



# Care and Compassion.

Methods for Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions

**Globethics.net Third International Conference**

24-29 January 2009  
Nairobi, Kenya

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## Subtopics of the conference

Participants will prepare the conference through participation to online working groups set up for the occasion.

Each online working group will address one of the following subtopics:

1. Defining Global Ethics
2. Care and compassion: Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics
3. Care and compassion: Integrating Different Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach
4. Care and compassion: Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation
5. Care and compassion: Sharing Values in the Kenyan & East African Context

These subtopics point to different methodological requirements necessary to discuss values and ethics across intellectual and religious cultures.

### Detailed description

#### 1. Defining Global Ethics

Moderators:

Sumner B. Twiss, Ph.D. (USA)

Distinguished Professor of Human Rights, Ethics, and Religion, Florida State University

Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, Brown University

Co-Editor, Journal of Religious Ethics (Blackwell)

Senior Editor, Advancing Human Rights Book Series (Georgetown)

Prof. Dr. Gerhold K. Becker (Germany)

Graduate School of Philosophy, Assumption University in Bangkok

Chair Professor of Philosophy (ret.) and Founding Director, Centre for Applied Ethics

Hong Kong Baptist University

Max. number of participants: 10

Theme description:

As a network concerned with global ethics, Globethics.net needs to formulate an understanding of the concept adapted to its mission and objectives. What does 'global ethics' mean? When we browse through the various initiatives and writings on global ethics, we find that definitions of the concept vary but sometimes also overlap. "Efforts to develop mutually agreed standards of conduct, and efforts to advance and defend human value" (Krystyna Górniak-Kocikowska, *The Computer Revolution and the Problem of Global Ethics*); "the promotion of ethical behaviour in individuals, institutions, and nations" (Institute for Global Ethics); "to define, implement, and promote policies of responsible global citizenship" (Center for Global Ethics); "a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards and personal attitudes" (Global Ethic Foundation), are but a few examples. What understanding of global ethics is most applicable to the work of Globethics.net? Should we put the emphasis on the results or on the process? Should we focus on the reflection or on the action – or on both? What should we take of already existing definitions? Etc.

The objective of this work group is to come to an understanding of global ethics suitable to the aims and objectives of Globethics.net, in dialogue with the other initiatives in the field. The group should take into account the concept's relevance and applicability in the global context, as well as Globethics.net's specific mission (give access to resources on ethics, network, research) and means of action (electronic networking, small staff and limited financial resources).

Examples of sub-topics:

- common definitions of human dignity, of community, of individuals
- universality of values vs. commonality of values
- absolute vs. contingent values
- relevance of global ethics
- universality vs. diversity
- 'dynamic' vs. 'static' ethics
- 'cold' (rational, philosophical, scientific) vs. 'warm' (emotional, pragmatic, dynamic) ethics
- concrete problems vs. epistemological concepts
- allegiance to multiple ethical systems: finding the internal/ personal coherence of practice
- origins of ethical rules' binding power

Reminder: Questions 2 to 5 will be addressed in connection with the theme 'Care and Compassion'.

## **2. Care and Compassion: Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics**

Moderator:

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer (India)  
Chairman, Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism  
Founding Chairman, Asian Muslim Action Network  
Leader, Progressive Dawoodi Bohra movement

Max. number of participants: 10

Theme description:

More often than not, interreligious/ intercultural dialogues have been criticized as a relatively useless activity where exclusive clubs of experts exchange niceties and return to their day-to-day routine after the meeting. What are the necessary requirements for a successful interreligious/ intercultural dialogue to happen (on the theme Care and Compassion in particular, and on ethics in general)? What is the right combination of people, the right process, the relevant issues, which objectives are realistic, who should host the meeting, etc. to ensure the dialogue is meaningful and yields results satisfactory to all around the table?

The objective of this work group is to define a set of criteria to which Globethics.net staff, network participants, and others, will be able to refer when organising future interreligious/ intercultural encounters and research partnerships on ethics.

Examples of sub-topics:

- identify the real issues
- include vs. exclude conflictive parties
- integrate as much diversity as possible around the table
- accept people in their own terms and not in the organisers' terms
- distinguish religion and culture
- accept the negative aspects, and deal with the historical dimension of traditions
- put our beliefs in practice when we dialogue, daring to be ourselves
- determine the influence of leadership models in the cultures of parties in dialogue
- focus on problems and not only on perspectives, which can harden positions
- balance our own convictions with others' experience and wisdom
- balance our own confidence with trust and reverence for elders, masters, teachers, etc.
- find coherence between values discussed and observed

### **3. Care and Compassion: Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, a Human-to-Human Approach**

Moderator:

Ingrid H. Shafer, Ph.D. (USA)

Professor of Philosophy, Religion, & Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma & Adjunct Professor of Human Relations, University of Oklahoma

Max. number of participants: 10

Theme description:

In a time where we are aware that 'the medium is the message,' we cannot spare a reflection on how we produce and share knowledge. While scientific research, critical thinking and other rational approaches to knowledge are a norm widely accepted in the so-called Western world, oral transmission is still vivid today in many regions of the world through story-telling, performing arts, master-disciples relationships, etc. It can therefore not be dismissed without further examination. In Globethics.net's future projects, we would like all partners to express their values in a way that conveys the full richness of their intellectual, religious, political, and cultural heritage, and personal wisdom – be it in a rational or 'irrational' way.

The objective of this work group is to find ways to accommodate the various 'languages' specific to the rich multitude of cultures and life-stories that composes our world, in a way to allow every individual to express his values (in particular those related to Care and Compassion), and be understood equally by all. Another objective of this work group is to reflect on how to implement a 'human-to-human' approach in the research on ethics. Special attention must be paid to the many dimensions of research partners, not only as representatives of a particular culture, political philosophy, or ethnic group, etc., but also as complex human beings.

Examples of sub-topics:

- integrate academic and non-academic means of expression (e.g. philosophical, theological and mythical sources, case studies and learning by doing, legal sources and historical resolutions of dilemma, narratives and life stories, poems, meditation and contemplation, fine and performing arts, etc.)
- define what we share when we share values
- focus on perspectives and not on a desired agreement
- find instruments to draw ethical values from art pieces
- link value setting and accountability to a higher authority
- define the ultimate responsibilities of value givers
- speak not from ideologies but from individual experiences

- shift attitudes from 'imposing' to 'understanding'
- define humanity – one species vs. communities vs. individuals with differences
- consider basic human feelings as priority stakes: fear, survival, greed, etc.
- find parallels between our relationship to a greater reality and to one another
- evolve together in a dynamic process, letting the energy emerge from the interaction
- derive values from a sense of a direction (history/ destiny) at individual and/or society levels (e.g. from our understanding of death)?

#### **4. Care and Compassion: Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation**

Moderator:

Maricel Mena López, Ph.D. (Brazil)

Professor of Theology, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá

Max. number of participants: 10

Theme description:

Many global issues stem today from a power imbalance between peoples, cultures, ethnic groups, classes, etc. and the often corollary status quo that maintains oppressed or disadvantaged populations at the mercy of political and economic powers. A meaningful dialogue on ethics can only happen between equal partners; this means in particular that research partnerships on ethics should include elements of content or form that intend to contribute to a real transformation in the global society.

The objective of this workgroup is to reflect on how we can induce this transformation, and find a balance between the various components of global society.

Examples of sub-topics:

- cope with multiple ethical standards
- reflect on how to induce a fruitful contestation between powers from above/ from below
- define leadership before talking about it
- contribute to taking the power back from the patriarchs, the institutions, etc.
- define the authorities entrusted to edict ethical values
- go away from standard discourses (e.g. ongoing debate between liberal pluralist and communitarian discourse)
- find how to bridge the gap between those who frame a rule and those who are supposed to observe them
- look at the link between ethical reflection and power relationships
- refrain from a potentially alienating globalised discourse?
- implement empathy and solidarity with the weakest
- define the nature of the desired change
- select the truly relevant values
- criticize democracy and comparing it to other political processes
- weigh potential losses for the privileged and gains for the non-privileged?

#### **5. Care and Compassion: Sharing Values in the Kenyan & East African Context**

Moderator:

(to be confirmed)

Max. number of participants: 15

Theme description:

The objective of this work group is to address questions 2, 3, and 4 in the Kenyan & East African context.