From the early 1990s on, terms similar to “global ethics” have been used to denote renewed attempts to discover or construct what binds humans together across cultural and religious differences (Küng’s Declaration toward a Global Ethic, Unesco’s Universal Ethics and the Global Ethics Project). These attempts, representing global ethics as the search to move beyond relativism towards a renewed conception of ethics for late-modern society, have developed within a wide range of academic (e.g. interreligious and intercultural studies) and non-academic (e.g. within the UN) disciplines. Besides these general proposals, new, concrete issues with global scope have become prominent and have been analysed from a multi-disciplinary perspective, ending up in new academic disciplines, such as development ethics and global justice studies.

The first milestone in the new developing field of global ethics was Nigel Dower’s “World Ethics” from 1998, in which he emphasized the importance of global “cosmopolitan” responsibilities to be realized through global institutions. In the same year, Christien van den Anker suggested “global ethics” as the name for a British International Studies Association Working Group in an attempt to capture the developing field of research on ethical aspects of globalization.

Today, what is really new for global ethics is that the search to move beyond relativism and the ethical study of concrete issues of globalization are starting to merge. Already in 1996, the Center for Ethics and Value Inquiry (CEVI), based at Ghent University (Belgium), was launched in order to study the “moral perplexity of our period” in an all-encompassing way, combining both theoretical and practical outlooks and working within a dynamic, multi-disciplinary environment. This moral perplexity concerns what Anthony Giddens has called a “runaway world” meaning a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do. We stand perplexed with regard to these transformations simply because humans have never experienced them before. In other words, the problems are new ones. Of course, human interdependence at a global level sustaining human practice within local communities is hardly a recent phenomenon. International trade and migration is at least as old as written history and the capitalistic world-system has since the sixteenth century produced a global reality of world-making. But, starting at the end of the 1960s and rapidly accelerating into the twenty-first century, technological, economical, political and other forces have crafted a world in which this interdependence has reached an unprecedented level and has raised new and pressing moral and ethical issues, such as: the one-sidedness of “economic globalization,” the generalized environmental crisis, worldwide social and cultural disintegration, the rise of racism and xenophobia, the sclerosis of lifestyles and life forms, the disruption of social protection, the increase of
migration, the violation of public spaces, the growth of media dictated mass consumption couples with earth-devastating waste patterns, … global ethics, as a specific discipline, addresses these global worries and hence can be called ethics of globalization.

But the moral perplexity we experience is not just resulting from new issues or new dilemmatic cases. The perplexity is more profound. It is not just that we do not know the answer yet. It is also that we do not seem to know how to answer. The “moral perplexity of our period”—as we coined it at CEVI—cannot be resolved by merely developing new answers. It also requires a new way of answering, so it seems. Moral perplexity is sometimes called “bewilderment” (Morris Ginzburg), “indeterminacy” (Abraham Edel) or even “crisis” (Emmanuel Levinas). The specificity of the “moral perplexity of our period” lies with the growing sense of discontent and unease with post-industrial society, a scientistic ideology and a strict utilitarian obsession of narrow material progress, all of these unaccompanied by a spiritual evolution and a moral development of humankind. The social and political evolutions during the current era of globalization are giving rise to a moral disarray and cynicism, as can be heard in phrases and laments like “the end of modernity,” “against ethics,” “the closing down of humanism,” “expertise-oriented administration of human existence,” “moral aestheticism and relativism” and so on. At Ghent University, CEVI aims at establishing a thoughtful defence against this widespread “unhappy moral conscience.” CEVI contributes to ethical reasoning that is able to tackle the moral perplexity of our period, through investigations into the value formulation of alternative visions of a citizen-based and nature-respecting consciousness. Global ethics therefore must also involve the critical study of ethics and morality under the conditions of globalization. Ethical reasoning about issues of globalization has now become an issue of globalization itself. Global ethics is not only ethics of globalization, but also ethics under globalization, or as Nigel Dower calls it: globalization of ethics. What is new to global ethics is not just the global worries, but also the fact that we are worrying globally.

It should be clear that at CEVI, we favor an idea of ethical inquiry based on the consciousness of the limits of any general foundationalist philosophy, refusing however the delusions of a fatalist and more than often self-defeating relativistic moral philosophy. In this, we champion the relative autonomy of moral thinking along the lines of what Marcus Singer, who once said that the great difficulty in morals is not really a matter of theory but lies in the resolution of concrete cases. The problems are often so complex and difficult, and no one is omniscient. Yet this is no reason for despair or for scepticism. In the reasonable disagreements of reasonable people we may find, so far as we are reasonable, both hope and enlightenment.

It was with this outlook that CEVI staged a number of events in 2006. We organized a number of seminars and public lectures on world-systems, global justice and global ethics. But we also organized the first international global ethics conference in April 2006. The conference was set up in a conventional way: a number of keynote lectures and a bunch of parallel paper sessions. A selection of papers from these sessions has been published as a special issue of
the *Journal of Global Ethics* (Vol. 3, No. 2). This book brings the keynotes and contributions to other CEVI seminars and organizes them to show what that first international global ethics conference was all about. Surely, the issues of cosmopolitanism, global justice, development ethics and the various fields of practical ethics in relation to globalization had already established a tradition as conference themes and research networks. But the conference in Ghent was the first attempt to bundle academic reflection on the ethics of globalization. The “bundling” itself, was an exercise in that other dimension of global ethics, namely ethics under globalization. Participants in the conference, at which papers on many topics and a variety of approaches were presented, were enthusiastic about the “bundling” of these several approaches. The pressing ethical issues of globalization had not only led to a growth of academic work on these issues but also to an increasing isolation of the various approaches from one another. But globalization and its ethical issues are multilayered and comprise many facets of human life and sense-making. Hence, it was felt very strongly at the conference that a commitment to resolve these ethical issues must go together with the care not to overspecialize in just one approach.

We decided to act upon that strong feeling and create a platform where the two research dimensions of global ethics could intersect: ethics of and under globalization. And so, at that conference in Ghent and reflected here in this volume, IGEA started—the International Global Ethics Association. IGEA connects today a number of researchers and academic centres spread across the globe (www.igea.ugent.be) and aims at biannual conferences (the second one—2008—being held in Melbourne, hosted by the Faculty of Arts of the Deakin University), joint research projects and other academic exchanges.

This book documents the start of IGEA. The contributing authors in this book have started IGEA simply by linking their approaches, there, in Ghent. These approaches stem from various backgrounds: political economy, social sciences, anthropology, moral philosophy and political philosophy (both analytical and continental). It is also in Ghent that the three questions dividing this book into three parts popped up:

1) What is the task of global ethics?
2) Is global ethics possible?
3) How can we “do” global ethics?

The first part, “The Task of Global Ethics” comprises four agendas for the field of global ethics. In the opening chapter of this book, *Carol C. Gould* puts aside a number of misconceptions with regard to global ethics and then continues with presenting three faces of global ethics. The first face is the analysis of the ethical issues that arise with globalization and of the transformations in applied ethics necessitated by globalization. The two most paramount ethical issues in our era of globalization concern the social responsibilities of transnational corporations and the issue of defining global ecological responsibilities. But the current context in which these issues arise also has implications for the principles of applied ethics themselves. One crucial implication, Gould argues, is that the
traditional view that the more remote consequences of action can be given less weight in our considerations, no longer makes sense in regard to globalization and its consequences. The second face of global ethics relates to cross-cultural approaches to key ethical issues. This face concerns universalism and culture, as well as historicity in our conceptions of human rights. Gould argues for a non-relativist point of view based on a conception of human freedom as self-transformation that we can phrase both in individual terms as well as in more collective contexts. In what Gould describes as the third face of global ethics, the notion of “cosmopolitical democracy” is put forward connecting ethics and politics. Gould does not envision a world government. Rather, she emphasizes democratic decision-making in cross-border and transnational communities and associations, such as the EU. The unifying themes of these three faces of global ethics, of what that is and must be, are the recognition of human rights and the norm of solidarity.

In his contribution, Gérald Berthoud recalls what in United Nations declarations and reports the globalization discourse stands for: a new information society built on shared knowledge, global solidarity, and a better mutual understanding. But he raises the question whether globalization and its resulting worldwide society is something new. He reminds us that globalization started in the fifteenth century when due to Western-European hegemony the world was radically divided in two institutionalized parts: world market and the so-called global community. Heterogeneity and inequality were the mark of this radical division. From then onwards another division captured the minds of the people who were reflecting on it. From the early days of globalization we find side-by-side an economist oriented and a moralist devised discourse on the phenomenon. Berthoud, with the interventions of UN and “civil society” organizations in mind, cautions for the absolute valorization of the market and “its supposedly liberating impact.” He refers to the social scientist Marcel Mauss, the linguist Emile Benveniste, and the moral philosopher Paul Ricoeur for proper arguments in favor of the embedded character of intersubjective relationships in a broader framework of societal and cultural institutions. Human relationships, contrary to the market discourse, cannot be “envisaged without an element of gratuitity and a certain amount of generosity,” he writes. Only in this way we can do justice to the significance of men’s practices which are marked by the pronouns: “I,” “you,” and “she/he,” acknowledging that within institutional settings the self and the others are interdependent.

The chapter by Christien van den Anker focuses on approaches to ethics in an era of globalization and how these interrelate. This effort is an attempt to move global ethics as a field beyond distinctive and apparently incompatible approaches. Her attempt to bridge the gaps in global ethics starts with the perceived stand-off between universal and contextual theories on global justice and global citizenship. While universalists argue that these subjects are best seen from the perspective of common humanity, contextualists argue that it is the (cultural) difference between people(s) that matters at least as much as what they have in common. The second “gap” is between theory and practice. Christien van den Anker suggests that global ethics consists of adopting a methodology that takes us beyond the
rigorous division between these respective areas of work and points to a possible balance between their core concerns.

“Has our world gone mad?,” asks Rebecca Todd Peters in her contribution on justice and the ethical landscape of globalization. She does so after recalling how private spending on personal consumption in the Western part of the world reveals a shocking picture of the priorities and values. This she confronts with the lacking though necessary expenditures for water, basic education and sanitation of the world population. Conversations about global ethics “must pay attention to the lived behaviors and material realities of real people.” It is not by neglecting or ignoring the basic facts concerning the differences in consumption patterns throughout the world that the morality of globalization will get substance. The author agrees with Berthoud in stating that globalization is “not the proper name of a new global era we are entering.” It refers to an acceleration of what was already an economic and social reality long before. Today one cannot avoid reflecting on the “epochal transformation necessary to facilitate human and planetary flourishing for the whole world.” Recalling her analysis, In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization (2004), Rebecca Todd Peters discovers four distinct globalization theories, each of which having a proper moral vision: neoliberalism, developmentalism, earthism, and post-colonialism. Using the word “ideology” for “a set of beliefs and assumptions about how the world works,” she examines each of the theories briefly in order to consider their moral visions on individual existence, justice, and global solidarity. Acknowledging that the present stage of globalization has the potential to transform our world for the better, it is required to interrogate these moral visions closely and critically. Different theories of globalization are to be compared and evaluated from a moral point of view, for which it is obligatory to establish a set of reasonable standards making the adjudication between the competing theories, visions, claims, and values possible. Rebecca Todd Peters puts her hope on the resources of many faith traditions to serve a prophetic role in world society “by challenging the status quo” and “by working toward social justice.”

The second part of this book features four chapters arguing that global ethics is indeed possible. Each of the chapters argues this by doing particular mine-sweeping. M.S. Ronald Commers presents global ethics as a “synversalist” approach to ethics. In our era of globalization it becomes possible and desirable to debunk notions of “the end of ethics” and the unbridgeable distinction between “is” (fact) and “ought” (norm). Commers’ “synversalist” approach regards a normative-factual continuum as the basis for global ethics. Globalization emphasizes cultural differences and situated knowledge but it also points out that we are not in the first place family members, cultural workers, citizens of the state and only secondly and therefore subordinately human beings. With Höfding, Commers argues that the possibility of global ethics lies herein that it stresses out that within the bonds of specific communities and identities, we should live our lives as human beings and treat each other as human beings. That insight is the basis of the “synversalist” approach and constitutes the possibility of global ethics. Commers articulates that approach by drawing on authors such
as Chaïm Perelman, Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Buber, Vladimir Jankélévitch, John Dewey, and Abraham Edel—authors that wrote on ethics also in a time of an expanding world capitalist system but before the subjective and relativistic turn in ethics. Their works are attempts to tie facts and norms, concrete existence and general values. They conceived ethics as a practically oriented “science” related to the problems of a globalizing world society as it was when they wrote. The researcher in global ethics then is the go-between, always moving back and forth on the normative-factual continuum. The “synversalist” global ethics urges the ethicist today to examine existential assumptions of the signifying concepts used in the post-cold war stage of the world capitalist system. In his chapter, Ronald Commers makes the exercise for “Development” signifiers. Clarifying these existential assumptions allows global ethics to prescribe reforms and action. Its explanation and prescription is based on veracity—stronger than exactness but weaker than truth. The existential assumptions underlie concrete action related valuations and prescriptions. Commers argues that we can regard all world citizen theories and agendas as a normative-factual continuum, because they are related both to ideal conceptions of citizenship and factual or realized citizenship organization and institutions. For example, the UN undoubtedly exists yet at the same time we all are deeply disappointed because the UN has not yet fully realized human aspirations. Hence, for Commers, global ethics is possible as a “Deweyian” pragmatically oriented discipline.

Heather Widdows considers at length the criticisms of both “Asian values” adepts and feminist ethicists concerning the supposedly imperialism of Western discourses in global ethics. In both the “Asian Values” and feminist discourse the argument runs as follows: human rights and concepts of justice do not express universal values for they promote but a Western view on valuation. To contradict the most extreme standpoints and to defend her own stand that the gap between the “ethics of the west” and the rest” has been greatly exaggerated,” Widdows endeavors to answer the related questions: “what global ethics?” and “why global ethics?” When ethicists recognize the relationality character of their ethical arguments one may avoid the pitfall of the extreme positions. Referring to the contributions of Carol C. Gould and Virginia Held, she argues that from an ethics of care and an ethics of virtue point of view the exaggerations can be left behind. Acknowledging the value of the criticisms on the “individualistic turn in liberal ethics”—linked with Enlightenment moral philosophy—she pleads for “a globally representative and applicable ethics which recognizes diversity.” To a global ethics so conceived of the “relatedness and the richness of lived experience” is of the utmost importance in order to bridge the gap between Western and non-Western insights in the good life, in justice, and rights of the people.

Nigel Dower defends his solidarist-pluralist form of cosmopolitanism against various objections and distinguishes it from moral relativism. The objections to the idea of universal values and global responsibilities—two aspects characteristic to cosmopolitan theories—are consequentialist. One critique is that cosmopolitan theory leads to a world government concentrating power in the hands of powerful nations. A second is that the projection of universal values entails a homogenization of cultures. A third critique fears that introducing ideals into
decision-making will lead politicians to do things that are inappropriate in the real world or that this will even lead to the prosecution of Holy War. Lastly, cosmopolitan theory is also accused of undermining the loyalty of the citizen to the state. Nigel Dower accepts that these objections pick out some real dangers, but argues for a version of cosmopolitanism that avoids these dangers. Dower’s solidarist-pluralist approach becomes clear as he contrasts it to two other approaches, the idealist-dogmatic and the libertarian-minimalist. His position is a middle one affirming the basic values of peace, access to elements of well-being, a healthy and resource-full environment to live in, stable community and relationships and autonomy. The solidarist-pluralist cosmopolitan denies the importance of promoting other values and beliefs but asserts the importance of obligations at the global level to bring these values into existence. Dower also investigates in his chapter how his approach might combine the strengths and insights of communitarian’s thinking with cosmopolitan theory.

In his chapter, Peter Caws discusses whether personal moral commitments are compatible with global ethical responsibilities. The question entails a test for global ethics because globalization means that as a moral agent, I am now obliged to think beyond the familial or ethnic or national or regional to remote others whose welfare is inextricably connected with my own. Caws touches upon Kant and Jefferson to point out that what reason prescribes has not been what people have done. And it is precisely the difficulty we seem to have to extend our moral commitments beyond our community. Caws clarifies this gap by referring to Ferdinand Tönnies well-known distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (community and society). But whereas Tönnies seems to have thought these two to be diachronically related—and where the emergence of modernity accompanies the transition of one into the other—Peter Caws sees them as synchronically coexistent. Community and society represent different ways in which the same subject and agent can and does relate to his or her contemporaries. The question of the possibility of global ethics then is how people can be members at the same time of local communities and of a global society. Caws links the distinctions community/society, local/global and moral/ethic to show that this requires two levels of understanding. Having commenced his chapter by giving reasons as to why ethical interests map awkwardly on to economic ones, Caws concludes that as economic relations have gone before in the process of globalization, they may help to pave the way for the penetration of ethical concerns. Not with the goal of embracing those who suffer as members of a moral community to which we all belong. Rather, those same channels are potential conduits for ethical remedies.

The third part of this book, “Global Ethics—How?” consists of four illustrations of how answering in “the moral perplexity of our period” can take place. These chapters show that reflection on how ethical reasoning can take place in an era of globalization is intricately linked with the ethical issues of globalization. For Asunción Lera St Clair, any conception of what may constitute fair globalization needs to address the processes that produce and reproduce global poverty. In her chapter, St Clair argues that the ethical aspects of global poverty lead to a
redefinition of both development and globalization. As the “global” impinges on every field of knowledge, so too development, philosophy, and ethics and the relations among these fields must redefine their scope and subject matter. The consequence for the ways in which globalization is treated, and more specifically for global ethics, is that the ethical aspects of globalization are interrelated with an ethical perspective of knowledge and policy for poverty reduction. Asunción St. Clair suggests that poverty needs to be treated globally and not as a social fact that occurs only in developing countries. What is needed is a re-engagement with literature and theories within the field of development studies and with poverty research. Global ethics for Asunción St Clair includes critical engagement with the knowledge production going on inside global institutions, and doing so may lead to stronger formulations for alternative globalizations and for a better understanding of the paths towards fairer development aid policies.

Thomas Mertens reflects on the contributions of Peter Singer and Thomas Pogge to the global justice debate in an effort to evaluate them critically against the background of John Rawls's “duty to assist.” Peter Singer in his approach on the ethics of globalization argues in favor of the redistribution between rich and poor communities. He holds that we should shift from the concept of negative to positive duties, implying a transfer from what is superfluous in the rich countries to the poor countries and communities of the global system. His argument is congruent to classic utilitarianism for it is the rich men’s duty to contribute to the happiness of all people. John Rawls’s arguments on the subject are far less general and radical. In his *A Theory of Justice* he explains that distributive justice applies to rather closed communities only and he pays no attention to the question of worldwide justice. It is not humanity as a whole, such as it is the implication of Singer’s arguments, but the relatively closed political communities that we should pay attention to. Moreover Rawls rejected the utilitarian stand. Mertens follows Rawls in his critique on Singer’s approach, which is not convincing on the issue where the right motivation for the whole of mankind must be coming from. On this point of the argument in favor of global justice, Thomas Pogge might help to correct the strong utilitarian tenets found in Singer’s work. That the rich must help the poor irrespective of relationships of proximity or causality is to remain an utopian creed. Only if we can prove, such as Pogge thinks we can, that on the subject of wealth and fair opportunities the rich stand in a causal relationship with the misery and suffering of the world poor, the moral urgency of “our” duty—as the rich ones—can be made convincing. The rules and institutions of financial, economic and legal relations have a devastating effect on the global poor, Pogge has argued. World poverty cannot be explained in terms of national and local factors only. It is the global institutional order, which is at the origin of misery, slavery and suffering in the world system. In doing so, Pogge tries to correct Rawls emphasis on the closed political communities and strongly argues in favor of a cosmopolitan solution. In contradistinction with Rawls’s conception of international justice (*The Law of Peoples*), Pogge opts for cosmopolitan justice. Mertens remains in doubt concerning the correctness and the relevance of this position. Again it seems to him that so little can be done on an institutionalized level, the proper institutional reforms lacking impetus, support, and force.
Following the arguments of Rawls about an all-inclusive League of Peoples, all the while respecting a “global difference principle” and the particular “bounds of affinity between peoples,” Mertens believes that the problem of global poverty should be approached through the emphasis on the “legal duty of assistance.” The duty of assistance can be made a real moral force by building up decent basic institutions that establish peaceful relations between the existing political communities. Moreover, Mertens argues, this would be more in harmony with the nature of morality in which the *amour propre* of the political communities—such as it is in the case where individuals are the “moral” persons—is not ignored.

An Verlinden starts her chapter by arguing that the current normative approaches to international relations are inapt to address salient normative questions in today’s international society, such as questions relating to poverty, the use of arms, the environment, armed interventions by states of other states, or the reception of refugees and migrants. Verlinden reviews ways in which these normative approaches can be classified and develops from that a position for global ethics that moves beyond a dichotomized thinking between ethics and justice. For Verlinden, global ethics is directed both at the level of individuals and collectives as well as at the institutional level of inter- and supra-state relations. She argues this is possible by adopting a contextualized and relational approach that sees ethics as arising from the particular forms of life shared by people within a given culture at a particular moment in history. The contribution of An Verlinden lies herein that she points at the moral philosophy of Martin Buber that allows us to sketch out such a contextualized dialogical or relational approach. Globalization as the increase of global interaction emphasizes the communicative dimension of constructivism and hence brings us to an ethical rationality as a relational affair, which moves beyond merely understanding or “respecting” cultural differences to a kind of “third space.” With Buber, she conceptualizes this “third space” as the Interhuman, characterized by the alternation of I-It (abstract principles) and I-Thou (concrete other) emphasis. Contextualized global ethics as the space of the Interhuman is no longer ethics of ultimate ends. Abstract values and principles can be useful and suggestive but is not the starting point of our ethical deliberation. Global ethics is the continuous go-between of universalism and particularism, objectivism and subjectivism. An Verlinden suggest global ethics to be the research into current conditions of, possibilities for and obstacles to the Interhuman—*Zwischenmenschliche* or interaction between complete and thoroughly responsive persons.

Redistributing global inequality is the aim that József Böröcz sets himself in his daring thought experiment. From a critical reading of the 1995 UN Resolution on the eradication of poverty, indicating the ahistorical character of the UN global inequality analysis, he focuses on the fiscal feasibility of his global inequality proposals. He puts forward that these proposals can “be defined as a large-scale, historic social process of social change.” The outcome of this social change process would be the diminishment of what Giovanni Arrighi called “oligarchic wealth.” This would be in favor of “democratic wealth,” resulting from a far less extremely “unbalanced structure of distribution.” The project of global action is in-existent, but the author endeavors to provide an empirical assessment of the volume of
Ethics in an Era of Globalization

resources needed to redistribute in order to reach a more fair state of global inequality. This global redistributive scheme of possible action is the counterpart of an “already existing global market system of capital accumulation.” Böröcz develops some striking numerical examples in an exercise that he qualifies himself as utopian. Nevertheless he considers a “controlled utopianism” both urgent and indispensable to think beyond the actual institutional system worldwide. His exercise addresses the question what it would take if a “global redistributive mechanism were to bring the world’s states closer to the world mean.” He leaves no doubt on the subject of the economic, social, and political chances to execute the proposed global redistributive scheme. But even so, the exercise enables us to question the tenets of global economic liberalism and the inevitability to consider world poverty and its eradication in monetary terms. He puts forward the question what would happen if global economic liberalism protagonists could support “a more reasonable and acceptable form of social organization,” providing a less unequal global distribution of income. Given the amount of today’s worldwide inequality humanity is left with two alternatives: either the creation of an organizational framework suitable for global redistribution, or continuing and perhaps even augmenting the present state of inhumane inequality. For “the moral unity of humankind” it would be beneficial to refuse choosing the latter. The global structure of inequality that splits humankind in two separate groups “opens an abyss of unforeseeable consequences concerning the survival of humankind.”

The chapters in this volume represent what IGEA—International Global Ethics Association—is as a platform: examples of ethics in an era of globalization. At the Center for Ethics and Value Inquiry (Ghent University), we are convinced this is possible and the authors in this volume have gladly accepted our invitation to show just how this might be done. They show global ethics as a domain that thinks not in opposites or distinctions but in continua and in bridges between objectivism and subjectivism, facts and values, universalism and particularism, institutions and persons. They show global ethics as not just discussing authors but also and mainly as finding solutions for our sense-making of and in the world today. Therefore, this volume has strived for a sophisticated equilibrium between academic depth and rigorous ethical argumentation on the one hand and the more lived activism and engagement of practically oriented researchers on the other. In this way, the editors hope that this volume will find its way to academics as well as to practitioners who are interested in both the philosophical underpinnings and the practical, applied aspects of the manifold questions of global ethics.