Is a Global Ethics Possible?

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Abstract: *Globalization has led to greater interdependence among states. Resultantly new challenges have emerged that affect other parts of the world in the same way as they do where they originally happen to originate. Thus there are issues global in nature that require global solutions with ethics to be dealt with properly and effectively. Global Ethics is a field of theoretical enquiry that addresses ethical questions and problems arising out of the global interconnection and interdependence of the world's population. One of the questions in global ethics debate is what ethical issues or claims count to be global and what must be excluded. Despite many tall claims and rising hopes, there are serious challenges to the establishment and application of agreeable and enforceable ethics globally. A good deal of what may be termed as global ethics to regulate international relations and transnational affairs and matters addressing issues of global importance exists in different sources. With national barriers receding and the world getting closer besides men making strides in the technological world, global citizens are faced with new challenges as well as opportunities asking for new consensus on global ethics.*

Introduction

Globalization has led to greater interdependence among states. Resultantly new challenges have emerged that affect other parts of the world in the same way as they do where they originally happen to originate. Thus there are issues global in nature that require global solutions with ethics to be dealt with properly and effectively. Given the sufferings of human beings, global ethics in global and transnational affairs has won renewed universal attention and importance. In the first instance there are moral problems that cut across national boundaries like air pollution, terrorism and extremism, military conflicts, religious intolerance and so on which requires systematic response. Then there are problems shared by particular peoples and societies like poverty, starvation, malnutrition, oppression and discrimination, which again require collective response for redress, particularly from developed nations. In both these cases, the over intensifying of world's interconnectedness make them of such common human concern that they can only be resolved through coordinated efforts of world citizens (Twiss, 2011). However, what constitutes global ethics, how to ensure a consensus based global ethics, how to make global governance structure responsive to ethical issues in global politics, what

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avenues are available for such global efforts and do they have the capacity and willingness to implement norms of global ethics are the questions at the center of debate.

What exactly global ethics is, what its boundaries are, what should be part of it and what not and importantly how to ensure its implementation in a plural society with sharp and deep rooted diversities, conflicting ideologies and interests and political and economic misunderstandings and prejudices. "Global Ethics is a field of theoretical enquiry that addresses ethical questions and problems arising out of the global interconnection and interdependence of the world's population" (Hutchings, 2010, p. 01). Global ethics provides a standard and mechanism to govern the conduct and behavior of human beings in capacity as individual and collective actor to be member of and participant in global world besides binding other relevant actors like states, non-governmental organizations and MNCs to act in certain given normative frame. To be legitimate and acceptable globally, the structure of global ethics is erected on two fundamental principles; first, global ethics should be composed of values, beliefs and norms shared by everyone or a greater majority of people around the world. Second, its scope and application should extend to every citizen in every country. Whether this is possible or not will be discussed in greater length in the lines to come but this is what one can make a minimum standard for ethics to be called global.

Why global ethics is desirable or necessary? Hans Kung describes the necessity of global ethics in a convincing manner by saying that without some moral standards and universally binding ethical norms, states are more vulnerable to fall into conflicts and crisis that may lead to national collapse in the shape of social disintegration, economic crisis and political anarchy (Hutchings, 2010). There is a strong conviction that there are cross-cultural social, political, economic and environmental challenges that can be handled only through global concerted efforts motivated besides binding all relevant actors to show exercise restraint in their transnational intercourse. The way to the establishment of global ethics is commitment to dialogues at different levels as a way forward to establish global ethics. This dialogue process will be instrumental in discovering the inner values to which all have already consented or in other cases may result in best compromising normative standards representative of different participants.

One of the questions in global ethics debate is what ethical issues or claims count to be global and what must be excluded. There is, no doubt disagreement on the contents and composition of global ethics. As the list is too long like war and peace, environment and ecological issues, humanitarian intervention, economic justice and so many other, there should be a well set criteria as what to include and what not. Hutchings develops two principles to gauge if a particular moral issue counts as global or not. First, an issue is global if it crosses national boundaries in its origin and effects. Secondly an issue comes in the domain of global if there are clear and deep disagreements between ethical values that have been brought together by the processes of globalization (Hutchings, 2010). In a way global ethics tries to achieve goals common to all human beings globally.

Challenges in the way to Global Ethics

Despite many tall claims and rising hopes, there are serious challenges to the establishment and application of agreeable and enforceable ethics globally. There are issues at every level; from individual to national to global level and from disagreement on norms of global ethics to their implementation and legitimacy to developed, developing and least developed countries without any discrimination and partiality. Take for example, though democracy is the dominant and most cherished political system, still there could be seen the champions of democracy working in close cooperation with military dictators and monarchs with some trying to find ways to ensure for them legitimacy. In the name of intervention, there are certain powerful states to expand their influence and exploit the downtrodden societies and communities. A good number of people around the world

continue to struggle for the right to self-determination with some switching over to bloody campaign to win independence but the world in general has failed to even respond to their very fundamental right. Religious and ethnic minorities still suffer at the hands of majority in different parts of the world. These are few of the instances to reflect on the fact that global ethics have yet to be global reaching every corner of the world besides having been found violated even at the hands of those who plead this noble cause.

Realist paradigm argues that states' material and power based interests would take precedence over non material and moral commitments and interests if the two ever come in conflict. It is a known reality that interests defined in terms of power come frequently in conflict with the moral and ethical aspirations of the states and this is one of the reasons that states break rules they themselves create or erect (Steele, 2013). The statement is quite powerful if one looks into the history from realist lenses with so many instances in the past where countries have broken promises, agreements and international commitments besides norms of morality and ethics for narrow national interests. We live in a world dominated by realist mindset where states have yet to think and plan beyond their national interests by keeping them at the top in the list of their priorities, especially when it comes to matters related to national security. In the words of Sir Harold Nicolson, there does not exist such a thing as international morality (Amstutz, 2013). This statement is enough to shake the very foundations of what is termed global ethics.

According to Jamie Gaskarth, today's global ethical perspective is reflective of political, economic and cultural outlook of few powerful dominant western states but certain economic powers are on the rise too on the global horizon. If this is the case, then such powers would try to exert pressure on global normative structure too as certainly economic power translates into normative power gradually (Gaskarth, 2015). As transformation of global power structure is inevitable, how would global ethics look like in a world dominated by a power with different approach and outlook? They are certain to raise questions on many things to make global ethics controversial. If Gaskarth's statement is interpreted in literal sense, it means that there is nothing like global ethics but reflection of western hegemony translated through their political and economic systems.

This conviction has further been reaffirmed by the (mis)understanding taking roots in the minds of the people that there has begun western imperialism in the name of globalization, intervention and global ethics. The international economic and financial system erected on Bretton Wood Institutions has become a tool in the hands of western world to further secure their interests at the cost of poor nations whose share in terms of economic benefit is negligible and have found it hard to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty, debt and deprivation (Pogge, 2002). According to Hardt, old-style imperialism has been replaced by a more informal and anony¬mous imperial project through interrelated global networks of communication and informal global networks of power. There is a strong belief that western elites have constructed in the guise of global ethical agendas such as humanitarian intervention to pursue some coherently defined goals they otherwise could not have achieved (Roberts, 2010). This kind of understanding is quite visible in the behavior of developing and under developed nations, making it a challenging task for those who champion the cause of global ethics.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that no one can refuse is how to ensure the implementation of provisions of global ethics. There is no mechanism and authority of coercive government to make morality and ethics binding on states and enforce punishments if anyone is found guilty of violating international norms. For that reason international law is often termed as international morality which lacks binding force. Resultantly many times over the years, countries have been found breaking terms of international law with impunity. This is a serious challenge to those who preach global ethics.

Opportunities and Avenues for Global Ethics

A good deal of what may be termed as global ethics to regulate international relations and transnational affairs and matters addressing issues of global importance exists in different sources. At the very basic level, almost all human societies have analogous moral rules regulating within the group such matters like violence, theft, deception and dispute settlement. On many occasions these normative rules are raised into binding laws. Then there are also norms and principles to facilitate cooperation with strangers and members of other societies. Then there are also occasions both within and across societies in this world of telecommunication to show resistance at the unjust treatment of others and express sympathy and compassion for those who are treated badly. There is also cross cultural consensus on fundamental human rights like protection for most vulnerable besides prohibition of genocide, slavery, ill treatment of minorities (Twiss, 2011). So individual and societies are inherently based on ethical grounds and so are more eager to live in a world with ethical principles. Moreover, with the world populace becoming more and more civilized and educated, it is expected that the validity and vitality of global ethics will take grounds. The common humanitarian instinct and feeling for one's fellow being provides a solid ground for global ethics.

Kung being a theologian throws very inserting arguments into the debate on global ethics. He highlights the role of different religions to be a helpful tool in addressing much of the questions in global ethics. As a good proportion of majority population subscribes to particular religion and all religions have shared and well-established system of ethical values and principles, so religion may be a reasonable starting point for efforts to reach at global ethical standard (Abdrrahman, 2008). All religions stand for peace, solidarity, harmony, tolerance, mutual help and assistance and so on and such things lie at the base of principles for global ethics. If given proper attention, world religions provide a solid foundation to global ethical issues.

Global world can well be called global society governed and regulated by international law. As law is the authoritative normative expression of a political community, international law not only achieves important moral aspirations but also helps in pursuing states' interests instrumentally. International law facilitates order among nations and states and advances values like peace, security, justice, nonviolence and human welfare shared by different communities across the globe. International law is therefore an important mechanism as well as tool in the practice pf global ethics (Heinze, 2013). Countries feel bound to a great extent by the normative provisions of international law and is an authoritative source to regulate the behaviour of states and non-state actors in a principled manner.

With the world becoming more interdependent, internationalization of issues has led to the establishment of global governance. Global governance is governing, without sovereign authority, relationships that transcend national frontiers. Global governance is doing internationally what governments do at home (Finkelstein, 1995). For years global governance in the shape of international regimes, institutions and organizations have been found actively involved in bringing order to the world and regulate the behaviour of the subject actors in accordance to the global rules. Organs of the global governance like UNGA, UNSC, WHO, FAO, UNESCO, UNHCR, World Bank, IMF may not have come to everyone's expectations over the years, but their role and performance in socio economic development and empowerment is too heavy to ignore. They are the most powerful and effective channels to be helpful in ensuring that global ethics may not be limited to discussion only. Such institutions have proven quite instrumental in the implementation of the norms of global ethics.

Although world lacks formal apparatus of government, there still exists informal channels to ensure that the provisions of international law and global normative commitments are implemented.

Eric A. Heinze suggest that there are a number of ways that global civil society actors can influence the behaviour of states and other powerful actors to act in more consistent manner with the provisions of global norms. One way is to put direct pressure on governments to put these issues on their domestic policy agenda and bring all its resources into use to improve the situation on ground. The other way is to influence the behaviour of the states and corporate actors to be part of law making process, resulting in international treaties to which states consent and promise to abide by. Finally and importantly, civil society actors can work to effect the conduct of states to monitor and report on whether they confirm to or not to the rules or norms they have promised to abide by (Heinze, 2013).

Conclusion

With national barriers receding and the world getting closer besides men making strides in the technological world, global citizens are faced with new challenges as well as opportunities asking for new consensus on global ethics. Although there are problems at every level of global ethics, however a consensus based reasonable parameters of global ethics is the need of the hour taking care of not only present but future generations too. At the very basic level, the normative goal should be to secure minimal material requirements of life like food, shelter, wages and employment, health care and education for all human being. There should be respect for life, liberty, justice, avenues for self-development besides a participatory political system at national level. Globally, economic system should be based on equity for all states and combating issues that threaten the peace of the world in an environment of cooperation besides preserving and protecting eco system. This much of standard in global ethics is neither impossible nor impractical.

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