

insists on following fundamental maxims. The most applicable global "rules," perhaps, are those contained in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Helsinki Final Act (1975), and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights (1996). These agreements combine a number of political rights pertaining to the security of the person with a number of economic and social rights designed to meet basic human needs. Those who cleave to these precepts make adherence to human rights a litmus test for governments: In 1977, President Jimmy Carter spoke for this view when he declared in a speech to the UN General Assembly that "no member of the United Nations can claim that mistreatment of its own citizens is solely its own business." That view, expanded, lies behind the uneasy agreement of U.N. member states to intervene in Rwanda, Sudan, the Congo, and other nations where governments have appeared to be slaughtering their own citizens. Though often scorned by pragmatists, this rule-based approach has had results. At least in the restructuring of the post-Communist world order during the late 1980s, writes Harlan Cleveland, these rights played a key role. "No government," says Cleveland, "not even the totalitarian Soviets or military dictators or even the long dug-in South African authorities, seemed able to ignore entirely the ultimate enforcer that the U.S. Declaration of Independence calls 'the general opinion of mankind.'"

Our third resolution principle, using the care-based approach, asks us to extend ourselves into the minds and hearts of the post-Soviet citizenry. So we try to answer such questions as "If we were the Russians, what would we want to have done to us?" To do so, we must first grasp the concept of *otherness* and learn to feel what it is like to be "the Russians." Here the dimension of cultural understanding comes into play. We often find we understand this otherness better through art than diplomacy, literature than politics, feature writing than news reporting, movies than statistics, music than lectures. The care-based approach begins with empathy, with feeling the life of another from the inside out, and with understanding the currents and desires of that life in its own context. As global communications improves, the potential for care-based resolutions increases: As more and more Westerners see Russian films, and as they travel in the post-Soviet world, the human face comes more sharply into focus. Result: The care-based approach

may well argue for significant economic aid to Russia—although, if the otherness we identify is that of America's homeless and unemployed, we might well oppose such aid.

The bottom line? Moving closer to center stage may be a set of rule-based convictions—fired by the success of such human-rights campaigns as those of Amnesty International, Freedom House, and the Helsinki Watch organizations—and the care-based principles that naturally flourish whenever humans get close enough to one another's cultures to feel compassion.

### Conservation Versus Consumption

One of the major ethical issues of the global future pits environmentalists against developers. That's nothing new. Eight years before the official closing of the American frontier in 1890, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of the People*, a polemic exploring the ethical issues surrounding a financially profitable but contaminated and unhealthy swimming-bath in a small Norwegian town. The dilemma facing Dr. Stockmann and his fellow townspeople was stark: shut the baths to control disease, or keep them open to maintain the town's lifestyle. Within another few years, America would be plunged into its first major preservation-versus-exploitation debate in the controversy over the Hetch Hetchy dam in Yosemite National Park. In 1930, the American poet Hart Crane captured the essence of such issues in a telling image:

The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas  
Loped under wires that span the mountain stream. . . .

Since then, environmental issues have rolled forward in a kaleidoscope of events: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the Endangered Species Act in 1973, the two hundred million people in 140 countries turning out for Earth Day in 1990—and the ongoing debate over global climate change that coalesced into a treaty at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992; was initially adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997; entered into force in 2005; and is scheduled for reconsideration at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009. At the heart of each lies the same core dilemma: how to protect the natural environment while permitting human development.

If that issue is serious today, it will be crucial tomorrow. The reason: global population growth. While often seen as a problem in and of itself, population growth would in fact be irrelevant were it not for its impact on the environment. If the biosphere were infinitely expandable—if, as in the past, new populations could simply move onward into uninhabited lands so vast that a human presence made hardly a dent—population growth would hardly matter. The problem is quite otherwise. Rapidly rising populations are confronting a finite and oddly fragile environment. As George D. Moffett pointed out in 1994 in *Critical Masses: The Global Population Challenge*, the impact can be spelled out in a litany of familiar statistics still valid today:

- Population growth now adds some nine thousand to eleven thousand people to the globe every hour—the equivalent of a new Dallas or Detroit in two days, a new Germany every eight months, a new Africa and Latin America combined every ten years.
- More than 90 percent of this growth will take place in the one hundred or so nations of the developing world that are least able to provide for these new individuals.
- Most of this growth will occur in urban areas. Many cities in third-world countries are doubling in size every twelve to fifteen years.
- This growth is unprecedented. It took us hundreds of thousands of years to reach, by the early 1880s, our first billion people. Now, at 6.7 billion, we add a new billion each decade, heading toward a total of between 9 billion and 20 billion in the next century.

Yet the very pressure that gives such cogency to environmental concerns also fires the need for development. Are we willing to let all these new people starve and freeze in the dark?

Will we deny them access to the same resources that have sustained us? Will we promulgate regulations and ideals that enshrine nature's rights at the expense of human rights? Of course we must control future population growth—but what do we do in the here and now with all those who have already been born?

Even if you live in the relative comfort of North America, with its low population density and immense tracts of preserved land, these

issues shape your future. Sometimes they cause us real anguish, as in the case of the beluga or white whales—the species celebrated by Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick*. An endangered species in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, belugas eat so much fish in those toxic-laden waters that their bodies are considered to be “hazardous waste” when beached along the shore. Sometimes, however, such issues simply provoke sighs over man's inanity—as when a paper mill in rural Maine, clearing the grating on its water-intake pipe of rocks lodged there during raging spring torrents, was solemnly ordered by state officials not to return the perfectly clean rocks to the riverbed but to truck them thirty miles to a soon-to-be-overloaded landfill.

Whatever the case, these issues feature two opposing core values. On one hand stands the value of preserving nature from the onslaughts of man. Humans are broadly adaptable, able to live on arctic ice floes and equatorial deserts, in dense cities or deserted mountains. Most other species are not so flexible: Wipe out their habitat, and they disappear. Some of the most vigorous and scrappy animals are acutely sensitive to habitat changes. Burrowing owls, for example, can endure all kinds of predators and still come out on top. But they depend on abandoned prairie dog holes for their nests. Wipe out prairie dogs, as western ranchers have been doing, and even the hardiest of burrowing owls can't survive.

To save habitats, then, is to save species. Why does saving species matter? One reason is their beauty and the lessons they teach. Another has to do with effective management of natural lands: Most species have an important niche in the habitat as food for something or as consumer of something else. Still another is for science, allowing us to take genes from certain kinds of wild maize and merge them into commercial corn to produce vigorous and disease-resistant strains. Finally, of course, is the sheer right of a species to exist—or, to put it another way, the unconscionable human pride that thinks it has the right to destroy forever another form of life.

Such preservation, at bottom, is one of the deepest symbols of our humanity. No other species is gifted with such capacity for rational foresight and long-range planning. To defer immediate gratification for the sake of offspring we will never see is an intensely human act: To plant oaks beside your house on the frontier, knowing that a century later they will shade your great-grandchildren, is to show

conscious respect for an environmental future in ways no other species can. Conservation, then, is not simply a luxury that we can overlook if we choose. It is part and parcel of our very humanity.

On the other hand stands an equally valid core value concerning human development. Among the most fundamental duties that humans have to one another are those that guarantee safety, warmth, food, shelter, and the right to propagate. The faces of the world's children, peering through our television screens from refugee camps or third-world slums, cry out for policies that could put even a few scraps of food into their mouths. Such help could conceivably come in the short term, of course, through a straightforward redistribution of current wealth: If rich countries simply taxed themselves to death, some of these children would be fed. But the best long-term help comes through the development of economic opportunities.

Such development depends on education, religious approval, willingness to work, family structures that recognize the needs and rights of women, and many other intangibles. But it also depends on creating something of value that someone else needs and wants to buy. That usually requires raw materials and energy—the very things nature has always provided. To be sure, there are environmentally “clean” service-oriented jobs in information technology, insurance, advertising, tourism, communications, and other areas. But even those depend upon the prosperity generated somewhere in the world through a manufacturing base, which almost always involves some exploitation of natural resources. To refuse that exploitation, then, is to condemn the world's poor to continued poverty—a condemnation that seems all the more inequitable when promoted by those in the developed world who already enjoy significant prosperity.

These two sides, clashing together, produce the environment-versus-development dilemma. It seems to fit three paradigms:

- It is right to honor the *short-term* demands for survival by developing economic paths out of poverty. Yet it is right to respect the *long-term* demands for survival by assuring a sustainable environment.
- The rights of the *individual* require us to supply food, clothing, and shelter despite the hardship on the environment. The rights of the *community* require that our common environmental heritage be protected despite the hardship on the individual. (This paradigm, how-

ever, can be put the other way: It is right for me as an individual to have access to unblemished wilderness tracts, though it may be right that, in order for my community to survive, everyone has access to the resources on that tract.)

- The greatest *justice* will be served by saving the environment out of fairness to those yet to be born, while the greatest *mercy* will be to provide for those who are suffering today.

How do our resolution principles help us? Ends-based thinkers, brooding upon consequences, lay out sober prophecies of future doom and gloom—on both sides of the issue. Global warming vies for our attention with prognostications of future job losses and welfare increases. To the ends-based thinker, a close study of such figures, and the methodologies behind them, is essential: How else will we know what “the greatest good” will be? Not surprisingly, then, the policymakers’ well-known penchant for utilitarianism plunges modern society into endless rounds of expert testimony, scientific debate, and statistical saber-rattling—the assumption being that whoever gets it intellectually right will also have captured the moral high ground.

Rule-based thinkers look on all this with wry detachment. The moral sense, to them, has little to do with such arcane debates. What rule, they ask instead, should be universalized? If it is to save species at all costs, then that must be done regardless of consequences. If, on the other hand, it is to honor every individual’s basic human dignity by supplying food and shelter, that must take precedence, no matter what happens. What gives these thinkers the shudders is the spectacle of moral inconsistency, a waffling set of policies that change every few years depending on scientific fashion or public whim. Get the rule right, they argue, and carry it out in full trust that it will produce the highest sense of goodness.

The care-based thinker may well dismiss both these views—the first for its cold disregard of suffering, the second for its rigid demand for consistency. What, they ask, would I want to have done to me? Living in a Dhaka slum, I would want a meal, an education, a job, a sense of hope—not a lecture on saving the whales. Living in a Los Angeles suburb, however, I would want a set of policies that would compel my entire community—myself included—to support alternatives to the gasoline-powered cars whose exhausts once engulfed me in smog.

Placing my highest emphasis on caring for others—and observing that there are more slum-dwellers than suburbanites—I might finally come down more in favor of supporting the former than the latter.

This dilemma also gives us a clear look at another part of the resolution process: locating the trilemma options. Among the most encouraging signs of progress has been the growth of coalitions that involve both environmentalists and developers. From a past filled with the strident animosities of stark opposition, we seem to be moving toward a greater recognition of the fact that like all true dilemmas, this one has a lot of right on both sides. The trilemma goal—saving the environment while at the same time providing economic development—is being met in some areas. Already supermarkets are offering reusable fabric bags as an alternative to plastic ones. The once-ubiquitous water bottle is becoming increasingly unpopular as it becomes clear that not enough people are recycling. Hybrid cars, compact fluorescent light bulbs, and four-minute showers are looking more attractive and affordable as energy prices go up. Ecotourism is on the rise, helping travelers visit unspoiled areas with damaging them. In these and other ways, a resolution process as old as Aristotle's Golden Mean is on the twenty-first century's agenda.

### *More Public Issues*

The discussion of these three public issues—involving AIDS, the new world order, and the environment—is meant to help us bring the lens of ethics to bear on problems of a national and international scope. These are not, by any means, the only right-versus-right dilemmas needing ethical analysis and resolution. Dozens of other global issues cry out for attention, including:

- Immigration across international borders: Do we keep them out or let them in?
- The human genome project: What are the ethical ramifications of designer babies and cloned humans?
- E-commerce and the Internet: Who pays, who benefits, who gets excluded, and why?

- Free trade: A boon for all, or a boondoggle for a few?
- Big science: Should the world's taxpayers fund a few supercolliders and space stations, or thousands of smaller research projects?
- Censorship: If violence on television and video games produces violence in the street, is there an ethical way to control either?
- Church scandals: Is it the state or the clergy's jurisdiction—or both?
- Character education: Can ethics be taught in the schools without trampling on religious freedom?
- Healthcare: Which patients should benefit from big-ticket, heroic surgical procedures—and who decides?
- Homelessness: Is having a home a right or a privilege?
- Child care: As women become more educated and contribute more to the working world, who raises the next generation?
- Global business: Can ethical standards survive in countries where bribery and corruption are endemic?
- Economic recession: Should governments intervene to save failing private businesses—or let market forces prevail?

If ethics is as valid in a public as in a private arena, these issues ought to be amenable to thoughtful analysis from an ethical perspective. That's not to say they won't also benefit from more familiar forms of analysis through economic, technological, historical, or political lenses. They will. Subjected to ethical scrutiny, however, they yield up a different kind of understanding. Through that scrutiny, we come closer to answering the question that, more than any other, seems to be commanding public attention as we move into the twenty-first century: Of all the things we *could* do, what's the *right* thing to do?