Global Ethic - A postmodern oxymoron, or the opening to dialogue?

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Throughout the centuries men and women have been grappling with the problems and pitfalls of morality - of what is ethical, what is right, and what is wrong. While this discourse has been both the preserve of philosophical and religious communities, in recent times a narrative of the 'ethical', which supposes to root itself in the religious, or more specifically the religions, has emerged. In addition, the process of 'Globalisation' has become a prominent concern for policy-makers, environmental activists, and scholars interested in the political and economic ramifications that this process effects in various regions of the world. It is the interweaving concerns of religious plurality, and economic globalisation that has given rise to the project of a 'Global Ethic', or, as some theorists have it, 'Global ethics'. This paper will focus on two documents that betray an interest in both the effects of globalisation and the possibility of an ethic that could meet the needs of changing religious conceptions and experiences: Hans Kung's 'Document Towards a Global Ethic'[1] and the 'Draft towards a Global Ethics'[2] developed by Professor Ruud Lubbers and Dr Patricia Morales.

A common response to the idea of a global ethic is a negatively critical one. It is often argued that such an idea is rooted in a universalising tendency of Western philosophical and political discourse, a tendency which masks a destructive and arrogant will to power, aimed to dominate cultures of those that are 'radically other'[3], rather than to fulfil the possibilities of a genuine balance of power, and a culture of ethical equality. This criticism, named here the 'postmodern objection,' will be explored with reference to and appraisal of Kung's efforts towards the creation of a global ethic. The paper will go on to consider, however, the counter-argument that such an ethic, whether considered philosophically viable or not, is in fact a practical necessity. This argument often asserts that the process of globalisation, understood as the opening of economic,

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[1]   Hans Kung, and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds), *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, Munich, 1993.

[2]   As it appears at http://www.globalize.org/publications/unesco.html.

[3]   Thomas R. Kopfensteiner, 'Globalization and the autonomy of human reasoning: an essay in fundamental moral theology,' *Theological Studies,* September 1993, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 485-512, p. 485.

linguistic and cultural borders, necessitates the exposure of different cultural and religious traditions to each other, and as a result, an ethic that could manage the competing claims and interests of such diverse communities is very much needed. It is this line of thought that, it is contended here, is very much in evidence in the work of Lubbers and his colleagues, and it is with an outline and assessment of his ideas that this normative benchmark will be analysed. From these discussions of the possible basis of such an ethic, the thesis that the aims and intentions of a 'Global Ethic' could be developed via the implementation of a 'dialogical methodology'[1] which seeks and encourages the encounter between those considered 'radically other', in the hope of reaching an approximate consensus of values, will be the final option analysed, and appraised.

Kung and the 'Golden Rule'

In analysing the development and argument which ground Kung's 'Document towards a Global Ethic', our investigation can begin.

Kung's document was tabled at the 1993 World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, an event that marked one hundred years since the inaugural meeting of the organisation in 1893, but the development of the document 'Declaration Towards a Global Ethic' had preoccupied its chief architect since the mid-Eighties. Consistently concerned with the disturbing examples of interreligious conflict prevalent in international contemporary society, Kung was encouraged to research and debate the possible bases for a moral code that could contain such conflict and establish a working peace between warring groups. Testing the ground for the possibility and workability of such an ethic with various academics, religious and political leaders, Kung reports that many responses were lukewarm. However, he continued to work on the idea, maintaining his teaching duties and also releasing the work *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic*[2], in 1990. A colleague of his, Professor Leonard Swidler in the USA, interested in Kung's work, independently suggested the development of a 'Global Ethos', one that could '... then serve a function similar to the 1948 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' of the United Nations..'[3]. Writing up an appeal to various religious and ethical

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[1]   *Ibid.*, p. 485.

[2]   Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London, 1991.

[3]   Kung, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 47.

groups on the idea of establishing such an ethos, Kung received a positive response from various thinkers, representing the Muslim, Confucian, Catholic, Methodist, Jewish, Presbyterian, Protestant, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and also from people of an atheist persuasion.[1]

As a result of this, and because of his continuing involvement with the Council developing plans to mark the centenary of the first World Parliament of Religions, Kung was asked to write an actual 'Declaration Towards a Global Ethic', one that could be presented and debated at the World Parliament celebrations to be held in Chicago in September, 1993. This he did. After a number of deliberations and debates amongst various religious leaders, and scholars within the field of religious studies, in July 1992, the first draft of the Declaration was offered to this varied community for corrective revision. Two drafts later, the Executive Director of the Council affirmed the appropriateness and relevance of the Ethic to the proceedings of the Centenary, and with this approval the 'Declaration Towards a Global Ethic' was sent to the two hundred delegates attending the Centenary and also the media. On September 4, 1993, at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the document was tabled. Its reception was mainly positive, but there were some detractors and disagreements as to the presentation, normative basis, and cultural conclusions of an uncritical acceptance of it.[2] An exploration of this normative basis, as well as the content and philosophical arguments that were central to the Declaration will be offered now as a preamble to its appraisal.

Hans Kung's document is based in the assertion that 'a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions and that these form the basis of a global ethic.'[3] Further, 'There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order.'[4] The framers of this document in committing themselves 'to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering and nature-friendly ways of life ... invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.'[5] The basis of this all encompassing global ethic or 'Golden Rule' is the assertion that:

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[1]   *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.
[2]   *Ibid.*, pp. 46–53.
[3]   *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[4]   *Loc.cit.*
[5]   *Ibid.*, p. 36.

There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others! Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others! This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions.[1]

The document goes on to argue that there are 'four broad ancient guidelines'[2] which can be built from this foundation, and which can be found in 'most of the religions of the world.'[3] These directives are

1) Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.

2) Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.

3) Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.

4) Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.[4]

The legitimacy of the normative basis of the 'Golden Rule' offered by Kung will now be examined with the intention of assessing Kung's proposal as a whole.

It does appear that many religious traditions do reveal a particular version of the 'Golden Rule', but they are not all the same. Kung quotes Confucian, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Jain, Buddhist and Hindu[5] scriptures in an effort to support his cause, whilst Hick argues that in addition to these both Zoroastrian and Taoist[6] writings reveal a moral imperative that embodies the normative energy of the 'Golden Rule'. It is an impressive list. It is more difficult, however, to observe whether or not contemporary religious systems such as Goddess worship, New Age groups, neo-pagan thought and others support such a particular guideline. It also seems that the mere presence of such a moral imperative within

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 26, 29, 32.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

[6] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London, 1989, pp. 313–14.

a certain section of a particular tradition's scriptures does not automatically exclude the possibility that another rule, supposedly ethical, supports different behaviour and opposing sentiments, even within the same tradition. These are important objections that need to be addressed and understood for the complexities of Kung's argument to be thoroughly critiqued. But there are two more obvious points where specific problems and a direct objection to the ideal that Kung presents as universal strongly reside. These two points are closely related. The first is that Kung plans to offer an ethic that can meet the moral needs of all peoples on earth today. That is he seeks for it to be practically universal, yet at the same time he acknowledges that it is 'most', but not *all* religious systems that support his idea of the basis for an ethic. The second objection is that it is easy to find spiritual or religious communities that deny the ascendancy of the Golden Rule within their spirituality, and which express their ethical intentions in very different ways. Kung's hope that the 'Golden Rule' is present within *most* religious communities is not enough to ensure its universal relevance, and the presence of very specific and particular moralities that support divergent practices, especially within indigenous, or premodern societies, also calls into doubt such a hope.

The mistake of this attempt at universalism is most clearly relevant in the effects that Christianisation have wreaked upon premodern, oral or indigenous cultures through the proliferation of colonial governments and the economic, agricultural and political changes that they have brought to their 'host' country. The following survey of various indigenous beliefs which could be termed 'moral' will bear this last statement out, and more clearly illustrate the problems and possible damaging effects of an insistence upon universalism, and the restriction of an ethical system to a supposedly single and universal ground rule (which is, ironically enough, simultaneously acknowledged as *not* universal).

Ritualistic or sacrificial killing has often been central to the religious life, beliefs and practices of such traditions. Melanesian religious belief, for instance, positively affirms the act of killing one's enemies or members of a foreign tribe, basing such an action on a 'logic of retribution', even though 'the logic of retribution is not always religious.'[1] To kill one's enemies, whether by stealth or in battle, was a favoured pastime of many Melanesians...', Trompf asserts, and was 'a powerful expression and integral part of tribal

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[1]   Garry Trompf, *Payback. The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions.* Cambridge, 1994, p. 9.

religious life.'[1] Further, in Mesoamerica one finds that the peoples of the late Maya of Yucatan, the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, the peoples of Central Mexico, as well as the population of the Guatemalan highlands, all participated extensively in ritual human sacrifice, whether by the excision of the human heart, or through decapitation. This is believed to have occurred 'as late as the nineteenth century,'[2] and was seen as fundamental to the maintenance of their religious life. In addition, anthropologists have noted that in Borneo and New Guinea 'headhunting and other sacrificial practices have survived into the modern age and have been studied by anthropologists.'[3] Moreover, the Arawete peoples of the Amazon Basin in South America use captives from tribal conflicts as sacrificial victims. This is performed as a religious rite, and is followed by the eating of the enemy flesh.[4]

On the face of it, these examples call into question the presence of the 'Golden Rule' in all religious traditions and thus undermines Kung's claim to the already existing foundation of a Global Ethic. However, it is important to note that sacrifice (from the Latin to 'make sacred') was viewed as a religious, ethical and moral act, usually based on a notion of reciprocity, and so one could argue that in some ways the meaning of these acts does seem to approximate and express a particular version of the 'Golden Rule'. For instance, Melanesian ritual murder was based on a 'payback' system. It was considered a spiritual duty to attempt to find and kill any person from another tribe who may have caused the death of a member of one's own tribe. To neglect this duty was a serious and perhaps fatal mistake.[5] This notion of payback is similarly expressed in the ideas of pagan Rome, where someone who stole corn was offered as a sacrifice to Ceres, the Corn Goddess, as reparation.[6]

These actions however, seem to be more closely related to a negative version of the 'Golden Rule', a version which is more

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[1]   Garry Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, Cambridge, USA, 1991, p. 52.

[2]   Jacques Soustelle, 'Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica: an Introduction,' in Elizabeth H. Boone (ed.), *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*, Washington DC, 1984, p. 1–2.

[3]   Nigel Davies, 'Human Sacrifice in the Old World and the New: Some Similarities and Differences,' in Boone, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

[4]   Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, Catherine V. Howard (trans.), Chicago and London, 1992, pp. 273–75.

[5]   Trompf, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 54.

[6]   Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

based on the notion 'Since you did this to me, I will do it back to you' (payback), or 'If I do this, you must return the favour' (especially in relation to the gods). It is clear that this is not the same ideal as that envisioned by Kung, and promoted in his document. These disjunctions between the moral attitudes and decisions of various traditions leads to a fundamental question about the content of a Global Ethic - who decides what rituals and beliefs are more 'moral' than others? How? On what basis? Why? Would the application of a Global Ethic mean a resurrection of God, but the crucifixion of the gods? A very careful analysis of the impact of a Global Ethic on the religious and spiritual practices of those communities that do not belong to one of the 'Great Traditions' is very much needed if a Global Ethic is to be at all relevant for them.

It is these concerns as outlined above that can be understood as the postmodern objection to the idea of a 'Global Ethic.'

Where to now? The case for the practical necessity of a project towards a Global Ethic.

With this postmodern objection more clearly defined and elaborated upon, the question remains: where to now? Although one could argue that the normative energy that the 'Golden Rule' contains does appear fairly readily and often in a significant number of religious traditions, it is also clear that it is not universal. As can be seen, even Kung acknowledges this. Is one compelled, therefore, to abandon the project of establishing a moral framework that can serve to contain and perhaps even dissipate the often violent, even brutal, clashes that occur within and between different religious, cultural and national groups? Are the ideals of '...understanding one another, ... socially-beneficial, peace-fostering and nature-friendly ways of life..'[1] also to be abandoned?

It is important to note here a strong objection to the postmodern response. Regardless of whether or not the 'Golden Rule' does or does not appear within various religious traditions, the number of signatories to the Declaration itself, and the generally positive response to the ideals and practice of a Global Ethic from significantly different and contrasting spiritual and political traditions indicates its very contemporary relevance and possible pacifying power, even within a world which certain Western social theorists may deem postmodernly fragmented and beyond repair.

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[1]   Kung, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Here is a list of the traditions that were represented by signatories on the actual document: Bahai, Buddhism (Mahayana, Theravada, Zen and Vajrayana), Christianity (Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic), Akuapi tradition (African indigenous peoples), Native American tradition/s, Hinduism (Vedanta and others), Jainism (Digambar and Shwetembar), Judaism (Conservative, Orthodox and Reform), Islam, Neo-pagans, Sikhs, Taoists, Theosophists, Zoroastrians and non-aligned 'interreligious organisations.'[1] A monograph entitled *Yes to a Global Ethic*[2] records the written support of Richard von Weizscaker (President of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1984 – 1994), Leo Kopelev (literary critic and journalist, originally born in Kiev, Ukraine), Mary Robinson (President of the Republic of Ireland), Helmut Schmidt (Editor – *Die Ziet*), Martti Ahtisaari (President of the Republic of Finland), Cornelio Sommaruga (President of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva), Juan Somavia (Chilean Ambassador to the USA), Rigoberta Menchu (civil rights activist for Indios of Guatemala), Carl Freidrich von Weisacker (German physicist and philosopher), Yehudi Menuhin (late internationally renowned musician), Teddy Kollek (mayor of Jerusalem from 1965 to 1993), Jonathan Magonet (Jewish scholar), Andre Chouraqui (Jewish writer and translator), Sir Sigmund Sternberg (Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Christians and Jews, London), Elie Wiesel (Jewish writer), Rene-Samuel Sirat (Chief Rabbi of France), Franz Konig (cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church), Konrad Raiser (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Geneva), Patriarch Bartholemew I (Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople), George Carey (Archbishop of Canterbury), Joseph Bernardin (Archbishop of Chicago, cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church), Paulo Evaristo Arns (Archbishop of Sao Paulo, cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church), Desmond Tutu (Anglican Archbishop of Capetown), Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal (Crown Prince of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), Muhammad el-Ghazali (Sheikh Al-Azhar University, Cairo), Hassan Hanafi (Professor of Philosophy, University of Cairo), Mahmoud Zakzouk (Dean, Faculty of Islamic Theology, Cairo), Muhammad Talbi (Professor of Islamic History, University of Tunis), Hajime Nakamura (historian of Buddhism), Sulak Sivaraksa (civil rights activist in Thailand, Buddhist), L. M Singhvi (High Commissioner of India for UK, London), Dileep Padgaonkar (member of

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[1]   *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[2]   Hans Kung (ed.), *Yes to a Global Ethic*, New York, 1996.

UNESCO Secretariat), Shu-Hsien Liu (Confucian, Professor of Philosophy, Hong Kong), and Aung San Suu Kyi (Leader of the Opposition, Burma.; civil rights activist). Again, an impressive list. Could the strength of support for the ideals and hopes expressed in the document be seen to override the objection that it is philosophically illegitimate?

This argument ties in closely with the second normative benchmark that has been used as the basis for the development of a 'global ethic' - the practical necessity of such a moral framework. While one can very rightly argue that 'at the very core of each and every ethos and ethical system ... [one finds] ... particularity ...[and not universality]...'[1], in the face of numerous interreligious conflicts present today, such a response seems irrelevant. Is the international religious community really only left with the alternative of a 'sophisticated ... but ultimately nihilistic contextualism,...'[2] in the face of dealing with and working through physically, emotionally and economically damaging conflicts? It appears that unless the local communities directly affected by the physical and emotional trauma of continual interreligious, intercultural and international conflict (and the wider communities indirectly affected by such problems), are happy to capitulate to the state of chaos created by such conditions, a solution that will promote '... understanding, ...socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature friendly ways of life...'[3] is very much needed - philosophically viable or not.

It is this very reality of different interreligious conflicts, of what is named the ecological crisis, as well as the process of economic globalisation and the effects that has on various peoples that has been pointed to as provoking the normative energy which could fuel the development and implementation of a global ethic, or ethics. For instance, Lubbers writes, 'The political activity, the emergence of a global culture and the ecological crisis demand a global ethic.'[4] Exploring the various efforts of different organisations that have worked towards establishing possible guidelines and frameworks for a greater understanding of the presence of values and ethics that could serve the international community and lessen the negative outcomes of different contemporary economic and cultural processes, Lubbers lists the international bodies United Nations, Amnesty International and

[1] James T. Bretzke, 'Cultural Particularity and the Globalisation of Ethics in the light of inculturation,' *Pacifica*, Vol. 9, February, 1996, pp. 69 – 85, p. 71.
[2] Kopfensteiner, *op. cit.*, p. 485.
[3] Kung, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[4] As it appears at http://www.globalize.org/publications/unesco.html.

Greenpeace as participants in this process, pointing out the fact that whether or not one believes that a universal ethic is already in existence (à la Kung), ready to be uncovered and utilised, people and organisations have begun to recognise the need for such an ethic, and are also working towards developing and establishing such a guideline.[1] Further, the international community, as far as Lubbers argues, has no other choice. It seems difficult to disagree.

Interestingly, Lubbers' work is seen as directly influenced by what many see as a 'spiritual' worldview. While he argues that the Eastern European experience of communism constituted a specific experience of 'darkness', it is his view that the twin powers of the market economy and democracy are not enough to ensure the security and safety of each individual citizen. These twin powers must be balanced by the development and appreciation of what he calls 'civil society', a concept which he places at the beginning of modern Western civilisation. He writes:

> Civil society is about the basic need to live in truth and dignity. To live in truth and dignity are the two basic functions to restore and to protect the moral integrity of a person (to live in truth) and it serves as a strategy of resistance to live in dignity.[2]

It is his commitment to civil society that informs the impetus and energy of his other projects.

Lubber's understanding of the practical needs of the contemporary political order is referred to here as one possible way a spiritual worldview and values can form a central, although not explicit, base for the development and understanding of a global ethics. However, there is no talk here of a 'Golden Rule' present in all religions, nor is there any explicit mention of religion at all. There is instead the simple argument that the actual experiences of conflict, human need and suffering are strong provocations for the development of an ethic applicable to contemporary situations.

But how can it be done? The possibility of dialogue.

From these discussions it appears that, firstly, a global ethic based on a single moral guideline which is supposedly universal is perhaps unworkable and philosophically questionable; and secondly, that the presence of conflict and violence between religious (and other)

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[1]   As it appears at http://www.globalize.org/publications/unesco.html.
[2]   As it appears at http://www.globalize.org/publications/prague.html.

communities prevents one from abandoning such a project altogether. But a third and more important question must now be asked: how can it be achieved? In what possible way can one hope to establish particular regulations and guidelines which will both be relevant for all parties concerned, and at the same time not neglect the differences and divergences present in each of these communities? The answer to this question presented here can be summed up in one word - dialogue. The process of dialogue (or 'multilogue', i.e. interaction between and among more than two parties), where interaction and communication about individual and collective differences and similarities, about the separate hopes for the future of the communities in question, about the possible changes wrought as such interaction with those considered 'radically other' continues, is fundamental to the possibility of developing a common consensus of values which can be affirmed as relevant and possible for all involved. Such dialogue forms the nucleus of the possibility of the pacifying and healing effects of the project of a 'Global Ethic.' Further, such dialogue challenges to the very core the uses and abuses of insularity and isolation which can be seen as a persistent feature of the creation of interreligious conflict. In exploring this option, two examples of the action of interreligious dialogue will be explored- one from Indonesia, and one from Bosnia. In addition, brief suggestions - which would need more research - for possible philosophical bases for the legitimacy of dialogue will be offered. Offering a definition of dialogue, in conclusion the relation of dialogue to the formulation of a 'Global Ethic' will be outlined, and the possibility of both assessed.

Examples

An important example of interreligious dialogue has occurred within the last decade in an international setting, as a response to changing and often conflicting relationships between various ethnic groups and religious communities. Based in Indonesia in 1996, a country recently wracked by intermittent and then incessant bloodshed, and especially known for the recent conflicts between Muslims and Christians in a number of its regions, MADIA (Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama), or SIDA (Society for Inter-religious Dialogue), developed from initially informal and 'relaxed' conversations between people of diverse backgrounds. As interest grew among the participants meetings became more formal and regular. Concerned with the way religion was often contributing to violence and conflict within Indonesia, as well as with the way

religion was seen to be used as a political weapon by various individuals and governments, members of the group were concerned to establish a forum where 'sincere, honest, open and critical inter-religious dialogue'[1] could occur. The members write that

> We were concerned that the history of interaction between the various religions and faiths, both nationally and internationally, had been coloured by mutual suspicion, chauvinism, condescension, traumatic conflicts and exclusive and arrogant theologies.[2]

In response to this common concern, the individuals opened their doors to interested people of different religious persuasions, thus expanding their community to Confucians, Buddhists and adherents of the Brahma Kumaris Sisters. Conceived of as mostly an 'experiment' and not a static entity, the webpage for the group states that their meetings were both regular and yet fluid, and most essentially an attempt to undermine the tendency to exclusion and judgement that was seen as the core cause of interreligious dispute. Changing venues for each meeting, the members of the group agreed that the prayers and rituals to accompany each meeting would be taken from the tradition that was the host for it. In this way practical steps were taken that led to the greater awareness of each participant of that which was 'radically other'.

By 1998 the East Timor crisis had brought the more relaxed aspect of the project to a halt, forcing the development of organisational issues that had been largely ignored, and seen as secondary to the group's core intentions. Faced with the political and global aspects of their religious convictions, it was only recently, on 22 January 2000, that a formal statement of concern for the economic situation of Indonesia has been made by MADIA. This statement asserts that

> ...the concerns and hopes which bound us together at the beginning have continued to strengthen. Even so, we all realize that the concerns that have motivated MADIA remain a vast and increasingly complex challenge and there is much work to do.[3]

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[1]   As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/indonesia1.html.

[2]   As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/indonesia1.html.

[3]   As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/indonesia1.html.

It is obvious that this group has not established a lasting peace in Indonesia. At the same time, it is also true that within the group important political and personal steps have been taken to tackle what are understood as core causes of interreligious dispute. Strengthened rather than beaten by the significant challenges of recent events in Indonesia, the group argues that 'the heritage of each religion and faith would have to be examined critically and re-formulated as a result of dialogues between different religions and faiths...',[1] thus revealing their contention that something new and different from the past would emerge as a result of dialogue. The recent statement of concern written by the group contains two important suggestions:

> Work to create a climate and opportunities for meetings between diverse religions, ethnic groups, races and social groupings, which allow honest, open, critical and respectful discussions between them.

> Promote dialogue and compassion as means for resolving political disputes, conflicts of interest and differences of perception.[2]

The importance and relevance of 'dialogue' to the possible development of ethical action is clear in this example.

Bosnia is also a very recent example of how differences of a religious nature can contribute to and exacerbate political conflicts and bloodshed. When the main conflicts taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina settled in 1995/6, plans to set up, within the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Sarajevo, a Department of Interreligious Dialogue 'whose purpose will be the research into and teaching of the major religions of the area in a scholarly and dialogue-oriented manner,' for the purpose of contributing 'fundamentally to the long-term existence and flourishing of the religiously-ethnically pluralistic civilization of Bosnia,'[3] were announced. An academic behind this project argues that in

> ...the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina this means that Bosnians must learn to know each other specifically in what makes *them different from each other*: especially as Muslims, Catholics,

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[1] As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/indonesia1.html.
[2] As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/indonesia1.html.
[3] As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/Bosnia/proposal.html.

Orthodox, Jews, and also as agnostic/atheistic humanists.[1] (Present author's emphasis)

On a trip to Sarajevo to meet with university staff who may be involved, an academic writes that

> The conditions in Sarajevo were dismal. Our greatest concern was not the shelling which so devastated the city and its inhabitants, though the danger was potentially there, but the insecurity (occasional killings by Serb sniper fire do still occur) and the cold. ... Burned out and destroyed houses, streetcars, buses, automobiles in Sarajevo came more easily to the eye than human casualties, which hit Paul Mojzes full force on his return flight when a father was carrying his ten-year old son who lost both arms and one leg as a result of the war.

> Water was available only every other day. Natural gas likewise, usually on alternate days. Fortunately electricity was available every day, but its use is restricted so that few can warm up their rooms to about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Cold seeps into the bones. Street cars function again and are crowded but from time to time they are still targeted by sniper fire. People are back on the streets. However, there is a police curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. [2]

Interreligious dialogue, again, is viewed here as central to the task of establishing a lasting peace in an area torn and destroyed by incessant violence.

Theoretical Suggestions – A Methodology of Processual, Intersubjective Dialogue.

It is important at this stage to outline some practical and theoretical bases for the project of interreligious dialogue, however brief. Kopfensteiner, a Catholic theologian, has explored the possibilities and implications of 'dialogue' between Christian communities and those he names 'radically other'. Entirely aware, and wary, of the damaging effects and philosophical hubris displayed in the history of imperialism, and the use of Christianity within such a system as a

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[1]   As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/Bosnia/proposal.html.
[2]   As it appears at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/Bosnia/proposal.html.

weapon of 'truth', Kopfensteiner argues for the development of a 'dialogic methodology which presupposes a solidarity upon which to reason about differences.'[1] Further, it is the development of such a 'dialogical or hermeneutical methodology ...[that]... will be the adequate response if tyranny or chaos are to be avoided.'[2] Basing his contentions upon the work of the hermeneuts and social theorists Gadamer and Habermas, Kopfensteiner contends that Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons' which develops between a text and its reader can also be applied to the relationship between the participants of dialogue. Further, this fusion leads to the creation of a 'third' – something different from the individual characteristics of the two separate entities. Habermas' theory of communicative action is also depended upon by Kopfensteiner as a possible methodological tool for use within the process of interreligious dialogue, especially as it attempts to acknowledge differences, most specifically differences based in language, whilst also aiming for a practical forum where such differences can meet and communication can be *effective*.[3]

The flavour of these theoretical endeavours is matched by the core ideas and intentions of both recent psychoanalytic theory and process thought, a late nineteenth and early twentieth century theoretical creation. Drawing on the traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology in Western philosophy, psychoanalytic intersubjectivity theory observes that the relationship between the analyst and the analysand establishes a psychological space within which the meeting of differences occurs and from which healing springs.[4] The observations and conclusions of such thought could be amplified so as to become relevant for the meeting between various peoples of different religious persuasions. The manner of Kopfensteiner's 'dialogic methodology' is echoed here, in that it is what emerges from the encounter between the individuals in a psychotherapeutic encounter that forms the aim and basis of the engagement between the analyst and analysand. If old patterns of behaviour are to be overcome, this creation of something 'new', a 'third' is a significant aspect of interreligious dialogue as well. It is this 'third' that is also seen as central to the MADIA experience, as outlined above.

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[1] Kopfensteiner, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 485.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 506.

[4] Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, and Bernard Brandchaft, *The Intersubjective Perspectives*, London, 1995, pp. 15–16, 54.

Process thought has similar contributions to make to the theoretical basis of interreligious dialogue. The core ideas that can bridge the gap between the two seemingly disparate projects are: firstly, in process thought, 'reality' is perceived as an experiential dynamic of consistent change and flux; secondly, divinity, concomitantly, is not understood as a static substance or *being*, but as a creative process of *becoming,* a becoming that emerges through *relationship*. Focussed on the process, not on the outcomes, focussed on change and flux, not on rigidity and stasis, focussed on relationship and creativity, not on isolation and stagnation, the relevance of process thought to the possible nature of dialogue is clear. Adopting these elements of process thought could greatly benefit theorists in their exploration of ways to characterise and establish dialogic communities.

With these actual and theoretical principles in mind a short characterisation of interreligious dialogue can be given.

Dialogue - What is it?

Dialogue is a *process* within which differences and divergences can emerge in the hope that mutual respect and understanding can be reached between parties that disagree. While dialogue may affirm differences in this way, at the same time, the *changing relationship* that emerges through the *experience* of interaction can also serve to lead to the creation of something on which both parties can agree - something therefore that is unique, different and new. Interminable, the action of dialogue does not end with the cessation of physical contact, but continues in the internal world of the participants, who, by involving themselves in the vagaries of this intersubjective engagement, allow themselves to be changed and transformed by such an experience, and thus affirm its *creative* function.

Conclusion – Could it work?

Whether or not the process of interreligious dialogue could successfully lead to the establishment and then implementation of a 'Global Ethic' is very difficult to say. The youth of the idea of the ethic means that one cannot yet make a definitive conclusion about its practical possibility. On the other hand, previous attempts to establish and implement a normative and universal benchmark in the past have often failed dismally. One need only read the

'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' and then take a look around to realise that. However, such failure in the past does not determine failure in the future. In addition the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' emerged from a political framework, and was primarily an attempt to influence and contribute to the human areas of law and politics. Kung's and Lubber's projects, however, while hoping to be similarly relevant, have emerged from the Academy, and serve to speak to concerns and needs considered 'spiritual' or 'religious.'

Moreover, as has been argued in this paper - what else is one to do? Ever mindful of the possibly damaging effects such an ethic could create, ever mindful of culturally specific ways of being that need to be encompassed by the project of creating the ethic, ever open to changing the content and tenor of such an ethic, what objection can be made to attempting to establish '...understanding one another, ... socially-beneficial, peace-fostering and nature-friendly ways of life..'[1]? The force of the practical necessity of such a project, even if never completed, or entirely 'successful' cannot be denied. As has been seen, interreligious dialogue is happening, as are serious deliberations about the possibility and content of a Global Ethic/s. The positive responses to the project of a Global Ethic indicate the powerful possibilities it may contain.

At the same time one should be mindful of Propertius when he wrote, 'There is no wide road which leads to the Muses.'[2] The issues outlined here seem to confirm his sentiment. Positively, the discourse opened by the writing of this Global Ethic has created a space within which scholarly, political, and religious communities can explicitly express their disagreements and conflicts about the nature and meaning of different religious communities, and their presence and function in the world; where religious leaders can become more knowledgeable about the way their own and other traditions work practically in the world, for good and bad; and where the processes of democratisation, modernisation and Westernisation can become more conscious of themselves and the effects they have for the wider global and religious community. Importantly, it leads us to reassess the nature and extent of secularisation, and the place premodern societies and their religious beliefs have in the emerging global economic order. Whilst it is clear that a reconfiguring of ourselves in relation to the changing dimensions of what others may see as the 'divine' may not lead to

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[1]   Kung, *ibid.*, p. 36.
[2]   Propertius, *Elegies*, G. P. Goold, (ed., trans.), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, p. 143.

world peace, it certainly widens the possibility for a global religious community that is conscious of itself, well informed about others and thus more creative rather than destructive. To conclude, Nietzsche's words, 'Creation – that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change,'[1] encapsulate the energy of my assessment of this Ethic – it is hopeful and optimistic, but also shadowed by significant gaps.

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[1]   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 186.