

On global ethics as an action-directed research discipline

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Abstract:

The author takes the post-communist socio-political scene as the background for the 'ethicization' of globalization phenomena. Within this global context, the signifying idea of a 'New World Agenda' was produced in international organizations such as the UNESCO and UNO. He takes the 1995 UNESCO Report on man's creative diversity as an example. He explores the discourse on two views of development, and the resulting quest for a 'global ethic'. Finally he tries to understand what 'global ethics' as a research discipline stands for, emphasizing the signifying building blocks of the 'global ethic' discourse, with the aim to delineate a 'global ethics' research program.

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John Dewey & James H. Tuft (1932, 282-283):

Complete universality of interest is, of course, impossible in the sense of equality of strength or force of quantity; that is, it would be mere pretense to suppose that one can be as *much* interested in those at a distance with whom one has little contact as in those with whom one is in constant communication. But equity, or impartiality, of interest is a matter of quality not of quantity as iniquity is a matter not of more or less, but of using uneven measures of judgment. Equity demands that *when* one has to act in relation to others, no matter whether friends or strangers, fellow citizens or foreigners, one should have an equal and even measure of value as far as the interests of the others come into reckoning. In an immediate or emotional sense it is not possible to love our enemies as we love our friends. But the maxim to love our enemies as we love ourselves signifies that in our conduct we should take into account their interests at the same rate of estimate as we rate our own. It is a principle for regulating judgment of the bearings of our acts on the happiness of others.

Idem, 285-286:

Through religion and from other sources, love of neighbor, exact equity, kindness of action and judgment, are taught and in theory accepted. The structure of society, however, puts emphasis upon other qualities. "Business" absorbs a large part of the life of most persons and business is conducted upon the basis of ruthless competition for private gain. National life is organized on the basis of exclusiveness and tends to generate suspicion, fear, often hatred, of other peoples. The world is divided into classes and races, and, in spite of acceptance of an opposed theory, the standards of valuation are based on class, race, color, with which one identifies oneself. The convictions that obtain in personal morality are negated on a large scale in collective conduct, and for this reason are weakened even in their strict personal application. They cannot be made good in practice except as they are extended to include the remaking of the social environment, economic, political, international.

1.

The post-communist scene and the ethicization of globalization

In discourses on globalization abundant reference is made to human rights, global justice, global citizenship, global democracy, human development, human dignity, human well-being, opportunities for all. They function as the signifying concepts, being in use for the value-oriented consideration of the 'post-cold war' stage of the world capitalist system.

The downfall of the communist political and economic regime —based on what turned out to be a caricature of a central planning of economy, culture, education, old age and health services in society— put an end to the cold war competition which in the core of the capitalist world system had contributed to raising standards of life and the spreading of 'consumer culture'. This competition gave the laboring population of the Western world access to a better life, in terms of income, health, education, leisure, and old age caring, all of which were indispensable to win the race against the communist opponent.

In the late communist states this long period of more than sixty years has led to the formation of new ruling and controlling elites. Only after setting themselves free from the constraints on capital formation and private profit, in due course these elites could appear as capitalist entrepreneurs in control of the central sectors of industrial production and of finance. All of this was in fact prepared during the long period of bureaucratic state socialism, to which Gorbatsjov's perestroika and glasnost finally had brought the end.

In the core of the capitalist world system this combined evolution at the end of the 'long twentieth century' provoked a radical shift in the dominant socio-political discourses and analyses, a new stage in the wage labor—capital relationships being arrived at. Globalization, in my opinion, is the name for the new situation, 'free market' ideology regaining the strength and arrogance it had had more than a century ago. I agree with the Hungarian political economist Janos Kornai (1971, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2002) in calling a social system dominantly based on economic free entrepreneurship, a 'free economy' rather than a 'free-market economy'. The reason for this is clear. Markets are never 'free' from constraints and from regulation. Or to say it more precisely: markets can but exist when they are supported by and assisted with

constraints and regulation, which are engendered by state bureaucracies and civil society organizations. In an important measure, labor-force supply and demand is regulated both by state bureaucracies and free entrepreneur actors, while civil society actors stand behind the scenes of the overall regulation mechanism. The market which regulates society's socio-economic activities is 'embedded' in complex institutional systemic mechanisms, many of which are based on state control assuring the freedom of private profit making entrepreneurship and which lay down rules for organizing labor—capital relationships.

It seems difficult not to agree with, or worse, to ignore Karl Polanyi's analysis of these complex institutional systemic mechanisms and the 'embedded' (or substantive) character of economic life (1944, 1957). In today's world capitalist system market economy flourishes thanks to the uninterrupted nation-state and international institutional regulation of it. World-capitalist institutions such as the *World Bank*, the *International Monetary Fund*, the *Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development*, the *World Trade Organization*—to name but the most important global actors— guarantee the financially organized economic processes in which the domination of capital over different kinds of labor is established on a worldwide scale. Beyond doubt, governments of western democratic nation-states are supporting these institutions of what has become to be called 'global governance'.

When, for example, one argues that 'we' can hold ourselves co-responsible for the global institutional scheme (of world governance) (Thomas Pogge, 2001, 2002), which makes the material and moral situation of the greater part of humanity worse off, one implies that western democratic nation-states are co-actors in provoking the humiliating process of worsening the living conditions of this greater part of humanity, and that we, as citizens of these nation-states, hold a share in the responsibilities of their international interventions. What's more, one admits that citizens of the western nation-state do indeed influence its policy decisions in a substantial way. However, this still leaves the question open, whether 'we' are the principal co-actors ourselves, for it seems difficult to consider each of 'us' to be an acting person in the establishment of political institutions and policies in the core of the world capitalist system. It is my point that the breakdown of the communist system at the end of the long

period of the Cold War, has resulted in a sharply pronounced disturbance in the socio-economic and political power relationships within western democracies itself. As a consequence of which the influence of citizens on policies, with a unambiguous global impact, remains highly challenging. Normative global citizenship agenda's can be identified as responding to these embarrassing conditions, with rhetorical answers not seldom loaded with strong criticisms on western nation-state legitimacy (A. Etzioni, 1984, 1988, 1997, 2004a, 2004b; David Korten, 1995, 1999).

How this may be, if western democratic nation-states are responsible for a global institutional violence —whether or not we call it 'structural violence', such as John Galtung has rightly suggested more than two decades ago (1974, 1996)— it seems to me a continuing research-task to ask 'ourselves' how and under what conditions people, who are living in these nation-states, have the possibilities to become dominant —or should I say hegemonic— actors in the global institutional system. Hegemony, or dominance, being defined in terms of how actors can weigh on directing policies in their own or others interests. As John Dewey already has said at the turn of the 19th century, no government has ever been —nor shall ever be— impartial. Plato's dream of the unbiased, independent, and morally driven expert, who zealously seeks to give his 'good' advice to the 'kings' who are frenetically operating in the post-communist world capitalist order, will prove itself to be but another illusion, intellectuals are cheering themselves up with.

Within the aforementioned historico-synthetical context, I would like to analyze the 'discourse' —or the 'semantics' as I would like to call it, following Niklas Luhmann's *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*— of the 'New World Agenda', the 'Global Ethics' efforts, and the 'Global Ethic' idea, all of which are frequently used 'signifiers' since the downfall of the communist block in the late eighties of the 20th century. As I hope to make clear, this analysis will lead us to new insights in the content of both 'global ethic' and 'global ethics', the latter being a social sciences determined moral philosophical investigation of a 'common morality', giving rise to an appropriate application of regulative principles, acceptable rules, and their underlying values, which are shared by as many people as possible (but not by all of them).

2. 'New World Agenda'-idea as a signifier. The example of the 1995 UNESCO/UNO Report World Commission on Culture and Development and the concept of 'global ethics'

In January 1988 Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations joined Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, in launching the *World Decade for Cultural Development* (1988-1997). In its 26th session in 1991 the General Conference of UNESCO requested its Director-General to co-operate with the Secretary-General of the UN, in order to "establish an independent World Commission on Culture and Development". The aim was to prepare for a *World Report on Culture and Development*. It was one of the take-offs of a conceptual and theoretical process in which a new post-Cold War signifying discourse was looked forward to and generated, in which expressions were used such as: 'development ethics', 'new world agenda for human development', 'human development', 'global ethics', 'global ethic', 'transcending economic development'. The history of this 'global ethic' process is still to be carried out. I only wish to draw some lines of its evolution, of which not few refer to the endeavors of the UN within the period 1980-2000. The afore mentioned former UN Secretary-General already gave a summary of it, which I go after in the next paragraphs.

In 1980 the report *North-South: a Programme for Survival* was published as the outcome of the *Brandt Commission*, formerly known as the *Independent Commission on International Development Issues*, which had started its activities in 1977. The commission put an end to its work in 1983 after the publication of yet another report, *Common Crisis: North-South. Co-operation for World Recovery*, which held recommendations about the acceleration of the development of poor countries (including the transfer of resources from the rich countries).

The *South Commission* initiated by former president of Tanzania, Julius K. Nyerere, continued research and discussion on the 'North-South Dialogue', resulting in the publication in 1990 of a report, *The Challenge to the South*.

From 1990 onwards, the *United Nations Development Program* started the publications of its annual reports, with the primary focus on 'human development', emphasizing the view that "people are the wealth of nations". It continued along the track of the 1983 *Brundtland Commission*, formerly

known as the *World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)*, with its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*. The same commission launched the idea of an ‘Earth Summit’, which in 1992 yielded the *Agenda 21, Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development*. In 1995 it was complemented by the *Commission on Global Governance*, which published its report, *Our Global Neighborhood*. By the turn of the century further international efforts under the lead of the UN produced the 2000 *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, outlining the ‘Millennium Goals’ to be reached in 2015. Another ‘Earth Summit’ was held in Johannesburg, with the *Johannesburg Declaration*, published in 2002, and in 2005 the report of the UN 58th *DPI / NGO Conference*, organized in New York, was published under the title: *Our Challenge: Voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal*, based on the idea of “a civil society taking action”.

Let us consider the main themes and conceptualizations of them all. It will become clear how the signifying concept of a ‘global ethic’ steadily matured within these ‘human development’ action-oriented undertakings. It will also prove how a promising idea of a scholarly research was linked with it, which was worked out under the title ‘global ethics’. The *UNDP* is the UN global network that seeks solutions to global and national development challenges, giving priority to ‘democratic governance’, ‘poverty reduction’, ‘crisis prevention and recovery’, ‘sustainable growth’ ‘respect and concern for the environment’, ‘empowerment of local communities, of the urban poor, of women’, and ‘world health concerns’. It encourages the ‘protection of human rights’, which is considered to be crucial for the fulfillment of a people-based ‘human development’. The foregoing enumeration gives an example of what the potential content of a global ethics research might be. At the same time it suggests what a global ethic is to give values, principles, goals, norms, rules, etc. about.

3.

Two types of development ideas: economic growth does not equal human development

The people-based ‘human development’ is the normative signifying concept repeatedly referred to in the various UN and UNESCO ‘Reports’ and

'Declarations'. Without any exception it is opposed to a narrow conception of economic development, which was the focus of attention of much of the Post-War development programs in the 'South'. This also is the case with the 1995 UNESCO/UN Report *Our Creative Diversity of the World Commission on Culture and Development*, which in its 'Introduction' mentions 'two views of development'. The first global UN development report, 1990, addressed as its main issue "the question of how economic growth translates –or fails to translate– the human development." The latter is conceived off as the way people are progressively enabled to make their own choices. The report suggested ways to measure this progression in choice enlargement. The 1993 report on 'people's participation' looked at means to improve the ways in which "people-friendly markets, decentralized governance and community organizations, especially non-governmental organizations (NGO's)" contribute to setting free people's individual and social self-determination. In 1996 the UNDP organization published its report on *Economic growth and human development*, in which it was argued that "if not properly managed" economic growth may equal a "jobless, voiceless, rootless and futureless" outcome for the many worldwide. 'Growth' is considered to be dependent on poverty reduction and sustainability, which implies the use of human development in stead of merely economic indicators of expansion. From then onwards, the annual global reports kept emphasizing the weight of the 'human face' of growth and development indicators, advancing subjects such as: the importance of a human rights based approach to social and economic accountability, the establishment and "deepening" of democratic political structures "at all levels of society", a singular conception of wealth in stating that human well-being is far more important than income and financial means, the significance of multicultural policies, the recognition of cultural differences, the potentialities of cultural diversity for human development, and the importance for religious freedom and tolerance. In the mean time the "Millennium Development Goals" had been launched, with the purpose to function as a global horizon for human development, and the prospering of the global order.

'Human Development', such as it was defined by the UNDP, consequently should be put alongside economic development. 'Human development' is

“about more than the rise and fall of national incomes” (UNDP, 2006). It bears reference to the creation of a material, an economic, and a cultural environment in which people can develop their capabilities, in able to lead a productive and creative life in harmony with their needs and interests (UNDP, 2006). The ‘Human Development Reports’ of the UN concentrate on the enlargement of people’s choices by protecting, supporting, and encouraging ‘human capabilities’, the latter broadly defined as “the range of things that people can do or be in life”. Health, access to knowledge through education, opportunity to participate in community-life, cultural and political self-determination, they are all equally important for human development (*Agenda 21*, 1991). It was stated from the very start that this view of development was in accordance with ‘human rights’ concerns, because they both secure the “well-being and dignity of all people, building self-respect and the respect of others” (UNDP, 2006).

From the eighties of the 20th century onwards, it became clear that the sole attention paid to the economic side of development in the poor countries –and even in the rest of the world– was wrong at the root. Not only had many people paid with their lives, their health and well-being –with their self-determination and political sovereignty ruined or nullified– but even economic development was harmed and misdirected by this one sidedness, as it produced some negative inverse mechanisms. One can call this the fatal and damaging paradox of early Post Second World-War development programs. Both Immanuel Wallerstein (1983, 1995) and David Korten (1995), through their work in poor countries in Africa and South-East Asia, experienced the insufficiency or inefficiency of western views on post-colonial development of the Southern hemisphere countries. But they were far from alone in their sudden conversion from this ‘developmentalist’ post-war ideology. All of these critical voices agreed with the idea expressed by former UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali:

As development becomes imperative, as we approach the turn of this century, we are faced with the necessity of giving new meaning to the word. Reflecting on development is thus the most important intellectual challenge in the coming years. (World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995, 23)

The view of ‘human development’, therefore, emphasizes other value-goal-norm sets. For our global ethics concerns it is of importance to study them closely, to look after their factual presuppositions and their action implied regulative principles. It ranges over signifying concepts such as follows: lack of opportunities, democratic institutions, participatory governance and management, quality of life, well-being, longevity, health, adequate nutrition, reasonable consumption, education, access to knowledge and to ICT, gender-based equality, decent labor conditions, child protection, dignity, human rights, justice and equity, cultural diversity, social and individual empowerment, human capabilities, sustainability, community duties, solidarity, caring, general –social– responsibility, public accountability, religious tolerance, intergenerational equity.

In the following table, I try to outline some issues for further ethical research on the subject of the opposition between the two views of development.

Table 1: Human and economic development signifying concepts

| Human development signifiers (Source: UNDP Reports) | Economic development signifiers (Source: P. Samuelson & W. Nordhaus, 2005, 555-579) |
|--|---|
| Reasonableness | Rationality |
| Human capabilities | Rational choice (social choice / public choice) |
| Opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political | Self-interest |
| Care & solidarity | Individual preferences |
| Self-determination in civil society and community life | Free trade & trade policies |
| Life experience at grass roots levels | Trade adjustments |
| Creative responsiveness | Competitiveness |
| Corporate social responsibility (CSR) | GDP & GNP output per capita |
| Stakeholder ship | PPF (production-possibility frontier) |
| Human Rights | Income |
| Embedding of market regulation | Human ‘resources’ |
| Sustainability | Natural ‘resources’ |
| Common good | Capital |
| Health | Technology |
| Education | Productivity |
| Knowledge access | Profitability (in terms of rates of return) |
| Social securisation | Externalities |
| Well-being | Diseconomies of scale |
| Social & environment economy | Free market |
| Duty centered | Exchange rates & trade balance |
| Open source information | Financial & monetary accountability |
| Contextual adaptability | Equilibrium |
| Horizontal governance conception | Vertical governance conception |

To illustrate the ‘economic development’ bias, I refer to Samuelson’s & Nordhaus’ treatment of “low-risk” and “high-risk countries”, related to

interest rates and investment opportunities (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2005, 634):

Promoting economic growth in an open economy involves ensuring that business is attractive for foreign and domestic investors who have a wide array of investment opportunities in the world economy. The ultimate goals of policy are to have high rates of saving and investment in productive channels and to ensure that businesses use best-practice techniques. Achieving these goals involves setting a stable macroeconomic climate, guaranteeing dependable property rights for both tangible investments and intellectual property, providing exchange-rate convertibility that allows investors to take home their profits, and maintaining confidence in the political and economic stability of the country.

In the quote the signifying concepts and expressions are: 'open economy', 'business attractive for investors', 'foreign & domestic investors' (as actors), 'investment opportunities', 'stable macroeconomic climate' (meaning: a stable social and political situation in the investment region), 'dependable property rights', 'tangible investments', 'tangible intellectual property', 'exchange-rate convertibility'. This certainly is not the discourse of a 'human development' report. No reference is made to the risks of this investment-biased approach for the social and political stability in the business solicited country, nor is there any concern for the freedom and the quality of life of the people who are supposed to work for the profitability of the investment. What does it mean to set "a stable macroeconomic climate" in terms of human empowerment, gender-equality, child protection against labor exploitation, avoidance of forced labor practices, health, sustainability and environmental protection, human rights defense and support, participatory governance, quality of life, etc.? All of these 'human development' items are ignored, for the 'limited' economic view of growth urges the economist only to focus on the allowance "to take home" profits, and on the assurance that both stability and profitability in the investment countries are guaranteed.

One of the deciding signifying differences bears on the assumed and underlying governance conception of the two views of development. In a 'human development' view, governance is conceived to be chiefly horizontal and decentralized, whereas a 'economic development' view is mainly based on a vertical and centralized governance conception. The role of 'civil society', of grass roots organizations, and of NGO's, is highlighted in 'human

development, whereas in ‘economic development’ governance the key agencies are multinationals, transnational professional organizations, international capitalist institutions, ceo’s, etc.

Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to think about the feasible relationships between the two views of development and about the reconcilability of their signifying conceptual bases. In the UNDP reports, but recently also in the World Bank reports, the idea that ‘human development’ and ‘economic development’ are only opposite and conflicting, has been dropped, a point of view to which the work of Amartya Sen (1999, 35-54; 2005) has contributed in a substantial way. I can see at least six possible relationships between the ‘human development’ and the ‘economic development’ view.

Table 2: Relationships between ‘human development’ and ‘economic development’

| ‘Human Development’ (HD) | ‘Economic Development’ (ED) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Opposing and conflicting, without any opportunity of mediation | |
| 2. ‘HD’ enhances ‘ED’ | |
| 3. ‘HD’ is enhanced by ‘ED’ | |
| 4. The economic impact of ‘HD’ beyond doubt | |
| 5. The humanizing range of ‘ED’ should be endorsed and supported | |
| 6. Extended economy (Karl Polanyi, 1944; 1957) / social economy conceptions (Amitai Etzioni, 1988; 1999) are meaningful for the proper understanding of ‘ED’ | |

Within the ranges offered by the cases 2, 3, 4, and 5, a global ethical conception on humanity’s future might be worked out. The economic impact of ‘human development’ regarded to be beyond doubt, a realistic and pragmatic endorsement of the humanizing force of economic development will be of great significance to improve the material and spiritual conditions of humankind. By following this pathway, we may transcend the narrow-minded economist inclinations to classify countries exclusively in ‘low-risk’ and ‘high-risk’ units for interest rates and capital investment, and we might be able to surpass both the ‘limits to competition’ (Riccardo Petrella, 1994/1995) and the pitfalls of a ‘limited’ conception of the economy of human life.

4. Global ethics as the search for a ‘global ethic’, the outcome of a ‘New World Agenda’

In the Report *Our Global Neighborhood* of the *Commission on Global Governance*, the idea of a 'global ethic' is, among other issues, directly linked with the defense and protection of human rights, of which the report gives a rather broad interpretation (cf. 'the right to earn a "fair living"', 1995). If it is true, what I go along with, that the "notion of world civilization can only be accepted...as a sort of limiting concept" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, UNESCO Report, 1995, 29), one is obliged to accept "that there can never be a world civilization in the absolute sense". Nor can there ever be a universally accepted 'global ethic', which will be developed by our global ethical inquiry. This may be applauded to be beneficial to the research domain of global ethics itself. There can never exist a truly globally accepted 'ethic' –conducive to peace, well-being, human understanding, concord, freedom, and self determination– since 'ethic' implies (and consists of) the conflicting co-existence of varied valuational, normative, and regulative discourses.

In the UNESCO 1995 report on humanity's creative diversity, mainly addressing the subject of "a new global ethics", the expression 'global ethics' appears 33 times, all of which suggest a different content. The first definition is a normative one for it states:

We should develop a global ethics that applies equally to all those involved in world affairs. Its efficacy will depend on the ability of people and governments to transcend narrow self-interests and agree that the interests of humanity as a whole will be best served by acceptance of a set of common rights and responsibilities (35)

What global ethics is about can easily be grasped in rereading this definition, although its content remains far from clear. The aim is to reach shared points of reference to provide a minimal moral guidance, a purpose to which the endorsed values and principles should contribute. Beyond doubt global issues of concern have a say in these endeavors. Although it remains a difficult task to define the content of global ethics as a discipline –fortunately facilitated by the undertakings of Nigel Dower in order to clarify the subject-matter (Nigel Dower, 1998)– it is not impossible to suggest the major themes of the ethical research.

Strikingly the 1995 Report rests somewhat confuse about the difference between 'global ethics' –as a particular research discipline– and 'global ethic'. The latter intended to be a private and public agencies centered agenda for

action, in which sets of value-goals-norms-principles are explicitly stated and explained from the central belief that they might have a practical significance for the future of humankind under further conditions of globalization. The meaning of 'global ethics' is confused with 'global ethic' at many instances in the text. Nevertheless the discourse is instructive about what the experts of the UNESCO and the UN considered as vital issues: "the deeply human urge to avoid avoidable suffering and some notion of the basic moral equality of all human beings together form an indispensable point of reference and a strong pillar of support for any attempt to work out a global ethics." (*Our Creative Diversity*, 1995, 36). The idea of human vulnerability and the purpose to alleviate suffering is of great inspiration to the writers of the report. Mankind should combat an age-old illness of western culture, namely its "contempt for weakness" (Harald Ofstad, 1989), and it should attempt to accept man's limitations and helplessness. Furthermore, the idea of human rights easily can be brought back to the concern for weakness and exposure, the way it was analyzed by 20th century ethicists (E. Levinas, 1961; Z. Bauman, 1993).

From this general valuational stand the UNESCO Commission suggested five principal ideas to form the core of what I think they meant to be a 'global ethic' (although continually the writers kept using the expression 'global ethics'): human rights and global responsibilities, democratic legitimacy linked with political autonomy and human empowerment, protection of minorities, commitment to peaceful conflict-resolution and fair negotiation, intergenerational equity. Be this as it may, it hardly seems concluding for a reflection on the relationship between global ethical research produced by globalization, and the feasible content of a global ethic, which although neither universally accepted, nor generally applied to concrete practical matters of concern, may function as a suitable benchmark for action and policies.

Let us consider this relationship somewhat further, hoping that it might give us more conclusive results on the relation between global ethics as a research discipline, and global ethic as a social agency-directed platform for private and public action (for an outstanding treatment of the relationship, I once more refer to the work of Nigel Dower, 1990; 2007 forthcoming). Global ethics is an issue oriented multidisciplinary, cross boundary research discipline. It rests upon the evolution of the many different 'languages of morals' (J. Stout, 1988)

in western tradition, within which diverse semantic traditions were and are at work. It has been, and it still is fed by various issue-centered research endeavors, generated by both the Post Second World War and the Post Cold War globalization processes, which the capitalist world-system was and is going through (E. Mandel, 1972; I. Wallerstein, 2005 & 2000; I. Mészáros, 1995). As a feasible research discipline, it stands at the crossroad of developmental ethics, human rights ethics, biomedical ethics, professional ethics, business ethics, migration ethics, etc., all of which have their proper agenda's of ethical inquiry. From this angle, it might look as if global ethics must be eclectically established. The tension between a general valuational substance — for which the systematic inquiry on the subject of regulative principles such as 'care', 'vulnerability', 'a-symmetry', 'dialogue as encounter', 'alterity' can be brought to our mind— and the demanding specific ethics agenda's, is a characteristic of all the UN and UNESCO 'global ethics' proposals. Global ethics as the search for a 'global ethic', capable to give moral answers to the challenging 'New World Agenda' reaches out to this general substance, despite the fact that with respect to the specific demanding issues, which through the globalization process are at stake, it necessary is mixed and even miscellaneous from nature. In my proposal for further ethical inquiry, we should not ignore the tension. The reason for not doing this seems to be as old as moral philosophy is. Again and again the dialectic of 'theoria' and 'praxis' declares itself as the essence of ethical inquiry (A. Edel e.a, 1994; A. Edel, 2001; I. L. Horowitz e.a, 1987), which urges us never to abandon the ethical inquiry of the general substance of a global morality.

In our view, a 'global ethic' covers numerous domains of diverse goal applications. It reaches from the spelling out of regulative principles to the prescription of rules and norms. It ranges, among other concerns:

- from the spelling out of caring principles to the advice to empower local communities and individuals
- from the defense of countervailing power in order to impede the negative results of a limited —and therefore inadequate— globalized economy to the safeguarding of men, women and children against the still ongoing re-introduction of forced labor relationships

- from the detection of agencies of judgment and decision to the recognition of audiences to which one appeals for the appliance of the rules of conduct
- from the demand of cosmopolitan citizenship to the request of local participatory democracy

The global ethical inquiry —‘global ethics’— should be guided by an action and life experience oriented research of the possible regulative principles, rules and norms. From a methodological point of view it ought to be conceived of as a ‘deweyian’ pragmatically oriented discipline (John Dewey, 1972/1939) answering to the radical dialogical outlook (Martin Buber, 1997; Mikhaïl Bakhtin, 1970) on human interpretation and signification of man’s existence:

The core of dialogue is always a-thematic, even when the dialogue is thematically well fixed and tightened... (M. Bakhtin, 1970, 345)

In what has been said earlier, the regulative principle of care and respect of human vulnerability —reproving ‘our contempt for weakness’— has a central place in ‘global ethic’ proposals. In the global ethical inquiry, such as I imagine it should be, this regulative principle has to be theoretically highlighted. To my knowledge of the matter it can be done using Vladimir Jankélévitch’s moral philosophical analysis (V. Jankélévitch, 1981, 151-188) of the a-symmetrical relationship between rights and obligations. Roughly stated this a-symmetry of rights and obligations (‘droits’ and “devoirs”) runs as follows:

Table 3 Rights and obligations: their a-symmetrical relationship in global ethical inquiry

| Rights (‘droits’) | Obligations (‘devoirs’) |
|---|---|
| Everyone has rights, also do ‘I’ (revendication) | |
| Everyone has rights, but not ‘me’ To ‘you’ nothing but rights | ‘I’ have only obligations To ‘me’ nothing but obligations |
| Reification of rights Objectivity of rights | Non-parity of obligations Irreversibility of obligations |
| The ‘first person’ (‘I’ / ‘We’) goes the last, whereas the ‘second’ (‘Thou’ / ‘You’) goes the first ‘I’ am the defender of ‘thy’ rights ‘We’ are the defenders of ‘your’ rights | The ‘first person’ (‘I’ / ‘We’) goes the last, whereas the ‘second’ (‘Thou’ / ‘You’) goes the first ‘I’ am not the custodian of ‘thy’ obligations ‘We’ are not the custodians of ‘your’ obligations |
| ‘My’ rights are not the basis of ‘your’ obligations | ‘Your’ obligations are not the basis of ‘my’ rights |
| The opening of the eyes —for instance in understanding the challenge of world poverty and world citizenship— implies the loss of our blamelessness The loss of one’s blamelessness is the price one has to pay for keeping one’s dignity | |

There is much realism in the statement of the fundamental regulative principle of the a-symmetry between rights and obligations, for the French moral philosopher acknowledged that man's assumed original incorruptibility—to use another word for 'blamelessness'— has to be laid down to conquer and to keep one's dignity. Dignity is what human rights and human freedom stand for.

5.

The semantics of global ethics thinking: a research proposal about ethical inquiry

All along the three or four 'global ethics' conferences I was attending in 2006, I was in constant wonder with the seemingly uncomplicated use, of the first personal pronoun in the plural: "we". I kept asking myself who are these "we's". I never got a clear answer, not even the suggestion of an opening to the answer about the intriguing question: "who are we when we are speaking in terms of we, and, who are they when we keep on speaking of them and of us?". From a methodological point, I therefore suggest a synthetic clarification of the 'signifying' concepts, which in the Post Cold-War period underpin our global ethics endeavors, such as they play their normative role in the knowledge and understanding of global issues. This will be important to contribute to the thriving of global ethics as a field of research and as a scholarly discipline. It will be equally important to back up any reasonable content of a policy oriented global ethic.

Table 4a: The 'Global Ethic' signifying scheme

| Pronouns | Verbs | Actors – Personal pronouns | Spatio-temporalities | Essentials / Concerns | Audiences (assumed or real) | Recognition |
|-----------------|--------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|
|-----------------|--------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Resources Accesses Education Participation Representation Opportunities Capabilities Choice Well-being Wealth Freedom Dignity Diversity Care Poverty Development Diversity Forced Labor | Empower Enlarge Enhance Expand Support Protect Care Sustain Participate | We They Us Their Our World Community Global Neighborhood Civil Society Citizens Community Communities Culture(s) Multinationals Corporations Institutions Global Institutions International Community Youth Workers Children Women | Core Semi-periphery Periphery Center North South Poor Countries Poorest Countries Rich Countries Richest Countries Our shared future Coming decade Global neighborhood Global Village | Opportunities Capabilities Education Health Water Resource Pharmaceuticals Environment Sustainability Cultural diversity Community creativity Poverty Consumption Pollution Deforestation Forced Labor | Opinion makers Media Civil society activists Ngo's Community activists Field workers Ceo's Multinationals Corporations Governments Government Officials Political Leaders Trade Unions Global Institutions Scholars Experts Artists World Community | Representation / participation Individual Community Cosmopolity Cultural diversity Otherness Alter Other Present generation Future generations |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|

Table 4b: The 'Global Ethic' signifying scheme

| Values | Goals | Norms Prescriptions | Rules | Regulative principles | Rights | Obligations | Application contexts |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Impartiality Care Creative Choice Dignity Autonomy Freedom Self-respect Co-operation Transparency Responsibility Justice Equity Integrity | Dialogue Empowerment Decency Participation Well-being Environmental Support & Protection Liberty Sovereignty Gender equality Global citizenship Mutual respect Global biodiversity | Preventing war and conflict Reducing child mortality Empowering women Controlling arms production and distribution Securing maternal health Reducing or banishing forced labor and slavery Banishing child labor Fighting corruption Promoting transparency in governance (good governance) Encouraging a sense of caring Facilitating co- operation Preventing conflict Maintaining the integrity of the planet's life- support system | The rule of law UN Rules about the global commons International Court justice rules Universal Jurisdiction rules Global Citizenship rules Golden rule | Mutuality Reciprocity A-symmetry Anti-symmetry Transitivity Reflexivity (Selbstreferenz) Universality Generality Contextuality Communality Fostering | Health Education Self- determination Secure life Fair living Decent work Gender equality Culture | Duties Individual Responsibilities Nation-states responsibilities International Responsibilities Intergenerational equity | Regions Communities International Relationships Civil Society Nature's web Generations |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|

Based on Abraham Edel (1939, 1950) & Niklas Luhmann (1980, 1989)

Pronouns, verbs, actors (personal pronouns), spatio-temporalities, essentials (concerns), audiences, recognitions, values, goals, norms (prescriptions, advices, requests, obligations, commands, suggestions), rules, regulative principles, rights, obligations, contexts of application: these are the building stones in any ethically imperative signifying discourse. In discriminating between them as clearly as is possible, while we study ethical justifying and legitimating arguments, we will be able to contribute to both the rhetorical and the scientific foundation of our moral concerns. Moreover in doing this research, we may avoid the ambiguities and the pitfalls of ‘global ethic’, ‘global justice’, and ‘developmentalist ethics’ discourses, in which invariably the first personal pronoun in the plural is used without clarifying the underlying social ontological bases. This also holds for the ‘application contexts’, whereas likewise the difference between goals, values, and norms remains vague and obscure. Following Dewey’s theory of valuation, I deem it preferable to question the dynamic circularities in the value-goal-norm sets, which in the many various spatio-temporal practical contexts come into play.

6.

Conclusion: ethics of globalization vs ethics under globalization

By the end of the 20th century, the world has become a smaller place than it used to be. Societies from all over the world are increasingly being linked into what has been called ‘one global system.’ Of course, human interdependence at a global level sustaining human practice within local communities is hardly a recent phenomenon. International trade and migration, e.g., is at least as old as written history and the capitalistic world-system has since the 16th century produced a global reality of world-making. However, starting by the end of the 1960’s and rapidly accelerating into the 21st century, technological, economical, political and other forces have crafted a world in which this interdependence has reached an unprecedented level. In his 1999 Reith lectures, Anthony Giddens labelled this globalising world a ‘runaway world.’ “We live,” so he says, “in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do.”

Accompanying this process of globalisation is the widespread recognition of these new global human interdependencies and of their ethical relevance. The on-going process of globalisation leads to the emergence of a 'global order' engendering new and pressing moral and ethical issues. The global dimension of many of these issues makes itself felt on many levels and in many ways, forcing societal, political, economical and individual actors to take this into account in their policies and strategies.

Political and economic leaders and institutions, e.g., are now addressing domestic issues in terms of globalisation and referring to global trends increasingly legitimates local as well as international policies. Also, trans-national non-governmental organizations are, in an increasingly overt way, presenting themselves as effective and efficient actors for service delivery, advocacy and policy making on ethically relevant issues. The global dimension also influences communications and interactions on an individual and interpersonal level.

The recognition of the ethical relevance of these interdependencies has already lead to analyses of social and political evolutions couched in terms of critiques of:

- the one-sidedness (biased and limited) of 'economic globalisation,'
- a 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 spreading of migration,
- the violation of public places,
- the erosion of the nation-state,
- the growth of media dictated mass consumption coupled with earth-devastating waste-patterns.

All this points towards a growing awareness of the moral implications of the globalising process and towards the establishment of what could be called an "Ethics of Globalisation" in which moral issues are analysed from a perspective in which the impact of globalisation figures predominantly. The

Centre for Ethics & Value Inquiry (CEVI, Ghent University, Belgium) welcomes this new development within this emerging field of ethics and wants actively to contribute to it by promoting critical research into these political, economical, social and cultural issues. However, this *Ethics of Globalisation* does not pre-empt the field of Global Ethics. The recognition of an enhanced global human interdependency under globalisation and its effects has contributed to what could be called a widespread moral perplexity. Sometimes this moral perplexity is called ‘bewilderment’ (Morris Ginzburg), ‘indeterminacy’ (Abraham Edel) or even ‘crisis’ (Emmanuel Levinas).

The specificity of this contemporary moral perplexity lies in its relation to an ever-growing sense of discontent and unease with:

- post-industrial society,
- a scientific ideology,
- and a strictly utilitarian obsessions of narrow material progress,

all of them unaccompanied by a spiritual evolution and a moral development of mankind.

The social and political evolutions during this era of globalisation, 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. Another factor fuelling this moral perplexity of our age is the radicalisation of the tension between on the one hand a much needed long-term vision for human aspirations and on the other hand the always threatening urgency and short-term applicability of policies. The moral perplexity of the era of globalisation has rendered us, in the words of Jerome Bindé, a ‘temporal myopia.’ Apparently, modern ethics has reached its limits in dealing with this kind of issues.

An “*Ethics of Globalisation*”, therefore, has to be complemented by a critical study of ethics and morality under the conditions of globalisation. Ethical reasoning about issues of globalisation has now become an issue of globalisation itself. It is precisely this that is captured under the heading of “*Ethics under Globalisation*”.

Morality and ethical thought are fundamentally embedded in the ways of live they are practiced in. Globalisation has fundamentally restructured human

ways of living and is deeply affecting our worldview. “For better or worse,” according to Giddens, “it is propelling us into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us.” One of these effects is a widespread unease about the aspirations of contemporary ethics, contributing to the moral perplexity referred to earlier. Contemporary ethics seems unable to cope with the new and pressing issues with which we are confronted in the era of globalisation. A global world order, therefore, also requires a fresh look at ethics—taken as a human endeavour and grounded in the world it reflects upon.

This delineation of the field of Global Ethics as both *Ethics of Globalisation* and *Ethics under Globalisation* should not be understood as reflecting a demarcation between theory and practice of Global Ethics. This would merely amount to a reiteration of a traditional way of coping with moral issues in which an ethical theory is developed and then applied to specific moral problems under the heading of applied ethics.

In contrast to this, a major theme should be the intricate structure of theoretical and practical outlooks in ethics in general and in global ethics in particular. My global ethics research wants to fall back on a Deweyan-pragmatist tradition in ethics, linked with the semantic-historical research program of N. Luhmann, enriched by the important contribution of Abraham Edel to the elaboration of a ‘moral science’ in which the idea of a flexible ‘valuational’ base in human judgment plays a crucial role.

The emphasis on the intricate structure of theoretical and practical outlooks leads to a critique of current scientific ideologies and technological-expertise visions concerning ethical rationality and to a defence of a prudent point of view concerning the philosophical foundation of ethical principles. These principles will forever remain provisory and incomplete. I therefore stress the meaning of human and natural diversity and ‘difference’. Men and women should leave behind them all simple and one-dimensional visions of human progress.

With the Ghent University Ethics research center we champion a new form and content of humanism, relying on a realistic view on man and man’s place in nature and which tops human responsibility before human and natural diversity. We want to contribute 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.

The aim is to establish a thoughtful defence against the widespread ‘unhappy moral conscience’ which seems to be besotting a considerable group of contemporary intellectuals and which gets expressed in many ways, like, e.g., in:

- an absolutist culturalism,
- an oversimplified defence of local communities,
- an undifferentiated defence of local knowledge, topping especially a certain ‘local moral knowledge’,
- a self-defeating defence of the moral significance of particularist and oppressive traditions, social practices, manners and conventional usages,
- the idea that ‘traditional knowledge’ is the unsurpassable vehicle of the moral life of individuals,
- and by laying siege to the idea of a non-local and universalising moral-philosophical program.

It should be clear that I prefer 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. It seems quite clear that men cannot and ought not return to an oversimplified moral universalism. The unique and definitive universal moral content of humanity is not yet present in any of human realization. It is still absent and awaited for – cf. Aristotle’s *steresis* – in the global and dynamic context of man’s ongoing moral life on earth, a context which in a rigid, static and absolutist moral philosophy is out of place. The whole of humanity is an ever-developing ‘moral laboratory’, in which peoples and cultures are contributing with their plural experiments in life and judgment.

To conclude, I would like to refer to Marcus Singer (1971, 340; 2001), who once said that “the great difficulty in morals is not really a matter of theory. It lies in the resolution of concrete cases (...) For the problems are often so complex and difficult, and no man is omniscient (...) Yet this is no reason for

despair or for scepticism. In the reasonable disagreements of reasonable men we may find, so far as we are reasonable, both hope and enlightenment ...” For me, this is an addition to what one of the least influential, but nevertheless one of 20th century’s greatest moral philosophers has written in his *magnum opus*, *A Treatise of the Virtues*: “the things respected are relative and contradictory, but the fact of respecting is not.” (V. Jankélévitch, 1983).

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(Section 6 of the paper has been partly written by Dr. Wim Vandekerckhove, who is the author of the difference between ‘ethics of globalization’ and ‘ethics under globalization’)

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