

TOWARD A VIABLE GLOBAL ETHOS

by

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As we confront the hard facts of ecological devastation and environmental degradation unfolding on a planetary scale--with overpopulation, famine, war, technology, pollution, and humankind's misguided *hubris* prodding the global ecosystem toward the brink of exponential systemic runaway--we simply do not believe that politics, economics and business, or science and technology, working independently or in conjunction, can effectively offer a unified/unifying vision that faithfully reflects the integrated complexity of this World. Granted, a great deal is being accomplished through politics, business, and science to reevaluate and improve humankind's perceived relationship with the *global ecosystem*, and also to counter the effects of our outmoded means of living on this planet. Still, it is our conviction that the world's religious traditions, joining together in authentic dialogue with each other, *and* with business, politics and science, represent our best hope for plotting a viable means of sustaining our species' continued existence on this earth.

As we move into the 21st Century, if humankind is going to solve the common problems that confront us on a global scale, we must develop new modes of interacting with each other, and with the global ecosystem. We believe that the growing emergence of *global consciousness*, which is reflected in recent efforts to formulate a *global ethic*, is an indicator that such a transformation has begun. In particular, the move to define, implement and promote a *global ethic* in both business and religion is cause for considerable optimism. We feel that humankind's self-awareness is undergoing a radical period of fundamental transformation, and these initially independent efforts to formulate a *global ethic* are evidence that a profound social and cultural evolution is occurring.

As a first step toward recognizing and cultivating a *global consciousness*, Ewert Cousins encourages us to embark on the process of experiencing the earth as an interrelated, organic whole "a single globe of remarkable beauty and unity."¹ This invitation requires from us an attempt to experience and understand both cultures and religions from a *global* perspective, and to see our history as a *global* history. Thus, the movement toward formulating a *global ethic* represents an important and necessary stage in the evolution of human culture, as it moves toward a *global society* which will be characterized by a newly complexified *global consciousness*.

Formulating an ecologically viable means of sustaining our continued existence on this earth is not going to be easy, but recognizing and promoting the emergence of *global consciousness* is clearly a step in the right direction. The task set before us is to cooperate creatively with the processes that are drawing us toward *global consciousness* and the formation of a *global society*. Complicating this task are the paradoxes fostered by the rapid development and inappropriate application of new technologies. Here, the technological advances responsible for our collective transformation are also largely responsible for the social and ecological crisis we face on a global scale. Given the complexity of our situation, simply cultivating *global consciousness* will not be a sufficient response. We must also radically transform our obsolete modes of interacting with each other and the global ecosystem. We must develop a viable and sustainable *global ethos*.

With this word, *ethos*, we are referring to the largely *unconscious* set of cultural habits, rules of behavior and expectations that inform, define and constitute our lives--including the various dimensions of emotional, intellectual and physical interrelationships that shape our daily activities. By now everyone is familiar with the expression, "all politics are local." This truism' reflects a narrowly defined *ethos*, and pays homage to the vital importance of maintaining a keen awareness of events that affect us in our own "backyard." However, with the move into an epoch of *global consciousness*, as a *global society* is slowly emerging, humankind must also cultivate a *global* perspective. Local, regional and national concerns will remain, but our personal and collective *ethos* will have to include a *global* dimension.

What movement in this direction is apparent? Consider the emergence of a global economy and the globalization of corporate business, which has led to the current interest in formulating a *global ethic*. Consider, also, the concurrent development of the world's religious traditions entering into dialogue and seeking to frame a *global ethic*.² These, among many other indicators, represent compelling evidence that we live in an increasingly global society that is incrementally developing a newly complexified global consciousness. The independent emergence and subsequent confluence of events unfolding within the pragmatic world of business and the spiritual discipline of interreligious dialogue indicates that these apparently divergent realms of human endeavor are evoking similar responses to the patterns of interaction that are leading us toward global consciousness.

The current dialogue between the business community and the religions-in-dialogue, as well as their shared recognition of the need for a global ethic may be understood as precise instances of creative cooperation with the processes that are drawing us toward global consciousness. These are examples of humankind's newly complexified global consciousness and they signal a radical departure from the past, for both the culture(s) of business and the world's religious traditions. They also provide a clear indication of a new stage in the development of socially responsible business--an event that will have profoundly beneficial effects on the social patterns of our world. As such, they are indicative of a newly emerging global ethos, and represent an initial and formative stage in the evolution of an emerging "Age of Global Consciousness." To the extent that evolution is an opportunistic process, these developments may be viewed as a rare opportunity of confluence--a meeting of minds, which deserves further exploration and encouragement.

In this sense, the parallel efforts of business leaders and the religions-in-dialogue to define, implement and promote a global ethic, as well as the ensuing dialogical confluence of their efforts, heralds a transformative complexification in the evolution of human consciousness--the emergence of both global consciousness and a recalibrated global ethos. This rare opportunity of confluence also extends a valuable window of opportunity that opens onto a collaborative horizon--a meeting of minds where we may observe, learn to recognize and cooperate with the convergent patterns that are drawing us toward global consciousness. As we are involved in observing these events, we are also participants in guiding the co-evolutionary processes that chart the planet's future course. Given this perspective, the efforts to formulate a global ethic, and the ensuing dialogical confluence of perspectives offered by business and religion, offer an opportunity to fashion a template from which a recalibrated and dialogically informed global ethos can emerge.

Why Religion, and Why Interreligious Dialogue?

For better or worse, religion is the only human endeavor that successfully provides us with an all-encompassing model of the *pattern which connects* our individual lives to the complex regularities of this world, and by extension the cosmos. Our religious traditions allow ordinary people the ability to live and think at levels of integrated complexity that would be otherwise impossible. If we are going to successfully formulate a viable *global ethos*, *i.e.*, if we are going to succeed in transforming the misguided and destructive values that are leading us to the brink of disaster, we must tap the vast resources of knowledge and potential wisdom manifest in the world's diverse religious traditions, as well as the enormous potential for positive change represented by business.

As we approach the 21st Century and incrementally experience the inbreaking of the *Age of Global Consciousness*, interreligious dialogue will be an increasingly indispensable tool for charting our course. Consider some of the basic presuppositions that have emerged from decades of successful interreligious dialogue. From the outset it affirms the positive value of diversity, and acknowledges the wisdom of the world's religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue recognizes the plurality of the world's religious systems as a valuable resource for discovering and working together toward common goals (and it tends to enhance the personal faith of each participant-in-dialogue). Through decades of constructive dialogical experience, we have discovered that these presuppositions--coupled with the inclusive methodology of open listening, so that we

may learn--initiate a process that opens the *possibility* of engaging one another in a manner that is as profound and integrative as that which is evident in the integration of a living ecosystem.

When we examine the sublime and enduring wisdom of long established ecosystems, such as the Barrier Reef off the west coast of Australia, or an old growth forest, we find that these living ecosystems are excellent examples of maintaining unity in-*and*-through diversity. Thus, living ecosystems provide an apt analogy of what may be accomplished within the *ecology of mind* that emerges when humankind's religious and cultural traditions meet in dialogue. As with any ecosystem in the natural world, pluralism and diversity increase the system's flexibility, and therefore its viability. In the natural world, a sustained pattern of balance or *steady-state* is characteristic of all healthy and enduring ecosystems. This "balance of nature" (an incessantly evolving steady-state) is bonded *via* a dialogical exchange of "information," a process that is indicative of the ecosphere's holistic knowledge and its innate wisdom.³

Nature's "steady-state" balance is maintained within an elegant dance of multiple variables, and sustained through a sublimely eloquent dialogue among each ecosystem's diverse, yet profoundly interconnected participants. This procession of an enduring, dialogically calibrated steady-state is evident even in the most elemental ecosystems. Moreover, ecosystems of whatever size--from the most elemental, up through and including the *global ecosystem*--exhibit a capacity to evolve *new* patterns of interrelationship. This ability to re-evaluate and alter habituated patterns of interaction optimizes an ecosystem's flexibility, its viability, and also, the flexibility/viability of each form of life within the overall system.

In short, a dialogical co-evolution among (and within) an ecosystem's "participants" serves to maintain the system's balance, while enhancing the ability of differentiated individuals within the system--along with the unified system as a whole--to learn, adapt and evolve. Learning and adaptation are both qualities of mental process, or mind. Therefore, it should not be too much of a "stretch of the imagination" to envision the *global ecosystem* as the embodiment of a holistically emergent *global ecomind*. Consequently, if we are going to successfully meet "the greatest challenge that has confronted the human race in its entire history," and "solve the common problems that threaten our future on the earth,"⁴ our modes of envisioning a *global ethic*--which will serve as the template for humankind's newly emergent *global ethos*--will have to reflect and cooperate creatively with the knowledge and wisdom evident in the patterns that sustain the *global ecomind*.

We must develop an *ethos* that is informed by the fact that all living creatures are part of a profoundly interconnected holistic system, the *global ecomind* of this living planet. From this perspective, humankind must begin to evoke a sense of humility--envisioning and responding to a mental system that is superior to its own. If our newly emerging *global consciousness* and our revitalized *global ethos* are going to reflect the knowledge and wisdom of the *global ecomind*, we will have to develop a *consciousness* and an *ethos* that are as dialogical, inclusive, and nurturing as the *global ecomind*.

The emergence of a new *global ethos* will involve a profound transformation of humankind's consciousness(es)--in the plural, for surely humankind's diverse cultures exhibit more than a single consciousness. Following the lead of Ewert Cousins, we may assume that the process of developing a *global ethos* will entail the development of a newly complexified *dialogical* consciousness, a "collective" consciousness that is integrated through dialogical dialogue as distinct from dialectical dialogue, in which one attempts to refute the claims of one's opponent.⁵ Perhaps the central task before us is to learn how best to engage the planet, the *global ecomind*, in an authentic dialogue--"to listen to the earth." Here, since we are all interactive participants within the singularly interconnected *holistic* system of the *global ecosystem* (and its emergent *global ecomind*), we are called upon to engage the whole earth in dialogue, and our *global ethos* will have to pay particular attention to understanding and caring for what "others" are "saying," especially the ecosystems of the planet.

Similarly, the *ecology of mind* that emerges when religious and cultural traditions meet in dialogue enhances our individual and shared abilities to learn, adapt and evolve. In contrast to humankind's past modes of interreligious, intercultural communication--far too often through polemics, posturing, and violence--the

discipline of interreligious dialogue is an entirely new mode of thinking about and experiencing the world, as well as the meaning and purpose of our lives. The exchanges that occur in successful dialogue deepen personal faith, while enabling people from diverse religious, cultural, and ideological perspectives to discover common interests, and to work together toward common goals. Since interreligious dialogue candidly accepts and affirms the pluralism and diversity embodied in the various religious systems of the world, truly open dialogue offers the means by which we may access and seek to develop the vital resources, the capacity for ethical leadership, the potential for meaningful change and the profound spiritual wisdom manifest in (though not always explicitly exhibited by) the world's religious traditions.

Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, while realizing that mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, for the sake of learning and living together--as well as for the sake of increased productivity and peace in a viable and sustainable *global society*. Interreligious dialogue provides us with insights and a successful methodology garnered from decades of practical and effective experience. The religions- *in-dialogue* represent an immensely valuable resource; a resource that should be constructively developed and expanded to include key groups that influence the wider community--business, communications media, education and professional organizations.

Of course, the intended purpose of expanding this dialogue cannot be to foist religion upon business, or any other social institution. Such an attitude runs counter to the fundamentals of interreligious dialogue. In fact, it is important to recognize that the traditional "osmotic" wall of separation between "the religions" and the enterprises of business, science, and technology preserves a civic value that is as crucial as the separation of church and state. However, we should also recognize that the religions-*in-dialogue* are a potential source of knowledge and wisdom--a valuable resource that can aid in defining and implementing a *global ethic*.

Here again, the parallel efforts of business leaders and the religions-*in-dialogue* to develop a *global ethic*, as well as the *dialogical confluence* of their efforts, represents an important opportunity. Expanding the dialogue among the world's diverse religious traditions, so the conversation concerning a *global ethic* includes businesses that are entering a new stage in the development of social responsibility, should help prepare the way for the emergence of something like a *recalibrated social matrix*, which will necessarily reflect a *global consciousness* and a newly complexified *global ethos*.

The Emerging Global Society:

Although our cultural and religious traditions have been conditioned by thousands of years of divergence, animosity, and violence, we can still envision a *global society* in which all citizens experience a healthy, safe environment. A world where all citizens have access to quality education, health care, and housing. An ecologically balanced, *global society* wherein the opportunities created by a just and equitable market economy are truly accessible to all. In order to release our full potential, the advent of *global consciousness* should allow for the total elimination of the social problems that inhibit the equality of humankind. Hence, our template(s) for the *Age of Global Consciousness* should account for the evolution of a society where the scourges of famine, poverty, disease, prejudice, and ecological devastation have been marginalized, and eventually eliminated.

Granted, these societal problems have existed for centuries, and we must neither overlook, nor simply dismiss the beneficial contributions provided by previous attempts at building a more equitable society. Still, from a global perspective it is self-evident that humankind has yet to actualize its full potential, and even our best efforts at creating a better world have fallen far short of the mark. As the twenty-first century approaches, there is clear evidence of an emerging social awareness that over time problems such as these can and must be solved on a global scale. This social transformation can be observed within business in the form of 1) an increased sensitivity for ethical issues, 2) a widening awareness that business decisions must reflect a fundamental concern for social, ecological and global responsibility, and 3) a growing interest in the formation of a *global ethic*.

We feel the unfolding of these developments is a clear indication that the business community is entering a new stage in the evolution of socially responsible business. Within the realm of business, ethical and moral questions are no longer considered fuzzy religious/philosophical concepts, but rather pivotal elements in business relationships. Increasingly, world business leaders are realizing that their "bottom line" is not simply a matter of dollars and cents, but embraces a more inclusive classification, that of stakeholders--for example, investors, management, workers, customers, communities impacted, and the environment. Many creative business leaders today are pursuing responsible social ethics in their enterprises, focusing on the "inner/spiritual" dimensions of all its *stakeholders*, and actively seeking environmentally sound business practices.

Consider the annual Caux Round Table, a gathering of business leaders from Europe, Japan and America. Founded in 1986 by Frederik Philips, former President of Philips Electronics, and Olivier Giscard d'Estaing, Vice Chairman of INSEAD, the Caux Round Tables have focused their attention on the importance of global corporate responsibility in reducing social and economic threats to world peace and stability. The Round Table recognizes that the world business community should play an important role in improving economic, social and environmental conditions, and has authored a code of conduct (*The Caux Principles*) that aims to express a world standard against which business behavior can be measured.

The Caux Principles are rooted in two basic ethical ideals: *Kyosei* and *human dignity*. Here, the Japanese term *kyosei* translates as, "living and working together for the common good, enabling cooperation and mutual prosperity to coexist with healthy and fair competition"; while human dignity is understood as, "the sacredness or value of each person as an end, not simply as a means to the fulfillment of others' purposes or even majority prescription."⁶ These ideals are employed globally throughout *The Caux Principles*, and if we now shift our focus to the document's Preamble, we can discover the degree to which this group of business leaders exhibits a *global consciousness*.

- The mobility of employment, capital, products and technology is making business increasingly global in its transaction and its effects.
- Laws and market forces are necessary but insufficient guides for conduct.
- Responsibility for the policies and actions of business and respect for the dignity and interests of its stakeholders are fundamental.
- Shared values, including a commitment to shared prosperity, are as important for a global community as for communities of smaller scale.
- For these reasons, and because business can be a powerful agent of positive social change, we offer the following principles as a foundation for dialogue and action by business leaders in search of business responsibility. In so doing, we affirm the necessity for moral values in business decision making. Without them, stable business relationships and a sustainable world community are impossible.

The above emphasis on global concerns and dialogical process offers an interesting and complimentary parallel to the approach of interreligious dialogue. *The Caux Principles*--along with other, similar moves within business--demonstrate that responsible corporate leadership is turning toward independently formulating a viable and sustainable *global ethic*. However, until recently they seem to have shied away from engaging the great religious traditions in their efforts. Although groups such as *The Center for Corporate Responsibility* at the University of Saint Thomas in Minnesota have focused on issues concerning the relationship between social responsibility and business decisions, they and others who are working in this field have not examined the manner in which dialogical encounters between business and the religions-*in-dialogue* can be a factor in facilitating a genuine transformation of the *global society*.

This oversight masks the degree to which many business leaders are prepared to explore the relationship between "ethics" and "spirituality." In fact, it is our experience that many business leaders are interested in dialogically employing the massively positive influence of the world's religious traditions-*in-dialogue*, for the purpose of envisioning a *global ethic*. Here, we recognize a *confluence* of events unfolding within the pragmatic

world of business and the spiritual discipline of interreligious dialogue which indicates that these apparently divergent realms of human endeavor are evoking similar responses to the processes that are drawing us toward the *Age of Global Consciousness*. These events also indicate that a new stage in the evolution of socially responsible business is surfacing.

As envisioned by Ryuzaburo Kaku, CEO of Cannon Inc., companies that exist today can be classified into four types, each type reflecting a different stage in the development of social awareness and the evolution of socially responsible business.⁷

1. The first type of company is the "purely capitalistic corporation." These companies are at the initial stage of corporate evolution. They serve to stimulate the economy, but management and owners hoard the benefits of operation, and care very little for employees. The exploitation of workers leads inevitably to labor-management conflicts and the problems described by Karl Marx.
2. The second type is the "company that shares a prosperous future." This type of corporation addresses the shortcomings of the first type of organization. In this kind of company, managers and workers are united in working for the prosperity of the corporation and both have a share in the profits. This alleviates labor disputes, but this type of company is still criticized because it does little to solve problems in the local community, and is often not concerned with environmental protection. For example, it is sometimes negligent in managing waste and noise, because its managers and workers are simply pursuing greater personal wealth.
3. The third type, the "company assuming local social responsibilities," respects the interests of a more inclusive classification of stakeholders--customers, staff, shareholders, suppliers, competitors, and the local community. They also spare no effort to further the advancement of their own country. However, although they accept social responsibilities, these are limited to those within their own national borders and local area. While this type of company draws little criticism within its domestic sphere, it is often censured by other countries because it cares for only local and national interests and is not concerned about global problems, such as the deterioration of the environment, global trade imbalance, and imbalances in development.
4. The fourth type, the "corporation assuming global social responsibilities," may also be described as a "truly global corporation." This type of company cares for all its direct stakeholders including its local community and beyond. While this type of corporation interacts harmoniously with its employees and the local community, it strives to fulfill its corporate obligations on a global scale, and it recognizes that its social responsibilities transcend national boundaries.

Note how each stage of development, broadly mapped by the above four categories, reflects a more comprehensive field of vision, more inclusive patterns of social interaction, and an increased sensitivity to socially responsible policies. This pattern of social development indicates that *global consciousness* is presently developing within the realm of business, and as it develops, the business community is rapidly entering a new stage in the evolution of socially responsible business. When these observations are coupled with the fact that, "business has become, in this last half-century, the most powerful institution on the planet,"⁸ this turn to *global consciousness* represents a process that will have profoundly beneficial effects on the social patterns of our world.

Employing these same categories, it is also possible to project a further stage in the progressive development of these four types of business organization--the "visionary corporation" of the *Age of Global Consciousness*. At this point one can only sketch an outline of this type of company in the broadest terms. However, considering the radical shift in consciousness heralded by the *Age of Global Consciousness*, it may well be that "visionary corporations" will exhibit a cooperative effort between capital and intent. In this instance, concern for profits and concern for ecological and social well-being will be synergistically integrated. Indeed, we believe there is ample evidence to support the view that "visionary corporations" will be able to reframe their enterprises, and reinvent the meaning of "profit," so this concept encompasses the ecological and social well-being of a *global*

society that includes every creature on the earth.⁹ Given the *dialogical consciousness* of the inbreaking *Age of Global Consciousness*, we may also assume that "visionary corporations" will actively seek to involve the world's religious and cultural traditions in an effort to develop a viable and sustainable *global ethic*. Hence, the "visionary corporation" of the *Age of Global Consciousness* will be pivotally involved in mapping the emergence of a newly complexified *global ethos*.

It is our conviction that humankind is on the threshold of creating and discovering a *dialogical vision of global concern* and *global responsibility* that will be embraced by individuals, organizations, nations and faith-communities. To clearly articulate this *dialogical vision*, and to forge models and methods for its practice is the task presently facing humankind. As we move into the *Age of Global Consciousness*, if we are going to implement viable and sustainable modes of development that genuinely secure justice and peace for every creature on the earth, we must evoke an *ethos* that is informed by the fact that all creatures are part of the profoundly interconnected holistic unity of this living planet. Humankind must begin reevaluating and transforming its persistent *hubris*, which is so much a part of the anthropocentric, ethnocentric and egocentric *ethos* that continues to guide humankind's dominant cultures.

In response to global convergence, authentic dialogue--especially among pivotal groups that influence the wider community, *e.g.*, business, communications media, education, professional organizations, and the religions--should nourish and enhance *global consciousness*. Such a dialogue should also serve to identify the fundamental principles that will support a formal definition, implementation and promotion of a viable *global ethic*. These developments, along with advances in the tandem technologies of communications and computers, are indicative of a profound transformation having already begun.

We should not imagine that a new *global ethos* will emerge solely in response to technological advances, or the formulation of a *global ethic*, or even less plausibly, the formulation of a detailed code of globalized ethics. Transforming *ethos*, our largely unconscious understanding of one's role in the interactions that define and constitute our very existence--including the various levels and dimensions of emotional, intellectual and physical interrelationships that shape our daily activities--presents a monumental task. We really don't know "how" it is done.

Nevertheless, we may optimistically predict that seeking out the fundamental principles that underlie a *global ethic*, as well as the activities involved in formally defining and promulgating a *global ethic*--including the ethical and legislative considerations that will grow out of such an effort--will prove beneficial to every living creature on the planet. Guided by *global consciousness*, these tasks will assist in transforming the attitudes, thoughts and actions that guide our dominant cultures, and prepare the way for the necessary *recalibration of our social matrix(es)*. If we are going to successfully move into the 21st Century and the *Age of Global Consciousness*, formulating a *global ethic* and evoking a newly complexified *global ethos* are both activities that need to be further explored and nurtured. The *dialogical confluence* of business and the religions-in-dialogue is an initial step in this direction, a necessary step toward cultivating the shared "change of mind" that must begin soon.

Notes

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1. Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992), p. 2.
2. Hans Küng, and Karl-Josef Kuschel, editors. *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993); See also: Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. Translated by John Bowden (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1991); and, Hans Küng, *Projekt Weltethos* (Munich: R. Piper GmbH & Co. KG, 1990).
3. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979).

4. Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992), p. 10.
5. Ewert H. Cousins, "Judaism--Christianity--Islam: Facing Modernity Together." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. 30:3-4 (Summer-Fall, 1993): pp. 423-424.
6. *Futures: The Journal of Forecasting, Planning, and Policy*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann, March 1995) pp. 263-269.
7. Ryuzaburo Kaku, "Kyosei--The Guide for a New World Order in Business."
8. Harman, Willis, "Why is There a World Business Academy?" San Francisco: World Business Academy, 1990.
9. James C. Collins, and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper Business, 1994).