

***Are Interfaith Dialogue and a Global Ethic
Compatible?
A Call for an Ethic to the Globe.¹***

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Abstract

It is suggested, through a friendly and sympathetic critique, that the current formulation of the Global Ethic is in need of reworking. While normally considered something which has grown from the context of interfaith dialogue, this paper suggests that interfaith dialogue and the current manifestation of the Global Ethic project are actually inimical. Rather than seeking a single synthesis of what ethics may be, it is suggested that an acknowledgment of the radical plurality of viewpoints would be a better starting point. This may lead to a plurality of ethical viewpoints each directed to living in a global community and context, termed Ethics to the Globe. It is recommended that current manifestos of a GE may better be recast as Western visions of an Ethic to the Globe, to which others may respond with their own ethical values and standpoints. The project of formulating a Global Ethic itself is therefore posited as something in the future, and which may only consist of a variety of ethical systems rather than a single vision.

Introduction

This essay is intended as a friendly and sympathetic critique of the Global Ethic (hereafter GE) project. Nevertheless, I believe a number of important concerns need to be raised with respect to it and its method of operation. Here, I intend to focus on one of these, which is to ask whether a contemporary understanding of Interfaith Dialogue is compatible with the quest for a GE; this may seem an odd question, as the GE can be seen, at least

¹ My thanks go to Alan Race for his comments on an earlier draft of this work, which was based upon a paper I gave at the 2nd International Faith, Spirituality and Social Change Conference, at the University of Winchester, 2007, entitled 'Interfaith Dialogue and the Global Ethic'.

in part, as coming from the initiatives of Interfaith Dialogue. However, I will suggest that a truly equitable understanding of relationship between the religions may suggest that we should not seek for a GE, at least as currently envisaged. To this end I will outline a history of the GE, before, briefly, outlining the principle ideas of Hans Küng's version of the GE. While recognizing that various moves towards a GE have been made, I shall make particular mention of Küng's as his is the best known example. I will, briefly, problematize the suggestion that this clearly and obviously offers us a universal ethical basis, before asking whether the relationship between religions should lead us on to develop a GE. This will lead us to an analysis of the concept of Interfaith Dialogue, and suggesting that a contemplation of this should lead us to recast attempts to write a GE. I will then make some tentative suggestions about the way we can re-envisage this, proposing that instead of seeking, at the moment, a GE, we should instead be advancing, what I will term (if somewhat inelegantly, but for reasons I will elaborate on), an Ethic to the Globe.

A brief (and Selective) History of the GE

This is a partial history, and by no means comprehensive, but intended merely as a guide to where the GE has come from.² As the principle statement of a GE is the Declaration Küng prepared for the 2nd Parliament of the World's Religions, it seems natural to start our history one hundred years earlier at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, Chicago. This landmark event is seen by many as the starting point of the modern interfaith movement (Kuschel, 1993, pp. 77ff). The significance of the event is hard to overestimate, because, for the first time *ever*, representatives of the world's many religions³ gathered together, to meet, debate and share their views, and despite many notable

² For more details see: Twiss & Grelle, 2000, pp. 1-2; Twiss, 2000, pp. 159-60; Kuschel, 1993, pp. 77-105; Swidler, 1999b, pp. 23-24; Swidler, 1999c, p. 237; and, Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 6-9.

³ The term 'religion' is, of course, not without its problems, and there are those who would argue against it as an illegitimate tool of Western colonial classification, however, because within the confines of the interfaith movement it operates as a relatively unproblematic term, and because there are many good reasons to suppose we can still use the term with nuanced meanings (i.e. not supposing as many at the original Parliament would have done, that every religion has an 'essence', or is a type of some fixed form) I will continue to use it (on debates surrounding the term, see Hedges, 2009).

omissions and exclusions it was a landmark ecumenical event (see Seager, 1993, pp. 3-12), which represented to many a vision of a new age of religious conversation (Eck, 1993, pp. xiii-xvii). It took place when the Western world was the dominant global force and had little reason to doubt its supremacy, whether this be economically, socially, politically, morally or religiously. The events of the First World War, however, shocked the West out of such complacency, while also allowing the rest of the world to see that the moral supremacy of the West was but a phantasm (Hedges, 2001, p. 232). Combined with the events of the 1893 Parliament, as well as the growing realization in the West that there was not a single monolithic framework as to how things should be done ('our way') which could be hoisted onto the rest of the world, alongside a growing skepticism about the Western model from other parts of the world, we can suggest there was a growing realization that any answer to the world's problems, or approach to them, would, increasingly, need to be a multi-faceted and cross-cultural affair. The Second World War also saw developments, as it led to the foundation of the United Nations, and, in terms of the GE, the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights, is seen as a landmark event. On a more parochial level, yet one to have global effects, in 1982 at Tübingen University, Germany, an Ecumenical Dialogue among the World Religions was instigated. This event brought one of the world's most famous and controversial theologians, Hans Küng, into field of dialogue, leading to his involvement in the 1989 UNESCO colloquium 'World Religions, Human Rights and World Peace', in Paris, while in 1990 he published, *Project Weltehos* (English: *Global Responsibility*, 1991), and, in the same year lectured to the World Economic Forum at Davos. From here developments towards a GE moved quickly, with Leonard Swidler calling for a 'Global Ethos Research Centre' in 1992, the year which also saw Küng commissioned to write the draft proposal of a GE for the 2nd Parliament of the World's Religions, with the Parliament ratifying the 'Declaration Toward a Global Ethic' the following year. In 1995, Küng co-founded the GE Foundation, while, in 1997, he published, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, proposing that business as well as government and religious groups have to work together in this venture. Other GEs came forward in 1998, with the

‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World’s Religions’ (Sharma, 1998), and Leonard Swidler first forwarding his vision of a GE (Swidler, 1999c), the year he also helped found the Centre for Global Ethics. Another important step was the 1999 Parliament’s ‘Call to Our Guiding Institutions’, which sought to call various institutions (educational, governmental, religious, etc.) to alter their ethos in line with the proposed GE. Since then, the organizations and individuals involved have worked to spread the acceptance and importance of a GE, exemplified, perhaps, by the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan speaking at Küng’s foundation in 2003.

Additionally, the world situation has been an impetus towards a GE. Küng, in one of his most famous phrases, has categorically stated that:

“No world peace without peace between the religions” (Küng, 1991, p. xv)

I think anyone who takes a serious look at the world situation today must agree with him. While some, especially in the ‘secularized’ West, may not see the situation as a clash of religions, there are many who do, most obviously those who see such things as the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as examples of the crusading spirit, where a perceived ‘Christian West’ battles the ‘Muslim world’ (Bennett, 2005, p. 211; Bhatia, 2004, p. 1).

The Global Ethic

As we have noted, the most widely used and famous version of the GE, is the declaration set out in 1993 at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago. Within a large document, setting out some background and context, four basic statements, or commitments, were laid out in this declaration set forth by Küng:

1. Non-violence and respect for life
2. Solidarity and a just economic order

3. Tolerance and a life of truthfulness
4. Equal rights and partnership between men and women (Küng, 1993a, pp. 24-34).

Each of these was considerably expanded upon in the declaration itself, yet, for many, these four basic commitments are seen as a representative assessment of the core ethics found within the world's religions, expressed by scriptures, institutions, leaders, etc. (Morgan & Braybrooke, 1998, especially pp. 34-123). I have elsewhere expressed doubts about the assumption that this can be said to represent a collection of common ethical agreements, and, instead, here, will focus upon a very different question, that of whether this GE, as it is currently expressed, is actually something that leads naturally out of the practice and ideals of interfaith dialogue itself.⁴ However, the essence of the other critiques, that there may not be a common set of understanding on these points, is central to the argument I shall make here, and, therefore, I will briefly overview some of the main points of this argument. This is not intended to be a critique of the whole project, for, as noted, it is intended as a friendly and sympathetic critique, suggesting the project should be remodelled rather than abandoned.

⁴ In a separate article drawn from themes in the same paper that inspired this one (see note 1), I argue that five main concerns surround the whole project of the GE, of which a fundamental concern is the way a common ethic is expressed through these commitments and the so-called Golden Rule. This article, entitled, 'Concerns about the Global Ethic: A Sympathetic Critique and Suggestions for a New Direction', is planned for submission to *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* (Hedges, unpublished)

Is There a Common Understanding of the Commitments of the GE?

Here, I will just take a few examples of ways the various statements within the GE can be read in a plurality of ways. A particularly contentious statement is the declaration of the equal rights and partnership of men and women (Küng, 1993b, pp. 69-70; Kushel, 1993, p. 96). This, raises issues that are pertinent to most religions. On an obvious level, the exclusion from leadership positions for females from most of the mainstream Christian churches is something which has been central to feminist critiques of this tradition for some time. However, beyond this, Porter has questioned if the stance of the Vatican on the issues of contraception and abortion can be seen as compatible with this commitment – if women’s roles and activities are governed by restrictions on access to these facilities, can they enjoy an equal role alongside men (Porter, 2001, p. 6)? Also, what is meant by ‘equal’ comes into debate:

“For instance, in Islam, it is taken for granted that both men and women have a full equality before God, nevertheless, certain religious duties proscribed for men, for instance, attendance at the mosque for Friday prayers, have not traditionally been seen as binding upon women. Also, within certain forms of Judaism, men and women are seen as having certain clearly defined areas of activity, either in the private sphere of the home for women, or the public sphere for men. Might such systems be seen as in accord with the notion of ‘Equal rights and partnership’?” (Hedges, unpublished).

Similar problems come when we examine the other commitments, for instance, one particularly contentious argument at the Parliament itself was when Bosnian Muslims wanted to ensure that the right to self-defence be stated clearly in the first commitment, on non-violence (Küng, 1993b, pp. 67-68). However, this would cause problems for many from Buddhist (King, 1995, p. 218) or Jain communities, and their interpretation of the principle of *ahimsa*.

The issues mentioned above should make clear that we cannot simply assume that a set of core central values or themes, which, in some ways seem common and unproblematic, can be taken as evidence of a basis for a single and united GE that exists between the religions. Certainly there are few (mainstream) proponents of any faith tradition who would disagree with the four commitments Küng laid out, however, to suggest that a common agreement between these exists is naive in the extreme. The problem of agreement on generalities is highlighted by Shu-hsien Liu, who raises the very question of divergent religious worldviews that underlies the issues we wish to discuss in this paper (Liu, 1999, pp. 165-166).

Does the Relationship between Faiths Lead us to Seek a Global Ethic?

Therefore, having noted that there are concerns about the current structure and functioning of the GE project, I will discuss the nature of interfaith dialogue, and how I see this relating to what the GE is and should be. I will now, therefore, ask how the relationship between religions affects the GE project. I will begin with a profound statement from the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association, 1989, quoted by Race:

“The religions of the world are expressions of the human openness to God. They are signs of God’s presence in the world. Every religion is unique and through this uniqueness, religions enrich one another. In their specificity, they manifest different faces of the supreme Mystery which is never exhausted. In their diversity, they enable us to experience the richness of the One more profoundly. When religions encounter one another in dialogue, they build up a community in which differences become complementarities and divergences are changed into pointers to communion” (in Race, 2001, p. 153).

Speaking of the uniqueness and diversity of faiths, it stresses that this very diversity is itself a strength leading towards a more profound understanding of

‘the One’, or, I may suggest, an appreciation of the diversity of ethics may lead us towards a more profound ethical standpoint. In particular, I wish to stress the last sentence, speaking of the meeting in dialogue. “Differences become complementarities,” tells us that it is perhaps where we disagree that we can learn most, not where we unite. While, paradoxically, “divergences are changed into pointers to communion,” suggests that these points of difference may be where we can expand our horizons and understandings of our own faiths most. If we are truly to value and recognize the worth of other faiths, then it is perhaps best not to look for the common ground, but the divergences, and from here seeking what new insights we can learn from those of other faiths. Therefore, the question is raised: should we seek to unite in one GE? This seems to be the endpoint envisaged by most of its proponents, and Hick and others have suggested that a number of drafts may come together to build up to an overall grand picture of one great super-ethic, the true GE, that will result from these many versions (Hick, 1999, p. 102). However, I suggest we may be better off with a diversity of ethics from which each can learn and profit. This, I contend, may avoid the need for these ethics to be so vague as to be meaningless, or so detailed as to exclude others, which is one danger Küng foresaw in creating his GE (Küng, 2000, p. 426), and which one of his most perceptive and sympathetic critics, Richard Falk, highlights as one problem the GE has not escaped (Falk, 1999, p. 77).⁵

Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond the Global Ethic?

I will now suggest something more radical, that authentic Interfaith Dialogue is offended by the GE. I recognize the very dramatic nature of this claim, for the GE stems from the interfaith movement, with Küng and Swidler both being highly involved and respected members of the movement – and there is no doubt that dialogue is central to the main strands of GE thinking (Wiredu, 2005, p. 50). Indeed, I should express my very highest respect for the main figures involved in this project, their thought, and their work in this area. It might be suspected, then, that my words are more rhetorical than otherwise.

⁵ For more on this see Hedges, unpublished.

Partly, but I also wish to make a serious point, and, to this end, will ask what Interfaith Dialogue is. A good definition is the Guidelines of the World Council of Churches, which sets out four basic propositions:

- Dialogue begins when people meet
- Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust
- Dialogue makes it possible to share in service
- Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness (Forward, 2001, p. 11).⁶

The first postulate here is straightforward and obvious, we cannot have dialogue without contact, it begins when people meet. However, beyond this statement of the obvious, it leads to more profound implications, that we must meet in a way that can lead beyond hostility and suspicion in the ways indicated. We may assume this suggests a GE, some common ground beyond our parochial views. However, real dialogue should not lead us, at least not yet, to a GE. To examine this claim, I will employ the statement, ‘Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs’ from The Inter Faith Network for the UK. From a fairly extensive statement, I have chosen three excerpts, which I believe represent typical expressions of genuine Interfaith work:

“Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms.”

“Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict.”

“We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values” (Interfaith Network).

⁶ It should be noted that the version cited from Forward is the adaptation of the WCC guidelines by the British Council of Churches.

The first suggests that, rather than providing *one* GE in common language, we should pay greater respect to the plurality and multiplicity of the divergent languages of the faith traditions. Who is to say that this may not lead us to greater commonality through diversity. I have already suggested above that we may be best off not seeking one single voice. In the context of this paper, as a principle of interfaith dialogue, this expression of “[l]earning... what others actually believe and value... in their own terms” marks a significant step in my argument that the GE may actually offend against those very principles of dialogue which it sees itself embedded in; a GE may not allow and understand the voice of each, preferring to substitute for the heteroglossy of dialogue (between ethical systems), a monoglossy of *an* ethic. The second, and here I will find, perhaps, my closest connections with Küng, is my agreement with his assertion that without peace between the religions, there will be no peace in the world; as this is intended not just as a negative attack on the GE project, I will therefore positively suggest where my critique is taking us, and how, in the light of my concerns here, the GE, as presently expressed, may be seen as problematic, and how it may be recast in a new way. The third speaks volumes, that, again, by listening we may learn more. It also stresses that speaking of the differences doesn’t mean absolute alterity, but that common strands still bind us, and that we can become as enriched through these differences as through bland commonality (Shaffer, 1998, citing Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 449). Again, this is why dialogue may be offended by the GE, rather than building to a mutual enrichment through difference, some aspects of the GE project may suggest that we need to adhere to one particular understanding and vision of what it means to be ethical, and how to interpret those ethics. As I have suggested, this may not be a virtue.

To continue this discussion, I will, perhaps more significantly, consider Martin Forward’s analysis of the roots of the term ‘dia-logue’:

“What, however, of the first part of the word ‘dialogue’? It is ‘dia-’, not ‘di-’ as many people wrongly infer. In Greek, ‘di-’ indicates ‘two’ rather than the ‘one’ that is signified by ‘mono-’. But ‘dia-’ is a preposition that

means ‘through’. ‘Di-logue’ could mean *two* people conversing about a worldview; maybe amicably, maybe not; maybe with results, maybe not. But ‘*dia*-logue’ signifies worldviews being argued *through* to significant and potentially transformative conclusions, for one or more participants. It involves a much more consequential encounter” (Forward, 2001, p. 12).

What this suggests can be set out in a fairly simple way:

Di-logue:

- Compare & contrast
- Leads to: ‘GE’

Dia-logue:

- Radical thinking through of own tradition
- No particular common ‘result’, but affirmation of both common values and acknowledgement of differences
- Leads to: mutual engagement and (perhaps) transformation

If ‘di-logue’ means we can compare and contrast and so find all the useful common bits, then this is not what a GE should be. By way of contrast, dialogue may suggest that we may never find any common result. Instead, we live with and through the differences we encounter. I recognize many problems with my proposal, indeed, some with which I feel distinctly uncomfortable, but I shall come to these in due course; suffice it to agree here with Knitter, who cites David Tracy, in noting that we must allow ourselves to be disturbed by the other, recognizing not strict identity, but an analogy of being, whereby we can be both fascinated and frightened by the other, that is truly other yet united to us (Knitter, 1995, pp. 75-76).

I believe that, in the light of this review of what interfaith dialogue can and should mean, that we should welcome diverse, even contradictory, accounts of

what ethics are. Therefore any suggestion that we can have one single GE is an offence to a true understanding of interfaith dialogue.

Towards an Ethic to the Globe

Throughout this paper, I have raised the issue that seeking a single GE may not be the best policy to pursue, but have suggested that a variety of ethics may be more attuned both to the demands of interfaith dialogue, as well, it may be said, to the reality of positions found between the world's religions. This is not to say that we should give way to a simple relativism, where we do nothing but bask in the diversity of faiths, and accept each as internally self-referencing systems, which have nothing to say to each other.⁷ Despite, the diversity of ethics, ideas, and practices found between the world's faiths, I would suggest that there is, and I have signalled my agreement with Küng in this, a need for the world's faiths to work in common purpose towards shared purposes, one of which is world peace. Therefore, before outlining my proposal, I would like to contrast my vision with that of Küng:

“the religions of the world can make a contribution to the peace of mankind only if they reflect on those elements of an ethic which they already have in common: on a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards and personal attitudes” (Hans Küng, 1991).

By way of contrast, I would contend:

The religions of the world can make a contribution to the peace of mankind only if they reflect on and openly acknowledge those elements which are common yet diverse: to recognize no fundamental consensus, except the desire to live together in mutual yet engaged difference.

⁷ This would be the viewpoint of some 'post-modern' advocates of the relationship between religions, but is one that is not without its difficulties (see Hedges, 2008).

If we are not, therefore, seeking a single GE, rather a diversity of ethics, then, I would suggest that setting our house in order first would be surely moving in the right direction. That is to say, we as the (Christian) West need to think and act in ways that would allow us to approach the world with moral integrity. One concern about the GE, is that it is seen as coming from the perspective of a liberalized Enlightenment Christian Western worldview,⁸ and one that, as such, is intimately bound up with an imperialist past, and is related to a culture that is (seen to be?) engaged in many unethical and colonialist agendas in the contemporary world situation.⁹ For this reason alone, even if we do not consider my foregoing argument, I suggest that we should move from the paradigm of the GE to that of an Ethic to the Globe. That is to say, we can seek to express a vision of how we, the (Christian) West (which, of course, is itself a diverse body and so may produce a variety of ethics), wish to approach the world and act within it. This, I hope, would offer a subversive religious narrative (McCann, 2000, p. 323) that disturbs our comfortable and typical notions of life and ethics. Elizabeth Stuart's notion of a hospitable Christology might be one useful area to enquire into (Stuart, 1998, pp. 58-62), which would help bring a distinctive voice and vision to the table, rather than a bland list of common generalities. It may also disturb our comfortable assumption that a GE is, inherently, a good thing.

Alan Race has suggested the problems should not stop the project, but merely sound a warning, with the GE continuing to progress more or less as it currently is (Race, 2001, p. 131).¹⁰ In a similar way, Swidler, in reviewing an essay by Fu Shan Zhao (who offers a Chinese (Daoist/ Confucian) perspective on his GE project) sees him as broadly concurring with his proposals, saying they both agree we are on the way to a GE (Swidler, 1999c, p. 233). I think

⁸ Space does not permit me to elaborate upon this here, but it is one of the concerns I have developed in more detail elsewhere (Hedges, unpublished).

⁹ These are almost too numerous to mention, but the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are obvious (see above, p. 2), the whole capitalist infrastructure of the Western world that leads to an overuse and exploitation of labour and resources around the world is another, both of which, while on a grand scale, only touch the tip of the iceberg.

¹⁰ In response to the kind of criticisms I have raised here and elsewhere (Hedges, unpublished), Race offers what is probably the best defence of the current set up of the GE in a forthcoming paper (Race, 2008).

Swidler misses the more radical point Zhao makes, and which, for similar and other reasons, I am reiterating, that the whole project needs to be rethought. For Zhao, the GE project as it is currently formulated seems to surmise that what we have is more or less the whole thing, and that we simply need to add some local colour to make it truly global. That is to say, there is an assumption, that the set of propositions given in something like Küng's four commitments is the basis of the GE. In relation to this, while both Küng and Swidler's proposals bear the title of being drafts, as something working 'towards' a GE, however, once their proposal is outlined, this guarded language seems to be replaced by a confident assertion that this *is* the GE (Hedges, unpublished). I, like Zhao, would want us to step back from this, and to say that these proposals are good, but that, at present, they are simply Western Christian visions of an ethical way to be part of a global community,¹¹ to which we should invite a host of others to respond with their visions. This would be a starting point, for, as Zhao rightly says, we are, at present, simply ignorant of when we may be ready to formulate a GE, while a continued process of dialogue before we even consider formulating a GE may result in something even more "meaningful and fruitful" (Zhao, 1999, p. 153; see also Hick, 2007, p. 16).¹² In the light of our discussion of interfaith dialogue, if we assume that it is only in truly encountering the 'Other' that we can grow and develop, then we must fully acknowledge that the presence of a plurality of voices in a long discussion with no known outcomes, or even firm directions, may, as Zhao indicates, lead us to something more profound.

Most especially, in the light of perceptions that the GE is, or may be, part of a Western Christian missionary and colonial plot (Duran, 1999, p. 126), we cannot simply assume the whole world can be brought online to a Western bred (and led) project no matter how noble its intentions, especially when,

¹¹ I fully acknowledge that Küng consulted widely with figures from around the world and from many different faiths in drawing up his declaration, but that nevertheless it still bears the imprint of a Western document (see Hedges, unpublished).

¹² I believe that Hick has moved from a position that more closely mirrored that of Küng and Swidler in his earlier work (Hick, 1999) to one that more closely matches my own in his latest thought in the area: "a global ethic remains to be uncovered, and that to do this requires world-wide consultation going beyond the present Western versions" (Hick, 2007, p. 16).

rather than serving to include, it may simply reinforce divisions and fault lines. By this I mean, that if the GE project is seen as part of a Western liberalizing agenda, then those who have issues with it because of this may become more adverse to seeking or sharing in common projects and interest with its proponents.¹³ Instead of ‘ethical colonizing’ with visions of a GE, we may best reach out to others with an Ethic to the Globe. This, itself, may be an advocacy to the Other to develop their own Ethic to the Globe, which may well mirror much of what a GE seeks to do – the African, Confucian and other examples have shown that, in many practical ways, concerns related to what we in the West would term ‘human rights’ can be expressed (or found) in many cultures (Zhao,1999; Liu, 1999; Nkulu, 1999; Mitra, 1999; Shaffer, 1999).¹⁴ However, unity on human rights may, perhaps, be best fostered by encouraging diversity in common partnership. The danger with the GE, as it is developing, and as is happening in some areas where an ethic is being developed globally, is that the Western ethos will be seen as a ‘base’ to which local colour can be ‘added’ on (Widdows, 2007, p. 315; on the pernicious ‘othering’ of post-modernism¹⁵ in this respect see Katongole, 2000 & Hedges, 2002, p. 9).

¹³ This, again, is a topic I explore more fully elsewhere (see Hedges, unpublished).

¹⁴ It goes beyond the scope of this paper to suggest that a very meaningful set of comparative ethics could be offered in practical terms that could guide future discussions, but we must not jump from these to a belief that we can set up a ready-to-go GE from this.

¹⁵ This is, of course, a deeply problematic term, employed in a vast diversity of ways. As I understand, and am using the term, we should distinguish post-modern philosophy (post-modernism) and post-modern culture (post-modernity). The latter being the contemporary cultural, social and technological matrix of Western society, identified by such things as multi-culturalism, communication technology, consumerism, etc. The former, being a variety of philosophical views typically centred around the following (interlinked) aspects: 1) a dissatisfaction with the modern world, especially the Enlightenment (project) as exemplified by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Hegel; 2) the attempt to reconstitute knowledge, or challenge traditional forms of knowing; 3) Jean-Francois Lyotard’s suspicion of meta-narratives; 4) Michel Foucault’s belief that knowledge and power are entwined – to define something, is, in some way, to claim control over it; 5) Jacques Derrida’s challenge to linguistic usage and understanding, especially his famous saying everything is text, glossed elsewhere as everything is context; 6) respect for the Other, especially a concern with the way marginalized or repressed (or exotic) groups are ignored or packaged and controlled by an elite (e.g., Western, male, powerful, academic); 7) the heteroglossy of Mikhail Bakhtin, implying a multiplicity of voices, as opposed to monoglossy, or a single voice or narrative; 8) the denial of fixed essences, and a trend to see everything as being a complex and changing set of relationships.

This may raise some difficult suggestions. For instance, as a Western ‘liberal’, I may be uncomfortable with the treatment of women in certain parts of, for instance, the Middle East and Central Asia (the Islamic world?), such as enforced veiling and the lack of access to education and other ‘rights’. However, it may be better that I accept this with tolerance, although engaging dialogically, and posing alternatives, with those who hold these views, instead of making demands that they change their customs and culture because it offends my sensibilities, or telling the Other that their ways do not match a GE and its demands of ‘equal rights’ – which, as I have noted, they may believe they already meet in their own terms. Perhaps there are things I can learn. For instance, the whole culture of veiling has been lambasted by Western (and Islamic) feminists, however, an increasing number of intelligent and educated Muslim women around the world are now choosing to take the veil. For many, it is a statement of faith, and morality, against the permissiveness of ‘Western’ society and values. It is also, for some, a way to be treated as a person – that people will react to the mind and intellect, rather than simply physical appearance. There are, then, positive virtues in the practice, which twenty, or even ten, years ago may have passed unnoticed (Geaves, 2005, p. 232; Dwyer, 1999). Indeed, looking at what may be considered the decadence and debauchery of much Western ‘civilization’, it is hard not to extol the virtues of certain less ‘open’ and ‘free’ systems and cultures. However, if we allow plural views to exist it raises other problems and concerns. As Sumner Twiss has pointed out, it is often the suffering and poor of the world who are crying out for a GE, while the oppressors ignore that which does not fit in with what they claim to be their culture (Twiss, 2000, pp. 157-159, see also Race, 2001, p. 136). It may seem then that my call to a variety of Ethics to the Globe fits in with the wishes of those who would not wish to see a GE in place, whether this be Third World Dictators, or First World Polluters! Yet, perhaps, as noted, this suggestion does point a way forward, if we, the West, set our house in order, and have a respectable ethic to face the world with, then we could have more moral authority to affect change. Also, by calling for engagement, dialogue and change on all sides, what may come out of this may be greater than any initial move to put a GE in place as a first step. Indeed, for those who think a

liberationist and action based attitude should come first – to overturn abuses against women or human rights in other countries by universal ethical decree before we even consider what the Other has to say in defence of their customs – I would note the story recounted by Knitter, who when placing the question of whether one shouldn't give up on interfaith dialogue with those who advocate (what we see as) social evils to a groups of Indian Christian ashramites, was met by the answer that the meetings in dialogue and meditation should continue in the hope that person would come to see these things as evil (or, indeed, I may add, that we may learn to see the merit in them), noting that, “we must learn to *resist without excluding, to resist and at the same time embrace*” (Knitter, 1995, p. 166).

My proposal then is that, from the perspective of interfaith dialogue, we need to rethink the GE in at least three ways:

1. A respect and acknowledgement of diversity, not as something negative, but as the very centre point from which we can grow and develop.
2. A belief that no single answer will do justice to the diversity of positions that we find expressed in the many and varied faith systems around the world.
3. A desire to respect differences and live in encounter with the views of those who may be very different, and even challenging and disturbing to our own.

Therefore, I have suggested we should recast the current GE project in terms of seeking for ourselves an Ethic to the Globe. While I acknowledge that this phrase is less elegant and more cumbersome than the catchy GE, I believe it is needed on several grounds, and the term expresses what is needed. In the first place, as I have suggested, we can do no more than offer our own version of what we see as an ethical way to act (as members of a global community), for we are simply in no position either to say what a GE will be like, still less to say our interpretation of ethics (or what we may see as an overview of the

commonalities between all major religions) is the basis of a GE. Secondly, this ethic must be something we can take out to the world, something we can live and act upon, therefore we go with it to the globe. It is, in one sense, a set of values we can hold up, and say this is how we wish to act as citizens within a global community. Third, in our present situation we cannot simply think of acting within human communities, but must consider ourselves as inhabitants of this planet and take the needs of the environment into consideration, thus our ethic must be to the globe itself, as well as to us as global beings as part of a global community. I have not said much about the environmental side of global ethical thinking in this paper, as my main focus has been elsewhere, but it is, I believe, crucial to any serious contemporary ethical system. Finally, it is an Ethic to the Globe because we hold out some hope, that it will stand amongst other systems as something that may eventually become a GE, not imagining this as one common set of rules or guidelines, but a set of commitments of cultures, nations, ethnicities, faith groups, and others about how we wish to live in joint and respectful community one with the other.

A Transformation of Consciousness

As a final note, many advocates of a GE believe we are seeing a transformation of thought that moves away from an insular and monocultural perspective to a reflexive and multicultural one that celebrates and values diversity, and is both challenged and transformed through this encounter (Swidler, 1999b, pp. 2-16; Küng, 1993b, pp. 34-36; and, Race, Kenney & Rao, 2005). Indeed, before a GE could become a viable proposition, we would need people to accept the move from monologue to dialogue that Swidler speaks of, or to embrace the sea change discussed within ‘The Interreligious Insight Paradigm’ of Race, Kenney and Rao. Leaving aside the lazy post-modern critique that this is but another manifestation of the modern mythology of ‘Progress’, I think there is something to be said for the notion in some ways. Certainly one facet of the culture of post-modernity is its multi-culturalism and awareness of plurality that means we must engage with the Other, so, on a purely descriptive level of social change it is right. More than this, I believe Küng and others are quite

right in suggesting that we need to think and act in relation to this to secure a stable future in our present situation. Nkulu expresses this well when he says:

“it is not enough to think in a ‘global way’ or to have a kind of ‘universal mind.’ What is required is ‘to act in a global way and with a global perspective’” (Nkulu, 1999, p. 72).

I think he is quite right, however, the current setup of the GE represents, I suggest, Nkulu’s ‘universal mind’, a one-size-fits-all mentality that will leave most with a poor fit. Instead, if we have a ‘global perspective’ we will look out to the world, with an Ethic to the Globe, and see others looking back with their own visions and ethics, not expecting a single synthesis, but seeking many engaged participants each bringing their wares to the table and, we may hope, but not expect or demand, that all will learn from each other, both transforming and being transformed in the process, and working in common where we see shared values and areas for action.

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