

# Ethics for One World\*

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*Technological advancement has made the increasing closeness among the diverse regions of the world inevitable. This article focuses on the ethical implications that this proximity entails. The author analyzes how global warming, commerce, and international law are topics that should interest and involve all nations because the decisions taken towards these matters have global consequences. He purports that there is a need to apply an ethic for one world that also goes beyond the human species.*

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Thank you very much for the warm welcome. It's my first visit to Monterrey and to the Tec. I appreciate your great interest in ethical issues. I must say I'm very impressed with the state of the art technology in this Institution and that you have made use of it to enhance the academic experience.

And in fact that does lead me to the theme of what I wish to talk about with you today, that is, the idea of ethics for one world. It is of course technology of various kinds that has played a role in making it true that we are one world today in a sense that we were not a hundred years ago, for example. It is through technology that we can know what is happening in other countries more or less immediately as it happens and we can also respond to it more or less immediately. We have the communication and we have the transportation to react to

whatever happens around the world. If we see a humanitarian disaster, a flood, or a cyclone or something of that sort, we can know about it and we can provide assistance within a day or two. If we think back even as little as a century, that would not have been possible. It would've taken much longer, so the opportunities that we have to assist others would have been very different. And naturally, therefore, we developed an ethics that was limited to our own community. In fact if you think back longer than a few hundred years we had an ethics that was essentially local, that was limited to our village, or our parish or perhaps to some extent to a large nation but certainly no further. And then gradually we developed ethics to a national level and over the past century we have talked about such ideas as universal human rights. But we have not really had the ability to make that a reality until much more recently.

It's also because of technology that the world has grown closer economically. The

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possibilities of trade are much greater with better transport. And we can also export not only goods, but services so that because of instant technology, for example, when I pick up the phone and call directory assistance in the United States, I may well be speaking to someone in India rather than someone in the United States, who is providing information because that's a cheaper way to do it and that provides employment obviously for people in India but it also makes the networks much closer.

And let me finally mention one other important development in our technology or more broadly in our science, which is another way in which the world has become more closely united. A hundred years ago, there were only one or two prescient scientists who had vaguely speculated that perhaps the increase in industry that had already taken place in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century could, through its emission of carbon dioxide, change the world's climate. And most people thought that that was a fairly wild speculation and it was not taken very seriously. But over the last 20 years that prediction has been shown with a very high degree of probability, if not absolute certainty, to be true. That is that the growth of industry and particularly the consumption of fossil fuels and the emission of carbon dioxide and some other greenhouse gases is having an effect on the climate, is creating global warming and is creating unpredictable weather patterns all around the world.

Now that discovery is also a fact that brings us closer together in a special sense. It

means that decisions that are made in New York about what kind of industries are developed, or even individual decisions about what kind of cars people drive and how far they drive them, can have an effect on people as far away as Bangladesh. Those decisions may change the world's climate and may contribute to a rise in the sea level in Bangladesh. And since there are at least twenty million people who are farming lands that are not more than one meter above the high tide level in Bangladesh, obviously quite a small rise in the sea level combined with local storms and particular weather conditions can make a life or death difference to millions of people. So the world has become smaller, and we now realize in that what we normally might have thought of as completely private decisions- what kind of car will I buy?; how much will I drive it? - can have an effect on people all around the world.

When I talk about ethics for one world, have in mind the idea of developing an ethic that goes beyond national boundaries and looks at the world as a whole. There are a number of different issues that can be raised under that topic. One of them, which I have already mentioned, and will come back to in a moment, is this question of climate change. Is that an ethical question and if so, what kind of ethics should we develop for it? I've also mentioned trade questions. And of course these have been very much in the news over the last three or four years, I guess dating from the World Trade Organization's meeting, or perhaps I should say attempted meeting in Seattle in 1999

when demonstrations disrupted that meeting and, I think, for the first time really pushed ethical questions about trade relations onto the international agenda. Before that, people were not paying very much attention. Everyone was assuming that global free trade was a desirable goal. That first set of demonstrations and subsequent demonstrations raised questions about that.

I also want to talk a little bit about international law and its role in developing ethics for one world, international law at the level of solving disputes between nations and also at the individual level of protecting human rights. And I want to talk about the obligation of rich nations to do something to help the poorest nations of the world, that ability, which as I said, we didn't have a century or so ago. And finally, since, as Professor Lopez mentioned, I have taken a keen interest in extending ethics beyond the human species to non-human animals. I will say just a little bit about that, which I also see as raising global questions as well as local ones.

So that's rather a large amount of things to get through in a relatively short time, but let me see what I can do in that time to at least stimulate your interest to pursue these questions a little bit further.

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## II

Let's talk about this question about climate change first. As I said, we now know that decisions what we make in any one country of the world will affect people all over the world and will affect them in unpredictable ways. We can also see that some people are going to be made significantly worse off if this process continues. In addition to people living close to sea level in Bangladesh there are people in Sub Saharan Africa farming lands that are marginal in terms of their rainfall. On some models of global climate change, this rainfall could become less reliable still. Regions that are now possible for agriculture could become simply desert. And it's these people, who are among the world's poorest people, who are the least able to adapt to that change. There are of course parts of the United States that are very near sea level, around the state of Florida, for example, and there would certainly be ecological damage to areas like the Everglades from rising sea levels, but people in the developed nations will often have the ability to build sea walls to keep out the sea and to use irrigation to overcome less reliable rainfalls. At the worst, they will move somewhere else where they will be able to make a living. So they will be less seriously affected. But it's the world's poorest people who will be most affected.

Now, if you think of this as an ethical question, you might at first be a little bit

about how we should think of this ethically? What kind of model should we use? I want to suggest the model of dividing up a scarce resource. We have something that many people want but there is not enough of it for everyone to have as much as they want. So we need some principles for deciding what is a fair or just division of it. You all know this problem. The classic example is how you divide the cake when there are many people who would like a slice of the cake and not enough cake to give everyone as much as they want. Well in this example, the cake is the atmosphere. Or to be more specific, it's the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb waste gases without causing adverse consequences. That capacity is limited. We can't all have as much as we want of it because if we look at the world situation today, most experts agree that we are already producing too much in the way of greenhouse gases to maintain the world's climate as it is. So we need to cut back. The agreement that was reached in Kyoto, known as the Kyoto protocol, would have cut back emissions by the developed nations by roughly five percent below their 1990 levels, which means considerably more than five percent below their present levels.

If we assume the the Kyoto protocol set a reasonable and sustainable overall level of omissions (some people think it's still too much) then we can ask how that should be divided among the people of the world, and whether some countries are using more than their proportionate share. When I say more than their proportionate share, I mean in

proportion to their population. If you divide the total amount of greenhouse gases that the world can sustain, according to the Kyoto agreement, by the population of the world, you would get a notional, equal, per-capita share of the atmosphere. So you can do that calculation and then you can match it against the various nations of the world by multiplying the per-capita share by the population of each country. If we do that calculation, we find that the United States is using about five times its per capita share. Developing nations are generally using less than their per capita share. The largest developing nation, still considered as such, of course is China, which is getting close to its per capita share, but is still a little below it, on most estimates. But it is increasing rapidly because China's economy is booming and it's been burning a lot more coal to provide more energy. More Chinese are starting to get cars of their own, although car ownership is still very low, and that's also increasing fossil fuel emissions. India is only using about one-third of its per capita share of the atmosphere at present, but it also has a quite rapidly growing economy and it's also a country with a very large population. So if China and India were to produce an amount of greenhouse emissions per capita that were anything comparable to what the United States is producing today, we would clearly be headed for a global disaster.

Is there a reason why China and India should be held back while countries like the United States and other developed nations, including my own native country, Australia and Canada and the European nations which

emitting between two and three times their per capita share? I have discussed this in my book *One World*, searching through a variety of possible principles that could justify the developed nations in using so much more of the atmosphere's capacity to absorb their waste gases than other nations like China or India. But I find it impossible to come up with any good arguments that can justify the skewed distribution that so greatly favors existing developed nations. And even if we did implement the Kyoto protocol, and even if, which doesn't seem likely under the present administration, the United States were to have a change of heart and were to sign on to Kyoto as well, we would still have a distribution that would be very favorable to the developed nations and would hold back developing nations if they were to simply stay at their existing level. Of course the Kyoto protocol, as it's currently formulated, does not bind the developing nations. But eventually, we certainly need global control, which includes countries like China and India and indeed all the developing countries, as well as the developed nations. That's the only fair allocation. But I think that there is an urgent necessity for the developed countries to take the first step, since they are the ones that are using so much in excess of what would be a notional fair share, that is an equal share for every inhabitant of the planet. Looking at this as an ethical problem, we need to recognize the needs of people in other countries, recognize the rights of the developing nations to develop and therefore to increase their amounts of fossil fuel burning,

and accordingly recognize the obligations on the developed nations to cut back.

### III

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Now, let's look at this question of global trade, which is very much in the news. If we look at that debate, we find that there are very polarized views on global trade and particularly on the World Trade Organization and its role. There are some people who say that global free trade is the way in which the poorest nations can catch up with the other nations and participate in the global economy, can prosper and benefit their inhabitants. And there are others who say, "No, a free trade regime is a way in which the richest nations and multinational corporations impose their will on the poorest nations and instead of helping them, actually widen the gap between the richest and the poorest".

We saw very recently, of course, in the meeting here in Mexico, in Cancun, a crisis because for the first time a group of developing nations turned to the developed nations and said: "You talk a lot about free trade and fair trade but what about your own restrictive trade practices? What about your own barriers to our exports of agricultural products and what about your own enormous subsidies to your farmers which will make it possible for them to compete unfairly with farmers in the developing world?" That was a significant step in a kind of

logical progression from the developments that in Seattle. But of course it hasn't solved anything yet, it hasn't changed the practices of the developed world, and it hasn't helped the developing nations either. It's still a kind of a stand off.

When we attempt to look at this issue impartially, we see that the truth lies somewhere between the two polarized extremes. Is free trade a good thing? People often say that free trade has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer. And certainly I think it's true that the gap has widened. That is the rich have gotten richer. It's less clear whether the poor have gotten poorer. In fact, as far as I can tell, although the data are not very reliable, the answer to that question depends on who exactly you mean by the poor. Do you, for example, mean the poorer half of the world? Have they gotten poorer in the last 20 or 30 years in a way that we could attribute to free trade? I think the answer is no. The poorer half of the world, the poorer 3 billion people in the world, have on average become better off. Alternatively, we can talk about the poorest third of the world. I think even there, as far as I read the figures, the poorest third of the world have on average become better off. What about if we talk about the poorest fifth of the world? The poorest 1.2 billion, which is the number that is usually said to be living in absolute poverty, on something like the equivalent of one US dollar per day in purchasing power. One cannot say that they have become better

off in the last 20 or 30 years. At best they've stayed roughly the same. And if we go to an even smaller group, the worst off ten percent, then there are good reasons for thinking that this group have become worse over the last 10 or 20 years. So when you ask: have the poorest become poorer? The answer depends on what you mean. One person could look at the progress made by the poorer half or third of the world and say "This is good, there are a billion people or more who were in poverty and have moved out of poverty because of development and trade." Or you could look at the poorest 600 million and say, "This is terrible! They were already extremely poor and now they're sinking into worse poverty." There is no simple answer, but I think it is clearly true that we must focus more on the situation of the worst off, both in trade and, as I will be saying shortly in terms of foreign aid, as well. The failure to do this has been the biggest flaw in the trade regime.

It is not, however, the only flaw. The fact that the free trade regime allows a competitive advantage to countries with the weakest environmental regulations is also a serious problem. Because the WTO trade rules do not allow importing nations to take into account the the process of production, they cannot discriminate against products because they were produced in ways that cause pollution. So these rules provide an economic incentive to countries to have low standards in order to attract industry even though that may be bad for the country and perhaps bad for the world as a whole. And it may also, of course, may be

bad for endangered species where industries are threatening to them.

So I think we need a more global ethical approach to this whole question of trade, which should be fair as well as free so it does assist the poorest countries and should have protection for the environment and for the rights of workers as well.

#### IV

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Now I turn to the topic of international law. We have been trying over the last few decades to work towards a system of international law that protects human rights. This has been true, particularly at the level of punishing criminals who commit crimes against humanity, or crimes like the crime of genocide. Twenty years ago, the only real example we had was the prosecution of Nazi war criminals. We now have a series of other tribunals trying criminals, for example, in former Yugoslavia and more in Rwanda. But more recently we have moved to acceptance of an International Criminal Court. At the latest count about 90 nations have signed on to the treaty setting up the court. These nations are saying they accept the jurisdiction of international law and of an international court to try people who are guilty of crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. This is an important progressive step towards protecting human rights, and towards insuring that those who violate human rights in

a particularly gross manner will be brought to justice, and will have no hiding place.

Here too, as with regard to the Kyoto protocol, the United States has not acted as a good global citizen. It has refused to sign on to the statute of the International Criminal Court and it has actively tried to undermine it by negotiating bilateral treaties with nations where it has troops stationed. These countries have been put under pressure by the U.S. to say that they will not apply the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court to Americans serving in that country. And I think it is particularly hypocritical when America claims the right to take prisoners of war anywhere in the world and fly them to Cuba, and hold them in detention without trial in Cuba, without charging them with any crime. This is saying: "we're not going to allow our citizens to be subject to the law of an international tribunal, which has much better safeguards for due process and proper impartial initial procedure, than we are allowing the detainees in Guantanamo Bay."

But on the whole I think there has been progress. The most difficult problem, of course, is the maintenance of international law at the level of disputes between nations. The events of the autumn of 2002 and the spring of 2003 saw a major setback for that because for all of its flaws - and it certainly has flaws - the United Nations is the only body that exists that could

resolve international disputes. Hence when the American administration took its concerns about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to the Security Council, that was a positive step, or at least appeared to be a positive step in recognizing the role of the Security Council in solving such disputes. But when in March 2003 the United States became impatient with the inspections procedures, on the basis of what appears to have been misleading intelligence, and decided to take the matter into their own hands irrespective of the lack of United Nations support, that was a setback for the idea that we should have a global body that can resolve disputes.

I'm not saying that it's never necessary to use force to resolve international disputes. But if we're going to use deadly force against nations, we should try to work towards a situation where we have an internationally accepted authority to decide when the use of force is justified. Overthrowing tyrants who kill and torture their subjects may be a desirable thing to do in some circumstances, but we should not leave it to an individual nation to decide whether a tyrant should be overthrown. We need more settled, more impartial procedures to make those sorts of decisions. So here, too, we need a different ethics.

## V

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I said I would talk a little about the obligations of the developed nations to assist the poorer nations in the world. This is a major topic that we could talk about at great length. It's not only as a question to be considered as a national level. I do think, of course, it's a question for the national government. Many, many years ago, the United Nations set a target of 0.7% of gross domestic product to be given as foreign aid. That is 70 cents in every 100 dollars. So it's not very much. But the number of nations that give even that small amount is just a handful: the Scandinavian nations: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, plus the Netherlands and that's about it. Some of the European nations may give about half of 1% or three-tenths of 1%. The United States, however, is currently giving only about 1/10 of 1%. Only 13 cents in every 100 dollars of gross domestic product. It's the lowest level of all the developed countries. Many of my students at Princeton, who you would think are fairly well educated Americans, are not aware of how little the United States gives. There a myth circulating in the United States that the United States is a generous nation in terms of foreign aid. The fact is that it is not. And although President Bush has said, and it is one of the things for which I give him credit, that the United States will increase its foreign aid from a present total of about \$10 billion dollars a year to about \$15 billion, so far very little of that money has actually been given.

## VI

This is something that many nations need to do more about, but as I say it's not something that is only to be considered at the national level, because in addition to rich or developed nations and developing or poor nations, we also have in developing nations, nations a lot of affluence that exists alongside great poverty. So that for example, we have in India, which is a poor nation, a middle class, that is larger than the middle class in France. That's true in Latin America too, to a large extent. We have countries with great poverty but with a very wealthy upper or middle classes. And I think it is up to each of us, if our government is not doing enough to help the poorest, to ask ourselves if we are doing enough. If we think our government should give more, should give 1% or perhaps 5%, or even 10%, then, why can't we ourselves at least make a start and at least do something by contributing some of our surplus income? When I say surplus I mean the amount we spend on luxuries: on holiday travel or on buying new clothes because we like the new fashions, or going to the theater or rock concerts. Those are all luxuries, which more than a billion people in the world can never think of doing. And there are voluntary agencies all over the world, which efficiently assist some of the world's poorest people. So although our own contribution is not going to be able to solve this problem, we can help specific people, we can make a difference. Our contributions through these agencies can help individual families or individual villages and I think that is what we ought to be doing.

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Finally let me say something about going beyond the human species, because everything that I've been talking about now has been about how can we make the world a better place for our fellow human beings. But of course, it's not only human beings who suffer. Non-human animals suffer as well, all over the world. A great deal of the suffering that they experience is inflicted on them by human beings. We might think, for example, of humans hunting them or clearing their habitat, clearing the jungle, or causing them to die by loss of habitat. We're all aware of the risks of extinction of many species. But it's not only in terms of extinction and endangered species that we should be thinking of non-human animals. We are also, and in fact, on a larger scale, inflicting suffering on them when we put them into modern high tech factory farms, confine them indoors and keep 10 thousand hens in a single shed, in small wire cages so that they will lay their eggs more cheaply. Or we'll put pigs together in sheds in stalls where they cannot turn around for their entire lives. These are perhaps economically efficient, but they are environmentally damaging because we have to grow crops to feed to these animals and we waste a lot of food in that way. They also cause a lot of pollution and are responsible for a lot of environmental pollution.

It's a form of agricultural production that is increasingly being exported from the developed world to the developing nations, and this is a retrograde step.

We should think about the interests of non-human animals as well, and we need to think about moving to a more environmentally sustainable diet which will often be a diet which is low in animal products or even a vegetarian. And ultimately, I think, in a future time we will embrace an ethic that tells us to take into account not only the interests of our fellow human beings but also those of members of other species as well.