



GLOBALISATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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It is, perhaps, regrettable that the United States and United Kingdom ambassadors chose to walk out from the lecture immediately preceding this one when the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mohammed, challenged the accepted idea of human rights by reference to what is happening today in Iraq. Unless we are willing to listen to others, particularly when these others are men and women of goodwill who are striving for the betterment of their people, then the prospect of international understanding increasing and developing is limited.

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A pessimistic outlook

The habitable space on this planet, is very small. It is 12 kilometres from the ocean floor to the airless space beyond the upper atmosphere. The Kyoto agreement to reduce CO₂ emissions was not signed by the U.S., Australia and some other countries although a recent agreement between these countries has agreed to share technology – however no limits are set and nothing is enforceable. There is, generally, little motive for countries to act other than in their own self interest. There are few international bodies managing global concerns. There is no international body with the power to manage the environment of the entire planet and no agreed set of ethics for environmental issues. Global matters have recently been negotiated at ‘world’ summits although there are few sanctions (except possibly through the ICJ) for countries who do not attend, do not sign agreements or do not keep to their agreements.

An international environmental code which would be legally binding would require loss or reduction of the principle of national sovereignty. Countries would need to agree to be bound by international law, for the common good, and not their own. Most countries will be unwilling to do this as they would feel that their own national interests might be compromised. What is more, the right to national sovereignty is enshrined as an entitlement for individual countries in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

There are two major issues:

1. There is no agreed set of ethics upon which to build an environmental code of practise.
2. Even if there were, there is no framework for implementing it. There is no framework that would safeguard the environment. This would require individual countries to surrender their right to act in their own best interest. The good of the whole world community can sometimes seem insignificant when measured against the good of ‘us’

Any attempt to tackle the complex problems of globalisation and the environment will need to engage four groups:

1. The United Nations,
2. Individual nation states
3. Major corporations
4. Individuals

This verges on the impossible. Most people and countries act in their own self-interest and bringing a vision forward that will involve all these groups is very hard.

My aim today is to set out a vision to which all these four groups could assent and which national governments could possibly accept and promote – although it seems some way from the specific title of this talk. Addressing globalisation and the environment effectively demands starting at a different place altogether.

Question 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TALK OF HUMAN RIGHTS?

On 18th November 2004 Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan said that: ‘The fundamental standards of humanity are increasingly being ignored’ and that there is an ‘absence of justice’ in the world. I believe

he is right in this and, increasingly, there is no agreement about what the fundamental standards of humanity are.

After the events of 9/11 and the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, the U.S. had little hesitation in shipping to the U.S. base in Cuba supposed members of either the Taliban or Al-Qaeda taken after combat in Afghanistan. There was no clear evidence against them which had been tested in any court of law and many considered that their human rights had been abused. When asked about this, the U.S. Secretary of State for Defence said 'We are acting as the majority of Americans would want us to act.' This may be true, but this does not address the issue of whether the action was JUST or whether the human rights of the individuals were ignored. It smacks more of a utilitarian approach to human rights which holds that what is popular with a very powerful country's electorate or what is perceived to be in that Country's interests is morally right.

The question then arises whether 'rights' talk is merely a device to preserve western self-interest and, when this conflicts with western priorities, these rights are quickly forgotten. In Britain, Tony Blair says that, in the face of the terrorist attacks on the London underground, he will introduce legislation to overturn human rights claims in the British courts. In Malaysia, the lack of judicial review of ISA orders (Internal Security Act) has been argued by some to offend human rights – but this assumes that human rights are an absolute which not everyone accepts, and this is not clear.

Human Rights may be the product of moral, political and social agreement. Human rights certainly exist - they are laid down in many documents including the French, U.S. and U.N. Declarations. However in the absence of God or any absolute (Platonic) values, Human Rights may be argued to be merely those that we accept or create. On the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998 the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad proposed a review of the declaration claiming that human rights were culturally relative. He argued that the declaration was a Western imposition on Asian societies, which ignored Asian values which were more community based and therefore hampered development. The then leading promoters of 'Asian values', Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's then Senior Minister, described the primary Asian values as the belief that obligations to society and the rights of the wider community are more important than the rights of the individual.

SO: QUESTION ONE:

1. Do we consider that HUMAN RIGHTS EXIST and do not depend on human being or governments, but are grounded in God or our common humanity. They cannot be taken away, OR
2. Do we consider that HUMAN RIGHTS ARE CONFERRED - they rest on agreement within a community or internationally. Just as they are created by human beings and governments they can be removed by governments.

There is no agreement on this issue and it underpins the whole debate about human rights.

Question 2: DEEP OR SHALLOW ECOLOGY?

If humans DO have rights, then does the environment itself have rights? Do animals have rights? If so, on what basis are such rights granted? Do whales have the right not to be killed and to roam the seas or is the only issue what is in the best interests of human beings? Japan would argue that whales can be harvested just like any other food and provided stocks are adequate there is no difference between a whale and a chicken. After all, they might claim, Kentucky Fried Chicken has little regard for the 'rights' of chickens. Australia, Canada and many in Europe would argue that whales are in a different category and they have the right not to be killed.

'Rights' in the environment are best seen as a continuum. Everyone sits somewhere on this line. Your response to over-population, pollution, conservation of resources and the preservation of 'untouched' areas will depend on where you stand on a line between two positions:

Deep Ecology and Rights.

1. Every entity is seen as an integral part of an Ecosystem.
2. Animals, humans and ecosystems have the same or similar value.
3. What matters is the preservation of the entire system (GAIA).
4. Environmental damage is never justifiable because it will upset the whole system.

Arne Naess ('The Shallow and the Deep Long-range Ecological Movement' (1973) Norway 1912) was the first to term the phrase deep ecology. He called it this because it requires deep reflection to see 'the intimate dependency of humanity upon decent behaviour towards the natural'. To think otherwise is shallow superficial and artificial. Natural diversity has 'its own intrinsic value'. He calls for 'biospherical egalitarianism' – equal rights of all life forms. Failure to do so, he argues, is 'racial

prejudice' against non-human life. This is very similar to the line taken by Peter Singer the Australian philosopher now working in the U.S.. Naess proposed that human beings should:

1. Radically reduce the earth's population
2. Abandon all goals of economic growth
3. Conserve biotic diversity
4. Live in small self reliant communities
5. 'Touch the earth lightly'

But many consider that this is simply not realistic, not least because the human population is increasingly rapidly and it may be argued that human beings themselves have the right to reproduce which itself may get in the way of talk of environmental rights.

Shallow Ecology and Rights.

Shallow ecology is a human centred approach to the environment and argues that provision of care for the environment depends on what serves human interests. This position is 'Anthropocentric' as it is centred on human concerns. The world is held to have no value in itself, except in so far as it serves the interests of humans. The earth only has rights in so far as it is of 'instrumental value.' Shallow ecology will accept environmental damage can continue if humans benefit from it. The clearing of rain forests can be justified if it can be shown to benefit humans - making space for human habitat or for farming industries. The preservation of a rain forest may be the right thing to do provided it can be shown to benefit human beings. Animals, therefore, have no rights and Nature has no rights. Any respect for animals or nature depends on the extent to which human beings benefit.

Where a person stands on the continuum between deep and shallow ecology will be central to the way they view environmental issues and apply ethical theories.

So: QUESTION TWO:

1. Do you support DEEP ECOLOGY and hold that animals and the environment have rights? OR
2. Do you support SHALLOW ECOLOGY and hold that the environment is only of concern in so far as this benefits human beings?

Again there is no agreement on these issues.

Question 3: ARE THERE ANY GLOBAL VALUES?

Today many people accept either a radical relativism which leads to them thinking that truth depends on who holds it or that there is only one truth – their own. "That's your truth but not mine" can actually be a way of stopping thinking – it contains a post-modern assumption which has not been examined or evaluated. In an increasing number of our countries, by the time young people reach their mid-teens, the idea of a search for truth, meaning and value is seen of little or no relevance.

Not everyone shares this view, but once the search for truth is abandoned, once truth no longer matters as everything depends on the community to which one belongs or one's own perspective – then the door to radical relativism opens and the distinction between truths and lies disappears. The European philosopher Nietzsche said that 'God is dead'. By this he meant not just that he was an atheist who rejected God but he also rejected all those things this God stood for – a real world, absolute value and morality and the search for meaning. Once these go, then absolute values may go as well leading to relativism.

In the absence of any agreed set of values, relativism appears very attractive and this makes the problem of tackling the environment even more difficult. There seems to be no set of clearly agreed values which can provide a foundation or a way forward. At one level individual societies are showing increased concern about moral issues (for instance through ethical investment trusts) but at another level there is massive diversity of approach.

There are an increasing number of ethical investment trusts which invest only in companies that are considered to be ethical acceptable. However what is ethical acceptable seems to have no common basis.

1. Islamic Shari'ah law attempts to maximise social welfare (Maslahah) by protecting the five 'pillars' of an Islamic society – faith, life, wealth, intellect and posterity. Islamic investment involves the screening out of those companies whose primary business does not conform with these objectives. The screening process will exclude companies whose activities relate to the following: alcohol, tobacco, gambling, armaments, pork, financial institutions and pornography.

2. Western countries would have a very different list – they would allow, for instance, interest on money lent and, therefore, investment in banks and insurance companies and companies that manufacture alcohol.

There appears to be no single morality and this easily leads to relativism and the absence of a global perspective.¹

This is one of the problems of a conference like this one. Even when Kyoto is agreed many countries will not sign up and other countries refuse even to accept the International Court in the Hague.

GLOBALISATION

Globalisation affects not just terrorism and the issue of global values but also how businesses conduct their affairs. It also affects international bodies like the GATT, World Bank, IMF, ASEAN, NAFTA and many others and the values of these need examination and are not always clear.

Many companies operate trans-nationally and the largest operate globally. There is an increasing movement towards free trade and this is good – but free trade is badly distorted largely by the rich and powerful countries of the West. Western governments insist on free trade – in other words that third world countries (and others) should reduce tariff barriers to allow good to pass freely between countries. This increases world trade and, it is argued, benefits all countries as it allows for specialisation. However although Western countries insist on having free access to Third World markets they sometimes effectively arrange things so that Third World countries do not have access to their own markets. Often this is done by subsidies.

For instance, the U.S. government subsidises 25000 cotton farmers in the U.S. by over \$2 billion dollars a year which makes it nearly impossible for third world cotton producers to compete. Both the European Community and the U.S. subsidise their farmers very heavily and then this subsidised food is 'dumped' on Africa which often undermines the agriculture of African countries. The European Community has had nine years to prepare to open its textile markets to China, yet due to pressure from Greece and Italy, it went back on a previous agreement with China and is limiting the textiles imported. This has had a negative effect on Chinese employment and runs directly against the spirit of free trade. China is expected to open its market to Europe, but Europe protests when European jobs are affected.

The way the world economy is conducted directly effects the poor as well as the rich – subsidies to farmers in Europe and the United States are a major contributor to poverty in Africa. Each nation state is no longer isolated – we are part of a global environmental problem. The first step is to recognise this and to recognise that human rights and the environment are actually linked:

1. The recent smog in Kuala Lumpur was at least partly caused by forest fires in Indonesia,
2. Over-fishing by Spain largely destroyed the Scottish fishing industry.
3. When the Chernobyl nuclear reactor suffered a major leak, this effected sheep in farms in England,
4. When the Amazon rain forest burns this effects the climate on the other side of the world
5. CFC emissions which continue from some countries serve to further damage the ozone layer.
6. The Israelis taking large quantities of water from the Jordan, directly affects Arab farmers.
7. The increase in global temperature will increase water levels which will threaten Bangladesh, the Maldives and other low lying areas.

WHERE HAVE WE GOT TO??

So far I have argued that:

1. There is no agreement on whether human rights are INNATE or CONFERRED
2. There is no agreement on whether we should favour SHALLOW or DEEP ecology
3. There appear to be no clear global values that everyone accepts
4. Democracy and globalisation tend towards national self-interest and do not really provide an effective way forward except one based on self-interest.

WHAT IS MORE, young people are not being helped to engage with these problems – and nor are many governments.

¹ I argued at the UNESCO conference in Adelaide in November 2004 that there is a need to avoid the extreme of relativism which denies any single truth and fundamentalism which asserts that it alone has the truth. The path of wisdom, as the C11th Sufi Nasrudin recognised, is between the two extremes.

WE ARE IN A MESS!

Democracy has disadvantages. Governments wish to get elected and people tend to elect those who they see will bring benefits to themselves. Democracy fosters short term solutions and avoidance of wider questions. In many countries economic problems are acute – there is little health care, few resources are available for old people, pollution controls are few and many do not have jobs. In other countries, economic circumstances are favourable which often leads to prosperity for some and self-interest being of central importance. Technology and materialism increasingly dominate with a decline in human values.

We need a new way forward that:

1. Is widely accepted in all cultures,
2. Is acceptable to national governments
3. Global corporations will commit to and abide by, and
4. That is easily understandable and fits in with generally accepted values (which is not easy when there are few such values!)

Remember also that to engage with the problem we need to engage the attention of:

1. The United Nations
2. National Governments
3. Corporate entities
4. Individuals.

HOW CAN THIS POSSIBLY BE DONE? It seems almost hopeless.

Let's start again....

Aristotle was the first Western scientist although the Chinese were far in advance of the West in every branch of science. Nevertheless Aristotle and Plato laid the foundation for the method of rational, philosophic and scientific enquiry now widely accepted round the world. Plato, Aristotle and Confucius lived within 100 years of each other. Aristotle focussed on the search for what it was to live a fully human life. Relationships with others and our relation to the whole of reality were vital to his understanding. Confucius, whilst more enigmatic, was concerned with 'humanness' or conduct worthy of a man ('ren' – the word appears 105 times in the Analects) and with the right relationships in society. He argued for the need for individuals to practice justice in order that society should be just.

Confucius said that the three marks of a superior man are

1. Being virtuous, and thus free from anxiety,
2. Being wise, and thus free from perplexity, and
3. Being brave, and thus free from fear.

There are links to Buddhism in some of Confucius' writings.

Aristotle considered that every animal or plant had a distinct nature – just as human beings had a distinct nature. To know what a thing was, it was necessary to study and understand its nature – this is how science started, in the attempt to understand the nature of things. Something was perfectly good if it was fully in accordance with its nature. Aristotle defined what a thing was in terms of its potential. Thus:

1. A zygote is not the same as a foetus but it has the potential to become a foetus,
2. A foetus is not the same as a baby but it has the potential to become a baby,
3. The baby is not the same as a young child, but it has the potential to become a young child,
4. A child is not the same as a teenager, but it has the potential to become a teenager,
5. A teenager is not the same as an adult but it has the potential to become an adult.

The question is whether being an adult is where the process of development of potential stops. Aristotle, the Islamic tradition, the Chinese, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Buddhist traditions and the wisdom of many indigenous cultures maintain that it does not. There is more to living a fulfilled human life than simple growing to be an adult and being economically successful.

My argument today is that we need an international commitment to foster the development of all human beings to their full potential. At one level I am aware that this seems almost trite – but this is precisely why it is important – it is an aspiration which no-one can reject. Once accepted, it becomes a

basis for human rights than can be grounded not in any single set of religious beliefs but in our common anthropology. This requires a commitment to the U.N. human rights convention (possibly with modifications to take account of the community aspect of what it means to live a fulfilled human life) and to fostering economic prosperity so that human beings can come out of poverty, ignorance, malnutrition and oppression.

BUT IT ALSO MEANS SOMETHING MORE – there is an instrumental value to preservation of the environment that is related to what it means to live a fulfilled human life. Being fully human demands consideration of our human position in the wider community (as 'Asian values' affirms) but also in the environment and a recognition that this environment is increasingly vulnerable. We are inter-dependent even though we do not recognise it.

The failure to recognise inter-dependence is a crucial aspect of the problem we face globally. The wealthy in the United States, Europe, Japan and Malaysia do not accept that they are inter-dependent with the peasant farmer in Da'lat in Vietnam, with the tuk-tuk driver in Chiang-Mai or with the peasant growing rice in Bangladesh.

If we can accept that we share a common commitment to help all human beings develop to their full potential, how does this effect the four interest groups to which reference has previously been made. Let us look at these in turn in relation to a global, inter-dependent economy and the environment and its effects on human well being.

AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

We need an international body which is properly funded and which will use the very best and latest science to show the link between the environmental policies of some national governments and corporate institutions and the negative effects on the human condition in other countries. The links are often not obvious – which is why they need to be demonstrated by scientists that do not depend on the interests of the countries or global corporations for which they work, which is why the UN needs to be involved.

Australia and the U.S. refused to sign the Kyoto treaty partly because they claimed to be not convinced by the science pointing to the link between global warming and carbon emissions. If there is such a link it needs to be established incontrovertibly prior to action being taken (as it has been with CFCs). To do this means a commitment to the best science available to identify and address the problem.

We also need an INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COURT² which can prosecute and penalise national governments which harm the environment. Achieving this will not be easy when some countries even refuse to sign up to the international criminal court!

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

National leaders need to provide a lead in asking how our actions affect not just our own community but the wider community to which we all belong. The idea that we should only act in our own interests or the interests of our immediate family or group needs to be challenged and questioned and a political lead is needed to achieve this. National governments need to commit to the idea that we all share a common human nature – irrespective of colour, creed, political affiliation we are all human beings. This would seem to point to a shallow rather than a deep approach to ecology, but it is not as simple as that.

National Governments need to help their communities ask the question of what it means to live a fulfilled human life. Damaging forests diminishes us as human beings – without our children having forests and rivers to enjoy, clean seas and land, clean air and access to ample water they will lead impoverished lives. We are not (and this is deeply counter cultural) simply creatures to be kept 'happy' by increased doses of technology and consumer goods – to fulfil our common human potential demands more than this and national leaders need to make this clear.

It is this 'more' that modern government constantly ignores. The humanity found amongst the poor of the world, does not depend on material possessions and we need to recognise that they have a wisdom that many of us have lost. The environment is part of their heritage and destroying it undermines who they are.

The idea of being committed to a broader circle of ethical concern beyond our own immediate group has always been a part of the great religions of the world. Jewish and Islamic morality have always

² The Malaysian government is, possibly, in an ideal position to give a lead in this area as the relationship between the smog in Kuala Lumpur and the deforestation and burning of trees in Indonesia seems highly plausible and a claim by the Malaysian government against the Indonesian government might, in the future, have a deterrent effect in avoiding a repeat of the practice.

recognised an obligation of care to the stranger – to the person who is ‘other’ than us. Abraham showed hospitality to strangers and found he was entertaining God. Christians are called to go out to all those in need as neighbours. Buddhism is the religion of infinite compassion for all created things and this means not damaging others. Hinduism and Sikhism both affirm the importance of the stranger and those from outside the culture.

National environmental courts or much stronger laws which can make it possible to sue corporate entities and governments are creating environmental damage are essential.

GLOBAL CORPORATIONS

The CEOs of major corporations (those who attend DAVOS and the like) need to commit to care of human beings and, by extension, the environment wherever they operate. At one level this is ‘apple pie’ – few can dissent from it. But it is an important principle and, once it is accepted, opens the possibility of corporate entities becoming accountable

Care of human beings and care of the environment are intimately related. Many CEOs would find it difficult to make this commitment not because they are not sympathetic, but because it is alien to them. They need to be asked to take it seriously – and to be accountable for doing so. This does not happen at present. We need to ask our major multinationals to commit to a broader vision of accountability – which includes not just profit but also an audit of how their operations affect the environment and human beings in the areas in which they operate or more widely. Nation states can give a lead in this by encouraging the adoption of such a commitment and by themselves disclosing the effect of their national policies.

INDIVIDUALS

This is, I would argue, almost the most important area and it is one that most people would not think of.

WE NEED TO EDUCATE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE:

- To recognise our common humanity and the obligation this imposes on us,
- To help them understand peoples and cultures other than their own
- To recognise our own interdependence in environmental and global business terms, and
- To help them to come to understand their commitment to others in everything they do.
- Recognising those who are ‘other’

In America we need people to recognise their obligations to the Palestinians in the Gaza strip as well as to the people of Bangladesh and Africa in the way that trade is conducted. In the Madrasshas of Pakistan we need people to recognise the humanity of those in Europe who come from a different belief system. In Australia, the humanity of the refugees desperately seeking access needs to be recognised. In Malaysia the different value systems between Chinese and Malays needs to be recognised in schools with both sides accepting their interdependence and obligation to the other.

We also need to communicate to our young people a broader view of what it is to live a fulfilled human life and we need a dialogue bringing together

- Psychologists and psychiatrists
- Anthropologists,
- Sociologists
- Environmentalists,
- Religious leaders
- And others

A fulfilled human life for us and our children demands – as Aristotle said – recognising that we are part of Gaia, part of planet earth. That the ability to swim in a waterfall or river, to watch a whale or dolphin, to walk in a forest and see the animals there is something civilising – something that is central to being human.

A PROPOSAL

I would like to propose an international conference to be convened in 2008 to coincide with the Olympic Games in Beijing to look at the question: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A FULFILLED HUMAN LIFE. Contributions would come from environmentalists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, major religious groups and CEOs. This conference could provide a spring board for future planning and to the central questions becoming more widely addressed.

There are no easy answers to globalisation and the environment – but there are some steps we can take to move forward and maybe this itself is grounds for optimism.

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