Globalization and Human Values: Promises and Challenges
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Abstract
In this paper I argue for an account of the evolution of human values according to which it is only through the resolution of local conflicts that broader social values develop. Global issues can only be understood as issues of increasingly broadening our understanding of the local, our understanding of who are the neighbors with whom we must productively and amicably engage. My analysis argues primarily for open dialogue based on listening carefully and maintaining a strong awareness of our own areas of systematic blindness to those with whom we disagree. While my approach offers no recipe here to guarantee successful resolution to value conflict, any other approach is far more likely to lead to failure.

Values guide life. The values of individuals guide the lives of those individuals. The values of communities guide the lives of those communities. The values of individuals function to guide individual lives in a simple enough manner. I value the taste of oranges more than I value the taste of apples. So I will eat more oranges, assuming that oranges are roughly as easy to acquire as are apples. I value time with my family. So I will choose a job that may pay less, but allows me more time to spend with my family. I value honesty. So I will generally tell the truth.

The values of communities function in a far more complicated manner. While the process of value development in communities has always been a complicated affair, it is even more complicated now at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This is due in large measure to a variety of aspects of globalization, to the increased levels of commerce, communication, and movement of populations that we experience because of the tremendous advances that we have made in communication and transportation technology. The conflicts in values between classes or occupational groups within a single society have been with us from the beginning of human history. Now we have also those conflicts in values that arise from the mutual encounters of cultural traditions that have embodied conflicting traditional values. There is, however, a common mechanism of value emergence that can account for the mediation and development of values within a traditional community of individuals sharing a relatively common body of cultural-historical experience and the mediation and development of values in a modern multi-cultural community, a community of individuals of widely divergent cultural-historical experiences. This same mechanism, in the context of globalization, provides for new possibilities for the emergence of increased agreement on values at a global scale. Moreover, the emergence of values through this mechanism generally will constitute positive progress in the realm of value.

Our optimism regarding this conclusion must, however, be tempered by two important sources of caution. My initial optimistic conclusion about the emergence of common values at a global scale depends upon an analysis of the development of human values that involves two general claims about human beings that generally serve to guide the development of values. While I think it is clear that these claims are generally true of human beings and of human communities, there seem to be important exceptions that should temper our optimism and should help to frame more clearly the question of how to achieve a broader level of global harmony.

A century ago William James offered an account of the development of moral values that can be generalized to other kinds of value as well.1 In at least two important ways, James’s account accords well with two basic facts about human beings that seem to be well supported by our emerging knowledge of our biological evolution. The two facts are that human beings are generally social creatures and that we are more particularly linguistic creatures. We have evolved

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with a substantial concern generally to get on well with the humans around us, and we have also
evolved with the abilities required to develop language.

The earliest archaeological data we have concerning human beings and our other close
evolutionary ancestors show us to be highly social creatures. More general considerations about
the kind of biological creatures that we are would also seem to support the view that we quickly
evolved as herd animals. We lack virtually all other forms of survival assets. We do not reproduce
in prodigious numbers like fish or flies. Therefore the human species cannot survive with only a
small percentage of offspring reaching reproductive age. We are not big enough to discourage
prospective predators by our sheer size as the elephants and whales do; nor are we swift enough
to escape prospective predators. We lack the sharp teeth or sharp talons that would enable us to
kill our prey and defeat prospective predators in single combat. Moreover, we survive on a mixed
diet of vegetation and meat. It seems that only by working in together in groups can human
beings prove capable of survival. These considerations should lead us to expect that human
beings should have evolved as social creatures, much as numerous other species of animals, from
wolves and coyotes to ants and bees, have evolved patterns of group interaction that have
enabled them to survive in ways that would not have been possible for those same animals to
survive functioning as solitary individuals.

If these evolutionary claims are right, then it also follows that we should expect that human beings
who are motivated solely by individual self-concern would be a distinct minority within the human
population. They would in effect be evolutionarily abnormal individuals, engaging in cooperative
enterprises with the rest of us only through systematically deceiving us into believing that they are
socially cooperative like most other people. Moreover, we should expect that those humans who
are narrowly egoistically motivated will tend more often than not to be found out, since systematic
and large scale deception is difficult to maintain, and, while they may succeed in advancing their
own interests at the expense of the community for a while, sooner or later most of them are likely
to be discovered and to suffer the disapprobation of the communities within which they live.

The other important fact is that human beings have evolved marvellous and subtle communicative
abilities. Our ability to speak enables us to exchange messages of great complexity. Language
provides one of the ways in which we can let others know of our desires. It also provides one of
the ways in which we can express approval and disapproval of those other humans with whom we
engage. Perhaps most interestingly, it provides a way in which we can express conditional
approval and disapproval. We can tell others that certain behaviors on their part will meet with
our approval and, perhaps, reward. We can also tell them that certain other behaviors will meet
with disapproval and, perhaps, retaliation. We can, in short, negotiate.

My position rests on two fairly modest claims about human evolution. We human beings are herd
animals; we live in groups and depend on group activity for our evolutionary success. We are also
heard animals; we speak to one another and, with reasonable frequency, listen to one another and
react to one another. Also note that the only particular value I have claimed for humans is the
 evolutionarily based value of getting on fairly well with those around us. Beyond that the things
that human beings value may vary wildly. This is a much simpler and more defensible
psychological view than that presumed by much of traditional value theory.

I will adopt from James the premise that values have their root in the human experience of
valuing. We may start by imagining an individual living alone on an island, a single solitary
individual living in the absence of any other sentient being. We may call this situation “value
solitude.” The individual will value any number of things. In this state of value solitude, there can
be no criticism of values. No values are better or worse. There is no issue of truth or falsity of
values. Rather, the values of the one solitary individual are what they are. They are the sole
values in our imaginary universe.

The next stage in the story is to imagine one or more other individuals. Yet at this second stage of
the story we imagine that these individuals inhabit the same world, but are totally indifferent to
one another’s value preferences. This new situation we may call “value duality” if there are two
individuals or “value plurality” if there are more than two. Because of the indifference of each individual to any other individual, it is not yet a condition of value community. In this situation there can still be no criticism of values. There is still no issue of truth or falsity of values. With the larger number of valuers, there is a larger universe of value. But there is still no independent or objective standard from which values might be judged. Moreover, since the individuals are completely indifferent to one another's valuations, there is no competition among values, and hence no occasion for any judgment among competing values.

Needless to say, the suppositions of value solitude or value duality or plurality are nowhere close to being realistic. Individuals are born into communities. They have families, friends, and neighbors whose values affect their values in any number of ways. Individuals live in communities, and individuals can never be indifferent to the values of the other individuals with whom they live because of the action-guiding character of values. Moreover, the communities in which individuals live develop common values which guide the collective action of the communities and affect the values of the individuals in those communities in countless additional ways. The entire point of the suppositions of value solitude and value duality and plurality was to make precisely the point that it is in our common life in communities that values gain their objectivity. It is in this context that values come into conflict with one another. It is also in this context that values can be cogently criticized. Perhaps most importantly, it is in this context that we can meaningfully speak of progress in the development of values.

When we have a number of people living in reasonable proximity and interacting with each other in multiple ways, we have what James calls a “moral universe,” or what we might call more broadly a “valuing community.” Clearly the people in any community will differ in their values in many ways. Yet the crucial facts are that they have to live together, and that in general they share a desire to live together with reasonable comity. What we should expect to happen is that the people living in such a community will engage in negotiation to bring about the best overall balance in honoring the values of those within the community. People will express their desires and aversions to one another. They will give one another indications of the urgency of their various desires and aversions. They will engage in various structures to mediate the conflicts that arise due to their desires and aversions. Some of the structures will be simple informal structures of individual dialogue and compromise. Of course there will also be a need to evolve more formal structures of resolution designed to resolve conflicts more serious and more deep-seated conflicts. The more formal structures will typically favor sets of demands generally agreed by the community to be more urgent than the other.

Needless to say, at any given point in the history of the community, it is almost inevitable that some people in the community will find their values and desires systematically neglected by the structures that control community decision making. However it should also be expected that those whose values and desires are systematically neglected are likely to cry out against control systems that they see are wronging them. Clearly we have seen precisely this kind of outcry from the voices of women and numerous ethnic and other minority groups. With enough outcry, there is some prospect that those whose values and desires are neglected may capture the attention of the rest of the community. The society’s systems of resolution may come to accede to the urgency of the group’s outcry. One historical example of this might be the manner in which the television pictures of the police brutality against the civil rights marchers at the bridge in Selma, Alabama, constituted an important moment in the emergence of civil rights in the United States, as it vividly captured the attention of large numbers of Americans to whom racial oppression had been something of a distant and unseen issue.

Of course, there will also be times when outcry will be ignored. In such cases, it may be that the values that motivated the outcry were in fact less urgent than those who raised the outcry had

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\(^2\)James, p. 147.
initially taken them to be. It may also be that the values that motivated the outcry were vitally urgent. Sometimes the conflict will escalate beyond what can be resolved by civil or civic structures of conflict resolution, and violence and even revolution or civil war may produce the ultimate resolution of the conflict. The United States and many other countries have experienced such revolutions and civil wars as parts of their histories.

The resolution of human value conflict can never be final. To the extent that the process of bargaining toward some equilibrium of value satisfaction is teleological, it is a process that moves toward greater inclusiveness, but never toward finality. At any point in any society, the equilibrium of value satisfaction that has emerged to that point should never be expected to be anything more than a starting point for the next stage of equilibrium creation. We may have considerable hope for resolving particular concrete value conflicts, but we have no hope of achieving an eternal and perfect resolution. The dynamic processes of environmental change, human production, and human institutional change will continue to generate new valuings and new groups who determine that their values and desires are neglected in important ways by the dominant community systems of conflict resolution.

It is particularly important to note that, on this account, social values do not flow from some grand abstract ethical theory. They also do not emerge from some mathematical process of maximization. To this extent, the account rejects both the transcendental derivation of values advocated by followers of Immanuel Kant and the utilitarianism of followers of John Stuart Mill. Rather social values emerge in what James called “the ethical republic.”3 Perhaps, in the account of value conflict resolution through civil and civic mechanisms, it is not too far from what Iris Marion Young and others have spoken of as “deliberative democracy.”4 Kant spoke of the “kingdom of ends,” in which we might speak of genuinely universal moral laws. What I am advocating here, by contrast, is much more local. It becomes increasingly less local as human beings are required to interact with increasingly broad and diverse groups of other human beings. This point underscores the importance of processes of globalization. The underlying principle of my account is far closer to the fairly pedestrian “golden rule,” “do to others as you would have them do to you,” than to the grand categorical imperative, “do to everyone as you would have everyone do to everyone else.” If the person whose desires and values are neglected can catch the attention of the people neglecting those desires and values, the old question, “How would you like it if someone treated you this way?” may well bear some persuasive weight.

In looking at the development of values in community it may be useful to think about three levels of community: simple traditional communities, complex traditional communities, and contemporary pluralistic communities. At the first level, we might imagine a very simple traditional community. Imagine a village on the sea coast where almost everyone makes a living by fishing. Similarly, we might imagine a small farming village where almost everyone makes a living on the land. In such communities there will be obvious differences in individual values. Yet at the same time the commonality of the way of life of the people will lead to a large overlap of values as well. We would expect that people in a fishing village would in general value practices that would facilitate the people of the community having a steady supply of fish. We would expect that the people of a farming community would value good, fertile land. The fact that one person in a fishing village may value the taste of salmon and disvalue the taste of mackerel, while another values the taste of mackerel and disvalues the taste of salmon causes no problem unless they should have to share a meal. Then we would expect that they will amicably arrive at some arrangement that would allow them to share a meal that each will find at least satisfactory. The collective values of such simple traditional communities are likely to arise simply through the broad area of shared values arising from the community members’ common form of life and the need to develop procedures to resolve individual disputes in socially beneficial ways.

3 James, p. 150.
Such simple traditional communities are for most of us creatures of our distant past. For over two thousand years we have witnessed the rises and falls of great empires. The complex traditional communities that have arisen in every corner of the globe have given rise to different social and economic classes with different levels of social and economic power. Agricultural populations often experienced conflicts of value with trading populations. Feudal societies were characterized by conflicts of value between the owners of large feudal estates and serfs who lived and toiled on those estates. The rise of industrial society led to conflicts of value between the capitalists and the industrial workers. The early history of the western United States saw countless conflicts of value between cattle ranchers and sheep farmers. These conflicts of value have proven much more difficult than the conflicts of value among individuals in far simpler and more homogeneous traditional societies. Commonly these conflicts of values have led to situations wherein one of the social or economic classes acquired for a time the power to systematically suppress the values of the other social or economic classes.

One important analysis of this kind of conflict was given a century and a half ago by Karl Marx. Written nearly a half century after the writings of Marx, William James’s analysis also set out a philosophical understanding that sheds light on the kinds of value conflicts mentioned above. In a seldom read, but insightful essay, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” James notes the frequent “falsity of our judgments, so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons’ conditions or ideals.” James claims that, since our own values and our communities’ values develop out of the demands placed on us and on our communities by our experience, we should expect that we will frequently fail to understand the importance of values that have arisen out of experiences very different from our own.

The social problem that arises in this more complex case comes from the fact that, while we may recognize the individual peculiarity of our more individual values, we are much less likely to recognize the particularity of values that are broadly shared in our primary social community. At the same time, as noted above, in the more complex traditional community one group may well acquire the power to suppress the values of another group whose values it has wrongly dismissed. How does the oppressed group assert the legitimacy of its own values in a way that can lead to their appropriate recognition in the common political community? How can the oppressed group focus the attention of those who hold power in the community in a way that will lead to recognition of the real “value of [their own] conditions or ideals?”

Human beings experience that and only that which either commands their attention or to which they pay attention. Our attention is directed by two mechanisms. On one of those mechanisms, we choose to attend to certain things. If I drop a button on the floor of my bedroom, I look carefully at the appropriate portion of my bedroom floor, attending to anything that looks much like a button. On the other mechanism, some things intrude upon our attention and force us to attend to them. If I hear someone behind me say my name, I turn around and attend to what the person wants to communicate to me. It is not at all uncommon for something to happen within our field of vision or within our range of hearing, and for us to be quite unaware because we fail to attend to it or because it is unsuccessful in capturing our attention. Sometimes, in fact, people can be quite resistant to the attempts of others to gain their attention. Consider a case where a person is involved in a telephone call and another person tries to direct the person’s attention to something else. The person on the telephone may often simply refuse to pay attention to the person trying to gain that attention.

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We see these mechanisms for directing attention at work when we consider conflicts of values in complex traditional communities. Sometimes people may quite innocently fail to be aware of values that have arisen in the experience of others, much as I may not be aware that my dinner guest dislikes the salmon that I have prepared for dinner. In this kind of situation, when the other person or group brings those values to the attention of those who had not previously attended to them, they are likely to change their understanding and acknowledge the legitimacy, and perhaps the urgency of those values. Sometimes, however, people may resolutely refuse to pay attention to the values of others. In this kind of case, there is no easy and amicable resolution of the value conflict. History has shown a broad range of kinds of action that oppressed groups have taken to gain the attention of the larger community to their urgent but unattended values. These actions have ranged from petition to peaceful demonstration, to violent demonstration, and ultimately to revolution. History has given numerous examples of each of these courses of action.

As James noted, the vast majority of us value amicable relationships with those around us. Such relationships constitute a very high value for most people. This accounts for the fact that people will serve their guests dinners that reasonably accord with the gustatory values of those who will be dining. It also accounts for the fact that the vast majority of people regard seriously the values of their friends and neighbors. Correspondingly, the vast majority of us disvalue social discord. We tend to try to reach some sort of reasonable accommodation with people whose significant values conflict with our own, a kind of value equilibrium or synthesis. The problem comes in recognizing as significant those values of others that differ from the values dominant in our own social groups. The various forms of social protestation mentioned above function to bring the attention to the values of the oppressed in the understandings of those who have the power to enforce social values by producing a social discord of disequilibrium that brings disvalue to those in power. The only way in which social equilibrium can be restored is either by suppressing the dissenting voices or by finding some means of reaching a new level of social equilibrium. The reaching of a new level of social equilibrium is likely to involve some combination of recognizing the urgency of the values of those in protest, and a modification of values or moderation of the strength with which certain values are held by some or all of the members of the whole community.

There have, of course, been cases in human history where social equilibrium has been restored by completely suppressing the voices of the oppressed. The human cost of such suppression is horrible. It is not even a possibility except in those cases in which the dominant classes of the traditional society place little or no value on the presence of the oppressed groups. In United States history, for example, the voices of protest of the Native American Indians were far more effectively suppressed than were the voices of the African slaves. The reason for this was that the dominant classes of the early nineteenth century United States placed a high value on the labor of the African slaves, and so could not bring about their total suppression without thwarting their own values. Such was not the case, however, with the Native American Indians, who in many cases were seen as nothing more than an impediment standing in the way of attempts by members of the dominant classes to seize valuable land.

Short of the suppression of the voices of the oppressed, their voices will be raised to whatever level is necessary to secure attention to their urgent values and ease their distress. Where either peaceful or violent social demonstration are successful, they produce a new equilibrium that adequately satisfies the crucial values of both the initially oppressed groups as well as those who had been their oppressors. This clearly constitutes an advance to a more comprehensive social equilibrium or synthesis. In those cases where such a new equilibrium cannot be reached through a process of negotiation and compromise, revolution sometimes becomes the only remaining alternative. Revolution, however, is only successful in generating a higher equilibrium when the social and economic power created by the revolution constitutes a sufficiently comprehensive synthesis as to be able to pay due heed to the crucial values of the entire society.
What I have said thus far has been focused on what I have characterized as complex traditional communities. By this I have meant communities composed of people who have shared a broad level of social tradition and history, but in which social and particularly economic divisions have created significant value differences. In the twenty-first century, however, we face a new kind of value conflict. New technologies in communications and transportation have made it impossible for any of us to remain isolated in our traditional communities. We all experience the impact of these new technologies in a number of ways. One way in which we are drawn beyond our traditional communities is in the area of trade. The people of the United States now encounter products made in Russia, China, Brazil, and a host of other places on a daily basis. People in most cities in the world encounter McDonalds, it seems, almost everywhere they look. The term, “McDonaldization” has become a word that epitomizes one important aspect of globalization, the exportation and dissemination of American commercial culture to the far corners of the globe. While there are certainly value differences among traditional United States society, traditional Russian society, traditional Chinese society, and the other great traditional societies of the world, we all recognize that the sphere of shared life between our numerous countries is expanding. While I cannot speak with great authority about all of the impact of this new communication and transportation on other communities, the impact on the United States community is striking. The United States is experiencing dramatic changes as people of widely different traditional cultures attempt to affirm their own values within the larger social setting of the United States. To cite one very simple example, salsa, a traditional Hispanic food item, is now sold in the United States in greater quantity than ketchup, a comparable traditional Anglo food item. United States political leaders increasingly find it to their advantage to be able to speak Spanish as well as English in order to be able to speak directly to certain groups of United States citizens.

The new situation is perhaps even more dramatic in Europe, with the development of the European Union. Value differences among the various traditional cultures of Europe continue, but barriers to trade, to population movement, and to expanded life in general are being pushed back. The common currency of Europe, the Euro, is seen by many as a great aid to increased European interaction. At the same time, many see adoption of the new currency as giving up a piece of their cultural and political sovereignty, a symbol of their traditional frames of value. Clearly, however, the advent of the Euro has been extremely valuable in terms of facilitating increased commerce. What is particularly remarkable, both from an economic and from a cultural standpoint, is the current interest of Turkey in European Union membership. The traditional culture and values of Turkey are rooted in profoundly different traditions from the traditional culture and values of Western Europe.

The new value conflicts that engage people and societies in the twenty-first century are not so much conflicts among the values of social and economic classes within traditional communities as they are conflicts among the values of different traditional cultures as they find themselves increasingly interacting in larger communities in a world made small by advances in communication and transportation. These new value conflicts also resolve through the same basic dynamical structure as earlier value conflicts. There is reason, however, to be hopeful that the new value conflicts can more easily give rise to yet new value equilibria through means less violent than the revolutions that were so often the final venue of resolution for the older value conflicts within traditional complex societies.

Certainly there have been instances of conflict that would lead us to be discouraged. The variety of brutal wars that beset southeastern Europe only a decade ago, and the present depth of conflict in the Middle East testify amply to the resistance people can have to attending to the urgent values of those with whom they must live. Yet the technology of communication and transportation that has led to the present form of value conflict may well also provide the chief means to its resolution. The simple fact is that we need each other. We cannot attempt to recreate traditional societies by isolating ourselves from one another. The events of Middle East and the recent history of the Balkan countries make that clear. Moreover, the tools of communication available at the present time in particular provide a vehicle through which the
urgent needs of different populations can be presented in a way that makes them hard to ignore. As an example, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, I received regular email messages from a friend of mine in Belgrade. His reports of the devastation going on around him made it impossible for me to ignore the urgency of his people's condition. The speed with which people can move from place to place and the speed with which we can transmit messages around the world provide a set of glasses that help us to overcome the "certain blindness in human beings" of which William James spoke so insightfully a century ago.

Yet while I have claimed that there is hope that, as we face the new kind of value conflict that we face in the encounter of divergent traditional cultures, we may be able to reach newer and more comprehensive value equilibria by processes less violent than those that were so prevalent in the twentieth century, it does not follow that we have reason to expect that value conflict will ever be resolved in any final value equilibrium or synthesis. We should expect, given the framework I have set out in this paper, that successive value equilibria will tend to be more comprehensive and encompassing than earlier value equilibria. But in order to reach any final equilibrium it would have to be the case that we might reach a point at which there was no possibility of encountering a new group of people with different experiences and previously unrecognized values. It is at best an open question whether such a point can be reached.

I suspect in the end that the pursuit of value is very much like the pursuit of knowledge. A century ago, William James's friend and fellow philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce spoke of "truth" as "that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit toward which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief." James, by contrast, saw no ideal limit toward which scientific knowledge or any other kind of knowledge converges. There are, of course, mistakes to be corrected, but the endless process of mistake correction does not, on James's view, constitute a convergence on some sort of mistake-free scientific knowledge. James would see valuation in the same way. He claims that, "[p]ent up under every system of moral rules are innumerable persons who it weighs upon, and the good which it represses; and these are always rumbling and grumbling in the background, and ready for any issue by which they may get free." Clearly the ongoing process of achieving new and increasingly more comprehensive value equilibria can go on correcting innumerable instances of value oppression. It may not be the case, and I firmly expect that it is not the case that the endless correction of value oppressions should constitute a convergence on some sort of oppression-free community in which all people's values are justly honored in a way they might recognize.

I noted at the outset of this paper, however, that there are important sources of caution that should temper the fairly optimistic conclusions I have tentatively reached regarding the impact of globalization on progress in the area of human values. One source of caution concerns my claim about the social nature of human beings, and the other concerns my claim about the linguistic nature of human beings.

One of the basic claims on which my analysis of valuation rests is that we humans have a general desire to get along reasonably well with those around us. While I am convinced that humans do in general have such a desire, it is equally clear that we see instances in the world where people do not seem to desire to get along with those around them. To note just two dramatic instances that I mentioned earlier, we see in the contemporary conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians and we have seen within the past decades in the brutal wars in the Balkan area situations in which people seem more interested in exterminating significant groups of people around them than in

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7 James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," p. 156.
getting along with them. Clearly if getting on fairly amicably with those around us in a general human desire it is not a universal human desire.

An issue that I think is central to the problem of groups of people lacking the desire to get along well with other groups of people around them is political demagoguery. The issue of political demagoguery relates to the important role of attention in valuation. In most of the areas of the world where we see people viewing one another more as enemies than as neighbors we seem also to see politicians who draw attention to groups of people in ways that demonize them and effectively make their interests and demands seem either trivial or perverse. A large part of this phenomenon appears to me to be a very old political tactic. If political leaders can focus the attention of their citizens on either internal or external enemies, then the attention of citizens can frequently be diverted from problems that may reduce support for those leaders. I suspect that many of the political leaders of both Israel and the Palestinians have sought to maintain the support of their people largely through portraying themselves almost exclusively as heroes in the fight against the enemy. If the Israelis ceased to hate the Palestinians and the Palestinians ceased to hate the Israelis, would those leaders any longer have anything on which to base the support of their people? Whatever we may say about the particular instances I have cited here, the general problem of such political demagoguery is a very old one. Unfortunately, the mechanisms of mass communication that we have developed so successfully at the present time are also mechanisms that demagogic politicians can use with remarkable effectiveness.

The second source of caution relates to the role of language in the development of values. At the 2003 World Congress of Philosophy in Istanbul, Turkey, Tista Bagchi, of the University of Delhi, presented a paper entitled, “Morally Right Action under Silence and Disempowerment.” Bagchi argues that “there are dynamics of power and authority that to a large extent intervene in the matter of who are allowed to have what share of the pie of public discourse.” One of the challenges presented by globalization would seem to be an emergent kind of linguistic hegemony. This new linguistic hegemony seems to assume two forms. One of the forms is the increasing dominance of English as the linguistic medium of international discourse. One of the basic and significant results of this hegemony would seem to be an emergent kind of linguistic hegemony. This new linguistic hegemony seems to assume two forms. One of the forms is the increasing dominance of English as the linguistic medium of international discourse. One of the basic and significant results of this hegemony is that those who have greater facility in the use of the English language have greater power in the public discourse of globalization. Such a disparity of linguistic power is anything but value neutral.

The second form of linguistic hegemony arises from the importance of commerce in the process of globalization. The global nature of commerce is apparent certainly in any major city in the world, and in general radiates out from those major cities into the more remote areas as well. Commerce presupposes its own set of linguistic categories. That language also embodies a certain range of values, largely material values. Some years ago I was listening to a news report on American soldiers in Afghanistan. One of the soldiers said that the Afghan people to whom he spoke said with near universality that what Afghanistan needed was factories. He went on to say that those same people did not have the cultural values required for an industrial society. He said that they would not be able to show up for work every morning at 9:00. His final comment was perhaps most telling. He said that the Afghans just didn’t care enough about money.

This situation leads to a global situation that, on my account, makes perfectly good sense, but would have been profoundly surprising to people my age twenty years ago. The best prospects for an emergence of a comfortable development of value equilibria in the era of globalization are among the people of the present and former communist nations and the people of the United States and Western Europe. This is because both Marxist and industrial capitalist ideologies placed a high regard on material values. By contrast, the weakest prospects for an emergence of a

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8Tista Bagchi, “Morally Right Action Under Silence and Disempowerment,” presently unpublished manuscript presented to the XXI World Congress of Philosophy, Istanbul, Turkey, p. 2.
workable set of value equilibria are between the present and emerging industrial nations, both western and eastern, and those societies whose dominant sets of traditional values are dominated by religious values of a sort that are incompatible with giving a high place to material values. I should hasten to emphasize that I am not setting up a general antithesis between material values and religious values. It has long been recognized by sociologists in the tradition of Max Weber that the dominant religious values of Protestant Christianity provided a strong basis for the embrace of material values. Yet, it is clear at the present time that the more fundamentalist strains of Islam do not provide a similar base for the embrace of material values.

Given this analysis, it is anything but surprising to find that those cultural traditions that do not provide a significant place for the embrace of material values will find themselves hostile to the entire process of globalization. They will see a significant and central part of the very language of globalization as a denial of some of their own most imperative values. The problem is not an easy one, nor does the analysis I have provided offer an Archimedean neutral standpoint for its resolution. The best I have to offer is a caution to the major industrial powers of the world. We need to heed James’s words about “a certain blindness in human beings,” and work to broaden productive and engaging dialogue with those who embrace anti-material values. The project cannot be an easy one, but it is absolutely imperative for the peace and well-being of the world. If the account of the evolution of human values I have outlined above is broadly correct, it follows that it is only through the resolution of local conflicts that broader social values develop. Global issues can only be understood as issues of increasingly broadening our understanding of the local, our understanding of who are the neighbors with whom we must productively and amicably engage. The account is a kind of naturalized epistemology of value, similar to the naturalized epistemology that we see advocated by many philosophers of science, inductive in a way, yet at the same time normative. When we are looking at any of the hard and contentious issues confronting the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, whether issues of global security or dealing with environmental risks, the correctness of our value perspectives can in the end be judged only by the outcomes of the choices we make on the basis of those perspectives. It would be nice, of course, to be able to address the concrete problems we face on the basis of some kind of abstractly correct value theory whose correctness we could settle by scholarly debate. Unfortunately, the only purchase we have on the correctness of the theories is their performance in application to the concrete problems. I have given an analysis here that argues primarily for open dialogue based on listening carefully and maintaining a strong awareness of our own areas of systematic blindness to those with whom we disagree. There is no recipe here to guarantee successful resolution to value conflict. I would contend, however, that any other approach is far more likely to lead to failure.

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