

For a Better Global Civilization

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Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#)

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“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief.” Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), French psychiatrist, philosopher, revolutionary, and author, born in Martinique

“One must have a strong mind and a soft heart... The world is full of people who have a dry heart and a weak mind.” Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), French philosopher

“The Seven Blunders of the World are:

1. Wealth without work;
2. Pleasure without conscience;
3. Knowledge without character;
4. Commerce without morality;
5. Science without humanity;
6. Worship without sacrifice;
7. Politics without principle.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Indian political leader, (“Mahatma” means “Great Soul”)

This year in 2011, we will be 7 billion people [<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/01/seven-billion/kunzig-text>] sharing Planet Earth, most of the recent increase in world population originating in the developing world, as has been the case since 1950. We were 3 billion people in 1960 and we will be three times that in 2050, i.e. 9 billion people. That’s a lot of people who will have to learn how to live together, if they don’t want to perish together.

To show you how big the number “7 billion” is, just consider that if you were today to begin counting 1, 2, 3, etc., (at the pace of one number a second), it would take you some 115 years to reach the number 7,000,000,000 (seven with nine zeros).

I- Economists and Ethics and Morality in General

Even though this may be a surprise to some, economists are very much concerned with the moral environment in which an efficient economy functions. That is because an environment of moral decay, corruption and savagery is not conducive to economic development, economic growth and economic progress in general. It is more a recipe for decadence, economic stagnation and poverty.

It has often been observed through history that economic and financial crises and widespread poverty are accompanied by moral decadence, excessive greed, widespread ignorance and by private and public corruption, as well as an unhealthy widening of the gap between rich and poor.

These are characteristics that can surely apply to our current environment. Unfortunately, I also think that things are getting progressively worse, not better, in the sense that I have the uneasy feeling that the world seems to be regressing morally, paradoxically at a time when economic development and education have reached a high level in many countries—and paradoxically also, at a time when religion in general seems to play a larger role in the politics of many countries, and that includes the United States—maybe above all, the United States.

This is what persuaded me to write a book about ethics on a global scale that only superficially seems to be unrelated to the nitty-gritty of economics, finance and the quest for prosperity. In fact, I believe that good ethics is the foundation of good economics.

I am very worried about the future prosperity of our nations, and I ask myself how we can avoid falling into moral regression and even to moral tribalism in this modern global age, and how on the contrary it could be possible to progress morally.

In the past, many well known economists have framed economics in similar moral terms.

For example, Adam Smith (1723-1790) wrote “A Theory of Moral Sentiments” some 20 years before he wrote “The Wealth of Nations” in 1776.

The same applies to David Hume, well known for his theory of the “Balance of Payments” (still relevant today) and who wrote “A Discourse about Natural Religion”, a book so critical of organized religion in his times that he arranged for the book to be published posthumously, for fear of severe reprisals.



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—Michael Parenti, author of *God and His Demons* and *Contrary Notions*

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II- The sources of our morality

Let me say a few words about the sources of our morality.

We often talk about our judeo-christian civilization. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judeo-Christian>]

In fact, this expression is incomplete, and somewhat inaccurate and misleading. It would be more accurate to refer to our greek-babylonian-egyptian-arab-judeo-christian civilization. This is because many of our core moral values come from far away times, some going back 4, 5 or 6,000 years, when most people were illiterate and only a few leaders and priests could read and write.

I will mention rapidly only two important such sources from a historical point of view, which are both secular and religious in nature:

1- Code of Hammurabi (around 1750 BC): 6th King of Babylon

A few words about the Babylonian Hammurabi Code. It was the first written code of laws in human history. It is a Code inscribed in the Akkadian language, carved into stone, and which one can view today on display in the Louvre, in Paris. It can also be found on various clay tablets.

It is a Code that students of law, and I would hope of theology, are prescribed to study.

The Hammurabi Code was written by the 6th Babylonian king and it consists of 282 laws, rules and commandments, one of which is the well known Hebrew rule of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (lex talionis), which is much more Babylonian than Jewish, (it is rule # 200 in the Hammurabi Code), and it was written more than 500 years before Moses’ Commandments (around 3750 years ago vs. 3200 years ago for Moses).

Some of today’s harsh Islamic rules can be found among the 282 rules of the Hammurabi Code. For instance, the Hammurabi code states that “If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off.” (rule #195 of the Hammurabi Code).

Or again (rule #205): “If the slave of a freed man strikes the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.”

This is probably where the Islamic idea of cutting off a thief’s hand comes from!

So, we can say that Judaism and Islam took many of their harsh moral rules from the Babylonians.

As for Christianity, and to a certain extent also Judaism, many of its moral rules seem to come directly from the Egyptians, especially from the Egyptian code in The Book of the Dead (Chap. 125), which was written on papyrus some 3,550 years ago.

That’s where we find the inspiration for many of Moses’ Hebrew 10 Commandments, written about 300 years later. (Keep in mind that Moses spent 40 years in Egypt and that he surely learned the Egyptian commandments by heart).

For example, we find these commandments in the Egyptian Code:

“Thou shalt not kill.”—“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” —“Thou shalt not steal.” —“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”...etc.

There is even a prayer in the Egyptian Book of the Dead that strangely reads like the Christian “Our Father”:

PRAYER to the gods of the underworld:

“Hail, gods, who dwell in the house of the Two Truths. —I know you and I know your names. —Let me not fall under your slaughter-knives. —And do not bring my wickedness to Osiris, the god you serve. —Let no evil come to me from you. —Declare me right and true in the presence of Osiris, because I have done what is right and true in Egypt. —I have not cursed a god. —I have not suffered evil through the king who ruled my day.”

Our moral rules are very ancient and they come from many sources, both secular and religious. Indeed, in ancient times, political leaders liked to dress as religious leaders because this gave them more legitimacy. But such rules were also designed for a social, political and economic environment that was quite different from the one in which we live today.

III- EMPATHY, TOLERANCE and SHARING

If we now concentrate on the present and the future, we may ask ourselves how we can go further than what these ancient moral codes dating from 3,000 or 4,000 years ago have taught us.

Since many of our problems did not exist 3,000 or 4,000 years ago, it would seem logical that we should design our moral rules in a more modern way.

Personally, I am very concerned about how civility and morality can help us to progress as human beings in a changing environment and, I believe, a more demanding environment today—but more realistically, in the coming decades and even centuries.

This motivated me in “The Code for Global Ethics,” [http://www.amazon.com/Code-Global-Ethics-Humanist-Principles/dp/1616141727/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1262398544&sr=1-1] to place a special emphasis on three interrelated moral imperatives that have always been sound moral values, but which I feel will become increasingly required for humanity to go forward and survive.

And I refer to:

– more human EMPATHY, – more interpersonal TOLERANCE, and – more interpersonal SHARING (altruism and generosity) as a foundation for a more harmonious, for a freer and for a more prosperous world. (In practical matters, if we think about it, both altruism and tolerance are really derived from our level of empathy toward others.)

EMPATHY

Let me quickly define empathy:

To have empathy towards others is to have the capacity to feel for others by imagining ourselves to be in their place and to act accordingly.

This is simple in theory, but difficult in practice.

Indeed, I think that to have empathy for others and to see things from their perspective (not only our own) is the foundation of all human morality and the necessary ingredient for a more advanced global civilization.

Our understanding of the human brain and of its functioning (and the new field of “neurotheology” is most useful in this) is that morality and empathy are buried deep in our genes and even in some precise parts of the brain, as a consequence of human evolution and the requirement to live in groups for survival. However, so were other, anti-social and egoistical traits such as savagery and cruelty, also part of the requirement for survival in the distant past when survival was more a daily challenge than today.

And, it’s here that I would hope that the world will adopt more readily what I call the Empathy Principle for the present, but especially for the future.

According to the empathy principle, one must aim at treating others as if one were in their place, and not necessarily expecting reciprocity as is the case in the traditional Golden rule [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Golden_Rule] of morality that one finds in virtually all moral systems (“Do to others as you would have them do to you”).

The empathy principle can thus be framed this way: “Do to others what you would wish to be done to you, if you were in their place.”

That is why I say that empathy can be the solid foundation of a more civilized global society based on the solidarity of all human beings. It is the awareness that other people can suffer, be happy and flourish just as one does, and that one should treat others accordingly.

Therefore, what I call the Super Golden Rule of morality goes further than the traditional Golden Rule based on implied reciprocity, i.e.:

“Not only do to others as you would have them do to you”.

But also, “do to others what you would wish to be done to you, if you were in their place.” The emphasis may seem subtle at first blush, but the consequences are considerable.

In practice, this moral principle requires that we judge whether an act is moral or not as if we did not know in advance if it would apply to us or to others. This is sort of a blind test of human justice that John Rawls (1921–2002) is famous for (See: A Theory of Justice).

What does that really mean in practice?

It means, for example,

—that racism is morally wrong because you would not want people to treat you badly if by chance of birth you were of another race;

—that sexism is wrong because you would not want to be treated disrespectfully if by chance of birth you were of the opposite sex;

—that torture is wrong because you would not want to be tortured if you became a prisoner at the mercy of prison guards;

—that wars of aggression are wrong because you would not want to have your country invaded militarily by another simply because it had invested less in

armaments than another, —that our collective system of mutual help must apply to all, not knowing in advance who will be advantaged or disadvantaged.... etc. etc. etc.

It also means that the modern apologists of egocentrism, egoism and greed as the moral foundation of our society are wrong, morally wrong, (and I would add, economically wrong.)

As an economist but also as a humanist, I believe that collectively, we must aim at creating the greatest good for the greatest number of people, not the maximizing of purely selfish personal financial objectives.

Many economists, and I am one of them, believe along with British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) that the pursuit of money does not necessarily lead to personal happiness and to general well-being. Happiness is more than money and power.

Indeed, many studies have shown that while it is true that well-being tends to rise with income, it also tends to level off after reaching a certain level. Surveys show, for example, that many people often prefer to earn less rather than be deprived of sleep time, or rather than commute long distances, or rather than living away from friends. This is a reflection of the notion that economics and money are not everything in making people happy and satisfied. There are other values in the moral scale of things, and that's what I would like to emphasize.

It is said that no man is an island, and this is even more true today than ever as our world becomes more complex and more globalized.

As I said, this Super Golden Rule of human morality could indirectly encompass the idea of moral reciprocity, but it goes much further towards genuine altruism, compassion and human empathy. It truly defines our moral obligations to others in positive terms about what should be done—not in negative terms with the implied fear of retaliation for bad behavior (“Don't do to others what you would not like to be done to you, because they may do it to you if you mistreat them”).

I think that such an approach to morality is likely to impose itself in the future as human beings realize more and more that they are all living on the same small Planet, and that if they want to survive collectively (and not repeat the disastrous experience of the dinosaurs who became extinct some 65 million years ago, after roaming the Earth for close to 200 million years.)

Actually, however, in terms of longevity, the dinosaurs were a great success. It should be humbling to consider that the first humans appeared less than two million years ago, and our more recent ancestor, the homo sapiens sapiens, [http://www.wsu.edu/gened/learn-modules/top_longfor/timeline/32_h_sapiens_sapiens.html] less than two hundred thousand years ago.

But, as I see it, the world today faces a fundamental moral dilemma.

—On the one hand, we live in an environment in which technology and scientific progress—as we would expect—have made survival somewhat easier for many populations.

—On the other hand, economically, this is done increasingly in a competitive

global context, and this could have potentially perverse effects on our tendency to feel empathy for others.

Overall economic wealth is increasing at the same time as income and wealth inequalities are also sharply on the rise.

- Let me open a parenthesis to say that, as a matter of fact, income and wealth inequalities are as bad today as they were just before the Great Depression of the 1930's.

(In the U.S., for example, the top 1% of the richest Americans now own 40% of the nation's total wealth. These devastating statistics give an indication of why this is so: The average CEO in the U.S. made 42 times the average worker's pay in 1980, 85 times in 1990 and 531 times in 2000, that is a 12-fold relative increase in just 20 years.)

And the consequences are all there to be seen. Such a concentration of money in a few hands has tilted the American political process toward money and plutocracy as never before. It has reduced considerably the influence of the average citizen, and it has hurt democracy.

All this may have catastrophic effects in the long run.

IV- Troubling findings of A Recent Study

And some moral tendencies are also worrisome.

It is even possible that we have entered a period of moral regression, not of moral progress.

For example, the current generation of college students in the United States has been found to show an empathy index that is about 40 per cent lower than 20 or 30 years ago.

(See study by Ms. Sara Konrath, a researcher at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, of 72 different studies of American college students conducted between 1979 and 2009).

Compared to college students of the late 1970s, indeed, a recent study found that college students today are less likely to agree with statements such as:

"I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective"

or

"I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me."

There seems to be a growing emphasis on the self, self-centered goals, and on personal greed and on personal success at any cost, accompanied by a corresponding devaluation of other people and of their needs.

Moreover, it has been found that the biggest drop in empathy took place most recently, i.e. after the year 2000. In other words, the moral environment seems to have taken a turn for

the worse at the beginning of the new century.

Because of these findings, it has been said—maybe with some exaggeration—that the current “Me Generation” is one of the most self-centered, narcissistic, competitive, confident and individualistic in recent history. One possible explanation could be that the current generation of college students grew up with a huge exposure to violent media and video games that tend to trivialize violence and to numb people to the pain of others.

And there is also the influence of television, which is a cold and passive medium, because it tends to isolate people from each other and predisposes them to be victim of propaganda.

The advent of economic globalization can also carry part of the blame. Global competition is more acute nowadays than before, global corporations [http://www.ehow.com/facts_5682516_global-corporation_.html] playing one country against another, one government against another, in their quest for higher profits.

In such an economic environment of unfettered international and domestic competition, the nation-state [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state] has come to count less and less in economic decisions and as an instrument of social justice, so people may develop the feeling that their institutions, from schools to Congress to the Supreme Court to business, are failing them, are irresponsible to their interests, and are even turning against them. In the United States, the republic is less and less a nation-state and more and more an empire devoted to promote narrow corporate interests. (I even wrote a book about that and it is titled “The New American Empire”.) [http://www.amazon.com/New-American-Empire-Rodrigue-Tremblay/dp/0741418878/ref=sr_1_1/104-8428100-2298348?ie=UTF8]

People increasingly have the feeling that the world is being organized around powerful organizations and that individuals count less and less.

My own deep feeling is that economic globalization [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_globalization] may have gone too far, too fast, with the unfettered international movements of capital and corporations alike being added to the free trade of goods, thus breaking the balance between capital and labor in the economic-social system.

Indeed, since labor is much less mobile internationally than capital and corporations, labor is now at a considerable disadvantage.

Add to that the fact that capital owners and corporations increasingly resort to outright corruption and use their access to money to set the political agenda and, more often than not, to influence and even control politicians and governments (for the reasons I have outlined), and you can understand the despair that many people face in such a degrading moral environment.

That could be another reason why young people tend to be more self-centered today than in the past. It is because the level of competition is higher today than in the past and because people feel somewhat abandoned by their institutions, even estranged from them, be they the business corporations, the governments or even families, which are disintegrating faster today than in the past.

At the moral level, if American college undergraduates are losing the ability to empathize

with other people, this could be bad news for the future, because they will be the leaders of tomorrow. What type of world are they announcing? A world of “dog eats dog”, or a world of cooperation and mutual respect? Can such a dangerous trend be reversed? One would certainly hope so.

But wait: As if things are not bad enough, now we are told by paleontologists that the average human brain has been shrinking [http://discovermagazine.com/2010/sep/25-modern-humans-smart-why-brain-shrinking/article_view?b_start:int=0&-C=] over the last 20,000 years and that if things keep going in the same direction, the human brain may go back to the size it had in the age of homo erectus, some 500,000 years ago!

There is the unpleasant possibility, according to the “idiocracy or dumbing-down theory” that the decline in the human brain size can be a harbinger of a future dumbed-down planet with idiocracy on the rise.

It would seem that the brains that gave us the two world wars during the 20th century were not very advanced. Indeed, the 20th century was the most murderous and the most barbaric in the entire history of the human race.

V- Is More and Better Moral Education our Way Out?

What therefore about the future?

Perhaps, our best hope could be to better educate our shrinking brains!!! We would perhaps be less intelligent but we could possibly become more moral.

This is not necessarily counter-intuitive because one explanation for why humans and domesticated animals alike have a tendency to have smaller brains over time is because aggressiveness rises with brain size, and conversely, brain size seems to shrink as the need for aggressiveness declines.

All is not lost: If we build a world where aggressiveness is less admissible or less necessary, we could adapt to having smaller brains while being simultaneously more moral individuals.

One would think that we could achieve such a goal if we could transfer to the international scene the rule of law [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_law] that most civilized countries have established within their borders.

As a matter of fact, it is the rule of the jungle [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Law_and_the_Jungle] that has operated in the past that is still, to a large extent, the rule today in international relations.

The central question is: Besides teaching science and general knowledge, can we also teach empathy, compassion and civility, especially to the young?

Studies show that only 20 percent of the population has empathy and spontaneous feelings for others. But empathy can be learned, especially if it is taught at a young age.

Of course, there is a small proportion of psychopaths and sociopaths in any society who do not feel any remorse when they hurt others. The least we can do for them is not place dangerous arms in their hands!!!

VI- What about Religion in the Quest for a more Moral World?

A question begs to be answered: Can religion, especially organized religions as human institutions, help us to survive in the future?

My short answer: Maybe; maybe not. —It depends. It depends if our numerous organized religions (there are some 5000 of them if you include all the sects and sub-sects!) can adapt to the new global environment and to our new global problems.

— If they feed division, exclusion and fanaticism, they may hasten our downfall.

— If they adapt and open their moral systems to the new global concerns, they may contribute positively to the solution of our global problems. I think that the jury is still out on this one.

At the individual level, I join economist Adam Smith who wrote more than 200 years ago (in the Theory of Moral Sentiments) that the truly virtuous person is not necessarily a religious person per se, but a person: -who does no harm to others;- who promotes the happiness of others through beneficence;- and, who follows his or her conscience, as a way to restrain his or her natural self-interest, rather than relying solely on an outside system of punishments and rewards.

Smith summarized these ideas by saying:

“To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections, constitute the perfection of human nature. ”

TOLERANCE

This brings me to the contentious issue of tolerance.

This is an issue that is much debated these days because it involves peace between individuals and between nations.

And here, I must open a parenthesis to make a clear distinction between the rule of tolerance, as I see it, toward other individuals that we should all adhere to, in an open and free society, and the tolerance of totalitarian principles or ideologies whose aims are to undermine and even destroy the very foundations of a free and open society.

Tolerance and respect of the individual and of his or her choices means that a society must recognize the rights and freedom of the individual. It doesn't mean, however, that an open, democratic, and just society has to accept officially the ideologies and beliefs of everyone, but rather that there must be equality of all citizens before the law.

Even though humans must live in society to survive, this does not mean that personal freedom has to be sacrificed in favor of social uniformity and general conformity.

Provided that society's survival and functioning are not threatened in a substantial way, individuals, whether they belong to a minority or to a majority, have the fundamental right to develop their own thoughts, their own philosophies, their own opinions, their own beliefs, their own religions and their own approaches to life and to living.

The first manifestation of tolerance is showing respect, empathy, and compassion for other people who happen to have different feelings, different philosophies, different interests, or different views of the world.

As a general rule, therefore, we should show tolerance to other people and to their choices. This is what I called the third humanist rule in my book. [http://www.amazon.com/Code-Global-Ethics-Humanist-Principles/dp/1616141727/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1262398544&sr=1-1]

SHARING

In the book, I write a lot about sharing, both at the individual and collective levels, even at the international level.

Altruism and a willingness to share with others appear to be innate, even in other primates. In fact, Frans de Waal has shown that great apes share most of our more natural moral traits, including reciprocal altruism, reward and punishment, and friendship and cooperativeness. We are not the only moral species on earth.

Moreover, researchers, doctors, and patients say the act of giving and of helping others offers deep psychological and physical benefits. American scientists are finding that being big-hearted may trigger the brain's pleasure centers. It would seem to be true that there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving!

The brain responds to cooperative behavior by releasing the feel-good chemical dopamine, so that helping someone else improve—or even just watching an improvement—makes us, as empathetic beings, feel better.

But there is more. It used to be said that “Nice guys finish last.” New research now shows however that generous people tend to live longer. New research thus may say: “Nice guys die last”.

Indeed, it seems that Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection has been misinterpreted and branded as a selfish theory of “every man for himself.” In fact, Darwin thought just the contrary. He believed that humans have been successful as a species precisely because of their capacity for nurturing, for their basic altruistic and compassionate traits that allowed them to live in society.

In fact, our human capacity to care and to cooperate has been wired into our brains and nervous systems through our long evolution. Our capacity to share with others made us stronger, and it has allowed us to survive and to live longer. We will need more of this trait in the future; certainly not less.

And here we may have one additional reason why women live longer than men. It may be the case because they are more generous toward others and more caring!

Resources, population growth and poverty

My concern is not about the past, but about the future and how we are going to tackle and solve some fundamental human problems.

How are 7 to 9 billion human beings going to manage to live together on a shrinking planet,

without destroying each other and without destroying the Planet? That's a central question that must be asked and that must be answered.

Consider the real problem of overpopulation and of poverty in some parts of the world.

We have to keep in mind that the phenomenon of fast population growth is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is less than 300 years old, only since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the middle of the 18th century, while the acceleration of population growth that we have observed during the last century is directly connected with the discovery of cheap fossil fuel, oil and gas, in the middle of the 19th century. This has allowed for mechanization and the use of cheap fertilizers in agriculture, and for the international trade in cheap food products.

The end of the era of cheap fossil energy is upon us and potential replacements will be much more expensive in the future. This means that the cost of growing food and of transporting food products will increase, at a time that another essential resource in agriculture—I am referring to the supply of clean water—will also become scarcer. With food becoming more expensive in the coming decades, our view of unlimited population growth will also have to be modified, lest we enter a period of widespread famine, of wars of aggression for resources, of diseases and of fast population migrations.

(This has already begun, since I am convinced that the current wars in the Middle East and the Islamic terrorism that it has fed are closely related to the control of the oil resources in that region.)

It is my contention that the issue of overpopulation is going to become more acute, as we progress into the 21st century, and as the world will be facing a global food crisis [<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2044719,00.html>] caused by climate and economic factors, on top of a growing fossil fuel crisis. [<http://solutions.synearth.net/the-fossil-fuel-depletion-crisis/>]

This is because, in many countries, the prevalence of widespread poverty is directly linked to overpopulation, be it in Africa, Haiti or in Bangladesh, for example. Overpopulation and the lack of access to education and to birth control methods are the principal factors driving poverty in those lands. In those countries, life expectancy is even declining while it is increasing elsewhere. This is a real mess and a real tragedy.

In those parts of the world, I can see, as an economist, that the link between excessive population growth and widespread poverty is likely to become more acute, as the food crisis deepens, and as oil and gas become more expensive, as water and sanitation are even less available than today, not taking into account the devastating effect that the projected rise in sea levels can have on some populations as the polar ice caps melt.

My sad observation, (and that's why such a problem is connected to ethics and morality), is that in these same poor countries, the principal forces working against family planning, the spread of knowledge regarding birth control and population control are often the dominant religious establishments. The contrast between China, for example, and Africa is startling. China has faced squarely its population problem and has embarked upon a policy of family planning, industrialization and international trade and is well on its way to overcoming its problem of endemic poverty.

No such thinking is evident in Africa, however, which has the fastest growing population in the world and which is also the most religious and superstitious continent in the world, a continent where the terrible disease of HIV/AIDS is most widespread and is at the epidemic level, especially in sub-Sahara Africa. Many countries are still relying on foreign aid to survive; some are constantly involved in tribal warfare, while the young feel that they don't have any future, except maybe through emigration to Northern Europe or to North America.

Today, Africa accounts for about 15 percent of the world population, but has close to 90 percent of all the people infected by HIV and deaths from AIDS. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS>] Moreover, this terrible disease seems to be spreading faster in Africa than elsewhere. Indeed it is spreading as quickly as ever, because of a higher incidence there of other sexually transmitted infections and because of general poverty and lack of education. (See Emily Oster, Esquire, November 30, 2006 Three Things You Don't Know About AIDS in Africa).

With 15 percent of the world population, the proportion of the world's poor who live in Africa is also climbing and is expected to reach around 40 percent in 2020.

For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, extreme poverty (the United Nations' definition of absolute poverty is a family living on less than \$1 a day) went up from 41 percent in 1981 to 46 percent in 2001. This translates to the number of people living in extreme poverty going from 231 million to 318 million, with women carrying a disproportionate proportion of that burden.

—This is a huge social and economic problem, not only in Africa but also on the global stage.

The historic fact that the rich continent of Africa has been colonized by Islamic armies and by Christian armies, plus the fact that in many places people still rely on tribal cultures, has created a legacy of retrograde intellectual and religious dependence on the outside world that is still lingering today.

Indeed, as I say, contrast that with China, which has also been colonized by outside armies. In China, secular Confucius morality [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism>] is still very strong and the outside colonizers' morality never really took hold. That may explain why China has been able to build on its own strong national and cultural heritage to solve its problems, while Africa has not. China has even been able to overcome the damage that the foreign ideology of communism did after the Maoist cultural revolution [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution] of 1966-76.

Both Islam and Christianity, which are the dominant religions in Africa, have imposed on that continent their paranoiac obsession with sex and reproduction. They are opposed to family planning and to population control, while the education of women, especially by Muslims, is officially opposed and vigorously fought. These are backward and counterproductive ideas, even destructive ideas.

Catholic Pope Benedict XVI recently opened, timidly, the door for the use of condoms, (probably in view of the AIDS disaster in Africa!) but this comes very late and is very limited, supposedly applying only to males (in the Pope's words, "male prostitutes"), and not to women, and only as a way to slow down the spread of AIDS, and not as a tool for family

planning.

Well, Africa needs much more than that, and some religious leaders should recognize all the damage they have created with their antiquated ideas regarding sex and family planning. Africa especially needs a completely new approach to sexuality and family planning if it wants to extirpate itself from poverty and disease, and this requires educating and empowering women, a move that many religious leaders fight vehemently.

It must be admitted that the old judeo-christian religious texts are not very useful solving the problem of overpopulation. In the Bible, the Old Testament orders humans (in Genesis 1:27-28) “to ...be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” This would seem to make it a virtue to overpopulate, just the reverse of what many parts of the world will need in the future.

In the New Testament, there are clear admonitions against establishing family life on a firm footing. For instance, it is written (Luke 14:25-33) that the only way to salvation is to abandon one’s families, wives and children; and I quote:

“If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”(Luke 14-26).

It would seem unfortunately that in Africa, but also elsewhere, many men take that commandment at heart and leave their families, leaving to illiterate women the harsh task of raising large families. This is an impossible task. And, this is surely no way to build a strong social fabric.

It is said that the Koran and the Bible cannot be amended because they are divinely inspired. I would say that it is high time that these many centuries-old texts be amended to reflect our new scientific knowledge and to be better adapted to the problems and solutions needed in today’s world—not to those prevailing in small agricultural and illiterate societies of many centuries ago.

As to the future sources of economic development, I would add this:

In the coming new context of a worldwide energy crisis, our societies may not have any other choice but to embrace a transition from our current hydrocarbon-based economies to even more advanced knowledge-based economies. Countries and societies that do not adopt knowledge-based policies risk being left behind to suffer.

Well, no society should be left behind, and we should design a better way to share knowledge in a global way. This could be the best way to raise everybody’s standard of living, to bridge cultures and to promote peace. That is the reason we should place additional emphasis on education, especially the education of women worldwide. And for that we should reform existing international institutions, such as the United Nations, [http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/20/a_false_friend_in_the_white_house?sms_ss=gmil&at_xt=4d628177b28ecc2d,0] which is presently moribund, (due essentially to the actions of two countries: The United States and Israel) and create new ones that could function without the veto of imperial powers. I have an entire section in my book about this new challenge.

Religious morality vs. humanist morality

In the book, I don't hesitate to criticize some ideas found in religious texts that appear to me to be contrary to logic, sound thinking and to the scientific breakthroughs that humanity has accomplished, especially over the last four centuries. Some of these ideas appear to be building fences between people rather than encouraging fraternity, cooperation and peace.

I hope that my criticism does not offend too many people because my objective is purely positive and constructive. Let me mention a few ideas that I think need to be revisited and reformed:

1-First, the idea that some people are "chosen" by some supernatural religious powers, while others are not, appears to me to be most anachronistic.

Historically, this has given rise to what I called "in-group" morality, certain things being forbidden when done to other members of the group, but perfectly acceptable when done to "outsiders". As I see it, the challenge in the future is to extend in-group morality to achieve between-group morality, in a truly global context.

2- Another idea that is increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of new knowledge is that human beings are not only at the top of all living species, but that they happen to be the center and the masters of the Universe.

This egocentric and anthropomorphic vision of things has unfortunately separated humans from the rest of the physical world and from other living species. By separating man from nature, indeed, the theory of "man-center-of-the-Universe" has caused us to lose respect for all other forms of life, and has prevented us from perceiving our true place in the Cosmos. We must not only have respect for our fellow human beings, but we must also have respect for all forms of life and for the environment.

3- Another idea that needs to be revisited, since its introduction by St. Augustine of Hippo in the 5th century, is the subtle distinction that is often made between individual or private morality, and public or state morality. In the eyes of some, there would seem to be one morality for ordinary people in their daily lives, and another morality for leaders and government agents acting in their official capacity.

This idea and the moral dichotomy that it introduces may be responsible more than any other for the fact that humanity is still saddled with murderous wars of aggression.

4- Another idea that seems odd in our global age is the fiction of an eternal hell, not only to terrorize the faithful (especially children), but also to intimidate and demonize non-believers who refuse to submit to the dicta of specific religious authorities or dogmas. This would appear to condemn two-thirds of humankind to exclusion, and possibly, to persecutions, religious wars, and genocide. In 1995, the Anglican Church abolished the idea of "Hell", and I would say "good riddance"!

5- Last, but not least, is the curious philosophical stance regarding an assumed hypothetical separation between the human mind and the human body. Much of the negative religious morality concerning the human body comes from this erroneous distinction that has no scientific basis whatsoever and is a legacy of times when nobody understood how the human brain functions.

VII- Democracy

In view of what has happened in the Middle East recently, I must stress how the value of having honest and democratic governments is also a fundamental humanist value that we should all endorse and cherish. In my book, I have an entire chapter on this issue.

Over the last thirty or so years, some 85 corrupt and repressive autocratic governments have been replaced around the world by more democratic governments. This is because democracy —civil society secular democracy, coming from the will of the people —is not only a fundamental human right; it is contagious, and given a chance, is the political regime that people around the world wish to have.

As President Abraham Lincoln framed it, it is a form of government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” It is based on the concept of the equality and dignity of all human beings and on the fundamental humanist principle of equal rights among all human beings.

VIII- Conclusions

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) once said “We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.” —I certainly agree. I would add that we should all hope that human beings, who, of all of the species that have ever existed on the Planet Earth, have evolved into a relatively high stage of intelligence and of conscience, would be intelligent enough to bring this evolution to a higher level of global morality.

I am not completely sure, but there are clear signs that justify our optimism.

Indeed, either we stand at the threshold of a major moral regression in the world with increasing conflicts and increasing disregard for international law and global responsibility. Or rather, more optimistically, I hope, we stand at the threshold of a new global morality—a new Global ethics, that will establish in theory and in practice the basic principles of dignity and equality for all human beings.

This means:

- increased tolerance of others;
- more voluntary sharing with others;
- less domination and more beneficial cooperation;
- more respect for our environment and for our Planet;
- fewer wars and waste of resources on destructive armaments;
- more democracy and citizen participation not only in public affairs, but also in economic affairs;
- and, above all, more education for all and especially for the children of this world.

To reach that new level of global ethics, we may need nothing less than a moral revolution in our thinking, a new moral norm, a global moral revolution, to fit the modern problems we

are facing today and in the future. Such a moral revolution may even be needed for our own biological survival as a species.

In general terms, let me say that I firmly believe that we should adopt the simple but somewhat revolutionary idea that we are living on the same small planet and that we should attempt to survive on this planet as members of the same human race.

—This is my most cherished hope.

* Notes for a conference by **Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay**, Emeritus professor, University of Montreal, Unitarian Universalist 2011 Winter lecture Series, Naples, Fl., USA, March 16, 2011

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