

PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE: THINKING ABOUT GLOBAL CRISES

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The world is beset by what seem to be an interminable set of problems. Many of these, increasingly, are transnational, which is to say, that they transcend the borders of individual nations. Issues such as climate change and apparent global warming are fiercely debated, with many arguing that without a change in the way in which human beings abuse the environment, we are all doomed. The crisis in 2011 surrounding the destruction of the nuclear reactor in Fukushima, Japan as a result of the devastation wrought by the massive earthquake and tsunami points to human powerlessness in the face of the forces of nature. It also points to the need to show respect for those same forces. Other crises, such as the global financial crisis in 2008, also have had a profound impact on human lives. While it is difficult to quantify, the global financial crisis has undoubtedly been responsible for many deaths also, as aid money decreases and projects which may have helped solve housing shortages, provided sanitation and clean water are unable to proceed. There is a need to reconfigure capitalism so that it serves the common good, rather than the self indulgent needs of venal speculators. Glaring inequalities in the distribution of the common wealth of countries are just as evil in the United States, China, India, Australia and the United Kingdom, to name a few of the G20 nations, as they are anywhere else. The waves of protest throughout the Middle East which saw the ousting of the Libyan dictator, Gaddafi and the Egyptian president Mubarak, should not be seen as simply a sign of the inherent instability in those countries, but as a sign that oppressive policies wherever they are met will eventually result in the overthrow of corrupt regimes. The situation in Syria is, of course, particularly parlous and points to the need for stronger international law. This paper argues that philosophy has a serious role to play in thinking about global issues and, using the example of global ethics, shows how it is central in the explication of the values that underpin proposed solutions to global problems. Though cultures are different, it is proposed, recent history shows that human beings share common values and purpose.

Key words: globalisation, global crises, global ethics, human rights.

PART 1

Globalisation and Global Crises

Globalisation is increasingly to be seen as the recognition that many of the problems faced by the world today are not simply the problems of individual nations. Globalisation may be defined as the multidimensional and interactive processes of political, economic and cultural change across the world resulting in increased social interconnectedness among different peoples.¹ It can also be taken to mean an increased awareness that all human beings and their activities do not occur in isolation, but have effects on those living elsewhere, both human and animal. Globalisation therefore extends beyond political, economic and cultural processes, but includes broader social,

ethical and environmental processes that impinge on the way in which human beings interact with one another, the environment and the impact that human activity has on the future well-being of humankind and the planet on which they live. The global crises briefly catalogued here are indicative of the kinds of issues that no individual nation is able to tackle alone.

Changes in weather patterns around the world have seen these changes attributed to global warming and climate change and these, in turn, have been blamed on the activities of human beings. If this is so, then it is not an individual nation that will be responsible for reversing the effects of increased pollution in the atmosphere, the overfishing of oceans and seas, the destruction of the ozone layer, the destruction of rain forests and the depletion of natural resources, but all nations. Many of these problems are due not only to a short-sighted pursuit of profit, but also a blindness to the damage being done to the environment and so the places that human beings and animals have to live. In some cases, the destruction of the environment can be due to extreme poverty and the failure of developed nations to support those struggling to support themselves in an unforgiving landscape. If the only source of fodder for one's sheep and goats is already degraded and marginalised land, it is not surprising that it degrades even further and it becomes impossible to survive in that environment.

Added to these problems are droughts, natural disasters, wars and other conflicts that have seen a rise in the number of people displaced from their homes and being forced to find somewhere else to live. The mass movement of people around the globe seeking to find asylum and refuge in another country is an increasing problem.¹ Apart from outright conflicts, there is also mass migration of people because of governments oppressing their own people² and because they come from what are called 'failed states'. That is, places where the government has been either so corrupt or so incompetent that the State can no longer sustain its people.³ Immigration and the attendant problems of resettlement and integration into a host community are problems for all international communities.⁴

Pandemics and epidemics, such as bird flu and AIDS never restrict themselves to national boundaries, but are increasingly problems for the whole world to solve. Outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, such as occurred in Europe in 2001, with a fresh occurrence reported in Britain in 2007, affect markets for fresh meat internationally and containment of such diseases is never just

¹ The UNHCR Report for 2011 indicates that some 42.5 million people have been forcibly displaced, of whom 15.2 were refugees under UN protection. See UNHCR (2012) *A Year of Crises: UNHCR Global Trends 2011*, at URL <http://www.unhcr.org/4fd6f87f9.html> Accessed: 20/5/2013.

² The current genocide of the Rohingya people in Myanmar is an example of a government attacking its own people. Some half a million Rohingya have been displaced. See Kristof, Nicholas (2017) *Is this Genocide?* *New York Times*, December 5th. At URL <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/opinion/sunday/genocide-myanmar-rohingya-bangladesh.html> Accessed 22/2/2018.

³ The current situation in Yemen in which a civil war has raged since 2015 has left some 19 million people in need of some aid. See the Al-Jazeera Report (November 2017) on the humanitarian crisis at URL <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2017/11/yemen-humanitarian-crisis-solved-171116184> Accessed: 22/2/2018.

⁴ Europe, in particular those nations that have accepted large numbers of immigrants from Muslim countries now face real difficulties in integrating these groups into the general community. There is no coincidence that the rise of right wing xenophobic political parties has occurred at the same time as a growth in immigration from very different cultural groups to the host nations.

the responsibility of one nation, but the international community. An outbreak of bird flu in China in 2013, fortunately contained because of what was learned in previous outbreaks, provided a salutary reminder of the irrelevance of borders to pandemics and epidemics.¹ Although wealthier countries are able to stockpile vaccines to prevent disease spreading, it is not so easy for poorer countries. This also can mean that pandemics can enter a country from a poorer neighbour and hence, it is clear that these problems are not restricted to particular nations.

Crime has become multinational, with opium grown in Afghanistan, for example, finding its way through various intermediaries to the streets of many other countries. Trafficking in human beings as well as their organs has also become a lucrative trade.² Illegal fishing and the ignoring of bans on fishing protected and endangered species has led to the collapse of fisheries world-wide and has the prospect of causing serious damage to communities world-wide.³ Poaching of endangered species is also a significant problem and illegal logging is leading to the destruction of forests, despoliation of land through erosion and the pollution of rivers.

Acts of terrorism are not restricted by national boundaries and government intelligence agencies are under considerable pressure to detect and prevent the mass murder of innocent people. Terrorists may be trained in one country but carry out their acts in other countries and so international cooperation is required in order to apprehend such individuals before they can carry out their deeds. Terrorism has become commonplace throughout the world and is not only directed at Western nations.⁴ It is therefore a global problem and not just one for individual countries.

Trade in arms continues to be a scandalous problem internationally. The amount of money spent on armaments each year would be more than sufficient to alleviate world poverty, yet only a fraction of this amount is spent on aid. Some of the largest multinational corporations in the world are arms manufacturers and their profits depend on there being combatants involved in conflicts and wars otherwise there would be no one to buy their weapons. Conflicts could not be sustained if there were not weapons to be bought. The connections between governments and arms dealers is also problematic, since most weapons are not manufactured by government owned companies, but by big corporations. The danger of corruption in the award of contracts is an ever present problem.⁵

Differences in national laws governing medical research have also been exploited by medical researchers and by large pharmaceutical companies. This raises the question of whether a researcher should be obliged to follow the moral norms and practices of his own country or those operating

¹ See, for example, the newspaper article in *The Guardian*, which reported that 24 people had died in the recent outbreak. At URL <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/01/scientists-concerned-h7n9-bird-flu-outbreak> Accessed: 20/5/2013

² See for example, Ozolins, J. (2009) "Human Beings as Resources: The Ethics of Buying and Selling Human Tissues and Organs", *Ethics Education*, 15, 1, 5-19

³ See for example, <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2010/09/09/3003951.htm> Accessed: 2/4/2011

⁴ See for example, Pettiford, L. and Harding, D. (2003) *Terrorism: The New World War*, Slough: Arcturus; Freilich, J.D. and Guerette, R.T. (eds.) (2006) *Culture, Conflict, Crime and Terrorism*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Ashgate; Zimmerman, E. (2011) "Globalisation and Terrorism", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 27, S152-S161.

⁵ The United States is by far the largest supplier of arms, accounting for 78% of the world's total trade in military hardware. Horner, D. (2012) "U.S. Dominated Global Arms Trade in 2011", *Arms Control Today*, October, 36-38

in the country in which he hopes to conduct his research. In any case he should follow his informed conscience about how to act, but there are significant concerns when large pharmaceutical companies conduct clinical trials of drugs, that might not be approved in their own countries, in developing countries where there may not be the same controls. This is, of course, only one of many possible cases of exploitation. There is the practice by drug companies of giving very expensive, but efficacious drugs to governments in poor countries at a discount price (or even free of charge) for a trial period, but withdrawing the subsidy and forcing the governments to spend scarce resources on it if they wish to continue to be able to make the drug available. When the drug is being used to help save children with a specific condition from dying it is extremely difficult to deny parents access to the drug. There are significant resource allocation issues which need to be faced, not just in relation to developing nations and the provision of adequate health care, but also for developed nations.

Just like big pharmaceutical companies, transnational corporations and big businesses which have annual turnovers that exceed the GDP of many small countries, operate outside the jurisdiction of countries and have the power to influence world markets in ways that government is completely powerless to do. Corporations do not operate like democracies and are generally single-minded about their purposes: namely, to return a dividend to their shareholders. Various scandals in recent years involving large transnational corporations provide us with examples of the lack of concern for the local populations where such corporations operate. Some examples of such lack of responsibility include the failure of Union Carbide to prevent the gas disaster in Bhopal, India¹, the contamination of the environment by Broken Hill in Ok Tedi, Papua New Guinea² and the destruction of the farming land of the Ogoni people in Nigeria by Shell.³

These are all problems that are not merely national concerns nor challenges for particular regions of the world but are problems for the whole world. As nations such as China and India, the two most populous nations of the world, push forward with economic development, their desire for non-renewable resources grows and there are serious questions to be raised about the sustainability of continued economic growth. The prevailing wisdom in the Reagan and Thatcher years through the 1980s was that economic prosperity could be maintained by continuous economic growth, so that as an economy grew, through a trickle-down effect, even the poorest would come to share in the wealth that was being created. Such economic models are still with us, with the world economy dependent on continued economic growth. China, with its vast population, is expanding its economy at a rapid rate, but it is unclear whether the results of this economic growth are being equally shared. The same may be said for countries such as Russia, with its huge reserve of resources, which has adopted a market economy model and has seen enormous wealth being gained by relatively few and many Russians sinking deeper into poverty and despair. In Western countries, a similar story can be told, with countless millions having to struggle on meagre wages, if they have a job at all, while Chief Executive Officers of big corporations enjoy stratospheric

¹ Boughton, E. (2005) "The Bhopal Disaster and its Aftermath: A Review", *Environmental Health: A Global Access Source*, 4, 6

² Banks, G. and Ballard, C. (eds.) (1997) *The Ok Tedi Settlement: Issues, Outcomes and Implications*, Pacific Policy Paper 27, Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies and Resource Management in Asia-Pacific, Research School for Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University

³ Frynas, J. G. (1998) "Political instability and business: focus on Shell in Nigeria", *Third World Quarterly*, 19, 3, 457-478

salaries and bonuses. An unregulated market and the ascendancy of libertarian conceptions of society have seen the disparity between rich and poor grow considerably throughout the world. Meanwhile, supine governments stand idly by and fail to ensure that all citizens are able to share in wealth being generated.

The Global Financial Crisis, which some claim is over as markets return to apparent normality, nevertheless, continues to reverberate throughout the world, some ten years later. It is evident that there are still considerable problems remaining for the world as governments in various countries struggle with the destruction wrought by an essentially unregulated market. The development of financial products with little connection to classical economic activity, represented by traditional trade in manufactured goods and commodities, and their lack of regulation is one of the reasons that the financial collapse occurred. Although undoubtedly the lending of money to those with little capacity to pay was one of the reasons for the collapse of the sub-prime market, a more serious issue concerns those who not only lent money to people with poor credit records, but also with those who invented various products that had little connection to anything tangible. For example, Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDOs), squared and even cubed, are far removed from the Mortgage Backed Securities (MBSs) which are the base from which these further financial instruments spring. Add to these various hedge funds, for example, Collateralised Debt Securities (CDSs), designed to insure against loss, but which unscrupulous speculators exploited, there is little connection to any tangible goods or services in the series of buying and selling of these financial products. Though it is the case that financial brokers and speculators invented new financial products, none of the desire to make money from money is new. Aristotle remarks that there is no bound to the riches which spring from the art of wealth getting. Those who are engaged in the accumulation of wealth know no limit to its acquisition. Aristotle observes that some human beings will stop at nothing in order to accumulate wealth, since they desire pleasure without limit and to have this, will pursue wealth without limit. They will subordinate every quality they can to its pursuit. "...as their desires are unlimited, they also desire that the means of gratifying them should be without limit."¹ The practices of speculators and so-called entrepreneurs have been little diminished by the Global Financial Crisis and the U.S. government, which presides over the largest economy in the world, has done little to introduce new regulations.

Although governments around the world took immediate action to limit the Global Financial Crisis by injecting funds into the market, it is by no means self evident that it is the only action that needed to be taken. As a result of the levels of debt to which banks and investment banks were exposed, governments, which is to say, tax payers, were forced to bail out those who ought to have been allowed to collapse. They should have been allowed to collapse and borne the consequences of their actions. It is understandable, nevertheless, why such a course of action was not taken. One of the motivations for governments in propping up such banks was the fear of what such a collapse would mean for the economy of the country, the possibility of political unrest because of the human cost of so many losing their savings and superannuation, and, purely from self interest, the wrath of the electorate. As already intimated, the worst situation seems to exist in the United States, where there continues to be little regulation and no action appears to have been taken against those who were responsible for the collapse in the first place, as many of them appear to be back trading as usual.

¹ Aristotle (1976) *The Politics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, Book I Chapter 9, [1258a]

Some governments, of course, care little for the people who they govern and many regimes exist simply to line their own pockets. Some, having attained power, allow themselves to be corrupted by it and become oppressors of their own people. In some cases, this has resulted in military action by neighbouring countries, but this may not have been for altruistic reasons to liberate an oppressed people, but may have been in order to secure long term access to valuable resources. Although the United States has claimed that the war in Iraq was to rid the Iraqi people of a tyrant, many commentators continue to believe that it was to secure Middle East oil.

The regime of recently deposed Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe¹ was an example of a corrupt regime which stopped at nothing to maintain its power, even at the cost of ruining the country and destroying the lives of countless citizens. Unfortunately, the United Nations and the countries neighbouring Zimbabwe did nothing to alleviate the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe. Of course, it is not just Zimbabwe which was affected by the Mugabe's corrupt and murderous regime, but the nations surrounding Zimbabwe who have had to bear the brunt of the millions of refugees who were leaving their country in search of food and employment. The actions of Mugabe's regime affected the international community, not just the people of Zimbabwe, though for the latter it was of utmost seriousness since their lives were at stake. The country remains in real difficulties, even after Mugabe's departure. Similarly, the civil war in Syria not only has resulted in many civilian deaths, but also threatens to destabilise the Middle East. The Assad regime's willingness to sacrifice innocent lives in order to remain in power is a crime against humanity.

Both the situation in Syria and in Zimbabwe raise questions about what actions the International community ought to take in dealing with governments that are oppressing, torturing and killing their own people and so destroying those whom they are obligated to protect. The recent upheavals in the Middle East illustrate well that the situations in Syria and Zimbabwe are not unique and there are numerous conflicts around the world that require the attention of the International community. The Syrian situation, at the present time, is parlous and it is evident that Assad is intent on remaining in power at all costs, even if it means the destruction of his country. That the conflict has been allowed to drag on is at least partly due to the jockeying for control and influence in the region by the major powers, who are seemingly unwilling to find a peaceful solution to the war. What is extraordinary about the situation in Syria, as it was in other countries in the Middle East, is the number of ordinary people who decided that they were not prepared to live under a tyrant any more. The need for a global peace-keeping force, independent of national governments, has never been more apparent.

TO BE CONTINUED

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¹ Mugabe was finally ousted in a bloodless coup on November 21st, 2017.

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ФІЛОСОФІЯ І КУЛЬТУРА: МІРКУВАННЯ ПРО ГЛОБАЛЬНІ КРИЗИ

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Світ охоплений, здавалось би, нескінченними проблемами. Багато з них виходять на міждержавний рівень, тобто за межі окремих держав. Такі питання як зміна клімату та очевидне глобальне потепління, яро обговорюють; багато хто стверджує, що якщо люди не змінять свої підходи до природокористування, то всі ми приречені. Криза 2011 р., пов'язана з аварією на ядерному реакторі у префектурі Фукушіма, Японія, що сталася внаслідок руйнувань, спричинених сильним землетрусом і цунамі, вказує на людську безпорадність перед силами природи. Вона також вказує на потребу поважати ці сили. Інші кризи, такі як світова фінансова криза 2008 р., також мали наскрізний вплив на людські життя. Хоч це й складно підрахувати, та немає сумнівів, що світова фінансова криза також стала причиною смертей, адже кількість грошей на допомогу зменшилася, проекти, які могли б посприяти вирішенню проблеми з нестачею житла, покращенням санітарії та забезпеченням чистою водою, припинилися. Існує потреба перебудувати капіталізм, щоб він служив для загального блага, а не для егоїстичних потреб корисливих спекулянтів. Разюча нерівність у розподілі спільного багатства країн однаково жахлива, як в Сполучених Штатах, Китаї, Індії, Австралії чи Об'єднаному Королівстві (а це лише декілька країн, що входять до Великої двадцятки), так і в усіх інших країнах. Хвилі протестів на Близькому Сході, що стали причиною вигнання лівійського диктатора Каддафі та єгипетського президента Мубарака, варто розглядати не лише як ознаку властивої цим країнам нестабільності, а і як ознаку того, що репресивна політика, де б вона не проводилася, в кінцевому результаті призводить до повалення корумпованого режиму. Звісно, ситуація в Сирії особливо складна й вказує на потребу в сильнішому міжнародному праві. В цій статті аргументовано, що філософія повинна відігравати важливу роль у міркуваннях про глобальні питання і, використовуючи приклад глобальної етики, показано, що вона відіграє центральну роль в експлікації цінностей, які є основою запропонованих вирішень глобальних проблем. Хоч культури – різні, новітня історія показує, що люди мають спільні цінності й призначення.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, глобальні кризи, глобальна етика, права людини.