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Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions

**Globethics.net Principles
on Sharing Values
across Cultures and Religions**

Globethics.net Texts

Series editor: Christoph Stückelberger. Founder and Executive Director of Globethics.net and Professor of Ethics, University of Basel

A draft of this text was adopted at the Globethics.net International Conference that took place from 25 to 29 January 2009 in Nairobi. It was drafted and revised by Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, Director, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation at the World Council of Churches, and by Prof. Dr. Christoph Stückelberger, Founder and Executive Director, Globethics.net, and Professor of Ethics at the University of Basel. Volume 4 of the Globethics.net Series: *Sharing Values. A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics* presents other documents related to the Conference including the present Principles and individual articles to take the reflection further.

Website: www.globethics.net

Contact: stueckelberger@globethics.net

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SUMMARY

‘Walking in the other’s shoes’, ‘Creating a safe zone for the dialogue’, ‘Keeping each other accountable’; these are only three of the 25 principles for a fair dialogue on values introduced by Globethics.net in the present publication. Nixed between the two poles of global and contextual ethics, and based on a set of generally recognized values, each of the principles offers a practical rule for a successful dialogue between people of different cultures and religions, with the aim of respecting diversity without justifying contextual injustice. Essentially, what is under scrutiny is the transformative potential of dialogue, which calls for certain personal postures of participants as well as organisational requirements including group dynamic.

INTRODUCTION

‘Care and Compassion. Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions’ was the theme of the Third International Conference of Globethics.net, which took place on 25-29 January 2009 in Nairobi. About sixty ethicists, religious scholars and economists from eighteen countries on five continents gathered for one week. Participants invested significant time and energy on determining a methodology for sharing values across cultures and religions. While most agreed that religion can substantially contribute to global ethics, some felt that religion is itself a problem. However, since many conflicts are in some way related to religious differences, the organisers felt that special attention needed to be given to religions.

Held in Kenya, the conference acknowledged the need to view the issues from the African perspective. The report presented by the group working on the African perspective stated that one cannot talk about African values without talking about religion. The group also feared that there is a tendency to view the questions of global ethics through the eyes of Western intellectual traditions and that this should not be the norm.

There are different types of interreligious and intercultural dialogues in ethics. Among them are grassroots dialogues, institutional dialogues and academic dialogues – which all have specific objectives and methodologies.

A large part of the work in preparation of and during the conference was done in five work groups: ‘Defining Global Ethics’, ‘Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics’, ‘Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach’,

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‘Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation’ and ‘Sharing Values in the Kenyan and East African Contexts’. All but the first used care and compassion as a support theme and as core values. Participants expressed the hope that the guidelines drawn from the discussions would be helpful to both religious and non-religious people who engage in dialogue on values.

This report contains areas of general consensus between the conference participants, even if in some areas that consensus was somewhat unstable.

GLOBAL AND CONTEXTUAL ETHICS

Global ethics is an inclusive approach to common binding values, guiding principles, personal attitudes and common action across cultures, religions, political and economic systems and ideologies. Global ethics is grounded in the ethical recognition of inalienable human dignity, freedom of decision, personal and social responsibility and justice. Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all human and non-human beings and extends the basic moral attitudes of care and compassion to our world. Global ethics identifies transboundary problems and contributes to their solution.

Global ethics promotes public awareness of those fundamental values and principles. They are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights is built. Human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this ethical vision. Global ethics fosters trust among human beings and strengthens caring and action for global environmental protection.

Contextual ethics takes seriously the identity of people and institutions in their local, cultural, religious, economic and political contexts. Global ethics needs to be local and contextual in order to have an impact on individual action and social structures. On the other hand, contextual ethics becomes isolationist if it remains local and is not linked to global ethics. Contextual ethics appreciates and respects diversity in its different forms as social, political, cultural, religious, and bio-diversity. There is an enormous richness in diversity. It may decrease vulnerability and be a source of sustainability. Contextual ethics contributes to global ethics. Together they can lead to unity in

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diversity. All cultures and religions can contribute to global values. For example, the contribution of African values to global values includes the viewpoint that all of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, injuring nature is unethical. This implies responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the inanimate universe as well as the continuum between generations that have gone before and that come after us.

Global and contextual ethics are two poles that challenge each other and inseparably belong together. Global and contextual ethics have to consider power structures. Global ethics can be abused for domination over other cultures, religions and values. Contextual ethics can be abused to defend traditional privileges or power. On a global as well as on a local level, 'power over others' tends to be oppressive, 'power with and for others' tends to be empowering and nurturing. Power as 'power from' (e.g. power from God, from the people through election) can be abused to justify oppressive power. It can also be used responsibly as an empowering power, serving the needs of the needy and thus responding to the origin of power.

VALUES AND NORMS

Global and contextual ethics are based on values and norms. Values are fundamental, long-term benchmarks of orientation, rooted in and justified by specific worldviews. Norms are mid-term applications of values to specific contexts.

Some values such as the golden rule and virtues such as honesty are commonly accepted across cultures and religions. Values in general have religious and non-religious justifications and origins. Agreeing on values that are common for humankind and values and norms that may be different in specific contexts requires dialogue across cultures and religions. When common values can be affirmed through dialogue, they provide a foundation from which communities can engage in common action towards conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace.

This work is particularly urgent at times of conflict and violence, but more difficult to accomplish once a conflict has already started. Therefore, it is best if dialogues are set up and functioning before a conflict occurs; firstly for sharing values that provide a foundation, and secondly for engaging in common action.

Below are examples of values that are shared across religions and cultures:

Care and compassion is the ability for empathy, respect and support of the other. It leads to solidarity.

All religions emphasise the centrality of care and compassion.

Sharing leads to, enables, and sustains relationships between human beings and strengthens communities. Sharing power leads to a responsible, community-oriented use of power.

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Participation, for example in decision-making, is an expression of respecting human dignity and strengthening communities in an inclusive way. Sharing values in dialogue is a participatory process.

Justice or equity is based on the inalienable human dignity of every human being and their equality. Justice grows when people cultivate a deep respect towards each other. This is expressed in the golden rule of mutuality and reciprocity as the basic norm of equity: ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you.’ It grounds solidarity and fairness. All known religious traditions commend some version of the golden rule to their followers, the operation of which is based on reciprocity, empathy, enlightened self-interest, and some notion of moral autonomy, and which is used to facilitate cooperation not only within the in-group but also between members of that group, strangers and all human beings.

Peace is the condition of justice and, at the same time, its fruit. Aiming at peace that leads also to security is a motivation for and a goal of sharing values.

Reconciliation is the healing power that enables the overcoming of past and present offences, violations and conflict, and the rebuilding of relations and communities.

Responsibility is accountability for one’s own actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to the level of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility for resolving problems.

The participants affirmed that there are significant differences in the interpretation of values and value systems. Sometimes these differences are expressions of distortion and instrumentalisation, but at other times they are expressions of real differences. Accordingly, differences have to be treated in different ways.

PRINCIPLES FOR SHARING VALUES IN TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUES

3.1. Goals and forms of sharing values in dialogues

Sharing values can be done in various forms, such as in formal interreligious and intercultural dialogues, research partnership projects and common action. Sharing of values also happens informally in daily life as people relate with each other in neighbourhoods, schools, work places, and sporting and cultural events. In such venues, neighbours, friends and colleagues may explore the deeper meanings in the fortunes and misfortunes of their day-to-day life or engage with each other in common action. Sometimes, the opening of houses of worship to other religious communities for exposure visits or for their use (as appropriate) also facilitates the sharing of values.

One specific form of such sharing is through formal dialogue. There are many forms of interaction called dialogue – and not all are seen as true dialogue – for example: In a learning dialogue, participants want to learn from each other. A testimonial dialogue aims at presenting one’s own position and persuading the other to accept it. The negotiating dialogue aims at reaching an agreement. The public relations dialogue is just window dressing. The action-oriented dialogue looks towards sharing through common action. Such sharing can be most fruitful when the dialogue is intended to be transformative.

Transformative dialogue nudges or even prods and pushes participants beyond where they are to a new, richer and more inclusive

understanding of who they are and what they should do. In order to have a fruitful transformative dialogue on sharing global and contextual values, the following principles are recommended:

3.2. Personal *attitudes* in dialogue

Honesty: People come to the dialogue table with varied motivations. Some also bring their fears and prejudices. The transformative nature of the dialogue will depend to a significant extent on the ability of participants to be honest with each other. Religious disciplines and personal reflections are often helpful means for each participant to prepare themselves for honest engagement.

Deep listening: Listening is a discipline that most people need to cultivate. The desire to have one's voice heard in coherent and clever expressions makes many to start thinking about what to say next while the other is still speaking, rather than carefully listening. Deep listening also requires one to listen not just to the words that are spoken but to emotions that are communicated non-verbally and to implicit values that are not expressed. Deep listening also requires one to be aware of the emotional triggers in one's own mind and have strong handles to keep from being swayed by them.

Walking in the other's shoes: The golden rule of reciprocity means to put oneself in someone else's place and to listen at some depth to the motivations and values of the other by walking in the other's shoes for a while.

Suspending judgment: Evaluating what the others communicate against our own values, we make judgments all the time. Transformative dialogue requires the conviction that unless one has walked in the other's shoes or at least listened at some depth, one cannot judge. Proper judgments are necessary for transformative dialogue. However, until the dialogue matures to the stage where participants are able to understand those values, it is necessary to suspend judgment.

Appreciating others' beliefs and values: It is necessary to come to a dialogue with a curiosity to appreciate and learn the beliefs and values of the dialogue partners and not with a motivation to debunk the beliefs and values of others. An important hallmark of transformative dialogue is that one participates hoping to learn and be enriched by the beliefs and values of the other.

Being self-critical of one's own beliefs: One does not come to dialogue expecting to prove that one's beliefs, values or tradition are right and true. Instead one comes to dialogue ready to be critical of one's own beliefs, values and tradition. It is easy to be self-critical among one's coreligionists. The real strength of the dialogue and its transformative nature is largely based on the ability and willingness of participants to be self-critical of their own beliefs, values and tradition in the presence of those from other traditions.

Acting in openness and transparency: Dialogue is transformative when trust is established between participants and the values of openness and transparency are shared. The personal attitudes mentioned above and the principles of organising are helpful in achieving this.

3.3. Organising a transformative dialogue

Cultivating strong personal relationships is a necessary first step to break through stereotypes and prejudices that colour our casual relationships. Strong personal relationships help the conversations not only to be cordial, but also allow participants to take greater risks towards honest interactions.

Establishing an innovative methodology of preparation: Acknowledging that the person, organisation or religious institution that initiates and organises the dialogue often has the power to determine its outcome, an extra methodological step of creating an ad-hoc bilateral or multilateral organising committee is recommended. The ad-hoc organising committee will agree on goals, expectations and

methodologies, raise funds, set the agenda, agree on the list of invitees, locate a common space and create a safe environment for dialogue to take place. The way a dialogue is organised is itself an expression of ethical values such as equity and participation.

Creating a safe zone: Despite the best attempts to create a safe zone, participants may find addressing controversial issues such as religious beliefs and values, race relations or political and economic prerogatives too threatening. Facilitators trained in group processes and skilled in the discipline of dialogue can steer the dialogue in ways that allows participants to take risks in the group.

Interrogating self-understanding: It is important that participants interrogate their own self-understanding prior to engaging in dialogue. Participants in dialogues must be rooted in their traditions in order to be authentic. Such rootedness requires thorough reflections on one's own self-understanding.

Exploring the self-understanding of the other: It is not unusual for participants to bring certain stereotypes and prejudices to the dialogue table. In order to get beyond this, it is important that participants explore the self-understanding of the other and seek to build trust.

Providing adequate time and space: Having multiple stakeholders also requires participatory interaction and decision-making. This means providing adequate time and space for participation by all parties, although it is important to reach prior agreement about how much time each person gets. It also means instituting decision-making methods that do not create an environment that excludes those who lost in a vote. Methods that help participants reach a consensus are preferable for transformative dialogue.

Organise gender-diverse dialogues: Unless it is specifically determined that the dialogue be organised as a women's group or a men's group, it is important that dialogues are intentionally gender-diverse. The problem is particularly acute when formal dialogues of

religious leaders are convened, since most religious leaders, even in today's world, are men. This invariably means that the voices of women, who have significant experience and expertise in dialogue, are lost. Today, a formal dialogue event that is not gender-diverse does not have credibility.

Engaging between religious and non-religious ethics: Sharing values is not an end in itself but an opportunity to engage with each other in ethical behaviour and action. Insight from the discipline of ethics therefore is useful. However, on this question a dialogue between secular ethicists and religious ethicists must be encouraged. Religious ethicists find their ethical reflection rooted in religion. Some secular ethicists are of the opinion that religion is a problem for ethics, rather than a help. The profundity of today's ethical dilemmas requires that both groups engage with each other, especially when global challenges such as climate justice have to be solved engaging all different worldviews.

3.4. Ensuring that dialogue is transformative

Looking at different identities: Such exploration will reveal the several identities that each participant brings to the table. Some identities are held forcefully or are solid while other identities are held lightly or are porous. In interreligious dialogue, for example, there is a tendency to look at participants only as religious. While that identity may be an obstacle to building trust, relating to the others through their other identities, whether ethnic, national, political, economic, or role in the family, can help create an opportunity for building trust.

Clarifying levels of power: In any group, multiple levels of power are present. They are often sensed by the participants but are rarely acknowledged. Acknowledging and clarifying the various levels of power involved will help the dialogue to move to its transformative level.

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Keeping each other accountable: Accountability for the commitments that participants make to each other is very important to the success of transformative dialogue. Since accountability often causes tension to arise in the group, participants don't often keep each other accountable. It is necessary that the participants understand tension as useful to the group process since it can help the dialogue reach its transformative goal.

Including contexts: No dialogue should be divorced from its context. Therefore a transformative dialogue must include reflections on the political, economic and other questions that arise from the contexts in which the dialogue partners live. For example, the dialogue must take in to account, as a part of its content, histories, especially of oppression, while not being entrapped or circumscribed by them.

Interpreting from the others' centre: While participants must be rooted in their own interpretive centre, they must be careful not to interpret the others' values from the perspective of that centre, but rather from the perspective of the others' interpretive centre. This requires each participant to stand lightly and to move back and forth between centres.

Starting cooperative action: Transformative dialogue does not only mean conversation but conversation that leads to cooperative action: diapraxis. Such diapraxis often provides another set of opportunities for sharing values for transformation.

Gaining new insights: A sign of a successful transformative dialogue is that new insights emerge from the group. These insights, different from the values or beliefs participants have already shared, appear as new insights that enrich each participant. Attentiveness to this emerging reality is necessary for transformative dialogue.

Open-ended and hopeful, such dialogues are contextually sensitive and have the greatest potential for undergirding and sustaining the development and education of a global ethics of responsibility. They

also provide opportunities for problems to be addressed cooperatively, equitably and urgently.

3.5. Other means of sharing values

There are means of sharing values other than formal dialogues, involving a range of activities far beyond the verbal (spoken or written language). Music, the visual arts, touch, common meals, etc. can also be understood as meaning-bearing ‘languages’.

Art (music, visual arts, and dance) can be used to understand values attached to a context as well as the values behind the intention of the artist; these values give expression to pieces of music, literature, film, theatre, dance, comedy, humour and irony, stories and folklore. In time, these expressions themselves become the carriers of these values. Institutions can engage artists-in-residence to create such expressions based on shared values, as well as to unveil the values that are embedded in older pieces. This creates new and improved opportunities to teach the community to share values.

Marriages across cultures and religions provide another opportunity to share values. An intercultural or interreligious couple will need to negotiate a new set of values as they set up their family and raise children. It is important that educational and religious institutions become more intentional about teaching those about to enter into such marriages the tools for sharing values.

Engaging in neighbourhood dialogues: Many formal dialogues bring religious, political or economic leaders to the table. While such dialogues are useful, some of the best dialogues and many transforming experiences take place in local neighbourhoods where neighbours gather to talk about their common concerns in order to find meaning or agree on common actions. It is important to privilege the participation from below by engaging the participants at the grassroots so that their voices are lifted up and heard both by the leaders and by the general public.



Globethics.net is a worldwide ethics network based in Geneva, with an international Board of Foundation of eminent persons, 70,000 participants from 200 countries, and regional and national programmes. Globethics.net provides services especially for people in Africa, Asia and Latin America to contribute to more equal access to knowledge resources in applied ethics and to make the voices from the Global South more audible in global discourse. It provides an electronic platform for dialogue, reflection and action. Its central instrument is the internet site www.globethics.net.

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The editor of the different series of Globethics.net Publications is Prof. Dr. Christoph Stückelberger, Founder and Executive Director of Globethics.net in Geneva and Professor of Ethics at the University of Basel/Switzerland.

Contact for manuscripts and suggestions: stueckelberger@globethics.net.

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- 4 Ariane Hentsch Cisneros / Shanta Premawardhana (eds.), *Sharing Values. A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics*, 418pp, 2010
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- 11 Corneille Ntamwenge, *Éthique des affaires au Congo. Tisser une culture d'intégrité par le Code de Conduite des Affaires en RD Congo*, 2012 (forthcoming)
- 12 Kitoka Moke Mutondo / Bosco Muchukiwa, *Montée de l'Islam au Sud-Kivu: opportunité ou menace à la paix sociale. Perspectives du dialogue islamo-chrétien en RD Congo*, 48pp, 2012

Globethics.net Texts

Short declarations and guidelines, some of them adopted by the International Board of Globethics.net Foundation.

- 1 *Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions*, 20pp, 2012. Available in English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Indonesian, Persian. Other languages in preparation.
- 2 *Ethics in Politics. Why it matters more than ever and how it can make a difference. A Declaration*, 8pp, 2012. Available in English and French

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Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions

In a time where different knowledge systems progress in close contact, sharing values effectively is crucial in order to steer clear of misunderstanding and conflict, and find common solutions to the most pressing issues affecting populations worldwide. Globethics.net, a global network on ethics of several thousands members, held its Third International Conference in 2009 on how to best share values across cultures and religions. As an outcome of their common reflection, participants laid out the present methodological Principles for a truly transformative dialogue on values. These principles will hopefully inspire institutions and professionals in the field, as well as contribute to the global debate on interreligious and intercultural ethics.

The Principles show in black and white what people can do who come together with a clear and positive sense of care and compassion.

Jayendra Soni, Lecturer in Indian Philosophy, University of Marburg, Germany

These principles and values should guide the world of business, economics, banking, insurance, ecology, dialogue, engagement, human relationships and our relationship with nature and other species, amongst others.

Kamran Mofid, Founder, Globalisation for the Common Good, United Kingdom

These principles take a concrete and significant step in the ongoing mutually transforming process of discerning ethics.

Oscar Carvajal, Assessor, Latin American Center of Kitchener-Waterloo Area, Canada

This document addresses the concerns of most of us in applied ethics.

Joseph King'ori, Executive Officer, Sacred Vision Foundation, Kenya

It is my view that the lasting legacy of our conference at Lukenya is that it leads us to evolve the general market principles for ethical convergence and integration in how the disparate national economies of the globe operate.

Peter Alexander Egom, Consultant Academic Editor, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

Let us hope that this text will reach the hands of many people across the world.

John M. Itty, School of People's Economics, India