

“Global Ethics”.

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## **Global Ethics**

*What moves us... is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just – which few of us expect – but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate.*  
(Amartya Sen)<sup>1</sup>

Imagine the world as a village with one hundred inhabitants. This village would consist of vastly different families. Most villagers would be Asians, many of them Africans or Latin Americans, and no more than thirteen denizens would be Westerners.

Every family in this global village speaks its own language and prays in a different temple. The bulk of land, properties and resources are owned by the well-educated privileged few, whereas most other villagers, including children, toil heavily, some in bondage. Nearly all villagers die young or when in middle-age; only the handful of well-to-do and rich are likely to reach the age of eighty and ninety.

There is no village government and people are given free rein to go about their business. No taxes are levied for village amenities and services. There is no school, no sewage system and no police. The few wealthy either sit around reading, are at their computers or occupy themselves with leisure activities. They cannot be bothered to have their peace and quiet disrupted. Outside there are the screams of villagers who are fighting, but that is a common, daily occurrence. About fifteen villagers go hungry every day, and polluted drinking water causes the death of numerous infants.

Some inhabitants feel the community must be brought in order. However, the man in the blue suit who resides in the hut marked ‘UNITED VILLAGERS’ has no control over the village. All villagers continuously meet each other to buy

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<sup>1</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard UP, 2009, vii. Web access: <http://www.ids-uva.nl/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sen-The-idea-of-justice.pdf>.

and sell merchandise and commodities, only to quickly turn their backs on one another again.

In spite of all this, the village does have a Code. It states, among other things, that there are human rights and children's rights. Aggression and violence have been solemnly pronounced prohibited, although nobody maintains the law, except for a few wealthy families – who only do so within their own houses and huts. There is also an official covenant which states that every villager is entitled to food, water, health care and education. It is clearly asserted in the village elders' Millennium Declaration, which however, is not lived up to.

Is there no remedy for this lamentable state of affairs? Could the inhabitants not create a happier and more gregarious village, where all enjoy their rights and are fully appreciated?

## **GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP**

Those who speak of a 'global village', or 'the world community', have a too rose-coloured view of humankind. The world we live in is divided, in states, in languages, in philosophies and cultures. Mutual influence caused by economic interdependence and electronic communication has not created a coherent global community. Competition for power and resources outweigh promising incentives for cooperation. When observing the factual course of events without being guided by idealistic wishful thinking, it is apparent that the power and the interests of both the large and many smaller players dictate daily global processes. Considerations of law and justice do not (yet) have a significant impact thereon.

However, conclusions like these are not sufficient to determine the best policy to tackle certain global issues. One must also decide according to which principles solutions could be sought. High-handedness, self-interest, our own convictions and concepts of justice are inadequate to properly analyse the various issues and to find solutions that could resolve conflicts in a just and appropriate way.

What will the future look like? This depends not only on power struggles, but also on people's beliefs and attitudes, the views whereby one responds to or confronts the world. After all, these views determine our actions and contributions when structuring the future.

To keep in check the threats to the future this book addresses, more than government action alone is required. A considerable effort by citizens themselves and their organizations is called for, since governments, international institutions and civil society organizations can or may take vigorous action only if citizens demand them to do so. Although the term 'global citizenship' is

commonly associated with the cosmopolitan, traveling, wealthy elite and intellectuals who allegedly do not feel a strong connection with their own country, an understanding of global or world citizenship is not about a *lack* of connection. Rather, it involves a committed connectedness, not merely to the people in our immediate vicinity, but also to those elsewhere on earth<sup>2</sup>. The consumption of energy, goods, food and water of people in rich countries has direct consequences for a myriad of people in poor areas, and not only at the present time, but especially for future generations. Overall engagement with the world, with nature and other peoples and cultures, and adapting one's intended behaviour, aware that it has an impact on others both near and far, is a form of 'world citizenship'<sup>3</sup>.

Those who live in the Netherlands must keep to Dutch legislation: they have rights as well as obligations. A citizen of the world must, firstly, abide by national law, but he or she also has certain rights which are applicable to everyone worldwide: human rights<sup>4</sup>. At the international level, a citizen has the ethical obligation to help protect the human rights of others. There are socio-economic rights (e.g. a right to food and water), political and civil rights (everyone is for example entitled to express their opinion), and group rights (a group with a certain identity, ethnicity or religion has the right to exist). These rights are unequally and unfairly observed throughout the world. Those who are in the fortunate position to fully enjoy these rights bear the positive responsibility to help ensure that others may also become happier.

It is scarcely possible to enforce human rights outside national legal systems, except in a number of European countries which fall under the supranational jurisdiction of the Strasbourg Court. There is no World State with a global government, as there is no global legal system which guarantees human rights everywhere. The majority of the world's population lives in dysfunctional and poor states, where these rights are poorly observed. Rights are only enjoyed

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<sup>2</sup> Beneker, Tine, Mariëtte van Stalborch and Rob van der Vaart. (2009), *Vensters op de Wereld: Rapport van de Commissie Canon voor Wereldburgerschap*. Utrecht: NCDO en Faculteit Geowetenschappen Universiteit Utrecht, 2009. Web access: <http://www.venstersopdewereld.nl/assets/Vensters.pdf>.; Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid. *Identificatie met Nederland*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam UP, 2007. Web access: [http://www.wrr.nl/fileadmin/nl/publicaties/PDF-Rapporten/Identificatie\\_met\\_Nederland.pdf](http://www.wrr.nl/fileadmin/nl/publicaties/PDF-Rapporten/Identificatie_met_Nederland.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.;

Mathiason, John R. *World Citizenship: The Individual and International Governance*. Third Pan-European International Relations Conference, Vienna, Austria, September 16-19, 1998. Web access: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2012/WorldCitizenship.pdf>;  
Adams, Michael and Angelo Carfagna. *Coming of Age in a Globalized World: The Next Generation*. Bloomfield, CT : Kumarian Press, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Web: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>.

in effect if there are states and powerful institutions which actively maintain them.

The notion of world or global citizenship requires an international extension of the following familiar ethical questions: What is social justice? What does every human being's co-responsibility entail? These questions address the extension of responsibility from the national to the 'global community'. Are we indeed all our brother's keeper, and if so, how far does that fraternity reach? Up into the desert and jungles of Africa and the slums of Asia and Latin America? Does our co-responsibility also extend to other forms of life besides humans – to the domain of animals and plants?

## SEVEN PREMISES

Therefore, first an attempt towards global ethics: the art and expertise of globally responsible agency which is based on a number of central premises.

1. Every individual should take care that the foundations of existence, nature, biological life and the environment will not be disturbed by collective activities to such a serious extent that the human species itself and the creatures around it are endangered. For the sake of convenience, I call this *the principle of continuity*, of sustainable survival, which is the long-term version of the basis of ethics: people should comport themselves such a way that harmony with their environment is optimal. This implies, among others, that avoidable causes of unhappiness should be fought by all possible means. It should be applicable to all faiths, ideologies and cultures.

2. If it is as yet uncertain whether or not a particular disturbance of the environment (nature, climate, or administrative bodies) seriously threatens life, it is advisable that, as a precautionary measure, the potential disruptions are prevented and reduced – where the (tangible and intangible) benefits of the reduction of these risks outweigh cost of precautions. This premise, *the principle of prevention*, is related to principle of sustainable survival.

3. All people have a right to be safeguarded from threats to their life and security. They should have access to major daily necessities. Eight primary needs are: i) not be threatened by immediate danger, ii) a sufficient quantity of pure drinking water, iii) enough healthy food, iv) basic health care, v) adequate clothing, vi) basic housing, vii) care for offspring and viii) primary education. I call these equal *rights of basic physical existence* for all. Some of these rights require further qualification (how far does this right go in a specific context?),

but I will omit these for the sake of brevity<sup>5</sup>. This focus on the same basic rights of physical existence constitutes a more limited scope than full equality and equal opportunities for all individuals and all stated human rights in the world (treaties include about 100 human rights). Furthermore, equal basic rights of physical existence do not imply uniformity and equality of results, for each individual is different.

4. If the production factors of business sense, knowledge, capital and labour are employed properly, it is possible to provide for the basic needs of all people: through optimal utilization and distribution of the earth's natural resources. It is not the case that because of overpopulation there are already more people than the earth can feed. However, the unequal use of resources and current forms of exploitation are not sustainable in the long run. An example is the consumption of energy. An American uses hundreds of times more energy, water, land, metals and minerals than an African. Incidentally, complete equality in the distribution of resources, income and capital is unnecessary, impossible and undesirable, because individuals are unequal in motivation, talents and needs. Yet, if all people would be provided with the same opportunities for basic needs (which is a different matter than equality), it would generally lead to a better utilization and allocation of resources, and to a more justifiable outcome than if there is a tremendous gap of inequality for such opportunities. This is *the principle of equal basic opportunity*.

5. Everyone strives for happiness and satisfaction of their needs; adults are as a rule of thumb happiest when they have freedom of self-determination, although there are certain exceptions to be made. Nevertheless, as long as they are not destructive, or mentally incompetent, or incapacitated to such an extent that they should be locked up due to psychiatric causes or criminal behaviour, or committed to forced treatment or supervision, people should have as much freedom of choice as possible. If the state treats its citizens as incapable children and limits or denies them freedom of choice, it becomes a dictatorship which causes the majority of people extreme unhappiness. Of course, the perception of what brings about happiness varies from person to person. Therefore, self-determination, freedom of agency, is essential. People should be able to take responsibility for free choices: *the principle of autonomy*.

Clearly, human happiness is only in part determined by material needs. For happiness, psychologically balanced and stable attachments to loved ones (family and relatives, friends, community, friends and acquaintances), spiritual peace and anchoring in beliefs, religion, philosophy, art and science are as

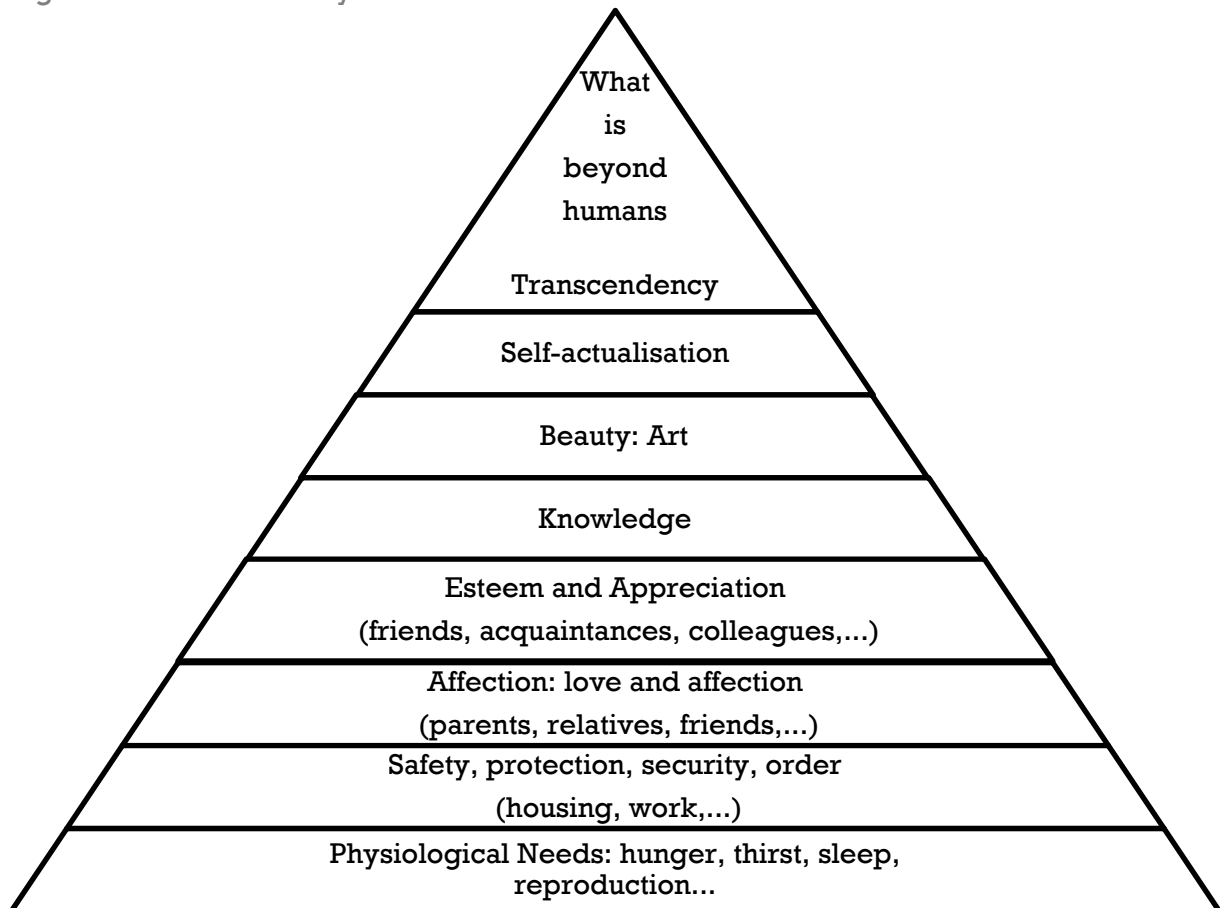
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<sup>5</sup> Whether or not every individual has equal rights to descendants, even if there is an issue of serious hereditary disease or if the person cannot provide properly for his/her offspring, will not be discussed here.

important as biological living conditions. (I do not aim to argue that physical and mental phenomena always differ substantially; they are interconnected and mutually dependent.)

The hierarchy of needs Abraham Maslow employs is enlightening<sup>6</sup>.

Figure 2.1: Maslow's Pyramid



In the following chapters, the two bottom layers of the hierarchy of needs will be emphasised, namely physiological needs and safety. They sum up the basic needs and form the basis of existence, the very base which is threatened by poverty, war, disease, climate change and energy shortage. This is not to imply that the higher placed needs in the pyramid are trivial. I will leave what could be understood by self-actualization and transcendence an open question, although many people are profoundly influenced by religion and philosophy.

6. The limitation of material consumption to what is necessary for basic needs, supplemented with a margin (which differs per individual) for the experience of personal happiness out of the needs which are identified higher up in the pyramid, offers better opportunities for health, and for personal,

<sup>6</sup> Maslow, A. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1998.

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psychological and emotional satisfaction for all than the unlimited material consumption by a privileged group. This principle of moderation is not an objective, quantitative criterion, because every individual will want to fill the margin differently. *The principle of moderation* has both a personal and a social side. Overindulgence will sooner or later affect personal well-being. Furthermore, highly unequal distributions of consumption possibilities in a society affect the social cohesion due to objections against the injustice of such a manner of distribution.

There is ample proof that personal overconsumption, excessive use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol and food, can cause serious illnesses (obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some forms of cancer). The moderation principle, however, need not be pursued puritanically. When the main focus lies on abiding happiness, this principle can also be realized in a relaxed and somewhat hedonistic manner. Excess is detrimental, but it is instrumental that what really *is* excessive must always be re-established through research, advice, experience and above all self-determination.

7. The comparability of various forms of happiness and the perception thereof by different people raises many questions. Still, it is possible to approach objectification by measuring certain indicators related to a happy life, such as the duration of life of people in certain circumstances, their health and their score on (self-) evaluation scales and psychological tests. It is easier to do the opposite, and to measure indicators which are experienced as serious threats to happiness – i.e. hunger, disease, injury, unemployment and mental illness. A significant, basic indication of unhappiness is a high infant and maternal mortality rate, which is strongly linked to poverty and oppression.

‘Happiness’ then, might be difficult to measure and compare, whereas the opposite, extreme *unhappiness*, it is easier to determine. It is possible, even though the risks which cause unhappiness vary widely and the people involved are very different, to still find one common denominator: the duration of life, statistical life expectancy. Because a long life in illness is not as happy as a long healthy life, life expectancy should be complemented with a quality aspect. Thus HALYs (Health Adjusted Life Years) or QALYs (Quality Adjusted Life Years)<sup>7</sup>, which enable a comparison between risks such as traffic accidents,

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<sup>7</sup> Gold, Marthe R., David Stevenson and Dennis G. Fryback . “HALYS AND QALYS AND DALYS, OH MY: Similarities and Differences in Summary Measures of Population Health”. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 2002, vol. 23, pp. 115-134. Web: DOI: 10.1146/annurev.publhealth.23.100901.140513; The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and Environment, het *Nederlandse Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu* (RIVM), uses QALYs; see for example: RIVM. *Gezondheidswinst door effectief tabaksontmoedigingsbeleid*. Press release, 9 May 2006. Linked web access: <http://www.artsenapotheke.nl/huisarts/nieuws/id18033-gezondheidswinst-door-effectief-tabaksontmoedigingsbeleid.html>.

malnutrition and disease, are rated. Bearing in mind my assumption that the actions of people and institutions are optimal if aimed at increasing these QALYs, I label this *the principle of life expectancy, of longevity*.

If applied to one individual, increasing QALYs is always desirable. When, on the other hand, implemented on large numbers of people such as a group or a whole population, then, on account of limitations of resources, choices must be made between measures pertaining to prolongation and improvement of life. Then, adding ten good years of life to a twenty year old who is seriously ill is more important than to a ninety year old. The diverse values of QALYs for different people and situations will not further be addressed here, although they are of great importance, e.g. for sound medical decisions and the utilisation of resources for public health<sup>8</sup>.

## **ETHICS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHOICE**

Ethics need not be derived from a culture or religion, although this has been asserted for centuries; conversely, ethics consists of maxims for life which can be established by independent consideration of humans and society.

People are social creatures which cannot survive for long without companions. A stable social network is a necessity for their complete development; it has oftentimes proven to indirectly increase health, well-being, and resistance to illness, safety and longevity as well. The same is true for a lack of social interaction: a child which is supplied with mere food and drink, which is not raised and cared for in an accepted, normal way, but is being concealed (e.g. an illegal “closet child”), or an orphaned child who must maintain itself in the wild (e.g. “wolf children”) will barely learn to speak, if at all, and will live at most into early puberty; it soon dies due to lack of contact. In addition, also discordant personalities have an essential need for communication and a group context<sup>9</sup>.

A group, in order to function properly for the sake of its members, requires rules and regulations: legal provisions or regulations of cultural practice (customs and traditions), standards of morality, and personal ethics. Many regulations are functional, as infringement upon them harms the smooth operation of the group and its members. Dysfunctional rules have lost their meaning or arise from conceptions that are detrimental to the group and its component members. Yet, outdated or even counterproductive regulations can

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<sup>8</sup> Pomp, Marc, Werner Brouwer and Frans Rutten. “QUALY-tijd. Nieuwe medische technologie, kosteneffectiviteit en richtlijnen”. Centraal Planbureau, 2007. Web access: <http://www.cpb.nl/publicatie/qaly-tijd-nieuwe-medische-technologie-kosteneffectiviteit-en-richtlijnen>

<sup>9</sup> Krech, David, Richard S. Crutchfield and Egerton L. Ballachey. *Individual in Society: A Textbook of Social Psychology*. New York/London: McGraw-Hill, 1962.



be found in some established religions and cultures, as in non-religious philosophies of life.

In the relationship with other people we seem to be rather prone to judge and sanction one another if we believe that someone else's actions are selfishly or wrongly motivated, or if they cause harm to our own interests or to those whom we hold dear. Not only do we tend to soon condemn other people's behaviour, but also their alleged intentions and underlying desires and thoughts. In personal contacts these 'ethics of intent' are oftentimes an important issue. In public administration and politics however, emphasis is placed not on intentions, as in friendship, but on the results of actions. If the outcome is favourable, then the motives are no real matter of interest. If the results are bad, then the outcome is not mitigated by good intentions, even though these (if we are aware of them) may soften our judgment.

The larger the group-context, the less important ethics of intent becomes, and the more the ultimate outcome matters. In government, politics and statesmanship then, the main emphasis lies on 'ethics of result'.

After all, good intentions *can* lead to poor results. The opposite can also be true; sometimes rather selfish intentions (lobbying issues of self-interest) render useful results for many. Apparently, at times, also less attractive motives (such as assertiveness) can have a desirable effect: people can do good out of ambition. My point is that political and administrative decisions and actions should be reviewed first and foremost on their reasonably foreseeable results, not only on good intentions.

This book underlines and argues for societal ethics of result in which personal and political freedom of action is reined in by a respect for others' rights. Such ethics differ very much from the view that "the end justifies the means", which leads to excessively high costs (victims, expenses and other collateral damage and drawbacks) and may even justify crimes for ultimately reaching a goal – which then is nullified or severely affected because of the use of wrong means. Ethics of result takes into account the total long term sum of costs, sacrifices and risks, and evaluates the ethical level of the eventual balance of burdens and benefits for the wellbeing of the population. There are several variants of this utilitarianism or consequentialism, which will here not be touched upon further.

## **LIBERTY AND AUTONOMY**

One of the above mentioned premises concerned liberty and freedom of choice. It could be argued that everyone is in favour of liberty. But what does the term liberty essentiality entail?

Liberty has five elements: (1) the possibility to conceive (and to reconsider) personal beliefs and life goals without coercion from others, and to choose realistic options in the pursuit of these goals, but also (2) to take responsibility for choices made and the consequences thereof, as well as (3) granting *others* freedom of choice, (4) not to inflict unnecessary and avoidable suffering upon others, and (5) the political freedom of active and passive suffrage. Thus, liberty is something quite different from the right to call, do and consume whatever one feels like without regard to the consequences for others.

Liberty can also be described in terms of absent and existing limitations. In liberty there is absence of coercion. I am free if others do not stand in my way, while at the same time I must take full responsibility for all of my actions. Having enough sustenance to live is an example of an existing, usable form of liberty. It is absence of shortage: freedom from want. If no pure, but only severely contaminated drinking water is available, I am not at liberty to provide my children with healthy drinking water. The same applies to health care, lack of funding for clothing, education and the like. The poorer and needier people are, the less usable forms of liberty they have to live and care for their loved ones. Correspondingly, freedom requires the absence of restrictions which seriously hamper the functioning in various spheres of human endeavour.

In a liberal system, people are free to organize themselves politically on grounds that they themselves choose, be they cultural, economic, ideological or religious. This mainly applies to freedom of speech, of religion, of the press, of assembly and association. The state should not have the authority to exercise control over inner inspiration and expressions of opinion, as long as these do not undermine the autonomy of others and the rule of law. Religions are not necessarily at odds with freedom, even though in some religious concepts, there are unfree aspects and dogmatic excesses. A plea for restricting a religion and to expel its followers, even if most of them conduct themselves in keeping with the free legal system, goes against basic human rights.

After WWII, Europe developed a very liberal system. The Strasbourg Court ensures the maintenance of human rights even above many countries' national legal systems. The European Union is a unique, historically unprecedented alliance: the participating countries cooperate closely on a voluntary basis to establish one community, while at the same time safeguarding their individuality. There is no association of states to be found which is of greater importance to human rights than the European Union and the Council of Europe. It is curious that European cooperation generates little enthusiasm nowadays, because it has proven to be one of international politics' greatest achievements since WWII.

## SUMMARY

### SEVEN PRINCIPLES

1. To not jeopardize the existence of the human species – *continuity*
2. To prevent and reduce serious threats – *prevention*
3. The right for all to elementary daily necessities (equal rights of basic physical existence) – *rights*
4. Opportunities for the fulfilment of basic needs for all – *opportunity*
5. Self-determination, liberty, freedom of choice to meet material and immaterial needs for all – *autonomy*
6. The limitation and fair distribution of material consumption (moderation and distribution) – *moderation*
7. To increase qualitative life expectancy – *longevity*

### FIVE CONSEQUENCES

1. More equitable distribution of consumption – *righteousness in the present*
2. Provide for future generations – *righteousness towards the future*
3. To focus regulations and policies on results – *consequentialism*
4. Responsible use of natural resources, fauna and flora – *stewardship*
5. Assist others to achieve their rights – *global solidarity*

## ECONOMIC LIBERALISM

Liberalism has excesses and distortions too. Liberty is not a simple question of demand, supply and market. Economic freedom which only focuses on supply and demand can have a devastating effect on the daily experience of freedom of many if there is no strong legal system maintained by laws and reliable institutions. A market needs a fair market regulator. The predatory capitalism which supplanted communism in the last decade of the Twentieth Century in some Eastern European states has ultimately brought little social progress. There is much abject poverty and great political injustice in large parts of Eastern Europe. Liberty requires strong state institutions that protect citizens against abuse of power.

Unfortunately, Adam Smith, the founder of economic liberalism, is poorly read. Smith, a philosopher who wrote on ethics, found that people who were left at liberty to act economically to their own discretion brought the greatest prosperity for society if they also featured civil virtues such as honesty, frugality and respect for others.

However, financial products that deceive investors on a massive scale, that cause the elimination of billions of assets in savings, that bring countries in positions of unsustainable debt and lead to shameless personal gain, find no justification in economic liberalism.

Unrestrained exploitation and pollution of nature eventually affects freedom. Overexploitation means the consumption of future generations' resources, just as the escalation of government deficits implies overexploitation: the liberty of future generations will be limited because the means they will need later are consumed at present. Nature is a collective good that everyone needs, now and in the future. What is currently being consumed or polluted and not restored, limits our children's and grandchildren's usable freedom.

The same is true in international economics. The world has one billion rich and wealthy individuals. On the other hand, nearly one billion people suffer from hunger every day, and another two billion can barely survive. This calls for an adjustment of economic policies, since the two billion extremely poor people at the bottom are denied the right to live free from hunger, preventable disease and oppression.

The creation of freedom is in essence a power issue. Poverty and hunger are the result of the lack of power of those who must endure it, their powerlessness to obtain sufficient food and clean drinking water and go to a doctor. The most powerful and shrewd people and businesses seize a large share of the world's resources for their own benefit and appropriate a portion of other people's incomes to themselves.

Determining that there is much to be done to help improve the freedom of suppressed people elsewhere should by no means escalate in humanitarian imperialism or military intervention, as recently in Iraq. Promoting freedom by offering people aid to unburden themselves from poverty, water shortages, avoidable morbidity and oppression also demands an attitude of empathy, comprehension and modesty towards other peoples and cultures. In addition, liberty requires tenacity in supporting citizens and social movements who seek justice.

## **FREEDOM OF EXPENDITURE**

It is a widely held belief that people should in principle be free to consume what they want and can afford. This view is often associated with a fundamental conviction that economic liberty is essential to political freedom.

Restriction of freedom of consumption affects the notion of unlimited freedom of agency, including freedom of expenditure, and would mark the beginning of political oppression. But is this really so? The freedom to choose is indeed essential for human development and progress of society. However, values should not be taken in absolute terms as if they were unconnected to other norms worthy of pursuit. To a certain degree, standards or values derive their significance and immediacy from their relationship with other values. Indeed, liberty requires the security of self and relatives and respect for the freedom of others. Yet, although I have the freedom to swing my arms this does not imply I may strike another person's face while doing so. No freedom can thus be absolute without heeding other core values such as safety, responsibility and justice. Hence, freedom of consumption cannot and should not be taken to the absolute. It is for example not only unjust but also irresponsible to use all drinking water and food for oneself when trying to survive in a lifeboat with others. Likewise, it is not justified to pass on outstanding payments to family, children and relatives. The same goes for companies, organizations, states and international organizations.

People are in principle entitled to curb another person's deleterious consumptive conduct, once it results in serious harm to themselves or the community. This applies intergenerationally: to the present moment, but also to the future. Parents should not use the resources their children will need for future survival. The same applies in a broader scope, to all generations and nations, and thus to the general liberty of consumption on a global scale. The waste of money, water, food, energy, land and nature sometimes damages other people in a direct manner, and usually indirectly.

The right to unlimited consumption (e.g. the use of two large cars per person) may thus be constrained by community policy. Entitlement to remote holidays by plane or aircraft cargo without paying tax on aircraft fuel can be restricted through taxes on kerosene. If the right to levy taxes on tobacco, alcohol and other damaging products – not only harmful to the user but also for society – is acknowledged, then V.A.T. on certain types of food, such as meat (damaging to the environment), is fundamentally not wrong. However, all this should be assessed on its practical effects and feasibility. It is important to structure limitations by taxation or other measures in such a way, that the desired effects and the revenue for the community will be optimal.

Restrictions should be clearly explainable, feasible, not cause too high a tax expense, and provoke as little circumvention, passing on or destructive behaviour as possible.

Certain types of consumption can be taxed additionally. Why no higher taxes for the registration of a second vehicle? On certain types of consumption additional taxes can be collected. Why no higher taxes for the registration of a second vehicle? Why not limit the abatements for mortgage interest rates beyond a large amount? Why not register and tax the engine power of large yachts, with which the maintenance of waterways could be financed and dirty money investments could also be detected? Why not more tax on energy and commodities? Why not a global tax on aircraft fuel? There are many more examples to be thought of.

Each of the here mentioned examples would undoubtedly raise questions and objections by the 'industry's' representatives, but many of these measures are, within practical limits, enforceable. Obviously, the art of it is to not affect people's freedom of choice to a greater extent than necessary. By tax measures a lot of liberty remains unscathed. People still decide over their own expenditures, though the government changed prices and costs for the benefit of the community and the state income from which a portion can in turn finance education, health care and law enforcement.

Rationing (per person) is more rigorous, but may be unavoidable in emergency situations. This method is accepted if national security is at issue. However, if over-consumption of energy, land, water and scarce metals and minerals will be left to run their course for much longer, national security will eventually be at stake. If restrictive taxes on consumption are rejected and scarcity worsens, emergency situations are closer at hand.

There are alternatives to fiscal measures and rationing: to auction or raffle off licenses. Raffles have the advantage of equal opportunities for all. In this manner, China has reduced the number of vehicle registration in Beijing and raffled them to reduce traffic jams. One could also auction permits. Singapore auctions registration documents for cars. Auctioning and lottery tickets have inherently different advantages and disadvantages: equality or inequality, income for the community, enforceability, susceptibility to abuse and illicit trade. Too much licensing does not work either, as the failure of the European emissions trading shows (please refer to Chapter 9). The choice between tax, auction, raffle or rationing must be balanced per subject. For example, the rampant growth of the vehicle fleet could be curbed by giving each adult with a driver's license the right to have a permit for one vehicle with a certain fuel economy. For the second vehicle or a much larger vehicle one should buy a

permit. Permits would be sold at auction by the state or an agency. Their quantity could be determined annually and take many factors, such as traffic jams, into account. The proceeds could be spent on a more modern transportation system, or be used for other purposes. In a likewise manner there are many other examples to be devised which could lower excessive consumption while still maintaining freedom of choice. Overfishing can also be addressed by auctioning permits. It might work far better than the currently used fishing quotas, limited sailing days and other economically questionable regulations.

Freedom of consumption and production should therefore not be a sacred cow. Restriction of the number or quantity of a product or service, the raffling or public auctioning thereof can provide a solution if free price formation stops working appropriately through taxation or scarcity.

Too simple prohibitions often evoke undesirable behaviour. Example: in Jakarta it became forbidden for one person in a car to use a fast lane. Thereupon, drivers hired students to travel back and forth as a passenger, which shows that the environmental impact of a thoughtless rule may cause more environmental damage.

There are often legal barriers that protect the liberty to unbridled consumerism: laws for market freedom and competition which make necessary environmental measures cumbersome. Changing a law can take many years. Opponents of restriction benefit from delay. Although the private sectors frequently criticize the government's slowness, they have a vested interest in it. Lobbies for economic interests bar many changes. Most persistent to adaptation are international treaties, which only can be changed if many states agree. It is difficult to terminate them unilaterally.

One example is the Convention on International Civil Aviation, commonly known as the Chicago Convention. It prohibits the necessary new taxation on kerosene. Any country that imposes this tax is in violation of the convention and affects its own aviation industry through forcing itself out of the market, while others do not. This can only be solved by taking similar steps in cooperation with large groups of states in the region. A group of members of the European Union could take the lead in advocating such policy in other countries.

## **ENCOURAGEMENT OF SENSIBLE / MEANINGFUL BEHAVIOUR**

How can the highly consuming 'elite' across the globe be moved to moderate its consumption without having to sacrifice political freedom? By altering the available choices thus, that they induce a more frequent option for

moderation, saving, space for others, plus meaningful assistance to the destitute. There could be positive and negative incentives. Some examples would be:

1. A waiver of banking secrecy. Much money earned by crime and corruption is deposited in secret bank accounts in Luxembourg, Switzerland, the Cayman Islands and several developing countries. Annually, tens of billions circulate through drug trafficking, illegal or undisclosed arms trade, prostitution, black market activities, illicit organ trade, the circumvention of international embargoes and the siphoning off of corruptly spent development aid. The mandatory disclosure of bank balances, at least to fiscal and judicial authorities, could put a firm brake on crime and encourage economic progress.

2. Less taxes on income and capital which is deployed for certified humanitarian and ecological goals. Several countries have already made such tax arrangements, e.g. donation deduction and exemption for environmental investments of capital tax. Donations of assets to charities before death, or by will, even set in the name of the donor, can be very effective. Such incentives could be extended.

3. Greater social recognition of volunteering activities, including administrative work for charitable organizations. In some countries, this is already taken into account with respect to the honours system, but this could be further extended. Sometimes people jest about ‘ribbons’, but it is a natural phenomenon that people feel motivated by the appreciation they expect. Socially, it makes sense to increase similar “psychological income” by introducing the recognition in a wider range of categories with lower thresholds, including for simple contributions, not only for highly placed persons.

4. Encouraging young people to choose socially desirable professions and undergo training for occupations, where the labour market does not in itself provide the influx, could be strengthened. For example, some Scandinavian countries absorbed the shortage of medical staff in the inhospitable north by donating student grants to people who wish to work there for several years. This principle could also be implemented for development cooperation, the support of refugees, education, parenting counselling and other tasks. Countries which suffer from a brain drain of educated people can use stimuli in their training policies, so the investment in the own youth is not lost.

Then, for example, African nurses could be obliged to earn back their student grants by first working several years in their home country, before being allowed to relocate to a rich country. Special incentives, opportunities and benefits are also suitable for those who want for instance to serve in peacekeeping operations, as the persons concerned run a far greater risk of



physical or psychological injury than if they stay at home. Each specific topic demands a customized approach.

There are more practical inferences to be made from the above mentioned premises which could lead to a more responsible experience and understanding of liberty.

### **FROM ‘OWN PEOPLE FIRST’ TO ‘ALSO OTHER CREATURES’**

‘Whose interests and values must be defended and in which manner?’ is the central question of political ethics. But what are, to begin with, our own personal interests and values? Who belongs to the own group? Who is close to us, who is our fellow man? How far should the care of a person, a government, a state, an international organization be extended? And should it be extended to not only other people, but also to animals, plants, all living beings, non-animate nature, the earth and ultimately the surrounding space?

Living creatures are motivated by the urge to survive (safety) and the drive to reproduce; it secures heredity and the perpetuation of their species. Every person wants survival for himself and his loved ones (children, partner, family and friends), which is what isolated, ‘primitive’ familial communities, clans or tribes are focused on. Because of this ‘natural drive’, strangers shall frequently be perceived as a menace. Evolutionarily, aversion to foreigners and non-believers seems related to a monkey colony’s aggressive assailment of invaders who belong to a tribe which lives in another territory.

Animal instincts are still present in modern society, even in highly educated people. Those who recognize them as such and establish that the ‘own-people-first’-impulse is powerful but not the most sensible response in the present internationalized society, can mitigate or discard this natural inclination. Our interests and values should be aimed at the smooth functioning of the current national and regional community, which is becoming more and more global. Consequently, except “I, my children, partner, family, friends and neighbours”, fellow members of the community, countrymen and immigrants are also to be considered. Because we are affected in our interests and values by the trouble and disasters which strike people who live far outside our country, since we deal with them through trade, traffic, media, tourism and so forth, we are factually associated with them. In addition, we are associated with them on an emotional level, because we empathize with those who barely survive elsewhere in harsh conditions or perish because of hunger, disease or political violence. With the increase of news coverage, commerce, tourism, science and technology, the group of people we consider and interact with, and to whom we (to a certain extent) sense a connection, expands more and more.

Thus, an, albeit still fragile, “world conscience” or global awareness arises, especially amongst people who are more empathically inclined, who are fairly safe and happy themselves and who grant others to be so as well. Global awareness is germinating, but we must be realistic and not give in to wishful thinking: this awareness is still vague. When faced with painful choices, people generally tend to prioritize themselves and their own group.

The necessity to focus on the future is related to both our own concerns and global awareness: not only our generation needs to be cared for, also future generations. We must not harm their future. Furthermore, the earth is not our property to exploit; rather it is entrusted to us.

Should our care also be extended to animals and plants? Old insights indicate thereon. Man was sent from the (imagined) paradise “to cultivate the earth and to keep it”, as the author of Genesis surmised<sup>10</sup>. It seems that of these requisites, mostly cultivating was observed. Since the 20th century, the exploitation of natural resources has reached a scale which in the long term is altogether unsustainable. In addition, some aspects have become intuitively repugnant, such as the maltreatment of animals and their abuse in factory farming as if they were protein-producing devices without any sensations or pain which produce eggs, dairy, meat and farmed fish from forage. Pigs are intelligent creatures – their DNA closely resembles that of humans. When they are kept in the domestic sphere, it becomes apparent how smart they really are and how strongly they experience feelings. By what right do humans, upright walking animals with a large brain, degrade pigs to farmed meat and make millions of them suffer? It is not from any law of nature, but from (technological) power that they derive this ‘right’. Therefore, it is not a right or an entitlement in the ethical sense, even though state law stipulates that only humans are right-holders.

If exhaustive animal husbandry were necessary for human survival, there would at least be an argument of sorts in favour of this practice. But this is not the case. Virtually all required protein can be obtained from plant-based sources. The natural diet of early humans consisted of plants, roots, nuts, leaves, and a measure of game and fish in order to supplement essential amino acids and vitamin B12. That is the food on which humans have evolved, and it is still a healthy diet. Moreover, intensive livestock farming has presently become an actual threat to man, to his own habitat as to the natural environment, because in the long run it will not be sustainable (for further information, refer to Chapter 7). Furthermore, diseases of civilization, lifestyle related maladies like heart disease and obesity, are closely associated with a high intake of animal fat and meat. Mega factory farms are a serious cause of air and water pollution. In addition, for the production of fodder, large natural areas have been sacrificed and indigenous communities ousted. Chapter 7, about nature, leads to the

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 2:15.

conclusion that not only humans and their fellow men and women, but also the domain of plants and animals are a matter of concern.

Indeed, since vegetation is an essential source of subsistence for the existence of animals (and humans), plant life is also subject to our care and guardianship. In turn, soil, water and sunlight enable the existence of plants. Hence, everything ultimately revolves around the cycle of energy. The key to responsible use thereof, as opposed to the current unsustainable exploitation and exhaustion of all energy resources, is a substantial reduction of energy consumption (see Chapter 9). In global ethics, this should be of paramount importance. How much individuals themselves can contribute in this area, whilst at the same time improving the quality of everyday life, is suggested in Chapter 13.

### AMARTYA SEN (INDIA)



Photo: Wikimedia Commons<sup>11</sup>

Amartya Sen (1933, India) won the Nobel Prize in economics for his scholarly work in economics and philosophy aimed at poverty reduction and freedom.

As a young child he witnessed the violence in India at close quarters. One afternoon, a man came to his home in Dhaka, screaming and bleeding severely. He was stabbed in the back. The man, a Muslim labourer, had come for employment to a house in this Hindu neighbourhood, but was stabbed. When taken to hospital by Amartya Sen's father, the man said his wife had urged him to stay clear from this area because of the violence between various communities. But, seeking work because his family had nothing to eat, he felt he had no options. The man died from his injuries: the consequence of this economic lack of freedom proved to be death. This awakened in young Sen an acute awareness of the dangers of narrowly defined identities and divisive politics. He recognised that economic bondage, in the form of extreme poverty, makes people much more vulnerable to other types of deprivation of liberty – the man would not have been forced to search for income in a neighbourhood dangerous to him, had he and his family not been so poor<sup>12</sup>.

Amartya Sen's works have been distributed in over 30 linguistic areas. In 1981, Sen demonstrated in *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* that famines are not necessarily a result of food shortages, rather that they are primarily caused by poverty and inequality. As a child, he had experienced the famine in Bengal (Bangladesh). The war in the region, soaring food prices because of hoarding, price manipulation, high

<sup>11</sup> Elke Wetzig, 2007. *Wikimedia Commons*.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amartya\\_Sen\\_20071128\\_cologne.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amartya_Sen_20071128_cologne.jpg).

<sup>12</sup> Tore Frängmyr (Ed.) *The Nobel Prizes 1998*. Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1999.

"Amartya Sen – Autobiography". Nobelprize.org. Web access:

[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/sen-autobio.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/sen-autobio.html).

unemployment rates and poverty led to the starvation of 3.000.000 people while supplies were in fact adequate.

In *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen argues that development is equivalent to the elimination of lack of freedom. He redefines positive liberty as having the opportunities to make personal choices which are necessary for self-development and survival, and negative liberty as the absence of restrictions by others on personal agency for survival. People who are denied the capacities (resources) to utilize their basic rights, will, for example, hardly benefit from the political right to vote for a political party when they cannot read any information on it. Partly because of his efforts, the annual Human Development Report of the UN Development Programme was established, in which the average income no longer determines countries' ranking, but an index of longevity, education and spending power.

Sen lays bare that human rights can be classified in terms of five basic liberties: political and participatory freedom and rights such as free speech and free elections, economic opportunities to generate income and participation in fair trade markets, social rights to sound education and health services, transparency of information on government and the economy, and the right to safety through maintenance of law and social security.

In his most recent book *The Idea of Justice* (2009) Sen contends that a righteous society is accomplished by eliminating injustices such as poverty, hunger, and political suppression. Justice does not merely pertain to the right institutions, but also to the conditions of people in practice. Notwithstanding his advanced age, Sen is still traveling the world, lecturing and inspiring many. In the Netherlands, the Sen Foundation for academic research on international cooperation was established in 2009. Refer to [www.sen-foundation.org](http://www.sen-foundation.org).