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Special Issue: Reclaiming Moral Values

## Special Edition: Reclaiming Moral Values

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### **Creative Transformation...**

takes its name from the belief of process theologians that God's work is always creative and always transformative; and that wherever creative transformation is occurring, God is there. This means that instead of clinging to past formulations of faith and the ways of action that used to work, we are striving to be co-workers with God by seeking new formulations and more effective ways of action. —John B. Cobb, Jr.

## **Creative Transformation**

*exploring the growing edge of religious life*

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## Editorial: Reclaiming Moral Values

We hear much these days about “moral values,” sometimes called “family values,” and by some strange twist in the culture these have been reduced to preventing gay or lesbian persons from the benefits of marriage, preventing women with unwanted pregnancies from having abortions, allowing government-sanctioned prayers to be offered openly in our public schools, and punishing convicted murderers with death. While these values have been paraded under the name of “Christianity,” other values that are far more deeply rooted in Christianity as well as in other traditions have receded from the public rhetoric. These core values concern issues of poverty, both care for those who are in need and actions that change the structures that make people poor. Depth values involve cultivating a fundamental respect for one another, and forming communities where well-being is accessible not only to the inhabitants of each community, but among the communities themselves. Peace on earth is a core value; peace *for* earth is a core value.

Five hundred years ago a brave Christian posted ninety-five theses to the door of a church, arguing that the church had been taken into a “Babylonian captivity” from which it required release. In the contemporary strangeness of “moral values” devoid of the classic Christian concern for the poor, perhaps we can argue that another Babylonian captivity of the church has taken place. Moral values themselves are captive, lying in the dungeon of despair while their usurpers play their

given roles on the stage of our public consciousness. With concern for the poor thus displaced, the numbers of the poor and their increasing plight have risen drastically. The earth suffers from despoliation, and fear rather than respect marks relations among the world’s peoples.

This special issue of *Creative Transformation* argues that Christians must reclaim moral values. Rather than arguing against the pseudo values named above, our essayists argue passionately for moral values in our economy, in our ecological living, in our social structures, so that these lead to a more universal standard of well-being. They argue for respect as a moral way of life, for a community that recognizes itself as including many within its unity, and as itself being one among many. Finally, there is a plea for a communal structure of our world that moves away from violence as its *modus operandi*, to a qualitatively different mode of world democracy.

Moral values are at the heart of each of the world’s religions, with these values structuring relations of one another within the community, and relations to those outside the community. We are no longer—if ever we were!—isolated into communities that can look to their good alone. As we reclaim moral values, we must do so within a pluralistic world, where the passionate care of each is to enhance the good of all.

These pages aspire to be a small contribution toward such a worthy goal.

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# Economic Justice in Process Perspective

John B. Cobb, Jr.



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Can process thought contribute to an understanding of economic justice? If the question means, can process thought develop an understanding of economic justice that is different from all others, then the answer is “no.” Almost certainly everything process theologians can say agrees with some other contributors to the discussion. Still I think the answer is “yes.” A process view will have distinctive elements and emphases and will, indeed, be quite different from most of the positions that now dominate the discussion.

One point of entry into this discussion is attention to the word “justice.” It plays a central role in both the Hebrew and the Greek heritage of Western civilization, or at least in the English translations of the documents of those traditions. But the absence of the term from Whitehead’s writings is striking. Does that mean that the followers of Whitehead are not interested in justice?

The superficial and obvious answer is that it does not have that meaning. Most process theologians use the term frequently. In any case, Whitehead himself expressed many judgments that belong to the field of meaning of “justice.” Nevertheless, the question bears deeper examination. Why did Whitehead avoid the term? We can only conjecture.

One interesting consideration is that the idea of “justice” is not attractive to Buddhists. Although it is doubtful that there is any significant influence of Buddhism on Whitehead personally, nevertheless, his vision is quite similar to that of many Buddhists. Both view every entity in the world as an instance of “dependent arising” or “the many becoming one.” For neither is there any underlying, self-contained, identity of personal existence of the sort that gives rise to the individualism of the modern Western tradition.

For both there is great value in the attainment of harmony.

In considering the problematic nature of justice, we can begin with its tension with harmony. Justice is strongly connected with punishment. Our “justice” system is primarily concerned to determine whether people should be punished and if so how much and then to carry out that punishment. Many people who have had a loved one murdered feel that they cannot rest until they have seen “justice” done, and that usually means, the killer killed. Belief in God has been closely bound up with the idea that although we may get away with sins here and now, we will meet with just punishment in life after death.

Another response to crime is possible, one that seeks the harmony of

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society more than retribution. Retribution may, of course, contribute to that harmony; so the two should not be seen as mutually exclusive. But in the present “justice” system in the United States, consideration of bringing the criminal back into a harmonious relation to the larger society plays a very small role. Most punishment is for the sake of “justice,” not for the restoration of harmonious community. The result is that most criminals, when their time in prison ends, commit additional crimes and are recycled back into prison.

From the point of view of a process theologian who believes in “justice” in its biblical root meaning, our system of “justice” is not just. But we must recognize how widespread is this punitive meaning, and how likely is the call for justice to encourage the commitment to appropriate punishment regardless of other consequences. It is not hard to understand why Whitehead and many Buddhists avoid the term.

But when we speak of economic “justice” punishment is not in view. Are we home free here, or are there still reasons to be concerned about the connotations of the word? There are still possible problems. Economic “justice” can mean that each person gets the income he or she deserves. How do we determine desert? One way is in terms of how much that person contributes economically to the employer. In this view, the market determines what is “just.” Employers in the

United States consider that some CEOs are worth five hundred times the just desert of the average employee, partly because they efficiently fire tens of thousands of the latter. If this is economic justice, then a theologian influenced by Whitehead will not support “justice.”

At the opposite extreme, the ideal of economic justice can lead to radical egalitarianism. In this view, simply as a human being each person deserves just as much as any of the others. Accordingly, it is not the economic contribution to employers, but simply being human that determines desert. The saying, “from each according to ability, to each according to need” is a beautiful summation of this vision of justice. Unfortunately, efforts to move in this direction have had serious negative consequences. Only a few people are motivated to work hard when there is no connection between their efforts and what they gain by them for themselves and their families. Societies that try to disconnect effort from reward have to use coercion or fear as a driving force. It is easy to see why one would avoid supporting this vision of justice as well.

Obviously, reflection about justice does not have to lead in any of these directions. It may focus on having laws that do not favor one group over others and then administering these laws honestly. It may emphasize the reduction of crime by seeking to reduce its causes. When crime has

been committed, it may seek apology and recompense from the criminal and forgiveness from the victim.

Advocates of economic justice may focus on meeting the basic needs of all while allowing a wide range of inequality in the distribution of wealth. They may seek to reduce the breadth of inequality as far as that can be done without weakening the incentives that stimulate entrepreneurship and hard work. They may try to keep the doors of opportunity open to all, even while recognizing that not all will pass through them.

There is some question, however, whether the word “justice” is the best word to use when we direct our energies in these directions. Perhaps our goal is better expressed in terms of harmonious community instead. Of course, this is also subject to distortion. If a society announces this as its goal, it may suppress the cries of the oppressed, insisting that they should accept their oppression for the sake of the harmony of the whole. In short, the goal of harmony can lead to acute injustice.

As a Southern white, I can recall the attitudes of many of us at the time of the civil rights struggle. There were many Southern whites who were outright racists and committed to the permanent subjection of blacks. But they would not have been able to control the politics of the South without the tacit support of many other whites who knew that such racism was wrong and that in the long run blacks should have been

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allowed to participate fully in society. However, many of these urged blacks not to demand justice. This, they pointed out, seriously disturbed the harmony of society, provoking violence from the white racists. For the sake of harmony they should patiently endure injustice.

A defender of the ideal of harmony can only say that the absence of commotion and widespread visible conflict does not constitute harmony, when large numbers of people are excluded from participation. A society is truly harmonious only when all its members feel themselves to be participants and contributors. In even the most harmonious society there will be those who are not satisfied with their roles and judge that they should receive more recognition and reward. This is the human condition. But in a relatively harmonious society, extreme cases of dissatisfaction will have some opportunity to be heard and have their claims adjudicated. Each member will be taken seriously.

This kind of society will be a community. A geographically defined community will be a society in which all long-term inhabitants have some participation in the decisions that govern the life of all. The society as a whole will take some responsibility for the well being of all its members. All will gain some of their sense of personal identity from their participation with others in the community. They

will judge themselves better off when the community as a whole flourishes.

This is a round-about way of approaching the topic of economic justice. In process perspective the economy should serve the community. This is a deep reversal of the present ordering in

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the United States and in the world as a whole. But it is the essential starting point for discussion "economic justice" from a Whiteheadian point of view.

The economy, to serve the community, cannot be set in contrast to the improvement of the economic condition of the members of the community. There is no community apart from the persons who make it up and whose identity is constituted in part by their participation in the community. Any economic policy that benefits some members of the community at the expense of others weakens the community.

Economic progress, in process perspective, cannot be measured by increase of market activity. There is always the question of whether such increase benefits the community. The answer in the past two centuries has usually been that it does not. Increased market activity has been accompanied by the systematic destruction of communities. The pace of such destruction has accelerated in the past fifty years and has become global.

That does not mean that there cannot be increase of market activity that improves the community. Speaking abstractly, if the increase does not involve removing boundaries between the community and the outside, such increase will normally improve the community. More goods will be produced and consumed within the community, and if these are desirable goods, the community as a whole will be better off. The introduction into a community of more efficient means of production normally has this positive effect.

Many development programs sponsored by churches and other nongovernmental organizations are oriented to beneficial community development. One pattern is for the development worker to live in a village and think with the villagers about how their lives could be improved. There are many possible answers. Better farm instruments, a nearby well, a convenient woodlot, and solar cookers are among the simple improvements that enable the

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people to accomplish more with less labor and therefore have better lives.

Gandhi proposed the sewing machine as a way to give work to women who were underemployed during parts of the year. Thinking together and working together to attain improvements of these sorts strengthens community, and usually the results enhance the economic condition of all of the villagers.

One might argue that it is patronizing to raise the economic “standard of living,” as measured by standard indices, as little as this kind of development does. To this objection there are several answers. Improvements that seem minor to us may be quite significant to those who experience them. Participation in improving their own condition makes the improvement more significant than when people are treated as pawns in some grand scheme. The human relations maintained in community are of greater importance for human happiness than the amount of consumption beyond a minimal level. Further, taking small steps of this sort can lead to taking others, so that, without destroying community, the village can become, step by step, more prosperous.

These further steps will lead, naturally, to cooperation and exchange with neighboring villages. A single village may be able to assemble its own bicycles and perhaps motor bikes, but it is unlikely to produce motorcycles. It would be too inefficient to have

the equipment needed for such an industry to produce for such a small market. The same would be true with regard to equipment for refrigeration and electrical equipment generally. These require a larger market that can be made up of a dozen villages, perhaps.

Those for whom the ideal of justice rings strongly of equality are still not satisfied. This is not a way in which, in the foreseeable future, inhabitants of Indian or African villages will attain economic equality with middle class Americans. Those for whom this is the goal are likely to prefer the standard forms of development.

The model I have proposed in the service of community emphasizes methods of improving the productivity of people step by step, moving toward more complex technologies. The standard model moves directly to industrialization on a large scale. This introduces a second contributor to increased productivity, that is, economies of scale. Large factories serving large markets can produce many types of goods more efficiently and, therefore, more cheaply than small factories serving small markets. Their products are also likely to be of better quality. Accordingly, where there are no barriers to trade, the products of these factories put out of business the local producers. The former artisans and small producers will then have to leave their villages and become part of the highly mobile workforce that provides the labor of the factories. Those who remain in the

villages can then buy more and better goods—if they have the money to pay for them and if they have not been displaced by agribusiness.

The goal of the dominant form of development is to increase total global production. It succeeds, although it is not clear that it succeeds better than the system of international trade that preceded it, since the rate of global growth has not increased during the period of thoroughgoing globalization beginning around 1980. However, the direct effect of this form of development is to impoverish many while enriching others. In general, the rich have grown dramatically richer while others have stayed the same or lost ground even as measured by the favored figures, average per capita income.

On the other hand, it may be that in the long run present policies would lead to an evening out among regions of the world. Production moves from high wage countries to low wage countries, lowering wages in countries like the United States and raising them in China. There they remain very low, but eventually, according to the theory, they should rise. At that point production will begin to move to some other region where wages are still lower. Robert Maris argues that by the end of this century, global economic activity will increase thirty-fold. The larger part of this increase will be in currently poor countries, so that wealth will be distributed equitably among

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nations. In this way, a certain kind of economic “justice” will be attained. Human beings will achieve equality at a level of affluence far beyond any that we can now imagine.

From my perspective as a process thinker, this is all quite impossible. The world economy is already operating in unsustainable ways. A thirty-fold increase in this activity is out of the question. Nevertheless, let us assume, contrary to fact, that such an increase is possible and that pursuing currently dominant policies would, over a century, lead to some approximation of equal affluence everywhere. Is this the right picture of “justice”?

The biblical word we translate “justice” is equally well translated as “righteousness.” Paul teaches that whereas once this attribute of God was understood to be expressed in treating people according to their deserts, and that this meant punishment, now, through the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, we understand that God’s “justice” is, in fact, God’s merciful love. Further, the true well-being of people is found in their participation in communities in which a similar love characterizes the relationships among them. Economic equality is not the issue, although in such communities, as long as anyone has resources, then no one will go hungry or unclothed.

Biblical justice is primarily referent to personal character, although it can refer to the wider character of the society. It is a

way of being in the world that is in accordance with God’s purposes for the world. The society it aims at is characterized by *shalom*. We sometimes translate that as “peace,” but it is a very rich understanding of “peace” that comes close to the idea of a harmony in which all participate.

*Any economic policy that benefits some members of the community at the expense of others weakens the community.*

It requires that all have their basic needs met, but it does not require that all be affluent. Indeed, thus far no correlation has been found between affluence and this kind of peace or righteousness or even happiness. The biblical vision of justice would not put the people of the world through terrible suffering and repeated destruction of their communities for the sake of the equal affluence of people everywhere several generations in the future.

So what does a process theologian say about economic justice? It is immensely important. But its

primary meaning is not that each person be paid what he or she is worth, that all individuals be paid equally, or that all peoples attain the same economic “standard of living.” Its primary meaning is that the basic economic needs of all are met in a way that expresses and strengthens the bonds of community. This requires that the economy be understood as one essential contributor to the life of the community among others.

Communal life is not injured by inequality as such. For the most part we do not resent the fact that persons of outstanding talent and achievement are paid better than we are. Few object if the physicians who heal them receive more income than they do. Workers assume that managers and top executives will receive more than those they employ and supervise.

However, communal life is injured by extremes of inequality such as those that now increasingly characterize the United States. It is injured when the government repeatedly adopts policies that benefit the rich at the expense of the remainder. It is seriously injured when the state claims to be too poor to maintain even basic support for the healthcare of those who do not have the money to pay for it.

At the level of abstraction appropriate for philosophy, one cannot specify how the gulf between rich and poor is best narrowed. But some practical conclusions follow from what has been said. The priority of the government as the primary institution through which

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the community operates should be to make sure that the basic economic needs of all are met. These needs are for food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and transportation. The question should not be whether we can afford to do this. The question is what else, after we have done this, we can afford.

In most industrial societies medical care and education are provided by the government for all, whereas food, shelter, and clothing are not. It is preferable that most are enabled to meet these basic needs through work that contributes to the well-being of the community, so that full employment is a proper economic goal. To whatever extent that is not achieved, and for those who cannot work, the community through the government has the responsibility to provide. To fail to do so is to abandon our self-understanding as a community.

Beyond this, there are various means of reducing the huge gap between rich and poor. The graduated income tax, which is now being eroded, is one way. The inheritance tax on large estates is another. Clearly our current administration is now committed to doing away with these restraining forces. Some have suggested that a wealth tax would serve better than an income tax. Some have proposed that a tax focused on land would have many advantages and few of the disadvantages of taxes on income and sales.

For those who regard the overall

increase of production as the primary goal, the question about taxes takes a different form. They sometimes argue that we should not tax the rich since these are the source of investment through which the economy grows. Whether in fact leaving more income in the hands of the rich has the supposed benefits is unclear, but if the function of the economy is to serve the community, this argument is pointless. Speeding growth in general through means that weaken community only serves to hasten the ecological collapse that is the inevitable outcome of present policies. Our concern should be for the well-being of communities of people, not for increased economic activity as an end in itself. If less economic activity suffices to meet the needs of all and the wants of many, so much the better.

Another approach to reducing the gap between rich and poor within a society is through improving the condition of workers. Governments can require higher minimum wages. They can decide to do business only with companies that pay a living wage, which is much higher than any minimum wage thus far proposed. They can also support workers in their organization of labor unions that can bargain for better wages and working conditions.

The argument against this effort to increase the wages of workers is that it makes our production more expensive and less competitive. It hastens the relocation of

our businesses in regions where labor is much cheaper and working conditions much worse. In the context of a global economy these arguments have merit. From the perspective of one who believes that the economy should serve the community, this is only a further reason for opposing the globalization of the economy.

Some people seem to think that the only alternative to globalization of the economy is a system of completely separate and self-contained economies. This is, of course, not so. Throughout history there has been trade between largely independent economies. Even today the economy is not completely globalized. It is absurd to suppose that total globalization and total independence are the only options, when in fact neither is a real possibility.

The debate is about the ideal. Today the dominant ideal is economic globalization. This means “free” trade and the privatization of virtually all property. The latter is required so that corporate capital can purchase whatever it wants wherever it wants. The great “sin” is “protectionism,” which means any effort by human communities to protect themselves and their economies. Human societies are to serve the global economy.

Those of us who believe that the economy should be in the service of community find this ideal repulsive. It would be repulsive because of its consistent assault on human community even if it

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were not a recipe for environmental collapse. That it leads to completely unsustainable practices and inherently opposes those that could lead to a livable world for our descendants is only a second reason for rejecting it.

An economy that serves community will almost always continue to trade with other communities. This trade should be in the interest of the trading communities as communities. What is now called “free” trade is trade between businesses that is free from consideration of its costs to the communities in which they operate. In the globalized economy of which it is a part, no society is free not to trade. Each is required to specialize in what it produces most cheaply and to import what others produce more cheaply. For the sake of “free” trade, every society loses its freedom to become a healthy community. All of this is sometimes promoted on the grounds of “justice,” but this is not the justice envisioned by the Hebrew prophets.

We who advocate economics for community must recognize that the communities served by their economies will be quite unequal. Some will be far more affluent than others. Commitment to justice as equality of affluence among the many human societies will lead us back to programs such as that of Maris or else to a totalitarian world government that will redistribute global wealth. The focus on community opposes both.

However, before regarding this failure to aim at equality as an argument against economics for community, we should recognize that thus far the present policies, with their subordination of the welfare of communities to the global economy, have been the cause of the vast increase in the gap between rich and poor countries. In much of the world this system has destroyed the basic self-sufficiency of agricultural economies without sharing with their people the increasing global wealth to which their new roles as servants of the global economy contribute. Even by standard measurements of economic welfare, many parts of the world would be far better off today if they had been allowed to develop in terms of the kind of community development described above. They would not be anything like as rich as the highly industrialized nations, but they would have escaped the grinding poverty that still pervades many of them. Their people would also enjoy a far richer communal life.

For those who advocate economics for community, accordingly, justice does not mean equal affluence among communities, but it also does not mean indifference to the great gaps between them. If we think of the world ideally as a community of communities, then every community has a concern for the well being of every other community. That means that every community with the means to do so will stand ready to assist other communities in meeting the basic economic needs of their people.

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But it also means that this assistance will be given only in those ways that strengthen the communities that are aided. It will not be tied to relations of dependency. The ideal is the old one of helping people to help themselves, with the goal not only of meeting basic needs but also of sustainable economic development.

There is a still wider context for the meaning of economic justice today. Whereas in the West “justice” has been almost exclusively limited to relations among human beings or between God and human beings, today it has become possible and desirable to extend the term to relations between human beings and other creatures. But what does it mean for human beings to treat other creatures justly?

The effort to extend individualistic ideas to interspecies relations works even less well than individualistic views of intrahuman justice. It is surely appropriate to reduce the amount of suffering humans inflict on individual members of other species, especially those that are domesticated. We can also admire those who decide not to kill other animals or to participate in the culture of killing by eating their flesh. But in general nature subordinates concern for individuals to the preservation and flourishing of species and eco-systems. The deeper and broader meaning of “justice” must be oriented to these goals.

With respect to the economy, the focus here is on restraint. When economic growth, understood as increased market activity, is the goal, less and less space and context is left for most other species. If the economy is in the service of human community, this problem is reduced, but it does not disappear. As long as human beings understand human community as separate from the larger ecological system, they will expand their use of land and resources in ways that encroach upon the habitat of other species. This is unjust to them.

Unfortunately, as long as human beings understand their relation with other species as competitive, they are unlikely to be restrained in their encroachment by an abstract concern for interspecies justice. Any such sense of justice needs the support of a deeper understanding of human flourishing. Much has rightly been written about the need for a profound change in sensibility on the part of human beings and especially in the modern Western mentality that has increasingly influenced human action around the world.

For many thousands of years our ancestors understood that their well-being was bound up with the well-being of the earth and its multifarious inhabitants. But beginning ten thousand years ago with the growing dominance of agriculture, the relation between human beings and other species became more competitive. Wilderness was replaced by an agriculture that excluded most wild animals. Those predators that threatened domesticated animals became enemies to be exterminated. The increase of global human population since the industrial revolution

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has vastly exacerbated the problem of sharing the planet with other species. Unless humans recover a sense of belonging, with other species, to a shared earth, they will not exercise the economic restraint required for the long-term well-being of the human community itself.

Economic restraint is not always possible without restraint of propagation. When the human population reaches certain levels locally, survival of human beings in that location is in fact in competition with that of other species. Globally, the increase of numbers among the affluent is a far more critical problem for other species, since the ecological footprint of the affluent is much greater.

The implication of these reflections is once again that a rich idea of harmony is a better guide to relating to other species than the idea of justice. We need to develop a harmonious global system that allows humans to flourish in ways that are not the expense of what remains of wilderness and its inhabitants. The goal should be to expand wilderness rather to allow its further reduction. This is hardly possible as long as the primary goal is increased economic activity in general, with concern for the environment given only a secondary role. It is still difficult if the flourishing of human community is the primary focus because of long-established habits of separating the concern for human beings from relations

with other creatures. But if we recover a more profound understanding of human community and its well-being, there is a chance of finding a way.

What process theology calls for is so different from currently dominant practices, and from currently dominant ideals as well, that articulating a process view of economic “justice” may seem an idle undertaking. However, there are signs of change, and articulating what we regard as the right goals for such a change may not be entirely irrelevant. Advocates of economic globalization have tried to present it as the inevitable outcome of technological progress as well as that which is shown by economic theory to be most desirable. They persuaded many. And their success in implementing the implications of this ideal led others to go along, assuming that there was no realistic alternative.

However, the results have caused such destruction and suffering that there have been massive and growing protests. A great deal of energy has emerged around the idea that “another world is possible.” The annual global meetings of the World Social Forum under this theme at Porto Alegre and elsewhere have expressed and generated strong conviction and commitment. The process of economic globalization in Latin America has been slowed with several important governments now sharing in the popular resistance. For several years the World Trade Organization has

made little progress in advancing its objectives.

It *may* be that the tide has turned, although it is still far too early to make this judgment with confidence. Political and economic power still lies overwhelmingly with the supporters of economic globalization. Much of the opposition is generated by resentment about the distortions of actual policies of globalization, favoring the rich nations and exploiting the poor. Those who oppose only the distortions may be bought off by modest concessions without any deep change of direction. Those who do believe that, truly, “another world is possible” lack a shared, unified vision of what that other world would be. The dominant powers can probably block their progress by divide-and-conquer means. Nevertheless, those who, for the sake of an economics for community, have all along opposed economic globalization are not as lonely as they once were. Designating the alternative to the World Economic Forum as the “World Social Forum” expresses a congenial sensibility. It seems worthwhile to continue to call for an economics in the service of community instead of one that destroys community for the sake of increased market activity or overall increase of production.

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# The Barbarity of Poverty: A Moral Indictment Against the Powers-That-Be\*

*Douglas Sturm*

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*There will be no poor among you. (Deut. 15:4)*

*USA, the wealthiest nation on Earth, has the widest gap between rich and poor of any industrialized nation, and disparities continue to grow. (Anup Shah)*

The pervasiveness of poverty throughout the world is a prime index of the moral failure of the powers-that-be. That claim is intended as a serious indictment against all those forces—personal and institutional—whose policies and actions perpetuate the dominant forms of our common life.

Apart from the special case of voluntary poverty (whose virtue is to witness to a way of life over against prevailing social patterns), poverty in its ordinary forms betrays a barbarous disorder in political and economic structures. The irony is that those whose actions sustain that barbarity pride themselves as keepers of civilized order, whereas, in truth, a genuinely civilized order would bend its energy toward the abolition of poverty given its effects on the quality of life within the community.

When the poor organize to protest their condition, they are, I propose, seeking not merely to better their personal condition, but, more importantly, to advance the cause of civilized society across the human community. They are witnessing (whether they know it or not) to the need for authentic civilization.

That is an implication of liberation theology's declaration of a preferential option for the poor. That is, as well, a reason for insisting that the abolition of poverty is among the highest of moral priorities at the present time, as acknowledged by such groups as the United Nations and the National Council of Churches.

Though the precise definition of poverty is a source of debate, its reality cannot be gainsaid. Consider the following kinds of generally accepted propositions.

\* Half of the world's population of six billion people live on less than two dollars per day.

\* The wealth of the world's three richest people exceeds the Gross

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National Product of the poorest 48 nations combined.

\* One of every two children in the world (a total of one billion) live in poverty, lacking adequate resources for daily living. Nearly 11 million died before reaching the age of 5 in 2003.

\* 20% of the world's population consume 86% of the world's goods. The richest 10% receive nearly 50% of the world's income annually.

\* In 2004, only 0.13% of the world's peoples controlled 25% of the world's assets. In the US, 10% of the population owned 70% of all the wealth of the nation in 2001.

\* To meet the basic sanitation and nutritional needs of everyone in the world would cost \$13 billion—roughly the amount citizens in the US & Europe spend annually on perfume. Some calculations declare that to alleviate extreme poverty would cost \$16 billion a year, about 3.2% of the annual US military budget.

Such findings are shocking. However, they are insufficient to explain the full sense in which poverty signifies a moral failure in our common life. For that purpose we must attend to several dimensions of the meaning of poverty in the everyday experience of those subjected to that status within the world system. Admitting that the face of poverty varies according to historical conditions, I suggest that, at least in our times, the experience of poverty is comprised of three

vital characteristics which, taken altogether, constitute a significant form of dehumanization.

### *A deprivation of economic sustenance*

Most discussions of poverty emphasize its economic dimension, as indicated in the propositions outlined above. The poorest of the poor lack virtually all the economic resources requisite for just plain survival. However, even the working poor—those many whose income fails to meet the basic needs of individuals and families—confront similar deprivations: inadequate housing, malnutrition, lack of health care, limited schooling. Moreover, all those living on the margins, barely coping to sustain themselves, are easily cast into an economic maelstrom whenever they confront a crisis—whether a natural disaster or a disruptive form of economic restructuring as currently promoted by dominant corporations, national governments, and international monetary agencies. The lives of the poor, in sum, are characterized by physical suffering and economic insecurity induced in large part as a result of factors beyond their control.

### *A denial of political agency*

Accompanying disparities in income and wealth between rich and poor in the contemporary world are disparities in political power. In the public forum and in the board room, where major

decisions are made about the shape of our common life, the voice of the poor is, except under extraordinary circumstances, ignored. Those with access to economic power control the media, manipulate public policy, determine the distribution of resources, govern the practices of corporate enterprise, transform the destiny of neighborhoods, and sway campaigns for public office. In the normal run of the political process, the poor are, despite pretenses of democracy, denied effective participation in the formulation of the rules and procedures that shape the commonwealth. The “power elite,” those who determine the dynamics and forms of our living together, are persons who are either themselves among the wealthier classes or supported by those classes. The poor have virtually no opportunity to engage meaningfully in making fundamental decisions about matters that affect their lives.

### *A diminishment of creative interaction*

Given divisions in the contemporary world between rich and poor, we are confronting a dramatic version of apartheid, a polarization of peoples located in separate enclaves with sparse communication across those boundaries, geographical and cultural, that set them apart from each other. Where many of the wealthy, for example, live their lives in gated communities and exclusive clubs, protected by private security

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forces, the poor are inextricably ensnarled in dying communities, lacking in educational and cultural opportunities that might expand their horizons, and subject to forces—natural and social—that constantly curtail their life span and severely delimit their range of creative interaction. To be sure, the poor oftentimes find a deeply satisfying kind of companionship within their own community and may create significant organizations to provide support for each other and to protest their condition, but they are nonetheless significantly restricted in the extent and depth of their opportunity to flourish within the more encompassing world.

In short, under modern conditions, the experience of poverty is a matter of dehumanization. By virtue of social structures currently shaped and sustained by the powers-that-be, the poor are wanting in three of the most vital qualities of a flourishing human life: economic sustenance, effective agency, and creative interaction. Modern poverty is therefore far more than a lack of economic resources. It is a structure of alienation, in which the poor are forced to participate in a global system that runs contrary to their own good as human persons. To be sure, the powers-that-be may not deliberately intend that result, yet that is the effect of their policies and practices and they may—they should—be held morally responsible for that effect.

Decades ago, Martin Luther King, Jr., called for a “revolution of values.” Besides calling for an end to militarism and racism, he called for an end to poverty as part of that revolution. That revolution remains as urgent at this time as it was then. It awaits our full commitment to such a change, our formulation of a plan of action, our gathering of peoples into a movement—all these stages as a way of taking seriously the desperate need for a humane civilization, a civilization honoring our intrinsic, even if ignored, connectedness with each other. Forces resisting this kind of change are massive—individualism, corporativism, nationalism—in addition to authoritarianism, patriarchalism, and racism. But they must be uncovered for what they are: ways of organizing our common life that deny our humanity, that run contrary to a civilized world, that are, therefore, barbarous.

\* Resources consulted for this column include: Chuck Collins, et al., *Economic Apartheid in America* (2005), Jeffrey Sachs, “The Abolition of Poverty” (2005).

<[www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1034738,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1034738,00.html)>), Anup Shah, “Poverty Around the World” (2005).

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# The Power of Respect: A Moral Vision to Transform the World

Rick Marshall



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*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. ~Matthew 22.36-40*

The main argument of this essay is that the word "love" should be replaced by "respect" as the core of ethics. Love is too general, too vague, too affectional, overly complicated, and confusing. What could it possibly mean to love your enemy? Must it mean that one has to like him or work up some depth of affection for her? Given the tone of Jesus' teachings and the way he dealt with people, the flow is more toward respect. Respect is a narrower idea than love, but then more useful. It is a more primary idea, and therefore is more universal in its application. It clarifies the intent of the two great commandments. We cannot command someone to love us, but we can expect the other to treat us with respect. We needn't love someone in order to treat her with respect, but we must treat others with respect however we may feel about them. Feelings of affection are gravy, the icing on the cake. Making respect the core of ethics frees people to fulfill the two commandments without the burden of mustering feelings for others. Love as the core idea has confused and burdened people with misunderstanding.

Treating others with respect entails acting toward their well-being. This does not require that we respect the behavior or beliefs of others, nor does it require that we like or feel fondly toward them. We can even dislike them, disapprove of their behavior, feel threatened by them, and still treat them with respect. Respect as a verb supports Matthew's emphasis upon doing the word of God. The most basic ethical principle of the Bible is about how we treat others.

Further, respect is not imposing what I think is in the other's best interest, but asking the question: what would be in my best interest if I were in their place? Neither does this ethic reduce to simply being "nice" to everyone or being a doormat, allowing others to run over you. The question of how to define well-being for self and for the other is crucial and is worth careful thought and discussion. Balancing the needs of the one against the many is often difficult, but seems to be a worthy, even a religious, goal.

A cluster of moral principles revolves around and supports the central

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idea of respect. The Beatitudes are an excellent demonstration of this. The Beatitudes lay out a moral point of view, using a different kind of power: a humble spirit, solidarity with those who suffer at the hand of others, a thirst for justice and well-being, an attitude of mercy, working for peace rather than perpetuating conflict. This is the embodiment of persuasive power, which is the foundational support of a world view that Jesus called the Reign of God. We are called to a new vision for this world, a new way of living in the world, a path that leads to well-being for all. We are called to be a light to this world, even agents of transformation. It has little to do with life in the hereafter, or in an otherworldly realm.

In light of the principles of the Beatitudes, Jesus discusses the problem of anger, with the requirement that we use anger creatively instead of using it to do harm. He then encourages repudiation of retaliation and retribution. We are to treat even our enemies with respect, and to forgive those who have injured us. It's all about our choice in how to treat others. Respect is a practice, a discipline. The value-world described by the Sermon on the Mount was meant to be embodied by the followers of Jesus, those who enter into this discipline, in order to transform the world. The

Christian churches were to be communities of disciples who would engage this world view, this alternative to coercive power, and become an example to the world of a way to break the cycle of violence and live peaceably with all of God's creatures, in God's unfolding created order, as God intends. Certain feelings facilitate the practice of respect:

*To fully appreciate the principle of respect is to simply recognize that we live in a world where everything is dynamically connected to everything else.*

compassion, empathy, appreciation of interdependence, hope, courage. Other feelings work against respect, such as desire to control or manipulate others, fulfilling one's ego needs at the expense of the other, fear, hate, envy, jealousy.

Contrast this biblical worldview with the dominant one in which we live. What the Bible describes as "The World" seems familiar to us: Coercive power is valued as the highest form of power. It is even attributed to God. The use of manipulation and control of others through political and economic structures is the thinly-

veiled policy of government. The quest to accumulate wealth at the expense of others is a social ideal. There is a high tolerance for injustice, greed and violence, even a rationalization of these values as "the real world." The idea of welfare and the common good are given lip service. This is a world-view in which very few at the top of the pyramid benefit

from the cycle of violence that is continually perpetuated in the name of God and country. The way the world is set up has not worked in the past, does not work now, and never will work. The value system that propels us all toward violence and domination is a failure. The Bible recognized this failure well over two thousand years ago and is perhaps the strongest critique of what we call "Empire." What

makes us think it will work now? In the words of Dr. Phil: "How's it been working for us so far?" What the Bible describes as "The World" is a disastrous failure.

A different power is required to save us, a different ethic. Two sides of the same coin—the biblical idea of persuasive power and the ethic of respect—are the key to a transformed world. To treat God with respect is to treat the neighbor with respect, and to treat the neighbor with respect is to treat God with respect. The two commands are dynamically connected; doing one is to do the other. "As you did it to one of the

least of these, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40).

Jesus offered a consistent, coherent worldview that will lead to well-being, peace and joy. It is admittedly idealistic, yet surprisingly pragmatic. This view is biblical and it makes sense in today’s world.

## *Process Theology and Respect*

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:12, 26).

To fully appreciate the principle of respect is simply to recognize that we live in a world where everything is dynamically connected to everything else. In such a world of interdependence, our welfare is mutual: each individual’s welfare depends upon the welfare of all others. I am part of the world and the world is part of me in a continual unfolding of the dynamic relationship between each successive moment of my experience as I incorporate my past and the world around me into my own internal experience. I take the world into myself and fuse it, in my own way and with divine guidance, into a private, momentary, experience. The many become one, yet I am one of the many for others. I am one among

the many, and the many reach their unity in God. We are all in God and God is in us. When one suffers we all suffer. This is deeply biblical.

Important biblical principles support the ethic of respect. The book of Genesis describes God as the Creator who is dynamically related to everything and is deeply involved in the unfolding of all

*The biblical idea of persuasive power and the ethic of respect are the key to a transformed world.*

creatures. God wills well-being for all creatures. The divine will to power is a will to well-being for all of creation.

Jesus called God “Father” or “daddy.” This seemed new at the time and implied a different kind of relationship between the Creator and the creatures: internal relations. As a parent myself, this kind of relationship seems intuitive to me. I know how it feels to want my children’s best interest and to treat them accordingly. They are literally part of me and I am part of them. I do not try to control them, or manipulate them, but treat them with respect, as true individuals and children of

God. My welfare is deeply involved in their welfare, which seems very risky to me, because this makes me vulnerable to being hurt, yet, at the same time, it is a source of great joy. I have a tender, loving, dynamic relationship with each of them and my guiding principle is, under all circumstances, to treat them with respect. I might not agree with their decisions, belief or behaviors, and we might need to talk about difficult issues, but respect remains the rule of the relationship, the only rule.

Why not extend this principle to all God’s children, to all of creation? Why shouldn’t I want for other peoples’ children what I want for my own? Truly to love God is to love the neighbor; truly to love the neighbor is to love God. But who is my neighbor? If everything is connected to everything else, then my neighbor is everything else: other people, other creatures, the environment. What difference would it make if everyone treated the world with respect? It would transform the world.

Respect is rooted in a particular theological perspective which is predicated on an inter-relational view that involves both external and internal relations. Respect recognizes both forms of relationship. A new world is possible, because the principle of respect uses a different kind of power, not power over the other to control and manipulate others,

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which would be to their harm, but to work for their well-being, which requires a persuasive power, as embodied in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## *The Practice of Respect*

The principle of respect is meant to be practiced beyond our circle of family, tribe, nation or even species. What good would this principle do for all of creation if we practice it only with those we love, or those we know and trust? “If you love only those who love you, what’s the point?” (Matt. 5:46)

There are several biblical ideals that support the general application of the principle of respect. Hospitality is a theme running through the Bible: taking the risk of reaching out to see to the needs of the stranger. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16ff) is an example of what happens when the principle of hospitality and respect is broken, resulting in violation and violence. Alternatively, the positive practice of hospitality in the story of Abraham and the three visitors (Gen. 18:1-15) opens up new possibilities for life.

Justice is another theme running throughout the Bible. The biblical call to justice is not a value in itself, but a measure of the well-being of a society. Taking care of the weakest members in a society—the orphan, the widow, the sick and poor, the outcast—means that well-being is increased

for all. I would call this the “Trickle Up“ theory of economics. When the conditions of well-being are encouraged for the least in a society, then all experience well-being. The mere presence of the poor is an indication of the ill health of a society. The gap between rich and poor is a measure of social disease. Attention to justice increases well-being and

*When the conditions of well-being are encouraged for the least in a society, then all experience well-being.*

the practice of respect is the key ethical command to attain social, economic and environmental balance.

Yet another theme deeply embedded in the Bible is the emphasis upon doing good. “God has shown you what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The Great Commission at the end of Matthew has Jesus saying “Go therefore and make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you” (28:19-

20). Notice the liberal use of strong verbs.

The practice of respect increases well-being, peace and joy. It unleashes creativity and deepens bonds. If the command to respect was taught in school and church, practiced in families and in government and in business, what kind of a world would be possible?

The way the world is now organized, the way the system is rigged to favor the rich at the expense of the poor, is not a world God intended. Teaching the principle of respect, embodying it in church and family, is the most effective way of undermining the dark powers of coercion and manipulation too often used by those in power.

The principle of respect can be used as we deal with issues of the environment, the political system, family, community, church, the justice system, international relations, business. It applies to all races, all religions, all beings. Can we envision a world in which the command of respect could be the central ethical principle? It would transform the world!

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# ***E Pluribus Unum: The Elusive Quest for Community***

*J. Philip Wogaman*

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At the beginning of a White House Conference on Hate Crimes toward the end of his term of office, President Clinton took note of the great diversity of individuals and groups in the United States. Our pluralistic situation is virtually unique in the world, he said, especially among the really large countries. If we can learn to live together in community this will be a model of hope for the whole world. An hour or so later, as Conference participants were bused from the White House to nearby George Washington University, they were greeted by mean-spirited demonstrators from a well-known anti-gay hate group—vivid and timely evidence that we’re not quite there yet.

## ***Community as a Universal Value***

The moral case for community, as a universal value, is almost a no-brainer among Christians and the adherents of other great religious traditions. In Christian terms, God has created us all and loves us all, despite our undeserving. We are to love one another as sisters and brothers. Nor is love to be taken in purely individualistic terms. Responding to the mid-twentieth century discussion of the relative uses of *agape* and *eros* as normative expressions of Christian love, the late L. Harold DeWolf cited a third Greek characterization in the word *Koinonia* which points to commonness or community. In that understanding, love is best expressed as mutuality.<sup>1</sup> Love is acknowledging that we belong to one another. In the Western tradition, the underlying point is present in Stoic philosophy, which locates our oneness in the fact that we are all rational beings, an expression of the ultimate mind—a philosophical viewpoint to which St. Paul probably alludes in the Mars Hill Address (“From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:26). In any event, Aristotle was right in saying that human beings are by nature social animals. One way or another this pops up as an emphasis in most, if not all, religious communities.

## ***Community Defined in Exclusive Form***

But here’s the rub: The human commitment toward community often, perhaps even *usually*, takes exclusive form. My identity is with my community. I may even give my life for it. But I do not acknowledge belonging to the universal community of all humankind.

H. Richard Niebuhr framed the issue helpfully by writing of three forms

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of worship.<sup>2</sup> One of these he called henotheism after the Greek *henos* for tribe. *Henotheism* is worship of one's own group—which could be one's family, city, nation, race, religion. It could be any grouping. In a scintillating insight, Niebuhr even treats humanism, or worship of the human, as a form of henotheism because it excludes everything that is not human. Niebuhr also speaks of polytheism as an alternative form of worship. By this he is not particularly referring to ancient or more recent mythological pantheons of gods and goddesses, but rather of a proliferation of values to which we are wholeheartedly attracted—first this, and then that, but without any enduring center of value. Materialism qualifies as *polytheism*, and arguably that is an altogether too prevalent value center for contemporary Americans—even among church-goers. But only the third form of worship, that Niebuhr calls *radical monotheism* is fully inclusive, since it is the worship of the one who is center and source of all being.

We can conclude that community, in contrast to blatant materialism and self-centeredness, has a moral claim upon us. Materialism is obvious idolatry. It is disintegrative of moral selfhood; at best it is but a consolation prize for those who have lost the deeper blessings and fulfillments of genuine life in community. Its prevalence in contemporary American life is a human tragedy. But over against the materialistic tendencies of our time, the

attractions of deeper community life are also stirring everywhere. These stirrings are present in the responses by Americans (and persons elsewhere) to the victims of natural disasters and, perhaps paradoxically, by the attractiveness of the new megachurches. The latter, despite conservative theological emphases and

*Community, in contrast to blatant materialism and self-centeredness, has a moral claim upon us.*

entertainment worship formats, work hard at making people feel included. One suspects that that, more than theology, accounts for their success.

At any rate, there is a whole lot of commitment to community in the contemporary world. Much of it is self-sacrificial, leading people to place the well-being of the communities with which they are identified above their own personal self-interest, even their own lives.

The haunting question is whether much if not most of this is, in Niebuhr's phrase, *henotheistic*. Are the communities to which people are committed exclusive? Do they

lead to disdain for and antagonism toward other communities? Should there be, and can there be commitment to universal community, inclusive of all humankind and respectful of the non-human aspects of creation? Or is moral commitment to community necessarily and by definition exclusive?

### *The Challenge of Racism to Community*

Racial identity poses the question in interesting ways. In its 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century forms, racism classified human beings by biologically fixed racial characteristics, some superior, some inferior. Racism was taken to justify North American slavery and German genocide, both ultimate expressions of the belief that some races are superior, others inferior. The attitude pervaded churches as well as the rest of the general public. However, reification of race is not scientifically sustainable. Careful scientific research, much of it under auspices of UNESCO, has made clear that different physiological characteristics are not in the same genetic causal sequence. Thus, for example, skin color, as such, related to height, weight, facial characteristics, straight or curly hair, etc. A very dark Indian or Pakistani may have little other than skin color in common with a very dark African. And none of the measurable physiological characteristics correlate with intelligence. It emerges the even the term "race" itself is problematic. A "race" turns out to be socially constructed, usually by a

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*First, there are some kinds of cultural values that must be discarded, and good riddance. Those values, like racism, sexism, and heterosexism, that dehumanize people are totally incompatible with universal community.*

dominant group seizing upon selected physiological characteristics to define a group for purposes of enmity or oppression.

Is there, then, any morally compelling reason why persons of one such socially constructed “racial” group should not marry a person of a different such group or adopt a child from a different group and thus depriving the child of its proper heritage? On one side, it may be said that this is diluting the purity of genetic inheritances, on the other that it is selling out one’s own group. The genetic argument is thoroughly fatuous; if anything, interracial amalgamation is more conducive to healthier offspring. In respect to adoption, the issues are clearly cultural, not physiological. The fact that an adopted African American or Vietnamese baby is raised in a white European or American home does not mean that the baby is deprived of its true identity, for that identity is not genetically constructed—except, of course, insofar as observable physical characteristics have broader social consequences for which the child needs to be prepared. There are other cultural issues to which we will turn below.

### ***Religious Exclusiveness and the Paradox of Monotheism***

Religious groups are constituted in a different way. While most adherents of the great world religions are born and raised in those faith communities, it is generally the faith commitment itself that constitutes the group identity, not anything genetic or physiological. Still, the group commitment is very deep and often very exclusive. Religion is one of the most divisive forces in the contemporary world, diminishing, not enhancing, commitments to a fellow-humanity that crosses religious bounds. Why is that so?

One answer is suggested by the Italian legal philosopher Francesco Ruffini and the American Constitutional lawyer Leo Pfeffer.<sup>3</sup> With some variations between them, both Ruffini and Pfeffer argued that religious intolerance in the West is rooted in the monotheistic faiths. If there is but one God, and you don’t worship this God, then you are alienated from the only group that matters. As an infidel or a goyim or a heretic you are outside my community. I may still feel an obligation to love you and to convert you, but you and I do not share community.

But that may not be the only way to look at monotheism. Can one not as easily say that if there is but one God, the maker and sustainer of all things, the one who has been from all time and who will be for all time, then who am I to claim to know all about this great God? Does it not suggest that my views are imperfect and that the views of persons of other faith communities, though also imperfect, may have truths I need to hear? This kind of principled humility is greatly underscored by the process theology project, which emphasizes that even God is moving on in that infinite future.

Paralleling exclusive tendencies among religious groups, ideological

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commitments also function sometimes to define who is and who is not acceptable in community life. That has been observable both on the right wing and the left wing in American social life. Conservatives disdain liberals, liberals are judgmental toward conservatives. Each feels superior toward the other. The ideological debates can be very important, leading to actions and policies of great importance. But the affirmation of common humanity across such battle lines helps define whether one's ideology is really just another form of *benotheism*. In my forty years in Washington, D.C., I have seen those lines become more divisive, with a mean-spiritedness that is partly generated by ideologically narrow support groups across the country.

### ***Nationalistic Divisiveness***

Nationalism also inspires huge loyalties, both among citizens of present nations and among those whose quest for nationhood has been frustrated. One recalls the deeply emotional scenes from 1930s Germany, as people affirmed their commitment to *Volk* under the shrewd leadership of Adolf Hitler—and the British people during the Battle of Britain, and the Armenians' nurturing of resentments against the Turks, and the American response to 9/11.

Love of country and love of the whole of humanity are not necessarily contradictory, although the divisive effects of the former upon the latter can be seen all over the world. Forgotten is the fact that modern nationhood is of such short historical duration. At most, anything resembling what we call nationhood is of less than a thousand years' duration. I find it quite credible that no current nation will still exist, as such, a thousand years from now—much less for the many more millennia yet to come. So that form of *benotheism* will have a short shelf-life.

### ***Divisive Issues of Gender and Sexual Orientation***

There are other kinds of group identity with exclusionary effects. Currently, American culture, and more especially its churches, are deeply conflicted over issues of gender and sexual orientation. Gay and lesbian people are often stigmatized, which means excluded from full moral acceptance in community. The scientific debate over what creates differences of sexual orientation continues without final, clear resolution. And yet, there is huge evidence that gay and lesbian people are no less functional as human beings than people of heterosexual orientation. That evidence is accumulating in many churches across the country, where gay and lesbian people are saints and sinners like everybody else, often manifesting extraordinary gifts and graces. Religious bodies like the United Methodist Church that speak of the “practice of homosexuality” as being “incompatible with Christian teaching” are hard-pressed to say exactly why. It can't be just because of the handful of scriptural passages that seem to condemn the practice because there are even

*The wider expressions of community cannot negate smaller loyalties any more than love for God negates love of other people. The problem is only when the smaller loyalties supplant the larger ones.*

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more passages whose teachings are no longer acceptable among most Christians. It can't be because it seems "unnatural," because, again, human life involves many interventions in the natural order. And if it is alleged that same gender sexual relations are a barrier to spiritual life in grace, then the evidence surely shows that isn't necessarily so. It seems much more plausible that we are dealing here with inherited cultural bias, owing much to attitudes about male superiority. Even the United Methodist Church appears to be of mixed mind about all this, for its 2000 General Conference proclaimed that "we implore churches and families not to condemn or reject their gay and lesbian members and friends." So the church affirms that more inclusive community, while still singling gay and lesbian "members and friends" for special community-diminishing stigmas!

Without piling on still more illustrations of division in contemporary society, is it not depressingly clear that the quest for universal community is elusive? All of the other forms of community are incomplete, often even destructive. When we settle for this or that form of *benotheism*, we have a slice of community, but our full humanity remains diminished. Is deeper human community, embracing all humankind, even possible?

## ***E Pluribus Unum: A Real Possibility?***

If it is not, then the whole moral enterprise comes under question. But there have been enough human illustrations of deeper commitment to sustain hope, including celebrated figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, but also the architects of the United Nations.

It may come down to how we are to combine the partial loyalties with the more universal. The American slogan *e pluribus unum* is suggestive: a union that is formed from many different parts. The wider expressions of community cannot negate smaller loyalties any more than love for God negates love of other people. The problem is only when the smaller loyalties supplant the larger ones.

Smaller community loyalties are characteristically an expression of a particular cultural framework. Culture is made up of shared historical experience, language, and values, all woven together in a picture of what life means. They are necessarily limited to the experience of a particular people and not an expression of humanity as a whole. That does not make them invalid; it does make them incomplete. There is nothing ontologically fixed about them—as a racist or nationalistic ideology might imply. Thus, when (for example) the people of a given "racial" group resist intermarriage or the adoption of its children by persons of other "racial" groups, this is to be interpreted as a culturally protective attitude.

As the Civil Rights Movement was reaching a climax in the mid-to late-1960s this is what the big debate over "integration" was all about. Did racial integration, which the Movement had struggled for, mean the absorption of distinctive aspects of African American culture into a dominant, overwhelming white culture? African Americans who sought to succeed in the dominant culture were called oreo cookies—black on the outside, but white on the inside. Similar attitudes are discernible in other ethnic or religious settings: Latinos/as seeking to preserve Spanish language and tradition, Jews concerned to perpetuate thousands of years of religious tradition, Indians alarmed at the loss of tribal customs and languages. In some respects the Indian experience is the most poignant of all, for Europeans descended on this continent in great numbers and wrested the land from those who had possessed it for thousands of years, while pressuring Indians to give up precious customs and traditions.<sup>4</sup> In Denver there has been an annual struggle over the Columbus Day parade. To Indians, a celebration of Columbus epitomizes the brutal conquest of the continent with large-scale loss of Indian life and culture. To those of European ancestry, especially the Italian-Americans, the parade is often viewed as a celebration of the "discovery" of America and the beginning of a vast new life for all.

Such illustrations raise the larger

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question: If to be a community is to have a common culture, can there be a common culture of shared experience and values for humanity as a whole?

If so, it could never be “complete,” for culture is constantly evolving—in “process” as readers of this journal might affirm! But then, is there a possibility that essential things about the process can be broadly shared? Some further observations are in order.

First, there are some kinds of cultural values that must be discarded, and good riddance. Those values, like racism, sexism, and heterosexism, that dehumanize people are totally incompatible with universal community. But other values, that embody positive aspects of historical experience can be affirmed as gifts from the “pluribus” to the “unum.” One does not often hear the term “melting pot” to describe the United States, for it often seemed to mean the absorption of people of other cultural heritages in what was basically a European outlook. The opposite danger, sometimes conveyed by the alternative term “pluralism,” could be taken to mean different groups occupying the continent, but only co-existing without being a part of an overarching community. A melting pot that simply absorbs people into a preexisting sameness is cultural imperialism, rightly discarded. A pluralism that represents total cultural relativism must also be discarded for the disrespect it shows for all cultures.

The project of real community

has to involve mutual sharing. Can a community of shared values exist? And if it can, what are the shared values and where do they come from? Some kinds of shared values can be observed in otherwise very divided societies. The shared value of survival, in face of threat or disaster, leaps to mind. New York, not known for the like-minded civility of its

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people, pulled together remarkably during the disaster of 9/11, as did America as a whole after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. In such moments people often pull together and their common humanity can be expressed and celebrated. Even in ordinary times there can be shared values of a more superficial kind. Most American cities are collections of very different kinds of people, but it is interesting to observe how those very people can unite in loyalty to the local football or baseball team. The Boston Red Sox World Series victory in 2004 united the city in mass celebration. In such a moment, brief as it always turns out to be, people could think as Bostonians and not only as Irish Americans, or

African Americans, Protestants or Catholics, rich or poor.

Deeper shared values are also possible, but they have to be worked at more. Note, for instance, the democratic values. American politics can be very divisive, and we’ve already mentioned the liberal/conservative divide and mean-spirited politics as examples. Moreover, an alarmingly large number of people do not even participate in voting. But, despite the divisiveness and the lethargy, results of elections are accepted without armed insurrection. The last big division of that kind followed the election of 1860 with Civil War. The acceptance of the results of elections means that our basic constitutional order is broadly shared, despite its imperfections. One of the values of a well-practiced democracy is the recognition that it contributes to stability and opportunity for all to participate.

Where did that value come from? Greek tradition can be cited, both in the thought of some Greek political philosophers and in the practice of some Greek cities. But functional democracy has roots in other traditions as well, including a good deal of African and American tribal tradition and practice and, for that matter, in aspects of Hebrew tradition. When Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement engaged in non-violent protest, their appeal was to the deeper democratic traditions and Christian values broadly shared in this

culture. That is why the struggle over the “Black Power” Movement in 1966 was perceived as being so pivotal. In one sense, the Civil Rights Movement was an *exercise* of power by black people. But the slogan implied that the ultimate objective of such power was not the empowerment of community but rather its division. Moreover, the Civil Rights Movement, with its ideal of the “Beloved Community,” made conscious appeal to what King and others regarded as fundamentally Christian values. The Movement understood the struggle against racial segregation to be for the liberation of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

It can be argued that the Civil Rights Movement understood a point that must be fundamental to any community: the mutual regard of its members.

Despite all differences, participants in a community, like members of a family, must care about one another. Former President Lyndon Johnson, never at a loss for colorful words, is supposed to have referred to a political ally by saying that “he may be an SOB, but he’s *our* SOB.” Translated into less colorful language, this could be read to say that while I believe so-and-so to be terribly wrong about many things, he or she is still my sister or brother and I care about him or her. It is difficult to conceive of real community without a high degree of such

mutual regard.

In part, that must emanate from the spiritual attitudes of the people as it finds its way into commonly shared cultural patterns. In part, it must be reinforced by policies and actions of the community as a whole. Surely that means, almost above everything else, that a community—to be a real community—must give

*The Civil Rights Movement understood the struggle against racial segregation to be for the liberation of both the oppressor and the oppressed.*

special attention to those who have been marginalized. The Liberation Theology slogan of a “preferential option for the poor” conveys the right idea, even though it is not a very good translation from the original Spanish. The point is that the poor and other marginalized people are the weakest link in the chain of community, and to make the chain as a whole viable that is the link that must be attended to. The tragedy in contemporary American life, not unrelated to political meanness, is that the country’s attention to that respon-

sibility has been eroding.

The shared values we’ve been referring to are fundamental, but they can be reinforced by shared procedural virtues. In another writing,<sup>5</sup> I took Paul’s 1 Corinthians 13—the love poem—as an example of exactly the kinds of virtues that need translation into the political process. I am intrigued by the thought that that great passage, expressing though it does the essence of Christian love, does not use theologically exclusive language. It could be expressed as a part of most of the world’s great religious traditions. Such non-sentimental insights about love as “love is patient and kind” and “love is not jealous or boastful” and “love does not insist on its own way” all have a universal right to them. A community built upon such foundations can be rock solid.

I think there is one other value that must be underscored: that is to value the transcendent mystery of life—the humble recognition that none of us has all the final answers and that we are all engaged in a common quest for greater truth and a fuller embodiment of goodness in our life together. Such humility makes it possible to receive the gifts flowing from many cultures and religions, even as we offer up the good we have found in our own.

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# Moral Values and Global Democracy

David Ray Griffin



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A burning question of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has become even more urgent in the 21<sup>st</sup>, is whether international relations can embody, or even be significantly shaped by, moral values. Political idealists have said Yes, that moral values both should and can shape the foreign policies of nation states. Most members of the tradition known as “political realism” have said No, arguing that international politics is necessarily *power* politics, in which power is all that counts. Insofar as moral values play a role, they are used cynically as tools or fig leaves.

The founders of the various world religions have invariably been idealists, holding that moral values should shape political relations, both within and between nations. This is most obvious in the Abrahamic religions, with their ideal of a Reign of God on earth, meaning a social-political-economic system that would reflect divine rather than demonic values. But similar ideals are also found in the other major religious traditions.

The histories of these traditions, to be sure, reflect what political realists would call an accommodation to reality, in which the expectation of such a transformation was effectively given up, at least until “the end of time.” The major accommodation in the Christian tradition was the idea that the Christian ethic was intended to be lived out only in the church, perhaps especially in monastic communities.

In any case, the spread of Christianity and the other major religions has not made any essential change in the way our planet is ruled. Early Christian writings depicted our world as under the control of demonic forces. The New Testament speaks of the devil as “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 14:30, 16:11) and “the god of this age” (II Cor. 4:4). Besides saying that “the whole world is in the power of the evil one” (I Jn. 5:19) it has the devil brag that the kingdoms of the world are under his control (Lk. 4:5-6).

This New Testament and later Christian idea of “Satan” or “the devil,” understood as a personal being rivaling God in power, knowledge, and ubiquity, was thoroughly mythological. We can, however, have a nonmythological understanding of the notion of demonic power, as creaturely power that, besides being exercised in ways that are diametrically opposed to divine values, is also strong enough to threaten divine purposes.

At the core of the message of Jesus was the anticipation that the present demonic rule would be replaced by a “reign of God” in which, in the words of Lord’s Prayer, God’s will would be “done on earth.”

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Instead, however, demonic control of the planet has continued to increase during the intervening 2000 years, especially in the past four centuries, which we call the modern age. War in the 20th century involved unprecedented slaughter of human beings. And this slaughter could have been much greater, thanks to the building of thousands of nuclear weapons, through which all human life and much of the rest of the planet's life could have been destroyed in hours—a threat that has by no means been removed. If the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are any indication, moreover, the international violence, with its threat of nuclear holocaust, will continue to increase.

Even if we do avoid nuclear holocaust, furthermore, the present trajectory of civilization, with its increasing population, consumerism, and depleting-and-polluting technologies, promises unprecedented suffering through scarcity and climate change in the near future. The projections based upon purely ecological matters are bad enough; when these projections are combined with increasing ethnic and cultural animosities, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and arms sales generally, any realistic picture of the future based on present trends is completely terrifying.

This situation makes the question of the possible relevance of the moral ideals of our religious traditions even more urgent. Is it possible that they might still come to be embodied in our social-political-economic structures,

both domestically and internationally, in time to prevent our civilization from self-destructing? In the remainder of this essay, I will argue the following theses:

1. The crucial fact about the present global order—a fact that promotes demonic control by ruling out a significant role for moral ideals—is the structure known as “international anarchy.”
2. International anarchy could be replaced by either global democracy or a global empire.
3. A global empire would not solve the problem of demonic control of the planet.
4. Global democracy, if set up wisely and on the basis of universal moral values, could lead to a “reign of God on earth,” in the sense that the world could be run on the basis of laws that reflect divine rather than demonic values.

### ***1. International Anarchy and the Parable of the Tribes***

Andrew Bard Schmookler has written an important study entitled *The Parable of the Tribes*.<sup>1</sup> His basic idea is that once the war-system arose, the various human societies—the various tribes—inevitably became locked in a competitive spiral that has led not only to increasingly lethal technology but also to many correlative developments. I will suggest that the emergence and increasing strength of demonic power has been part and parcel of this process.

### ***The War-System***

Schmookler's argument takes off from the fact that the war-system began within the past 10 to 12 thousand years. This beginning was closely related to the rise of civilization, with its cities and agriculture. During the prior existence of human beings, in which they supported themselves by hunting and gathering, human life was surely filled with evils of various sorts. Desires of revenge and other motives would have led tribes to carry out savage raids on each other from time to time. But the hunting-and-gathering mode of existence would have provided no motive for a war-system as such. For example, captives, who could not be given enough freedom to share in the hunt, would have simply provided more mouths to feed. But the rise of civilization changed all this. Slaves could be assigned the drudge work involved in agriculture and the building of walls and water canals. Women captives could, besides working in the homes and the fields, bear children to build up the city's defensive and offensive capacity. The cities, with their cultivated lands and their domesticated herds, provided additional motives for attack. The rise of civilization brought the institutionalization of war.

Once the war-system began, everyone was forced to participate. Even if most societies wanted to be peaceful, any one society could force the rest to prepare for war or risk being subjugated or annihilated. As

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Schmookler puts it, “Nice guys are finished first.”<sup>2</sup>

Schmookler’s perspective in many respects follows the classic analysis provided in the 17th century by Thomas Hobbes, which became the basis for the approach known as political realism.

### ***The State of Anarchy***

According to the Hobbesian-realist analysis, the interstate realm is a state of *anarchy*. This term is not used here in its popular sense, to mean a totally lawless, chaotic situation, but in its technical sense, to mean simply the absence of a superior power to regulate the behavior of the states to each other, perhaps by declaring and enforcing moral norms. In this anarchical situation, it is simply power—not power qualified by moral principles—that determines the relations between the tribes.<sup>3</sup> The classic formulation is provided by Thucydides, who has the Athenian general give other peoples only the choice of being taken over peacefully or violently—adding that if they had the superior power, they would do the same to the Athenians.

Anarchy, according to this Hobbesian-realist analysis, means the war of all against all. The point is not that you actually fight against everyone else, but that every other society is at least potentially your enemy. War is brought on not only by the desire of one society’s leaders for additional power, riches, and glory. It can be brought on simply by one

society’s fear that another society is amassing enough military power to attack. Thucydides again provides the classic statement, having his general say with regard to taking Sicily: “If we cease to rule others, we are in danger of being ruled ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

It is important to understand that the doctrine of political realism,

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strictly speaking, is limited to this analysis of the present situation, with its twofold point: (1) that the present world order is anarchical and that (2) this fact makes power the determining factor in international relations. For example, the editors of a volume entitled *The Perils of Anarchy* provide this summary statement of the position of political realists:

[R]ealists regard anarchy—the absence of any common sovereign—as the distinguishing feature of international life.

Without a central authority to enforce agreements or to guarantee security, states must rely on their own means to protect their interests.<sup>5</sup>

Most realists, to be sure, go beyond this descriptive analysis to include a prediction: that this is not only way the international situation has always been but also the way it always will be. These realists, in other words, believe that it would be impossible to overcome anarchy through the free creation of a global government. They do recognize, to be sure, that a *de facto* global government might be created by a sufficiently strong imperial power, which could simply impose its own rule on the rest of the world. But they reject as unrealistic the idea that anarchy could be overcome by the free decision of the states or the peoples of the world to create a global democratic government.

However, even though the political realists who add this prediction about the future have surely been in the majority, this prediction does not belong to political realism as such. That this is so can be seen from existence of political scientists and philosophers who completely accept the realist analysis of the past and the present while calling for the creation of a global government. For example, Georg Schwarzenberger, who in 1941 published an otherwise orthodox realist book entitled *Power Politics*, said: “Power politics, international anarchy and war are inseparable. . . . [War’s] antidote is

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international government.”<sup>6</sup>

Fellow realist Frederick Schuman argued for overcoming “the Western state system” through the political unification of the world by means of a world federation.<sup>7</sup>

Political realism can be characterized, accordingly, as the view that global anarchy, as long as it lasts, will continue to make power politics inevitable.

### **The Selection for Power**

The next crucial point of Schmookler’s analysis is that in the present anarchical state of civilization, coercive power inevitably grows. A new offensive weapon created by one tribe forces the other tribes to create new defenses against it. These defensive advances then lead to the first tribe to develop still more deadly weapons. Furthermore, a move that may be intended defensively will often look offensive to others, evoking further efforts by them to increase *their* power. And there is no stopping point. Although the development of nuclear weapons might have occurred either sooner or considerably later than it actually did, the fact that it did eventually occur was made virtually inevitable by the dynamics of the system. Even the creation of this seemingly ultimate weapon did not slow down the drive to invent more weapons to get an edge over potential enemies, as shown by the development of “smart bombs” and the drive to weaponize space.

The development of ever greater

coercive power does not, however, involve only the development of new forms of weapons and defenses. The most obvious additional element is military strategy and tactics, to which a major portion of any history of warfare is devoted. But a society’s

*Human civilizations have increasingly been oriented around the drive to increase human power, in the sense of the power to control, destroy, and intimidate.*

ability to wage war is also to a great extent a function of its political and economic systems. Any development that gives a society a temporary military edge will tend to spread to the neighboring societies. For example, the rise of capitalism in the Italian city-states in the 14th century gave them an edge over their rivals, because they had more money to buy weapons and pay their troops. It therefore soon spread to the rest of Europe.

The main point of this analysis is

that the evolution of civilization in the state of anarchy is necessarily shaped in large part by a principle similar to that of natural selection in Darwinian evolution, according to which only the fit survive. Schmookler calls this principle the “selection for power.” This analysis is not reductionistic, as if the drive for power were at the root of all cultural developments. The point is, instead, that of those developments that do occur, those that increase a society’s power *vis-à-vis* other societies will tend not only to survive but also to spread. In the long run, the direction of civilization has been shaped decisively by this selection for power. And, as civilization evolves, the need for power increasingly shapes every aspect of a society. In recent decades, for example, something like half of our nation’s science has been devoted to military-related research. And a recent analysis suggests that spending for military-related matters, rather than constituting only one-fifth of the U.S. federal budget, as we are told, actually constitutes two-thirds of it.<sup>8</sup>

It is through this process that demonic power, which the rise of human existence made possible, actually came to dominance on our planet. Over the past 10,000 years, human civilizations have increasingly been oriented around the drive to increase human power, in the sense of the power to control, destroy, and intimidate. Human beings in this context have wanted more power over nature in

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order to increase their power over other human groups in order to give them more power over nature, and on and on. Civilization has especially been in the grip of this drive during the past 5,000 years, since the rise of great empires.

The trajectory through which demonic control of civilization has grown has, in fact, run primarily through the history of empire. Two thousand years ago, that trajectory was embodied primarily in the Roman Empire. Although Rome saw itself as divinely authorized, the authors of the New Testament saw it as the ultimate embodiment of the demonic to date. The final book of the New Testament portrays Rome as a dragon, which symbolizes Satan.<sup>9</sup> Christianity in fact began, as Richard Horsley has emphasized, as a movement opposed to this empire, with Jesus preaching an “anti-imperial gospel.”<sup>10</sup> And it clearly was the empire that put him to death, since crucifixion was a method that could be used only by Rome.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Is Global Empire a Viable Solution?*

Today, the trajectory of empire is embodied in the United States, which has an empire that dwarfs Rome’s in both power and reach.

The condition that gave rise to the war-system and hence imperialism and has allowed them to continue, Schmookler emphasizes, is the anarchical state of civilization. Like Schwarzenberger, Schuman, and several other political realists, he believes that

the spiral of violence will be overcome only when civilizational anarchy has been overcome by a global government.

There are two paths through which such a government could be created. One path would be for the peoples of the world to form a global democracy. The other path would be for one country to become the de facto government of the world. The US government seems to be embarked on this latter path.

Some elite thinkers who have called for the American empire to become truly global have, in fact, done so on the grounds that it would overcome international anarchy. In a commentary in 2003 entitled “Thank God for the Death of the UN,” Richard Perle said: “[The UN’s] abject failure gave us only anarchy. The world needs order.”<sup>12</sup> His meaning, that this order is to be provided by the USA, was stated explicitly that same year by Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, who wrote: “The alternative to American leadership is a chaotic, Hobbesian world,” in which “there is no authority to thwart aggression, ensure peace and security or enforce international norms.”<sup>13</sup>

Perle, Kaplan, and Kristol belong to a long tradition, recently revived, that has portrayed the American empire as uniquely benign, even benevolent. In 1998 of Robert Kagan, described American as “The Benevolent Empire.”<sup>14</sup> In 2002, Dinesh D’Souza described America as “the most magnanimous imperial

power ever.”<sup>15</sup> In 2003, Michael Ignatieff wrote: “America’s empire is not like empires of times past, built on . . . conquest. . . . It is the imperialism of . . . good intentions.”<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, the idea that America would overcome global anarchy by itself ruling the world creates no problems. Already in 1990, Charles Krauthammer had argued that although people usually “recoil[] at the thought of a single dominant power for fear of what it will do with its power. . . . [.] America is the exception to this rule,” because “the world generally sees it as benign,” as a power that “acts not just out of self-interest but a sense of right.”<sup>17</sup> In 2003, Krauthammer repeated this idea, saying that America’s claim to being a benign power is not mere “self-congratulation” but is verified by our country’s “track record.”<sup>18</sup>

Many other intellectuals, however, say that this track record provides no reason to believe that an all-inclusive American empire would be benign. A recent book by Noam Chomsky is subtitled *America’s Quest for Global Dominance*.<sup>19</sup> Richard Falk has written of the Bush administration’s “global domination project,” which poses the threat of “global fascism.”<sup>20</sup> Chalmers Johnson, who was once a conservative who believed that American foreign policy aimed at promoting freedom and democracy, now describes the United States as “a military juggernaut intent on world domination.”<sup>21</sup>

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Another conservative who has recently changed his mind about the American empire is Andrew Bacevich. At one time, he says in his book *American Empire*, he believed that America's foreign policy objectives were "quite limited—to protect our homeland, to preserve our values, to defend our closest allies."<sup>22</sup> But he now writes:

Holding sway in not one but several regions of pivotal geopolitical importance, disdaining the legitimacy of political economic principles other than its own, . . . asserting unquestioned military supremacy with a globally deployed force configured not for self-defense but for coercion: these are the actions of a nation engaged in the governance of empire.<sup>23</sup>

In opposition to those who claim that "the United States . . . achieved pre-eminence not by consciously seeking it but simply as an unintended consequence of actions taken either in self-defense or on behalf of others,"<sup>24</sup> Bacevich says that America's empire resulted from a "grand strategy," which "is nothing short of stupendous."<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to those who justify this empire on the grounds of its benevolence, Bacevich ridicules the claim "that the promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights and the punishment of evil-doers—not the pursuit of self-interest—[has] defined the essence of American diplomacy."<sup>26</sup> Against those who justify American interventions in other countries on the grounds that

America's foreign policy is to promote democracy, Bacevich points out that in previous countries in which America has intervened, "democracy [did not] flower as a result." America intervenes not for altruistic purposes, he adds, but "to sustain American primacy."<sup>27</sup> Pointing out that the aim of the US military has been "to achieve something approaching omnipotence," Bacevich mocks the idea that such power in America's hands "is by definition benign."<sup>28</sup>

An examination of the actual history of U.S. foreign policy, I have found, bears out the views of Chomsky, Falk, Johnson, and Bacevich.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, as Falk has suggested, the result of an all-inclusive American empire would most likely be global fascism, not global democracy. If we want to overcome the rule of demonic values, therefore, we must work to overcome the international anarchy by creating a global democratic government.

### ***3. Global Democracy Based on Universal Moral Values***

It is widely recognized that the creation of a global democratic government would be the only way to achieve several desirable results, such as overcoming the war-system, which makes imperialism possible, and protecting the human rights of all people. As we have seen, however, the dominant view among theorists of international relations is that the creation of such a government would be

impossible. One of the principal reasons for this view is that, whereas a global constitution with a global bill of rights would require agreement on a set of universal human rights, no such agreement would be possible.<sup>30</sup>

That view, however, has been increasingly challenged. Hans Küng has pointed out that at least most religious traditions affirm some version of what Christians have called the golden rule—at least in its negative formulation, sometimes called the "silver rule": Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.<sup>31</sup>

One summary statement of our universal moral principles is a maxim made famous by Immanuel Kant: Don't treat other people as mere means to your ends; rather, treat them as ends in themselves.

These general principles imply all sorts of more specific rules, which refer to things that people universally do not like to have done to them or their loved ones. (See box below.)

These same basic principles can also be formulated in terms of human rights, such as the right to life, the right to adequate food and water, and so on. Although some things that are thought of as "human rights" in one culture may not be truly universal but merely culture-specific rights, they can be distinguished from a set of moral principles that are, in fact, universally shared. As the editors of a book entitled *Prospects for a Common Morality* have pointed out, although the writings

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of several Western intellectuals would lead one to think that the prospects for such a morality were not good, a “remarkable kind of cross-cultural moral agreement about human rights” has, nonetheless, emerged in the practical world of international affairs.<sup>32</sup>

One moral philosopher who has developed this point is Henry Shue, who emphasizes—in a book discussing moral principles in relation to US foreign policy—what he calls “basic rights.” These basic rights, says Shue, constitute “the morality of the depths,” because they specify “the line beneath which no one is to be allowed to sink.”<sup>33</sup>

The idea of a universal ethic has also been affirmed by Michael Walzer in his 1994 book, *Thick and Thin*. In earlier writings, Walzer’s concern with difference and particularity had seemed to lead him to an extreme relativism. In the debate between the “cosmopolitans,” who affirm a universal morality, and the “communitarians,” who emphasize the distinctive ethos of each nation or cultural tradition, he was placed totally in the latter camp, being

regarded as denying any universal moral principles. In *Thick and Thin*, however, he argues that every thick, particularist morality has within it “the makings of a thin and universalist morality.”<sup>34</sup> He now affirms, in other words, a position that could be called “cosmopolitan communitarianism.”

In calling this universalist morality “thin,” Walzer does not mean that it is unimportant. Indeed, he says:

The opposite is more likely true: this is morality close to the bone. There isn’t much that is more important than ‘truth’ and ‘justice,’ minimally understood. The minimal demands that we make on one another are, when denied, repeated with passionate insistence. In moral discourse, thinness and intensity go together.<sup>35</sup>

Another crucial aspect of Walzer’s position is that because the various peoples of the world live in terms of their own thick traditions, which are quite different from each other, the thin, universalist morality usually becomes apparent “only on special occasions,” especially when there is “the sense of a common enemy.”<sup>36</sup>

*Don't murder other people.*

*Don't starve other people to death.*

*Don't steal other people's water or oil.*

*Don't tell lies about other people to justify stealing their water or oil.*

*Don't deprive other people of their basic freedoms.*

*Don't cause needless pain.*

*Don't terrorize other people.*

*Don't humiliate other people.*

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If Walzer is right, then this recognition that we share a passionate commitment to basic moral principles can be evoked by the awareness that all the peoples of the world do have a common enemy—the present global order based on lies, injustice, theft, murder, plutocracy, imperialism, and other demonic values. Indeed, there are signs that this recognition has been growing within Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and the various indigenous traditions.<sup>37</sup>

This recognition could lead to the will to create a global democratic government, based on the following implicit argument: The world order, reflecting the international anarchy that encourages every country to look out only for itself, is based on values that are diametrically opposed to the values that are embedded in all the traditional religions and moral philosophies of the world and thereby to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This world order permits and even encourages governments, corporations, and financial institutions to do to millions, even billions, of human beings what none of us would want done to us or our loved ones. This world order does not merely allow billions of human beings to sink below “the line beneath which no one [should] be allowed to sink”; it *pushes* them under.

At the heart of the present world order is the war-system of settling conflicts and the imperialism it makes virtually inevitable. This war-and-imperialism system results in regular, systemic, and massive violations of basic human rights, such as the rights of people not to be murdered, starved, raped, terrorized, and humiliated. It results in massive and systematic lying in order to justify killing other people and the theft of their resources. It necessarily

involves, on a huge scale, the treatment of other people not as ends in themselves but as mere means to satisfy the attacking country's own ends—which are usually based more on greed than genuine need.

We should, therefore, work to replace the present system with a truly new world order: global democracy.

### **Global Democracy**

We can begin our discussion of this idea by focusing first on democracy as such.

*If democracy is the only legitimate way for a country to be ruled, it is the only legitimate way for any rule over the planet as a whole to be exercised.*

One of the major social-political developments of the 20th century was that by the end of the century, democracy had increasingly become almost universally recognized as the only legitimate form of government.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the idea of political legitimacy, in the sense of “rightful rule,” involves two elements. One of these, which is required of *any* form of government, is the government's capacity and willingness to protect its people from preventable threats to their security.

Thomas Hobbes argued that this promise of security is the basis of the ruler's right to demand obedience from the citizenry.<sup>39</sup> Since the rise of democratic convictions, however, the idea of political legitimacy has come to include a second element, which is implicit in the word “democracy,” meaning “rule by the people.” This ideal is reflected in Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase, “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Most governments claiming to be democratic, to be sure, have embodied this ideal only partially at best. Some of them embody it in name only. But this very fact—that even many dictatorships feel a need to describe themselves as democracies—shows that in our day only governments perceived as democratic are perceived as legitimate. Given this development,

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it is not surprising that a desire for *global* democracy has become widespread. If democracy is the only legitimate way for a country to be ruled, it is the only legitimate way for any rule over the planet as a whole to be exercised.

Just as, above and beyond the 50 state governments in the USA, there is a federal government, with its own legislative, judicial, and executive powers, there would be, above and beyond all the national governments of the world, a global democratic government, with its own legislative, judicial, and executive powers to pass and enforce laws for the governance of the planet as a whole. With these institutions in place, we, the people of the world, would for the first time in history be able to govern ourselves. Through our elected representatives, we would be able to pass laws to protect human rights, overcome the growing gap between the rich and the poor, prevent the depletion of natural resources, rid the world of nuclear weapons, protect the environment, and prevent war and hence imperialism. We would thereby be able to respond to what, as Chomsky has reminded us, is the basic question of our day—*hegemony or survival?*<sup>40</sup>—because we would be able to say No to hegemony and Yes to survival, thereby making possible an inhabitable world for our grandchildren, their grandchildren, and for more grandchildren for centuries and millenia to come.

This global government, rather than having been imposed on the

majority of the human race by a single imperial power, would have been freely created by all the peoples of the world. Rather than reflecting the interests and aims of only one nation and its junior partners, it would reflect the interests and aims of the peoples of all nations. This transformed structure, constituting a “new world order” that is *truly* new, would remove hegemony—the domination of the whole by a part—as a temptation. The world would, for the first time, have a government mandated to work for the *common* good, the good of the whole.<sup>41</sup>

With such a structure, the present demonic rule, based on indifference, exploitation, lies, injustice, theft, and murder, could be replaced by the kind of world called for by Jesus and the prophets before him—a world in which there is justice and mercy and in which all peoples have their daily bread.

### *Epilogue*

Although the influence of Alfred North Whitehead on this essay has thus far remained merely implicit, the ideas proposed here are in line with his thought.

Speaking of the “Gospel of Force,” according to which all progress results from the exercise of coercive power, Whitehead said that this notion “is incompatible with a social life.”<sup>42</sup> If civilization is to be saved, he argued, it must move “From Force to Persuasion” as its dominant mode of interaction.<sup>43</sup> Implicit in this call is a call to move away from international anarchy to a unified civilization.

*This war-and-imperialism system results in regular, systemic, and massive violations of basic human rights . . . [it] results in massive and systematic lying in order to justify killing other people and the theft of their resources.*

Whitehead held that religion has a vital role to play in this transition, saying that religion “should be the common basis for the unity of civilization.”<sup>44</sup> To do this, of course, the various religions would need to reach some fundamental agreements, but it would be possible, he suggested, for the various religions, “amid [their] differences, to reach a general agreement as to those elements in intimate human experience and in general history, which we select to exemplify . . . the divine immanence.”<sup>45</sup> And for Whitehead, this divine immanence has to do primarily with our experience of values and ideals. Our experience of ideals, he declared, “is the experience of the deity of the universe.”<sup>46</sup>

Given this understanding of the heart of religion, moreover, he believed that the religions could and should help bring about something that could be called a reign of God on earth. The religions, he said, should strive for new virtues “to make the common life the City of God that it should be.”<sup>47</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986). On the importance of the war-system in shaping the direction taken by civilization over the past 10,000 years, see also William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes*, 45.

<sup>3</sup> As David Held says: “Realism posits that the system of sovereign states is inescapably anarchic in character; and that this anarchy forces all states, in the inevitable absence of any supreme arbiter to enforce moral behaviour and agreed international codes, to pursue power politics in order to attain their vital interests” (*Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995], 74-75).

<sup>4</sup> These statements from Thucydides are quoted in Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes*, 70.

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Seven E. Miller, eds., *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Georg Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations and Post-War Planning* (London: J Cape, 1941), 430, 339.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics: An Introduction to the Western State System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), 642, 661-63, 828-30. Schumann later published *The Commonwealth of Man: An Inquiry into Power Politics and World Government* (London: Robert Hale, 1954).

<sup>8</sup> Jurgen Brauer and Nicholas Anglewicz, “Two-Thirds On Defense,” Tom Paine, June 10, 2005 ([http://www.tompaine.com/articles/20050610/twothirds\\_on\\_defense.php](http://www.tompaine.com/articles/20050610/twothirds_on_defense.php)).

<sup>9</sup> Rev. 12:9, 13:2, 20:2.

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 129.

<sup>11</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 132.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Perle, “Thank God for the Death of the UN,” *Guardian*, March 21, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission* (San Francisco: Encounter Books), 121.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kagan, “The Benevolent Empire,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998: 24-35.

<sup>15</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, “In Praise of an American Empire,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 26, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “The American Empire: The Burden,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 5, 2003: 23-27, 50-54, at 24, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” in *Foreign Affairs* 70/1 (1990-91): 295-306, at 304-05.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Era,” in Andrew J. Bacevich, ed., *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 47-65, at 59.

<sup>19</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Henry Holt [Metropolitan Books], 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Falk, “Will the Empire Be Fascist?” *Global Dialogues*, 2003; “Resisting the Global Domination Project: An Interview with Prof. Richard Falk,” *Frontline*, 20/8 (April 12-25, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), viii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-44.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., ix, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 115, 196.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 133, 52.

<sup>29</sup> I have depicted some of this history, which is far uglier than any summary can even begin to suggest, in a work in progress tentatively entitled *The American Empire and Global Democracy*.

<sup>30</sup> For example, B. V. A. Röling has argued that “[s]tates and peoples differ too much in interests and in values for ‘one world’ to be feasible. . . without an unacceptable dictatorial setting” (“Are Grotius’ Ideas Obsolete in an Expanded World?”, in *Hugo Grotius and International Relations*, ed. Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury, and Adam Roberts [Oxford: Clarendon, 1992], 281-99, at 294). In a more complete statement elsewhere, I will address the other major reasons for thinking global democratic government impossible.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98-99.

<sup>32</sup> Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Prospects for a Common Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), xi.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4, 18.

<sup>37</sup> See Leonard Swidler, ed., *For All Life:*

*Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic: An Interreligious Dialogue* (Ashland, Ore: White Cloud Press, 1998); Daniel C. Maguire, *Sacred Energies: When the World’s Religions Sit Down to Talk about the Future of Human Life and the Plight of This Planet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); and Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar, eds., *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 329; David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>39</sup> John Dunn, ed., *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*.

<sup>41</sup> In a more complete discussion, I would discuss the need to institute rigorous safeguards to prevent the global government from being corrupted by the lust for power and money. But here I am focusing simply on the way in which a global democratic government could serve as an instrument for the common good.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; New York: Free Press, 1967), 206.

<sup>43</sup> This is the title of Chapter 5 of Whitehead’s *Adventures of Ideas* (1933; New York: Free Press, 1967).

<sup>44</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>46</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (1938; New York: Free Press, 1968), 103.

<sup>47</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926; reprint, Fordham University Press, 1996), 39.

## Wogaman, continued from page 24

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> L. Harold DeWolf, *Responsible Freedom Guidelines to Christian Action* (NY: Harper and Row, 1971), 102-110. Joseph Haroutunian made a similar point with his concept of “fellowman”: “We do not know our ‘nature’ except in our transactions with our fellowmen. We do our speaking and thinking, our purposing and acting, in the process of our mutual transactions.” *God with Us: A Theology of Transpersonal Life* (Westminster, 1965), 17.

<sup>2</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993 [1960]).

<sup>3</sup> See Ruffini, *Religious Liberty*, tr. J. Parker Heyes (NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 12 and Pfeffer, *Church, State, and Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Even the name “Indian,” which I have employed here, is illustrative of the conflict. I use the word because a colleague identified with the American Indian Movement prefers it to the alternative “Native American.” But both words are of European origin. Most Indians who are sensitive about this would much rather use their tribal name, spoken in the original tongue, for identification.

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Perspectives on Politics: Revised and Expanded* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

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# Book Review

Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 and American Empire*. Reviewed by John B Cobb, Jr.

Those of us who want to contribute to a redirection of the global and internal policies of the United States badly need first to understand what is now happening. To do so requires seeing current cultural and political forces in their continuity with what has been happening for a long time. And we cannot act wisely without identifying those *loci* of creative response with which we should stand in solidarity. Taylor's book is a remarkable aid to orienting us in this frightening post-9/11 period.

In chapters 3 and 4 he describes and analyzes the three major strands of attitude and thought that many now recognize are woven together in shaping current American imperial policy. The first two are the religious right and the neo-conservatives. He locates both of these in the context of "American romanticism," which he views as a potentially healthy expression of "belonging being." But both are forms of "revolutionary romanticism," one religious and one secular, which emphasizes American "exceptionalism" and is ready to use force to advance global domination.

The third strand he identifies as "contractual liberalism," which is a form of "expectant being." This label suggests an individualistic liberalism for which human relations are primarily in the form of contracts. This is not excluded.

But Taylor's point is that Western liberalism has had another implicit contract, one that has always limited the group that could participate in its benefits, typically in terms of gender, class, and race. The advocates of this tradition today, practically speaking, limit the beneficiaries to the capitalist class. Indeed, Taylor notes that some have shed the liberal side of this tradition entirely and embrace a modernism that emphasizes only efficiency and technological advance. Those in this camp are not always interested in the intense national feelings of the romantics, but they are often ready to use national power to maintain their privileged status. The current alliance in support of American imperialism, between them and the romantics, is not exceptional.

He calls revolutionary romanticism and contractual liberalism "specters." The third specter, the one with which he expects his reader to identify, is the "prophetic spirit." This is present in both religious and secular forms wherever people protest and resist the powers that exploit them and abuse them. The prophetic spirit gave rise to liberalism, which then in its contractual form limited its influence and thereby made it demonic. Taylor calls for a radical liberalism that uncovers and expresses the prophetic spirit itself. This can satisfy the authentic

elements in belonging being and expectant being without the demonic distortions to which they are now subject.

Among his practical proposals is a call for "paragovernment councils of the prophetic spirit." The best known examples of para-government councils were those created by segregationists to resist the advance of civil rights for blacks; so the idea carries a negative connotation. However, if, as Taylor and I believe, the prophetic spirit is radically excluded from most structures of American government today, his proposal is worthy of serious consideration.

Perhaps I should mention that the subtitle is, as so often, a more accurate indication of the content of the book than the title. This is not a book about the Christian right or even about the role of religion in politics. These topics cannot be excluded from even the most secular discussion of what is taking place in American politics. And Taylor is far better equipped to discuss them than most secular commentators. But secular ideologies are equally featured, and it is the interrelation of the religious and the secular on which the book sheds the most original light.

I am grateful for this book, and in terms of the important task it sets itself, any criticisms I might have would be trivial. Accordingly, I

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have summarized his theses, inviting the reader to engage. Taylor's rich development of them. But now I want to reflect on his important contribution from the point of view of process thought. If the situation is as he describes it, what contribution can process thought make to changing it?

The answer, I believe, is implied in the word "thought." One of the most valuable sections of the book is Taylor's account of the political philosophy of Leo Strauss and its influence in this administration through the neo-conservatives who serve it and to a large extent shape it. More than elsewhere in the book, this discussion makes evident the way theory informs practice. Taylor does not seem disturbed by the fact that he can mention no comparable thinker who spells out the implications of the prophetic spirit for public policy. But as one who believes that ideas have consequences, and that the absence of ideas also has consequences, I see this lack as a matter of great concern.

Without a vision of the kind of world toward which the prophetic spirit moves us, I fear that the many movements of protest will have no more effect on the course of events than most of the past protests Taylor notes. Each expresses the rage and despair of limited groups who are particularly aggrieved by different features of the many-sided oppression and exploitation built into the contemporary national and global situation. Focusing on the demand for immediate relief from particular evils, they often work at cross

purposes. Individual movements can be bought off by minor concessions. Further, we know that when the vision is "utopian" in the bad sense, the success of its proponents can lead to horrors to which we do not want to return. There is need for serious reflection about political theory that takes the negative realities of human nature and society fully into consideration.

I look with hope to the World Social Forum (not mentioned by Taylor), which annually gathers somewhere around a hundred thousand people representing many prophetic groups. It nurtures a sense of solidarity among them, a sense that is crucial to effective resistance. Its slogan is "another world is possible." Yet it intentionally avoids any effort to come out with a common vision of that other world. Fortunately, there are individuals and groups that do propose such visions. I particularly appreciate the work of the International Forum on Globalization. I think that process thought has indirectly contributed to some of the more promising proposals.

But something is missing. This can be illustrated by noting that we cannot lay the writings of this group or any other proposal for the world we want alongside the work of Leo Strauss. Indeed, the proposals for the possible "other world" make little contact with what goes on in any department of the university. They do not engage scholars in political theory or international relations or make contact with the way public issues are debated either in the scholarly

journals or the popular press. I do not celebrate academia or the level at which policy debates are carried on. I believe that both reflect fundamental, largely unexamined, assumptions with which I deeply disagree. But I do recognize that as long as those who are recognized as "experts" are not touched by a point of view, its possible influence is greatly reduced.

We need careful and rigorous thinking rooted in a conceptuality quite different from the one that has dominated modernity. I believe that in Whiteheadian process thought we have the needed conceptuality. This conceptuality is inherently revolutionary in any field now shaped by dominant modern categories. The task of making its alternative implications clear in the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences, as well as theology, is vast. We can be grateful for those who have been applying this conceptuality in political theory, but much remains to be done before the process vision of political order can be made a real option for the public.

We cannot suspend the activism for which Taylor calls until the intellectual task is done. Without it, the thinking would be irrelevant to the real world. Indeed, it may be that those who engage in action will contribute most to the theoretical work. But those of us who understand the revolutionary implications of a different way of thinking have as our primary responsibility pursuing that mode of thought to the end.

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