law and a panoply of worldwide institutions like the United Nations, International Court of Justice, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund to foster those rights. However, unlike Hobbes, who sought refuge in absolute

government at the national level, proponents of a global ethic seek its application on a voluntary, democratic basis throughout the world (Hallowell, 1950, pp.77-78, 83).

Fifth – and finally – the term *global ethic* is a concept whose advocates defend it from the stigma of ethnocentrism (cultural superiority) or moral imperialism (a desire to impose the views of one nation or set of countries on the rest of the world). Its proponents seek a set of freely agreed-upon worldwide standards, which leave room national sovereignty and diversity of cultures. A search for such an ethic sometimes encounters the criticism that it originated in the West (particularly the United States) as an effort to subjugate the East or in the North as a means of dominating the South or as a way for the Christian areas of the world to convert non-Christian peoples. The provenance of the effort, therefore, makes it suspect. However, as ethicist John Hick points out:

It cannot count as a legitimate criticism that the search for a global ethic has originated in the West; for it had to originate somewhere! And the West probably contains more abundantly than elsewhere the practical resources required to launch and promote the process. But it would be a ground for legitimate criticism if the search remained around our Western contribution to it. The challenge is now to find ways of opening the discussion up on an equal basis within all the great traditions of the earth (Hick, 1997, p. 3)

## **Converging Forces**

### **Political**

The first force providing impetus for the establishment of a global ethic was political grounded in a newly found widespread sensitivity toward human rights. The search for a global ethic began mainly as a reaction to World War II, although more broadly it was a general revulsion against two such conflicts in less than a half century, following a comparatively peaceful nineteenth century. The massive casualties, genocide, and widespread destruction caused especially by the latter war, resulted in the establishment of what many hoped would be a permanent worldwide structure for peace and justice: the United Nations (UN) in 1945. One of the new

organization's first preoccupations was human rights whose delineation would serve as a partial framework as a way of reducing the prospect of a third world war, which might be fought with what were then called atomic (now nuclear) weapons, and of eliminating a concomitant, mortal threat to the survival of the human race. In 1946, the UN created the Commission on Human Rights, composed of nearly one-third of its membership (eighteen nations out of fifty-eight). The new commission began to work on a draft of a document that would describe and advocate human rights for all, a worldwide charter. The draft became the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by forty-eight of the UN's members in 1948 (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights: a Magna Carta for all Humanity (Press Kit)*, 1997, pp.1-2).

The Declaration consisted of two subdivisions: a preamble and a set of thirty articles. The former emphasized that people possess an inherent dignity (or worth) simply by virtue of their humanness and therefore fundamental, inalienable rights. The latter enumerates a series of individual, political rights, which read as if they were mostly an elaboration on the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment (particularly, the due process and equal protection clauses) of the United States Constitution. But the Declaration, in addition to its numerous political articles, also contained a few economic ones, foreshadowing broad interest by the 1980s in a highly developed component of an overall global ethic. These provisions espoused rights to humane working conditions and compensation above a subsistence level for a decent standard of living – no more slave labor. The Declaration sought to sketch a vision of what the world should seek to become over decades and inspired the creation of more than sixty human rights documents that together constitute an International Bill of Rights (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1998, pp.1-5).

The Declaration did not attribute its genesis to a golden rule (doing unto others as they would do unto you or mutually eschewing harmful behavior), although its spirit permeates the document. It is hard to imagine how any nation could genuinely endorse its articles without also believing in the substance of such a rule, regardless of what it might be called. However, even though the words *golden rule* are not used, a version of this rule received acknowledgment as a seminal force in a document drafted in 1997 by another subdivision of the UN: The United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural

Organization (UNESCO). The document, called the “Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities,” contains twenty-two articles, the most directly pertinent of which is Article 4, which reads:

All human beings, endowed with reason and conscience, should act towards one another in a spirit of sisterhood/brotherhood. Therefore, there should be applied to all human beings, both individuals and groups, including among other families, communities, races, nations, and religions, the long-standing principles of so many ethical and religious traditions: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization, 1997, p. 3).

Like the 1948 declaration, the UNESCO draft centered mostly on political rights but also recognized the existence of economic rights. It expanded the earlier declaration in two respects that have become common features of recent efforts to formulate a global ethic: a recognition of environmental rights and support for the peaceful resolution of disputes among nations and other institutions (with war as ethically permissible only as a genuinely last resort). Stated another way, the document extended a positive form to a golden rule from individuals (the focus of human rights) to nature (treating it as you would like to treat you) and to nations (treating other countries as they themselves would like to be treated). Moreover, the UNESCO document reflects the outlooks of other UN subdivisions, such as the World Commission on Culture and Development and the Commission on Global Governance, toward the subject of a global ethic (*Commission on Global Governance*, 1999, p. 2).

### **Economic**

A second force pressing for the formation of a global ethic was economic. The evolution of this type of pressure was more complex and thus warrants greater attention. Economic pressures started in the 1960s with the proliferation of multinational corporations. These organizations took the form of parent companies headquartered on one country with wholly owned subsidiaries in other countries. Such corporations did not emerge during this decade. Management expert Peter Drucker traced their source to the 1850s when Georg Siemens established the Deutsch Bank as a multinational financial institution in the parent company located in what was then Prussia (now



Germany) with branches in Russia and the United Kingdom. Others followed, such as McCormick with its harvesters, Remington with its typewriters, Singer with its sewing machines and Ford with its automobiles. Multinationals continued to grow during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until interrupted by two world wars. They resumed their growth after 1945 and surged in the 1950s and 1960s with American companies in the vanguard because of this country's pre-eminent economic strength. However, as other nations recovered from World War II, such institutions began and spread from centers mainly on two continents: Europe (France, Germany, Holland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) and Asia (especially Japan). By the 1970s nearly half of such institutions were headquartered outside the United States (Drucker, 1973, pp. 730-731).

Furthermore, by the 1970s, an international economy had turned into a global economy because of what sociologist M.D. Litonjua called a "microelectronic revolution," the development of new technologies in the areas of nuclear power, missiles supersonic aircraft, television, and computers. Under the international economy, a division of labor had existed between the first and second worlds (Europe and the United States) and the third world. Raw materials were extracted mostly from the latter; largely the former manufactured finished products. An emerging global economy eroded this dichotomy, for the world was rapidly becoming a single market for money, goods, quality workers, and technical knowledge—all of which readily crisscrossed national borders in search of the most lucrative investments and profits on goods and services. Worldwide communications and transportation systems fostered this development. Third world nations began to industrialized; first and second world countries started to diversify from manufacturing to services (Litonjua, 1999, pp. 2-3).

In addition, multinational corporations began to be replaced by transnational organizations. Under the former model, the parent company (the headquarters) designed and manufactured products for its domestic market whereas the offspring (the subsidiaries) produced what the parent had designed and then sold the products in the local markets. There was intra-organizational specialization analogous to the division of labor among nations. Under the latter paradigm, any company with a business could design, manufacture, and distribute products or render services, or handle any combination

of these functions. Subsidiaries of a single headquarters in an international economy became functionally complete and virtually autonomous units in a global economy. Top management, which consisted of the executives of the parent company, became diversified by including executives from the former subsidiaries (Drucker, 1989, pp. 124-125).

The most salient result of these developments was, by the 1980s, the creation of a virtually laissez faire global economy dominated by transnational corporations. Moreover, this outcome was fueled by widespread discontent in the western world with the welfare state in its then extant form because of its steadily rising taxes to fund current or declining levels of benefits. People increasingly objected to paying more for less. As a consequence, the position of governments vis-à-vis the corporate world declined and weakened their individual and collective ability to regulate transnational institutions. In fact, the influence of the corporate world over governments was greater than the converse. National governments in the western world sought to privatize some of their long-standing functions. They devolved others to regional and local governments, deregulated businesses, and promoted free trade. They became more business like in their operations because of the new public management and reinventing government movements. Their counterparts in much of Asia (such as China and Vietnam) moved away from state control of their economies. Third World countries with strong private sectors let them alone by declining to nationalize or regulate them to any significant degree. Market values were regnant on a global scale and mid size business pursued efficiency, productivity, and profitability virtually at will with little fear of individual and collective government interventions to restrain them in the name of a common good (Kettl, 1998, pp. 7, 12-15, 35; Lane, 1997, pp. 1-2; De Montricher, 1998, pp. 108-109; Peters and Wright, 1996, p. 629; Uvegas and Keller, 1998, p. 29; Guess, pp. 535, 552-554, 557, 559).

A global free market and unregulated capitalism generated an abundance of inexpensive, high-quality products distributed easily across national boundaries. But it also spawned various externalities. For instance, gaps between rich and poor nations grew. Extremes of wealth within such countries also worsened. The global environment (faced with the threats of greenhouse effects, deforestation, acid rain, and exhaustions of natural resources among other problems to

current and future generations) was generally ignored. The well-being of stakeholder (those beyond the shareholders, such as communities, consumers, employees and suppliers) met with pervasive indifference. People—children as well as adults—were increasingly exploited to produce more and better items for export at below subsistence wages and benefits. For instance, it is estimated that the worldwide number of child workers has grown to more than 200,000,000 (Jackson, 1997, p. 5). In much of the world, there was not merely cheap labor but virtual slave labor. There was also global downward pressure on levels of compensations. Businesses were readily mobile, able to relocate within and across boundaries almost as they saw fit. Within the global corporate realm, competition was increasingly Darwinian, less restrained by weakened governments and by any business self-discipline or collective sense of fair competition or other ethical concerns (Brown, 1998, pp. 3-4; Litonuja, 1999, pp. 2-8).

However, the 1980s and 1990s also witnessed the birth of counter forces to virtual global *laissez faire*. These responses flowed from some widely known businesses. They thought that, in a highly competitive international economic realm bereft of effective ethical restraints, it was not wrong to emulate the conduct of their rivals to avoid placing themselves as a significant disadvantage (Geva, 1999, pp. 6-7). But, from their own experiences, they came to believe that ethical behavior, even at a voluntary level, could be profitable and that they could augment their profits and market shares by ethical rather than unethical conduct toward stakeholders in their internal and external environs. To them, ethics were instrumental, not ends in themselves; their attraction to it, pragmatic. Stated simply, good ethics were good business. Virtue pays. They sought to give global capitalism a human face (Swidler, 1998, p. 16).

The attitudes of such businesses evolved further from tolerance of a Darwinian milieu and instrumental ethics to a third stage: normative ethics. Some business leaders espoused the view that the world business community not only could but also should improve global social and economic conditions. They believed that this community could be a powerful force for the betterment of humankind because it provides employment and products and thus possessed the ability to bring about such amelioration. They also thought that the world had metaphorically shrunk because of transformations in communications and transportation and the mobility of capital, jobs, products, and technology. The glob was

increasingly interconnected as transactions everywhere influenced other transactions to a growing degree. For instance, hiring children in Bangladesh often meant laying off comparative expensive workers in the United States (Solomon, 1996, p. 3).

At the forefront of the third stage were two corporate organizations: the Caux Roundtable and Canon Inc. The former was established in 1986 by American and French executives and consisted of a group of business leaders from corporate giants in the United States, Japan, and Europe—such as Chase Manhattan, ITT, 3M, Siemens AG, the World Bank (France), Matsushita Electrical Industrial Company, as well as Canon, Inc. The Roundtable is headquartered in Minneapolis, The Hague, and Tokyo. The name *Caux* came from a small eponymous village in Switzerland where such executives met and sought to devise and propose a global ethic for voluntary corporate adherence. With the aid of the Minnesota Center for Corporate Responsibility, they sought to formulate a model for global corporate responsibility that would gradually win general acceptance because of existing examples of successful business applications and because of its inherent, evident soundness.

Meeting annually, Roundtable members sought to formulate sensible methods of measuring global corporate ethical behavior. Their efforts involved furnishing operational meanings for two fundamental concepts: human dignity (a respect for human rights) and *kyosei* (a Japanese belief in living and working together for the common good or mutual prosperity). The two concepts overlap greatly and are perhaps redundant, for it is difficult to imagine how there can be social and organizational synergy without respect for the rights of others. One may also view both concepts as synonyms for human rights or as new names for a venerable concept. Moreover, one may perceive both concepts are de facto epiphanies of a golden rule, although Roundtable participants did not use this phrase in its documents to describe their outlook. Nonetheless, regardless of the degree of overlap, both concepts were to function as philosophical touchstones for assessing global business ethics. Furthermore, espousal of these concepts by the Roundtable contradicts the stereotype of business people as individuals who typically look at the world in hard-nosed, unsentimental, and realistic manner (*Caux Roundtable: Principles for Business*, 1999, pp. 1, 5; Halloran and Bale, 1997, pp. 5-6; Solomon, 1996, p. 3; Swidler, 1998, pp. 25-28; Canon, Inc., 1995, p. 1).

The iterative discussions of the Roundtable members culminated in the drafting of the Caux Principles, which consisted of three sections. In the first, its preamble, the document cited five reasons for its work: the increasingly global nature of business dealings and effects, the inadequacy of laws and market forces as guides for business behavior, a basic respect for the dignity and interests of stakeholders, the responsibility of business for their policies and actions, and the shared values of business and their stakeholders, encompassing shared prosperity (*Caux Roundtable: Principles for Business*, 1999, p. 2).

In the second section, the Caux Principles offered seven general principles for guidance: 1) the responsibilities of business transcended their shareholders and embraced their stakeholders, which included the former. All together, seven stakeholders were mentioned: communities (local, national, regional, as well as global), competitors, consumers, customers, employees, shareholders, and suppliers (*Caux Roundtable: Principles for Business*, 1999, p. 2). One should note that this typology of stakeholders is not the only one. For instance, Swidler lists eight in the following order: stockholders, management, employees, suppliers, customers, community, competitors, and environment (Swidler, 1998, p. 12). The basis for the sense of global corporate obligations expressed in the Caux Principles was that the stakeholders collectively were the sources of wealth through employment and the production of quality goods and services for consumers at reasonable prices. The generation of affluence under such circumstances was what infused business with social value.

The Principles continue. 2) The document observed that businesses should promote the social advancement of the countries in which they operate not only by providing employment opportunities but also by raising the purchasing power of their employees and by contributing to human rights, education, welfare, and vitality of nations where they function. 3) It stated that business conduct should go beyond what is merely legal in order to foster trust through candor, truthfulness, promise keeping, and openness (with the caveat that it accepted the legitimacy of trade secrets). 4) It advised respect for international and national rules to promote a level economic competitive playing field and a higher degree of free and equal trade. 5) It extended the trade aspect of the fourth principle to urge business support for multilateral trade agreements like the World Trade Organization (WTO) (replacing the General Agreement on Trade and

Tariffs [GATT]), which seeks to reduce tariffs and unilateral, discriminatory commercial practices among nations. 6) it urged conservation of natural resources and, at a minimum, protection of the environment and its improvement, where possible. 7) It condemned corruption, particularly bribery and money laundering, as well as the arms trade, which entails business transactions with terrorists, drug traffickers, and organized crime. In the third-and last-section, it discussed a set of stakeholder principles and listed the stakeholders on what appeared a ranking (and widening circle) of obligational rubrics: customers, employees, owners/investors, suppliers, competitors, and communities (*Caux Roundtable: Principles for Business*, 1999, pp. 2-5).

In 1988, two years after the founding of the Caux Roundtable, one of its participant -- Ryuzaburo Kaku, the Chairman of Canon, Inc., -- expanded upon its work. He spelled out the concept of *kyosei* for two purposes: first, to initiate a process of helping to furnish his organization (which a year earlier had celebrated its fiftieth anniversary) with a corporate philosophy that expressed its collective vision and would guide its future development, particularly in the twenty-first century, as a globally responsible business. He expressed a hope that it would become a paradigm for individual, corporate, and national emulation with adaptations. He wrote that businesses evolve through five phases of widening responsibilities (Canon, Inc., 1995). In the first, corporations are "purely capitalistic," as Marx had envisioned, because their owners and managers share profits, help expand national economies, but care little about their employees. In the second phase, businesses share profits with their workers but are apathetic toward local communities and environmental protections. In the third, businesses recognize the existence and worth of stakeholders, of which he enumerated six: customers, staff, shareholders, suppliers, competitors, and local communities. Kaku listed these components in what appears to be a declining order of corporate responsibility.

In the fourth phase, businesses assume global social responsibilities and thus become genuinely global corporations, for it saw its obligations as extending beyond its stakeholders and national boundaries. To him, these obligations fell within three categories: First, companies in this phase seek to reduce trade deficits and surpluses among developed nations since such differences affect the international balance of payments, a source of trade frictions.

However, he did not explain how such companies might fulfill this responsibility. Second, businesses work to narrow the gap between wealthy (or industrial) and poor (or agrarian) countries by building production plants in the latter, by shifting technology to industrializing nations, by setting up branches in communities around the world, and by reinvesting profits into the nations in which those gains had been made. In his view, these steps would increase local employment and foster balance in trade and technological progress in such nations. Third, and most important to Kaku, companies in this phase recognize that they have an intergenerational global environment responsibility -- this is, an obligation to help make the ecology of the earth better than they found it. He saw an imbalance between the present and the future regarding a spectrum of environment issues, especially in the areas of human population and energy resources.

In the fifth phase, corporations with global outlooks similar to Canon's would seek to increase their ranks. Kaku suggested one way: the formation of an informal consortium that practiced *kyosei* in fact (regardless of the names given to individual corporation philosophies); shared global social responsibilities; and pursued the alleviation (if not the solution of global problems, such as nationalistic, ethnic, and religious conflicts, overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, and environmental deterioration. Together, they would assume de facto leadership in helping to bring about a New World order, working with nations individually and collectively where possible but if necessary, independently of them. They would also implicitly assume an obligation to pressure, through legitimate methods, indifferent or recalcitrant nations to move toward an approximation of such an order. It would function in a state of harmony, happiness, human rights, freedom, democracy, a reduction of developmental imbalances, mutually profitable (and hence moral) trade, and care for the environment. People would live and work together for the common good (Canon, Inc., 1995).

One may readily disparage this ideal as a promise of an eventual paradise on earth, a form of corporate eschatology, or end of history; but the movement toward it has begun fitfully, however distant its approximation remains. One may also deride the proposals of the Caux Roundtable and Canon as efforts of some transnational corporations to freeze their advantageous positions by devising ethics to restrict the means that their competitors might use to catch up

with them. In addition, one may suspect that these companies, which may have used de facto unethical policies and practices to help them achieve their lofty current global positions, had reached a point where they could afford the luxury of a global conscience (or sense of ethical self-restraint). However, one may also postulate that trailing competitors might favor a global ethic as a means of putting some limits on what these giants can do to maintain their position.

### **Environmental**

A third force pressing for the development of a global ethic was environmental. Those who viewed the subject from this perspective also valued political (or human) rights and the economic well being of the world's peoples. But such proponents accorded primary emphasis to an ecological outlook because they considered it as a prerequisite for the fulfillment of political and economic imperatives. After all, what good are human rights and material necessities if the planet is dying? This concern may have stemmed partly from enlightened corporate self-interest. From an instrumental perspective, good environment was also good business. A poor environment threatened profit margins in the long run as natural-resource depletion and atmospheric, water, and land pollution reduced markets for corporate products and services. Furthermore, attention to this component of a global ethic became widespread in the 1970s--a decade later than interest in the economic dimension. A landmark event took place in 1972 with the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, sponsored by the United Nations. Until that year, the UN's agenda for world security had stressed three areas: 1) peace, 2) human rights, and 3) equitable socioeconomic development. As a result of this conference, environment security became a fourth salient concern of the UN. Countries, aided by non-government organizations, sought to issue declarations and charters and make treaties that balanced development with conservation (Earth Charter Campaign. *Historical Overview*, 1999, p. 1).

The works of the Caux Roundtable and Canon toward a global ethic are simply illustrations of a growing corporate responsibility to preserve the worldwide environment in addition to political and economic priorities. The evolution of a global ethic from an environmental perspective has flowed along two tributaries, which empty into a widening and deepening river. The first is the work of non-corporate international organizations (like the United Nations).



The second involves a collaboration of corporations and environmental groups. In the center of the first tributary has been the Earth Charter Campaign (ECC), which began in 1987. It has sought to build on the efforts of numerous countries and non-government organizations as well as the World Charter for Nature, adopted by the General Assembly of the UN five years earlier. However, the ECC has not been marked by the degree of success envisioned by its supporters. In 1992, for instance, the Earth Summit convened in Rio de Janeiro under the aegis of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and led to the issuance of the Rio Declaration, which contained twenty-seven principles that attempted to expand upon the work in Stockholm two decades before. However, to many, the Rio Declaration represented a step backward because it gave priority to economic growth over ecological protection. The latter was to take place within the context of the former (Earth Charter Campaign. *Historical Overview*, 1999, p. 2).

In 1994, efforts resumed to devise a more environmentally favorable Earth Charter. Three years later, a commission was named to oversee the project, and a Benchmark Draft was issued. In 1998 a final document on the subject was promulgated. It proposed a voluntary global partnership among peoples and nations to protect and, where necessary, restore the planet's biosphere, a prerequisite for all life. To ECC supporters, the preservation of the biosphere was paramount. It was a priority that transcended human rights and economic well-being and thus both approaches to the formation of a global ethic. The ECC viewed human life as simply one part (albeit the most important component) of nature. The document cited what it regarded as nine overlapping threats: exhaustion of natural resources, excessive consumption, growing population pressures, a continuation of disparities in wealth among and within nations, poverty, pollution, ignorance, injustice, and armed conflicts (Earth Charter Campaign. *Historical Overview*, 1999, pp. 1-2).

Furthermore, the Charter listed six areas that any global ethic should encompass: respect for nature, the earth, and the "community of life"; an intergenerational right to an environment that fosters their health, welfare, and dignity (intergenerational equity); development within ecological limits (for instance, the carrying capacity of the planet); an equitable international economic system for the sharing of benefits and costs of national resource development among rich and poor countries; national sovereignty with regard to environmental

protection and development as long as other countries are not harmed; and collective and individual responsibility among nations to prevent or reduce pollution, especially radioactive, toxic, and any other hazardous wastes that cannot be recycled or reused. The Earth Charter embraced a form of a golden rule when it declared: "States shall take appropriate measures to prevent transboundary harm. Do not do to others what you would not do to your own citizens" (Earth Charter Campaign. *Summary of Principles*, 1999, p. 5).

In the center of a second environmental tributary moving toward the creation of a global ethic have been organizations involving a synergy of businesses and environmental organizations. The most notable illustration is the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), established in 1989. It brought together some well-known institutional investors, some important American environmental groups, and some religious organizations for an ongoing dialogue about methods of protecting the biosphere and of providing those who cared about both ecological stewardship and profits with a way to make more informed investment decisions. Among the participating corporations were the Sun Company (an oil refiner and, in 1993, the first business to join); Arizona Public Service; Bank of America; Bethlehem Steel; Catholic Health Care West; H. B. Fuller (an adhesives manufacturer); General Motors; and the ITT (International Telephone and Telegraph) Industries. Added to these corporations were institutions representing in excess of 150-billion-dollars in capital investments, such as the California Public Employees Retirement System and the New York City Employees Retirement System. Among the involved environmental organizations were Friends of the Earth, the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Sierra Club. Among the participating religious groups were more than two hundred Catholic orders and protestant denominations, which combined to form the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (*About CERES*, 1999, pp. 1-2; Swidler, 1999, pp. 22-23).

Byproducts of this collaboration were the formation and voluntary adoption of the CERES Principles, a global ethic rooted in the primacy of the worldwide environment over human rights and economic goals. Advocates of these principles held that there is no insurmountable conflict among these aims (even though the preservation of the global environment comes first) and that all such

goals can be reconciled. Moreover, they implicitly favored a form of a golden rule, although this term is not used in the CERES Principles. They sought to treat nature, as they wanted nature to treat them: If people respect the equilibriums (or balances) in nature, there would probably be no global natural catastrophes. They believed that global environmental ethics is good business in the short term and in the long run.

The advocates of the Principles wanted to protect the biosphere in a variety of ways--by refusing to release pollutants into the air, land, and water and by protecting all habitats, open spaces, wilderness, and biodiversity affected by business operations. They pledged to give priority to the use of renewable resources like water, soil, and forests in making their products over the use of nonrenewable resources like coal, gas, and oil. Where use of the latter was unavoidable, they would conserve them through careful planning and efficient use. They promised to reduce waste in their operations through prevention and recycling. They sought to conserve energy and improve its efficiency in their production. They asserted their desire to protect the environment, health, and safety of two categories of stakeholders: their employees and the communities in which the subscribing businesses operated. They pledged to make only those products that protected these stakeholders. They showed further concern for such stakeholders by promising to restore their environment, health, and safety if production wrought such harms. They stated their obligation to inform the public of any dangers emanating from their operations and to forego reprisals against whistleblowers. They announced their determination to carry out these principles by holding their boards of directors and chief executive officers responsible for such implementation. Furthermore, they pledged to consider proven environmental commitment as a factor in selecting such boards and, presumably, their CEO's. Finally, they committed their businesses to conducting annual audits measuring their progress in effecting such principles and to making the results public. They saw their businesses as obligated to do more environmentally than is legally required. They assumed that ethics transcends law and that what is legal is not necessarily ethical (*CERES Principles*, 1999, pp. 1-3).

## **Religious**

The fourth--and most recent--force behind the impetus for a global ethic has been religious. This force complemented political, economic, and environmental pressures and represented still another stream moving toward the same broad goal. The main difference was one of emphasis. Proponents of a religious outlook believed that the pursuit of human rights, decent living standards, and the conservation of nature was an imperative because the planet was divinely created and therefore divinely owned, because people are merely stewards of this creation, and because these pursuits are divinely mandated in the sacred scriptures of many of the world's faiths.

The religious impetus dates from the beginning of the 1990s (Swidler et al., 1990; Kung, 1991) and is reflected largely in three sources: the writings of Hans Kung, those of Leonard Swidler, and an Interfaith Declaration (a Code of Ethics on International Business for Christians, Muslims, and Jews). Kung's work culminated in drafting a document entitled *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* that was adopted in 1993 in Chicago by the Parliament of the World's Religions. This gathering involved almost two hundred delegates with 6,500 people in attendance. The approval of this document was the main achievement of this parliament, which had met to commemorate the centenary of an eponymous body. The proximate causes for this effort were what the Parliament regarded as three interrelated crises that added up to a fundamental world crisis. One was global politics whose principal problem lay in conflicts that vitiated the prospect of lasting peace among nations. A second was the global economy with its inequities among and within countries, which produced or aggravated poverty, hunger, unemployment, and the destruction of families. A third was global ecology, which faced the growing threat of collapse because of widespread disregard (Kung, 1993, pp. 1-2)

Kung and Swidler observed that the formulation of a global ethic was not so daunting a task as one might think because the world's numerous religions had already supplied an ethic, which could be applied to current and future crises and which could serve as the basis for a humane and prosperous global order. That ethic was a golden rule, which, in its positive form, meant treating others as one wants to be treated or, in its negative variant, refraining from treating others as one would not want to be treated. These theologians envisioned a global ethic as a specific set of values, standards, and attitudes derived from this rule by common consent and voluntarily embraced

by individuals, organizations, and nations because of its intrinsic rightness and practical worth. One may perceive a golden rule as an old global ethic and see proposals for a new global ethic as merely applications of an ancient rule to current and future situations. Although stated in different ways, this rule pervaded various religions and was first recorded 2,600 years ago in Zoroastrianism. Since that time, the precept has been expressed in positive or negative forms in Confucianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha'ism among other faiths. It was a bond among religions that transcended their doctrinal differences—a reflection of their convergence at a fundamental level and ecumenical evidence that they held more in common than they may have realized. It was also a nexus to those whose ethics were secularly based (Swidler, 1999, pp. 8-9).

One may ask why, in view of the age and pervasiveness of this rule, the world has not been in better shape over the millennia. One reply is that, without this rule, the planet would be in worse condition; that it needed to be followed more often; and that proactivity in this regard by religions (or a higher degree of such activity) could have brought about greater adherence to it and its derivative precepts. The Parliament strongly favored such an answer. Its declaration asserted that a golden rule supplies a moral foundation for the betterment of individuals and of humankind, regardless of whether they had a religious or secular orientation. Furthermore, the Declaration regarded a new global order as impossible without the application of such a rule through a new global ethic. The document also noted that opportunity for the effectuation of this rule has never been better in the aftermath of two world wars and the collapse of fascism, Nazism, communism, colonialism; as well as the end of the cold war. In addition, the Declaration also asserted that humanity was in a better cultural, economic, and spiritual position to move toward a new global order.

The *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* made what it called a “fundamental demand” and four “irrevocable directives” (Kung, 1993, pp. 1-15). The “demand” was that every person is treated humanely—a proposition redolent of the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which had afforded priority to political matters over economic and environmental concerns. The “demand” rested on an assumption that everyone, by virtue of being human (that is, by possessing reason and conscience), has an inalienable dignity, which

merits respect and protection and which can achieve its full realization through recognition of freedom, equality, and interdependence. This assumption was expressed in secular terms rather than in religious language, perhaps because the Parliament members wanted to adopt a document with the broadest possible appeal. Its first “directive” (the word itself sounds like an order instead of a recommendation) involved their commitment to the achievement of a non-violent culture and a respect for life, which is the obverse of the ancient injunction against killing. This “directive” stemmed from the postulate that all humans have a right to life, which to the Parliament had a meaning far broader than a prohibition against abortions. Such a right extended to animals and plants and to the earth and cosmos as if they, too, were human. Hence the Declaration sought to conserve air, soil, and water and to promote living in harmony with nature. This injunction also viewed permutations of conflict among individuals, peoples, and nations as inevitable but was emphatic about resolving them without war.

A second “directive” entailed a commitment of Parliament members to the creation of worldwide cultural solidarity and a just economic order. It cited the old prohibition against stealing or, in positive form, honesty and fair dealings with others as the basis for this position. Moreover, on a pragmatic plane, it warned that global justice was prerequisite to global peace. And such justice necessitated a balancing of numerous interests peacefully, although the document conceded an obligation to violent resistance as a last resort “wherever might oppresses right . . .” (Kung, 1993, p. 10). Also underlying this provision was the idea that nations and individuals bear a degree of responsibility for the well-being of others—that people are one another’s keepers to some extent. A third “directive” committed the signers of the Declaration to fostering tolerant cultures and truthful lives and institutions. They attributed this position to the ancient condemnation of lying or, expressed positively, an obligation to speak and act truthfully. This “directive” posited that, because there can be no global peace without global justice, there can also be no global justice in the absence of truth and humanness. Although this standard applied to everyone, it applied especially to six groups: artists, mass media, politicians, religious representatives, scientists, and writers. The fourth “directive” pledged the signers to bringing about a culture of equal rights, respect, and partnership across gender. In the view of the Parliament, this imperative derived from a centuries-old injunction against sexual immorality (such as

adultery) or, in positive form, a commitment to respect and live one another. It condemned all forms of sexual exploitation of adults and children as well as all manifestations of patriarchal domination. It assumed that matriarchal domination did not exist or was an oxymoron.

The Declaration signers perceived their prime function as one of global consciousness-raising and transformation on a worldwide scale with regard to ecological, economic, and political matters (Kung, 1993, pp. 7, 13-14). They saw their main task as converting hearts and minds and as promoting spiritual renewal—first changing the inner lives of people, which cumulatively would change the world from the inside out. The consciousness would be grassroots or organic rather than top down.

A similar orientation is evident in two other notable formulations of a global ethic from a religious perspective: a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic, promulgated in 1998, and an *Interfaith Declaration (A Code of Ethics on International Business for Christians, Muslims, and Jews)*, formulated in 1993. The former was drafted by Leonard Swidler, who also directs the Center for Global Ethics at Temple University. That Swidler's draft echoes most of Kung's Parliament Declaration is not surprising since they are long-time colleagues and ecumenists. A Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic began by noting that the world's religious traditions provide support for universal human rights, a duty for seek justice and peace, and concern for the maintenance of the planet. The document also ascribed its provenance to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. Swidler's Declaration further asserted that the values of democracy, equality, freedom, human rights, interdependence, and justice were increasingly being accepted and espoused. Moreover, it listed five presuppositions for the establishment of a global ethic: a need to respect human dignity, a moral obligation of all to do good and avoid evil, a duty to foster reason and conscience, a right of organizations benefiting people and the world to flourish, and a recognition that, since human beings are part of nature, ethical concerns extend beyond people to encompass the rest of the planet and universe (Swidler, 1999, pp. 1-2). The last precondition reflected an orientation that Swidler's document called "not just anthropo-centric, but osmo-anthropo-centric" (Swidler, 1999, p. 2).

Swidler's draft also envisioned a golden rule as fundamental to a construction of a global ethic. From this rule, the document also purported to derive eight "basic principles" and ten "middle principles" to help effectuate the fundamental injunction. The "basic principles" embraced: individual freedom conditioned on not violating the rights of others, respect for human dignity, respect for nature, a belief that



each person has something of value to give, a love for others, an obligation to help others even though one is not responsible for their well-being, religious liberty, and gender equality. The “middle principles,” which are as abstract as the basic ones and which mostly overlap or reiterate them, were explicitly borrowed from the 1948 UN document. They included equal protection of the law, freedom of conscience and religion, a right to free speech, democracy, gender equality, a right to individual and community property, rights to meaningful work and leisure, a duty toward children and their education, peace with justice, and respect for the ecosphere (Swidler, 1999, pp. 2-5).

Furthermore, the Interfaith Declaration listed four “principles” as bases for all human interactions: justice (fair dealings); mutual respect for all those with whom businesses come in contact, especially its employees; stewardship of the world; and honesty (truthfulness and reliability) (*Interfaith Declaration*, 1999, p. 4). Moreover, the Declaration viewed the subject of a global ethic from three vantage points: the morality of the economic system in which businesses operate, the policies and strategies of businesses, and the conduct of their employees in their organizational capacities (*Interfaith Declaration*, 1999, pp. 3-4). It proposed guidelines for businesses within each of these spheres because businesses function within economic, political, and social systems. From the first vantage point, businesses needed to recognize that they exist primarily to meet the needs of a social order through the efficient production and distribution of goods and services. Businesses perform most efficiently when they operate in a fair, competitive market regulated by the state. Sometimes they can enhance their efficiency through partnerships with the state. Profit making is socially beneficial because it results in a growth of businesses and employment opportunities as well as increased tax revenues. The state has to be strong enough to curb abuses of the market. Employees have an intrinsic dignity, which precludes their being seen as simply Marxist factors of production. Furthermore, businesses have an obligation to use their powers (finances, technology, land, and natural renewable resources) efficiently because all are important and most are scarce. They also have a responsibility to preserve the environment for future generations and to improve the well being of the latter (*Interfaith Declaration*, 1999, p. 5).

From the second vantage point, businesses are obligated to follow the laws of the nations where they operate. If the laws vary, they need to be bound everywhere by the highest standard among such nations. Consequently, in some countries, they would be functioning within a restraint beyond what is legally required. Moreover, businesses have obligations (honesty, fairness, reliability in the performance of commitments, and continuing relationships) to a set of stakeholders: employees, shareholders, lenders, customers, suppliers, communities, local governments, and national governments. In addition, they must consider the consequences of their decisions, especially with regard to plant closings, the selection of new sites, the expansion of existing ones, and the impact on smaller businesses. They also need to eschew bribery, extortion, or other forms of corruption in their operations. But they must recognize that shareholders are the ones who accept the risks of business ownership and are entitled to have their interests protected by elected boards of directors (*Interfaith Declaration*, 1999, pp. 5-6).

Finally, from the third vantage point, businesses undertake to make only those decisions that are lawful and pursuant to their internal policies and to carry them out in a collaborative rather than unilateral manner. They pledged to eschew all abuses of power and user of insider information for personal gain or the benefit of relatives and friends. They promised to inform their superiors of all conflicts of interest and of the effects of company plans on subordinates in order to take the latter's interests fully into account. They advocated the fair treatment of employees, accessibility to them, and a process for handling grievances (*Interfaith Declaration*, 1999, pp. 6). As a result, businesses under an Interfaith Declaration simply followed another course--a religious-economic route rather than a primarily economic way--toward becoming what Canon's chief executive officer, Ryuzaburu Kaku, had advocated: fourth stage businesses (globally responsible companies) practicing *kyosei*. The Declaration further encouraged them to be proactive not only individually but also collectively on a global scale. This step mirrored Kaku's fifth stage whereby such companies work as a loose coalition (or network) to create a better world (Swidler, 1998, pp. 24-25).

## **Conclusion**

This article has described the formation of a global ethic as a development that began shortly after World War II and that resulted over the following half century from a confluence of four main streams (political, economic, environmental, and religious) into a deepening and broadening river. Even though the various formulations of a global ethic have differed in their emphasis of priorities, they have found a consensus through an intercultural belief in a golden rule. This consensus seeks to increase the likelihood for the survival of life on earth in all its forms. It sees a global ethic as a reflection of rising global consciousness toward the prospects for global survival. It has proceeded, concurrently but fitfully, to form an interlocking chain along seven overlapping dimensions.

These are: 1) the paramount position of human rights, broadly defined, from normative and instrumental perspectives; 2) a political order based on representative or democratic government, again broadly conceived, as the best way of establishing, preserving, and expanding such rights; 3) a humane economic system founded on government-regulated capitalism (or any mixed systems along a capitalist-socialist continuum) as the optimal means of enabling countries to achieve high enough living standards that make human rights more meaningful; 4) a respect for the environment as a system that makes possible a just world at the human, political, and economic levels; 5) a proclivity toward non-violent resolutions of disputes, which becomes more likely as individuals and nations become more conscious within the first four categories as a prerequisite for advancing within them; 6) an orientation toward the future as opposed to satisfaction with the present or nostalgia for an idealized past; and 7) a belief in the possibility of a global ethic achieved over time as a result of an organic, voluntary, grassroots efforts within and across national boundaries and accelerated through the increasing ease of communication.

Progress along these dimensions will eventually -- no one forecasts when--culminate in a global ethos and a global society broadly united its adherence to these values but still greatly diverse in cultural and national terms within this overarching umbrella but without a world government (Halloran and Bale, 1997, pp. 1, 3-4). Perhaps the very idea of a global ethic is intrinsically destined to function mostly at a high level of abstraction. But there have been some specific areas of agreement as this article intermittently suggests. Further such agreement may someday remove from it the

aura of being a “pie-in-the-sky” ideal, incapable of approximation, and thus lead, in Hans Kung’s words, to a “new global order” that is “socially-beneficial and pluralist, partner-sharing and peace-fostering, nature-friendly and ecumenical . . .” (Kung, 1997, p. 8).

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