



**ETHICS  
IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

An Introduction

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*Ethics in International Affairs:  
An Introduction*



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## *Preface*

Ethics matter. Many institutions take up ethical issues. But few have the vantage point of Carnegie Council—a place where leaders from around the world come to share ideas, reflect on their experiences, and engage in public conversation.

This short introduction explains the point of view underlying the Council's activities. It is rooted in realism with the idea that power and ethics are inseparable and are best considered together.

Two additional operating principles are evident in the work. The first is humility—no single person, institution, or school of thought has a monopoly on truth. The second, closely related, is pluralism—respect for differences while recognizing what is common in the human experience.

This work is conducted in the spirit of mutual learning. For the Council and its constituents, ethics is a practical thing. There is something

intellectually satisfying about reflecting on the good life. But ethical inquiry can be more than that. It can help in specific ways to imagine a better future, and it can inform and improve consequential decision-making.

Lastly, ethics in a globally interconnected world requires open dialogue—across cultures, borders, and professions. This book is offered as a small step in this direction.



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## *Background & Theories*

The discipline of ethics begins with Socrates' question: How should one live? Ethics is about choice. What values guide us? What standards do we use? What principles are at stake? And how do we choose among them? An ethical approach will inquire about ends (goals) and means (the instruments we use to achieve these goals) and the relationship between the two.

According to the philosopher Simon Blackburn, "Human beings are ethical animals.... We grade, evaluate, and compare and admire, claim and justify....Events endlessly adjust our sense of responsibility, our guilt and our shame, our sense of our own worth and that of others."<sup>1</sup>

Blackburn explains ethical inquiry as normative in the sense that it suggests "norms." Norms are what we consider to be "expected and required" behavior. Functional norms are descriptive. For

example, in continental Europe and the United States, drivers stay on the right-hand side of the road; in the United Kingdom, drivers keep to the left. Moral norms are prescriptive. For example, there is the expectation to respect the needs of the most vulnerable members of society (e.g. children, the elderly, and the infirm). Moral norms are aspirational rather than merely functional—they often suggest the “ought” rather than the “is.”

Compliance with accepted norms and law is a useful beginning. But it is not enough. Compliance is merely a floor, a minimum upon which to build. Many actions in government, business, or private life comply with both the law and commonly held norms but remain less than optimal from an ethical perspective. Examples are all around us. British members of Parliament may not have broken laws when they used expense accounts to bill taxpayers for lifestyle enhancements such as moat cleaning, the upkeep of second homes, or the rental of adult movies. But surely this kind of behavior was wrong.

In more serious policy matters, during the global financial crisis of 2008, it may well be that most major banks and financial institutions were in full compliance with the law in the management of credit default swaps and derivative trading. Yet something went very wrong in the area of risk and



*“Socrates, A Visionary Head” / William Blake (Public Domain), via Wikimedia Commons*

responsibility. There are many decisions made that are in compliance with common norms and the law—but some of them are wrong. Ethical reasoning helps us to make these distinctions.

Despite the emphasis on something as vague as aspirational standards, ethical inquiry is not an idle philosophical pursuit—it is quite literally a practical enterprise. In his book, *The Practice of Ethics*, Hugh LaFollette argues that ethics is in many regards similar to medicine. Just as we study medicine not only to learn about the body and its functions, but to make us better (to promote good health); so too we study ethics not just for philosophical enlightenment, but to improve our living conditions and to make our lives better.<sup>2</sup>

Ethics helps us to understand what we truly value and how to connect this with the practice of our daily lives, our individual choices, and the policies of the institutions of which we are a part. A good ethicist will link his or her work in some dialectical fashion to real-world experience. The goal is to find clarity and to choose wisely—to choose in ways that promote human well-being and human flourishing.

It is important to keep in mind that ethics—especially as it relates to matters of public policy—is non-perfectionist in its character. Non-

perfectionist does not equate with relativism. Rather, it suggests that conflict is natural and perfection is not possible: values inevitably overlap and conflict. As Isaiah Berlin reminds us, the pursuit of any single virtue will ultimately face the obstacles of competing virtues.<sup>3</sup> Freedom often conflicts with order, justice with mercy, truth with loyalty. There is no conflict-free path to a good life, just as there is no single model of the good life to be pursued by all people everywhere.

### *Ethics in Three Dimensions*

To get a full picture of the place of ethics in international affairs—its possibilities and limitations—three dimensions of activity deserve equal consideration: actors, institutions, and social arrangements.

The first dimension focuses on the decision-maker—the actor or the agent who makes a choice. We can and should evaluate the acts of individuals, be they presidents, ministers, official representatives, CEOs, community leaders, advocates, employees, consumers, or citizens. Each has a role as an autonomous moral actor.

Collective entities such as states, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and international

organizations are also moral agents. One of the most important trends of our time is the growing power of non-state actors—especially multinational corporations. Google, Amazon, Walmart, ExxonMobil, and other companies of this size and scope rival the capacities of many states in terms of their economic, political, and social reach. It is therefore both necessary and proper to ask and answer questions relating to the moral choices of corporate entities. All are moral agents.

The second dimension of ethics has to do with the institutions that define our range of choices. In short, we need to examine the “rules of the game” by which we live and make decisions. We all live within sets of norms and expectations—some more fair and just than others. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this dimension is to show examples of when “rational” choices within an institution yield “bad” or less than desirable results. In some institutions, when an actor does the “right thing” within the system, the net result is morally sub-optimal.

This problem exists on many levels of policy and institutional design. For instance, consider the nuclear weapons doctrine of MAD—mutual assured destruction. The entire strategic framework is based on the idea of reciprocal threat. Within this system, to ensure stability, the most rational

thing to do is to make an immoral threat (and be prepared to carry it out).

There is something deeply troubling about MAD. Would it not be a worthy goal to try to create policies where the “rational” thing to do would be more benign than to make a threat of annihilation? In brief, this second dimension calls attention to the fact that we live within institutions of human design. The rules, norms, and conditions of these arrangements should be subject to ethical evaluation.

The third dimension of ethics is the assertion that there is often an opportunity to improve a situation—to do better. Consider a standard ethics scenario like this: My mother is sick. I cannot afford medicine. So I steal the medicine from a pharmacy whose managers will not even notice that it is gone. Is stealing the medicine in this circumstance the right or wrong thing to do?

We can discuss this case in terms of my decision as a moral agent—whether I am a thief and a villain, a rescuer and a hero, or both. Ethical questions are frequently raised as dilemmas such as this one. In many situations, there is a genuine need to choose between two competing and irreconcilable claims. Ethical reasoning can help to sort these out. However, we can also expand the inquiry to



ask a broader question beyond the narrow one of whether to steal or not to steal. We can also ask: What kind of community denies medicine to sick people who cannot afford it? Is there something unfair or unethical about this system?

Here is an example from history. Andrew Carnegie believed in the power of institutions to improve public policy. An advocate for the peaceful resolution of international disputes, Carnegie supported the mediation and arbitration movement that grew out of Geneva in the mid-nineteenth century. The idea was simple yet profound. Just as legal mechanisms were created to arbitrate disputes in domestic society, it should be possible to create similar mechanisms in international society for the same purpose.

The concept of international law and organization was gaining momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century—the movement merely needed new institutions to give it shape and force. In this spirit, Carnegie financed the building of the Peace Palace at The Hague, supported the establishment of the International Court of Justice, and lobbied for the formation of the League of Nations. Carnegie devoted much of his philanthropy—and his personal energy—to promoting these new institutions and the ideas



*Peace Palace, The Hague / Courtesy of Carnegie Foundation Peace Palace*

behind them. He founded several organizations dedicated to this cause—organizations that remain active more than a century later—including Carnegie Corporation of New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. His institutional investments helped to create the means for a new kind of diplomacy and a genuine alternative to war.

As the Carnegie example illustrates, the third dimension of ethics expands the range of options available. It creates new possibilities. Sometimes genuine dilemmas are unavoidable—and there is no escape from tragic choices. But at other times we can and should use creative talents to imagine alternate scenarios, and to manufacture better options.

### *Realism Reconsidered*

A hundred years ago Andrew Carnegie thought international relations was about to change forever. War would be abolished. Just as private war in the form of dueling had passed from the scene, so too would the slaughters of public war become a relic of a bygone age. Carnegie believed in moral progress. He had adopted a version of Social Darwinism popularized by Herbert Spencer: The world was evolving in a positive direction; attitudes and expectations were changing for the better. Carnegie had good reason to think this way. In his lifetime, slavery had been abolished and the Industrial Revolution was beginning to bring benefits to society in health, education, and personal opportunity. Living conditions were improving for the burgeoning middle classes and he was going to do his part to make a difference.

Despite the influence of idealists like Carnegie, the history of Western thought on interstate relations is dominated by the realist model.<sup>4</sup> From the beginning of recorded history, the inevitable centrality of power as the key element of politics was understood. As the Athenian generals put it in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian Wars, "The strong do what they will, the weak do what

they must." Machiavelli built on this idea, advising the prince that state rulers must not be under any illusions—power and interests are the controlling variables of politics. According to Machiavelli, the good ruler must learn how to manipulate power to serve his own ends, and therefore, the best interests of the state. Thomas Hobbes later added



*Portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli / Santi di Tito (Public Domain), via Wikimedia Commons*

to Machiavelli's observations with his version of the Leviathan in which he describes life in the state of nature as "solitary, nasty, brutish, and short."

Realists are well known for their profound skepticism over the possibilities for moral action. This skepticism stems from both their assessment of human nature and their observation of political life itself. According to realist theory, human nature has within it an *animus dominandi*—a will to power. In international society, this will to power combines with a lack of central authority and enforcement mechanisms to produce a perpetual security dilemma. No one feels safe; the world is seen as a zero-sum game where one nation's benefit is always another nation's loss. As a consequence, power maximization—and therefore enhanced security—becomes all-important. In this environment almost all actions are seen as necessities. Such a world leaves little room for choice.

As commonplace as it is, this simple version of realism does not explain everything. There is a competing account of international relations theory commonly referred to as the liberal internationalist model. This model has illustrious intellectual roots in the likes of Erasmus, Hugo Grotius, and Immanuel Kant. For liberals, the human condition is subject to improvement. Man



*Studies of the Hands of Erasmus of Rotterdam / Hans Holbein (Public Domain), via Wikimedia Commons*

is not fated to engage in conflict—reason and the rational application of universal principles offer a potential path to social order. In the liberal world there is no inevitable *animus dominandi* that is not subject to potential amelioration. The will to power exists, but it can be tamed. It can be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty.

Generally thought of as heirs to the Enlightenment (although their roots can be traced to earlier times), liberals strive for human progress. They believe in the possibilities of social institutions—institutions that are created by the imperatives of morality and sustained by rational principles. Liberals place great faith in the positive effects of education and other social institutions (such as legal systems) that promote individual fulfillment and social harmony.

The liberal version of twentieth-century history focuses on institutional developments. From the League of Nations to the United Nations, from the International Court of Justice to the International Criminal Court, progress has been made to expand the analogy of “rule of law” from the domestic sphere to the international sphere—just as Carnegie hoped. As Robert Jackson writes in *The Global Covenant*, a set of norms has been established, widely recognized by all states,

shaping the parameters of acceptable behavior in international politics.<sup>5</sup>

Among these norms are the sovereign equality of states, an expectation to refrain from using force, non-intervention, self-determination, and respect for human rights. We see these norms in action in organizations and regimes ranging from the Law of the Sea to the World Trade Organization (WTO). We also see them in various components of the UN system, especially through its alphabet soup of agencies: UNDP (development), UNEP (environment), WHO (health) and so on. The norms generated in these institutions are often non-binding and are frequently in conflict, yet they do offer a guiding framework.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, international institutions and international law remain relatively weak. As the realists would put it, international society is still primitive. It suffers from a lack of coherence, cohesiveness, and consensus. It also lacks political will and independent military power. Liberal internationalism is, at best, an incomplete project.

But for all of the shortcomings of the liberal internationalist model in both concept and performance, a simple realist account is equally deficient. Realism alone cannot account for

enormous and influential shifts in expected and required behavior. Norms have shifted, especially in areas of labor rights, human rights, and the treatment of the natural world. Many of these norms are not universally accepted; but it is safe to say that over the past hundred years, we have seen wider and deeper recognition and acceptance of norms such as prohibitions against child labor, expectations of equal treatment for women, and the duty to preserve and protect the natural environment.

An ethical approach to international affairs begins with the realists' insights about power and human nature. Realism rightly points out that nations will act in their own interests, and that they are correct to do so. But the ethical approach goes beyond these insights to account for the very real weight of conscience, principle, responsibility, and restraint in international decision-making.

A recent book by Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, suggests that conscience and principle may be having an effect on an issue as fundamental and intractable as armed conflict. Despite perception and conventional wisdom, empirical study shows that the global death toll due to violent conflict is trending downward. Pinker argues that norms and

institutions have delegitimized the instruments of industrial war (not to mention nuclear war) and suggests that we may actually be living through an era of measurable moral progress.<sup>6</sup> If he's right, war may be evolving into a much more restrained practice than the total wars of the twentieth century. As a result, war as we know it may begin to look more like policing (coercive force used selectively to maintain order) than the all-out massive slaughters we have become accustomed to. The first decades of the twenty-first century will put this hypothesis to the test.

### *Ethics & Legitimacy*

Ethics does its work in the world by granting and withdrawing legitimacy. History shows that the mitigation and cessation of unjust practices ultimately comes from the assertion of core values. The end of slavery began with various revolutions and rebellions—yet the source of its final demise was its loss of moral legitimacy. Communism, for the most part, ended in similar fashion. The Soviet Union collapsed when the values that held it together were no longer credible and sustainable—its legitimacy evaporated. The same could be said of apartheid in South Africa. Overall, more regime





*Tabrir Square / Alice Naicomeno (Creative Commons), via Flickr*

changes in recent years can be attributed to the power of principles than to the power of the gun.

Surely, legitimacy played a critical role in the 2011 uprisings in the Middle East. Mubarak, Qaddafi, and other Arab leaders faced a tipping point. When their rule and their regimes lost legitimacy in the eyes of the public, this illegitimacy became the decisive force for change.

New struggles for legitimacy can be found everywhere. We see normative consensus-forming that rejects the tactic of terrorism. We see movement on the need to address climate change. We see new initiatives to shore up the so-called “nuclear taboo” and to move toward radical

reductions in the number of nuclear weapons. We see strong voices rejecting genocide and promoting humanitarian intervention and the “Responsibility to Protect.” We see robust responses to issues of global health. We see serious attention given to the status of women. We see concern for global poverty and the plight of the least well-off expressed in the aspirations of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. All of these issues are gaining normative legitimacy. They are providing leverage for action. They are even changing the way that individuals, corporate entities, and nations perceive their own interests. But progress will take time, and debate around these issues will be the battleground for some time to come.



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## *The Three Pillars of Ethics*

The core of ethics in international affairs is found in three principles: pluralism, rights and responsibilities, and fairness. Together, these principles define a view that is grounded yet not dogmatic, substantial yet open to interpretation.

### *Pluralism*

No single moral imperative can make a citizen's or a statesman's choices automatic. Pluralism is the term used to recognize the irreconcilable nature of many of the moral claims that motivate us.

Pluralism charts a course that avoids the pitfalls of monism and relativism. As Isaiah Berlin puts it, monism holds that "only one set of values is true, all others are false." Relativism holds that "my values are mine, yours are yours, and if we clash, too bad, neither of us can claim to be right."<sup>7</sup>



*The Tower of Babel / Pieter Brueghel the Elder (Public Domain), via Wikimedia Commons*

In response to Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes a compelling argument for pluralism. The essence is captured in the title of his book, *The Dignity of Difference*. While many people of deep religious faith are monists of one sort or another, Sacks is a determined pluralist. Using the Bible story of the Tower of Babel as his illustration, Sacks tells of the attempt to bring the entire world together to speak one language and follow a single operating system:

*God saw that Babel was...the first totalitarianism, the first imperialism, the first attempt at fundamentalism. How am I*

*defining fundamentalism here? I would say it is an attempt to impose a single truth on a plural world. And having seen the building of the Tower as attempted fundamentalism, God confused the languages of humanity at Babel and said, "From here on there will be many languages, many cultures, many civilizations, and I want you to live together in peace."*

Thus God calls on one man, one nation, to be different in order to teach all humanity the dignity of difference. God lives in difference, and the proof is that his people are given that mission to be different.<sup>8</sup>



*Eleanor Roosevelt and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lake Success, New York / Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Photographs*

This commentary emphasizes the paradox of pluralism. Humanity is shared as a common experience. Yet what unites us is the fact of our differences. And so, Sacks embraces diversity while reminding us of our essential sameness. When this idea is put to work in arranging social institutions, the premium is on managing differences. The goal is not to make everyone the same; it is rather to find ways to build on basic commonalities, to live with differences, and to escape the all-controlling moral dogmas that frequently shape our lives.

### *Rights & Responsibilities*

Rights are protections and entitlements associated with corresponding duties and responsibilities. There have been many attempts at forging general agreement on the composition of human rights—the best known being the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions, and other international agreements, such as the Refugee Convention. The challenge with arguing for rights and responsibilities as an essential concept for the study of ethics and international affairs is that though we can achieve agreement at levels of high abstraction, that agreement begins to fray



as we get down to concrete cases. This is because at some point in the analysis, arguments become political—they succumb to differing values and interests. This realization need not be debilitating. But it does speak to the challenge of forging moral agreement on actionable international policy.

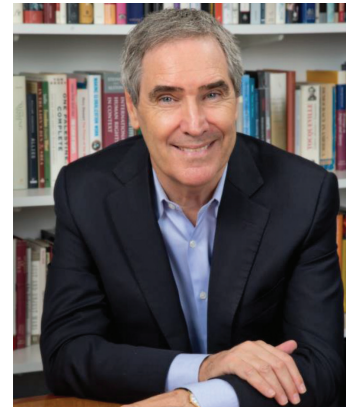
The concept of rights has within it a suggestion of universality—a universal moral sense based on sympathy and mutuality. In preparing for the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947–48, the philosopher Jacques Maritain famously wrote, “We agree on these rights on the condition that no one asks us why.” Pragmatists have argued that in the end, foundational arguments—that is, where rights come from—may not really matter. Simple, factual observation of the need for human rights and the work that human rights arguments do to provide protections may be sufficient.

The facts of the genocides and gulags in such recent memory should be enough to make the case that protections are needed. The argument is simple. As Michael Ignatieff puts it: Why rights? Well, where would we be without them? The sad historical experiences of genocide and tyranny suggest that rights offer protection from the dehumanization that fuels gross injustices and deadly

conflicts.<sup>9</sup> When a person or group is seen as less than human—when they are not bearers of basic rights—exploitation often follows.

Despite unending controversies over the origin, standing, and composition of rights, one aspect seems widely accepted. That is, any rights claim implies a corresponding set of duties and responsibilities.

But how are we to understand the nature of our responsibilities? One way to clarify the issue of responsibility is to consider rights claims in terms of “perfect” and “imperfect” obligations. Perfect obligations are specific and direct. For example, we



*Michael Ignatieff, Rector and President of Central European University in Budapest; Centennial Chair at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs (2012–2015)*



*United Nations peacekeepers in Sarajevo, 1996 / by MSGT Michael J. Haggerty, U.S. Air Force (www.dodmedia.osd.mil; VIRIN: DF-ST-96-00267) (Public Domain), via Wikimedia Commons*

have the perfect obligation not to torture. Imperfect obligations are more general, less specific, and inexactly targeted. So in the case of torture, there is the requirement to consider the ways and means through which torture can be prevented. The exercise of an imperfect duty such as preventing torture is far from altruism. It should be self-evident that it would be in one's own self-interest to live in a world where torture is not permitted.

The assignment of duties and responsibilities is especially relevant to the study of globalization. Looking at global concerns today, there are several obvious cases where both direct and indirect participation in the causing and alleviating of harms is inevitable. Whether it is the global economy, the

global climate, or in areas such as humanitarian relief and the “Responsibility to Protect,” there is no dodging the questions. We are all connected by virtue of economic integration, climate conditions, and the real-time flow of information. Who will lead in addressing collective action problems? Who will play supporting roles? Who will design and create new arrangements? What about the role of individual citizens acting outside of state institutions? These questions about fair contribution are open-ended, but inevitable, given concern over rights and responsibilities. If international politics were about power and power only, these questions of responsibility would not be debated so seriously. But they are. So, more than many care to admit—ethics do matter.

### *Fairness*

Fairness addresses normative standards for appropriate contribution, equal regard, and just desert. Contemporary methods for thinking through these standards include John Rawls’ “difference principle,” Amartya Sen’s “capabilities approach,” Peter Singer’s “one world,” and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “cosmopolitanism”—just to name a few.<sup>10</sup>

Ideas about fairness are highly subjective and heavily influenced by circumstances. In the study of international affairs, fairness is a tool to critique social arrangements. The concept of fairness signals concern for the least well-off, points to imbalances of prerogative and privilege, and helps us to understand the bases for legitimacy within social and political entities.

Much of the literature on fairness is found in the sub-field of distributive justice. Distributive justice is concerned with mechanisms for the fair division of goods. Rawls famously offers his “veil of ignorance” as a thought experiment to help answer this question. Ronald Dworkin suggests a “social insurance model” in a similar vein.<sup>11</sup> Michael Walzer captures the main challenge in his depiction of “complex equality.” As Walzer puts it:

*The regime of complex equality is the opposite of tyranny. It establishes a set of relationships such that domination is impossible. In formal terms, complex equality means that no citizen's standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good.*

He then goes on to elaborate on the three essential principles of distributive justice: free exchange, desert, and need.<sup>12</sup>

On the global level, fairness implies at least a minimal amount of impartiality and reciprocity. Fairness suggests that what is good for you is often linked to what is good for others involved. This is the nature of complex problems and decisions. It is not hard to see this connection in light of pressing issues like climate change, public health concerns like the Zika or Ebola virus, and global poverty issues where the fate of the hundreds of millions of people living on less than \$2 per day is entwined with the fate of the more developed world.

Fairness may become an increasingly relevant element of public policy. Complex systems enabled by global integration require significant elements of reciprocity and “other-regarding” behaviors to be sustainable. There will be many opportunities—in fact, there will be many necessities—that will require cooperation and “non-zero” thinking. The non-zero approach, championed by Robert Wright, emphasizes win-win outcomes over winner-take-all strategies. In the increasingly interconnected world in which we live, such an approach requires fair contribution to collective action challenges and recognition of the interests of others. Wright’s work is itself a contribution to a potential normative shift in the direction of enhanced cooperation around issues of common concern.<sup>13</sup>



### *Normative Shifts & the Path Ahead*

To be sure, the aim of ethics in international affairs is not to set the stage for world government. Schemes for world government have foundered on basic and by now well-understood structural challenges. Rather, an understanding of ethics in international affairs should help us evolve within the structures we have already built and suggest new arrangements, where necessary, that are feasible and compatible with local support. In the street fight that is often the reality of international affairs, there should be moral minimums (things to be avoided) as well as desired outcomes (global aspirations).

In his book, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, historian Jay Winter writes of “minor utopias,” or “moments of possibility” when new ideas moved from the margin to the center of public life, each suggesting a better future on a global scale.

Examples include 1919, when self-determination came into its own; 1948, when human rights became an international standard; 1968, when the idea of liberation launched student movements around the world; and 1992, when the concept of global citizenship gained notoriety in a variety of international forums. Each moment of possibility introduced a new principle to be reckoned with. Each changed the way the world was understood.<sup>14</sup>

Are we living in another moment of possibility now? Maybe so. This moment is being leveraged by leaders more clear-eyed and realistic than many of their predecessors. There are many examples of normative shifts in emergence. We see it in areas such as security, climate, and education. Projects are springing up that are ambitious but incremental. The purpose of each is to change expectations to reflect the demands of a global ethic.

In considering the security agenda, there is the example of former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, the leader of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI)—the engine behind the Global Zero campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The campaign was started by Nunn along with George Shultz, William Perry, and Henry Kissinger to confront the alarming fact that disarmament and non-

proliferation has not proceeded as efficiently as these Cold War leaders had hoped. NTI develops new strategies and new partnerships to work toward the reduction of nuclear threats and the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Whether they reach their ultimate goal of abolition or not, “Global Zero” has entered the consciousness of a new generation of strategists, policy-makers, and concerned citizens.

The climate agenda has generated numerous examples of a global ethic in the making. One of the most noteworthy is the Carnegie Climate Geoengineering Governance project (C2G2), launched in 2017 by the Carnegie Council in New York, with participation from team members and advisors worldwide. The project addresses the ethical and policy questions raised by the availability of new technologies that could be deployed to cool the climate. The initiative is not for or against the research, testing, or potential use of climate geoengineering technologies. That is a choice for society to make. The purpose of C2G2 is to catalyze the creation of effective governance for climate engineering technologies by shifting the conversation from the scientific and research community to the global policy-making arena, and by encouraging a broader, society-wide discussion



*Launch of Carnegie Climate Geoengineering Governance Initiative (C2G2), February 2017. Left to right: Jennifer Morgan (onscreen via Skype), Janos Pasztor, Oliver Morton, Pablo Suarez, Jane Long, Doug MacMartin, Simon Nicolson*

about the risks and potential benefits, and the ethical and governance challenges raised by new human capacities to alter the natural world.

The education agenda is similarly well-positioned to evolve, energized by the possibilities of instantaneous worldwide communication. A prime example is Professor Michael Sandel, who is leveraging this opportunity by taking his Harvard lectures on “Justice” to online audiences around the world. In a 2011 *New York Times* column he is quoted as saying, “Students everywhere are hungry for discussion of the big ethical questions we confront in our everyday lives....My dream

is to create a video-linked global classroom, connecting students across cultures and national boundaries—to think through these hard moral questions together, to see what we can learn from one another.”<sup>15</sup> With this initiative and others like it, education has reached a new stage. A truly educated person in the twenty-first century will have to take account of ideas and information from sources around the world.

How will we know when new norms might be making a difference? Meaningful normative shifts toward accepting a global ethic will shape personal experience. Individuals in even the most remote locations will begin to see themselves as part of a global economy, a global climate, and a global information system. Values and priorities will evolve to take into account global-level concerns. Zero-sum thinking will begin to give way in some circumstances. Political and social arrangements will evolve. More and more, systems and structures will be designed to align with global expectations while preserving local autonomy and flavor.

Approached in a responsible manner, ethics in international affairs in the twenty-first century would inspire, not legislate; it would offer insight, not rules and regulations. Its goal would not be

to promote uniformity or impose consensus. It would be, rather, to preserve liberty and diversity by recognizing a new reality and the norms that must come along with it.

A moral world is not the same as a world in which everyone acts with perfect ethical result. This is not possible. However, it is possible to have a world in which the idea of morality is central to decision-making. If we can create a world where pluralism, responsibility, and fairness are taken seriously, then the study of ethics and international affairs will indeed be a useful and practical art.



## Notes

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Andrew Carnegie, “Andrew Carnegie’s New Year Greeting, 1914” (text)

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Steven Guest, “The Unity and Objectivity of Value,” 2013, *Ethics & International Affairs* Issue 25.4, review essay of Ronald Dworkin’s *Justice for Hedgehogs*

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Michael Ignatieff, “Reimagining a Global Ethic,” 2012, *Ethics & International Affairs* Issue 26.1, part of a symposium: In Search of a Global Ethic

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