

## Is Global Community Possible for a Planet in Jeopardy?

*The 2007 Kauper Lecture: Prepared and Delivered by Dr. Larry L. Rasmussen: October 21, 2007*

The dream of the unity of humankind is a hoary one. At least as old as prophetic monotheism, it is the way of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. All nations stream in praise to the mountain of the Lord, all peoples feast in mixed company at the messianic banquet. It is the Buddha's path as well, Plato's, the Stoics', and the *umma* of Islam. In Jewish terms, it's *tikkun olam*, the healing of a broken world intoned in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy: "In the face of the many, to stand for the one; in the presence of fragments, to make them whole."<sup>1</sup>

These dreams of universal belonging and a good life together should surprise no one since religions themselves, together with aged philosophies and the primordial visions of first peoples, have consistently staked out an audacious claim for "community." It is community sufficiently generous to include not only the neighbors (at least those we like!) but Earth as a whole, indeed the cosmos *in toto*. Even more than that, creation as a community has not only been the enduring dream, it has been a basic religious, moral, even metaphysical, claim.

Now it is a scientific claim as well. That the material universe—"nature"—is literally a cosmic community is the great theme across recent science, from theoretical physics and astrophysics to ecology, genetics and evolutionary biology. Sages have long observed that humans dream dreams of community on a grand scale because of some restive, irrepressible stirrings deep within our wee little souls. We have always wanted to belong to the same order that hurled the planets into orbit and sent the stars singing on their way. We have always wanted to align our mortal lives with a community that outstrips and outlives them. We have, in fact, built empires and enslaved peoples and ruined lands in the wayward quest to do so, just as we have composed music and crafted masterpieces and birthed and raised children in our striving to belong and be remembered. Now it turns out we have belonged to the cosmos, not only by virtue of our longing and desire, or our dreams of empire, but because, literally we are stardust, a late version of early supernova explosions. The scale of the Darwin's fabled Tree of Life, it turns out, is not only from molecules and cells to purposes and apes, but ecosystems and beyond, to the heavens themselves. The yearning in our solar plexis—yes, solar plexis—that tells us the universe itself is "home" is physically correct, we discover. We belong to creation in every transient cell of our bodies, to the community of all life knit in DNA, and to mitochondria millennia deep. The favored image of early Christian theologians, that we are microcosms of the macrocosm, is now underwritten by a science they did not have. What they did not know is that, in many and varied quirky ways, all else is microcosm, too. The relatives are everywhere, and everything. Or, to cite the Hindu Upanishads—"tat tvam asi": "all that is you," "you are all that." All things great and small, from atoms to galaxies, share a common history and a common, if unfinished, story. All that exists, co-exists. All that is, belongs. Wildly diverse creation is one.

In our time this weather-beaten dream of a planetary community has gained new traction, bolstered by science's gift of a common creation story, yet beyond it. Some of that gain is an emerging global ethic. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, is posited on the notion of universal human dignity and has been endorsed as a common moral standard and instrument for uplifting and protecting all peoples everywhere.

By all counts, it has been a powerful means for effecting and institutionalizing universal moral claims, moral claims that reflect—I now use Jewish and Christian terms—the image of God as “the value, equality, and uniqueness”<sup>ii</sup> of every human being as a child of God.

But there is more. The Earth Charter, too, belongs to the irrepressible dream of earth as a comprehensive community. And here there are noteworthy new twists. The most remarkable one, at least for the modern world, is to render the ethics of *homo sapiens* derivative of Earth's requirements and to consider the whole community of life the bearer of compelling moral claims. “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” is the fundamental principle of the Earth Charter. It is in fact the parallel of respect for every human life as the baseline of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, except now that respect and reverence is extended to life, period.

This parallel of the Earth Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is deceptive, however, since it hides a moral revolution at the heart of the charter. While the Charter's language is never truly confrontational, the Charter is a quiet assault on the institutionalized human-centeredness of reigning practices and their morality, especially global patterns of production, distribution and consumption. To say, as the Charter does, that “humanity is part of a vast evolving universe” and to view Earth as a remarkable niche in that universe, and alive, because it is the bearer and sustainer of a unique community of life, is to invert the orientation of prevailing ethics. The Earth Charter de-centers the sovereign human self (historically a male, largely white and Western self) who is the moral legislator and whose very notion of freedom rests in giving ourselves the laws we live by. The Charter wants to locate the ecology of all human action within the economy of Earth itself and temper the sovereign swagger of idolatrous human powers parading mastery on a grand scale. While it underscores human responsibility for the planet, it rejects the grandiose notion of modernity that we can have a world of our making and it can be good. That kind of species pride wed to the arrogance of addictive affluence has in fact now set us on a course of uncreation.

Another, related, theme also puts the ethic of the Charter far from the reigning moral universe of present institutions and habits. The cosmologies in science mentioned earlier have little place in our daily sensibilities and conventions. They are mostly the stuff of “ooh/aah” planetarium visits for unruly 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. The reason these stunning pictures of reality don't penetrate and shape our lives may be our anorexic imaginations. Even the free-range vision of psalmists and prophets was not ready for the detail, the dynamism, and the utter strangeness of a universe infinite in all directions on a scale we cannot fathom (or at least could not until the Hubble telescope). Poets and mystics, or a humble cell biologist or astrophysicist, may have broken through on occasion, but only in wonder and Einsteinian awe.

The charming arguments of Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Augustine that not all species of plants and animals could have initially been created by God but must have evolved from other of God's creatures, since a boat that size of Noah's could not have borne the full load, are utterly quaint now, the stuff of children's stories. And yet most dominant ways of life still regard us as an ecologically segregated and privileged species, with nature our last and best slave. This abolition and liberation we do not support. So we moved more rocks and soil and water in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than did volcanoes and glaciers and tectonic plates, and we altered the thin envelope of the atmosphere more in that time than all humans together in far, far longer stretches of time, so that now things that normally happen [to the planet] in geologic time are happening during the span of a human lifetime. Boggling though it be, none of this has registered as a profoundly moral matter or a badly misshapen identity, much less a moral crisis or an identity crisis. Even bringing death to birth itself—extinction, uncreation—fails to move us. It may sadden us, even depress us at some level, but it does not change our ways.

In sum, the Earth Charter lines out what Earth *as Earth community* means for how all of us live life together; and this communitarian understanding of nature and society together, with the economy of Earth basic to all is the new foray that extends the scope of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights beyond its anthropocentrism.

Yet the point I don't want us to lose is this—both of these recent efforts (the Universal Declaration and the Charter) are new expressions of the most irrepressible human dream of all; namely, a planetary common good that is truly held in common. And both belong to an emerging global ethic.

I hasten to add that the Charter is not a closed ethic. While it provides substantive shared content, it does not endorse any particular worldview or universalize any single set of parochial norms. It functions more like a moral "dome" or as moral "habitat," sheltering and nurturing the practices of plural peoples and plural values in the same moment that it challenges all of them in bracing ways to be Earth-honoring ways of life. The degree to which the Charter has worked from difference to a commonality that still respects and draws on difference is extraordinary. It is a lesson we all have to learn; namely, how to get from the curse of "we/they" to the blessing of "we/us." "They" don't live here anymore.

But of course "they" do, and that takes us back to the initial question: is global community possible. On one deep and profound level, we have already given the answer. The answer is "yes," not because we can imagine global community and desire it, but because we are literally born to belonging amidst the fierce ontology of communion that binds all things together in heaven and on earth.

Still, on another profound level, that is no answer at all. We may be joined at the hip to all that is, but we are still left with the degraded world and its jealously guarded, warring fragments. And since no one can be whole in a broken world, we must ask the question again, this time in order to confront the socio-economic and religious obstacles. To do that, I call on Reinhold Niebuhr and his remarkable chapter on "The World Community" published in 1944 in The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (it cost me \$1.25 new in 1965 and I intend to get my money's worth). The necessary introduction, however, is from Niebuhr's 1959 volume, The Structures of Nations and Empires.

He begins there by saying that “the communities of mankind, like every human achievement and contrivance, are subject to endless variety and progression.”<sup>iii</sup> Family, clan, tribe, city-state, nation, empires ancient and modern—all these are diverse forms in the ongoing human quest for community. This quest itself issues from our basic nature as bio-social creatures. We thus seek meaning and fulfillment in varied, changing communities. In the course of this quest, persistent and perennial patterns recur—thus the repeating “structure” of families, nations and empires. But there are novel elements as well—thus the “indeterminate possibilities” of history.

This interplay of structure and novelty means, for Niebuhr, that new political, economic, social and cultural forms of community will arise and others will die. Endless levels of technical, social, legal, and political economic organization are possible, though all are only provisional. There is no final resting point or final form of society. Human freedom triumphs over structure in an endlessly dynamic history. Invariably, the results are both creative and destructive.

Such restless human creativity means there can be genuine progress. Yet history is not redemptive. Any progress achieved is insecure and imperfect. Good and evil tend to grow apace and together, with the virtues and achievements of one era the source of vices and malperformance for the next. Let me again cite the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, since it so accurately reflects Niebuhr’s own view of human nature: “There is evil enough to break the heart, enough good to exalt the soul.”<sup>iv</sup> A moral qualification thus intersects all human efforts, with tempered pride the proper response, even to genuine achievement. “[N]o society, not even a democratic one,” Niebuhr writes, “is great enough or good enough to make itself the final end of human existence.”<sup>v</sup>

So is world community possible? If urgency and historical momentum be the measure, then it is already palpable, for Niebuhr. “The problem of overcoming this [international] chaos and of extending the principle of community to worldwide terms has become the most urgent of all the issues which face our epoch,”<sup>vi</sup> he writes in the mid 1940s. The conclusion of The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness even speaks of “[t]he world community, toward which all historical forces seem to be driving us,” as “mankind’s final possibility and impossibility.”<sup>vii</sup>

The pressing new condition is advancing constraints on nation-state sovereignty in the face of a contracting world of interlocking dependence and interdependence. Or, to put it in terms Niebuhr already foresaw in 1930, the techniques of democratic rule have not been developed in and for international relations<sup>viii</sup> while at the same time “the instruments of production, transport and communication reduced the space-time dimensions of the world to a fraction of their previous size and led to a phenomenal increase in the interdependence of all national communities.”<sup>ix</sup> “The development of technics thus confronted our epoch with a novel situation.”<sup>x</sup> Interlocking destinies have outrun nation-state sovereignty and nation-state capacity.

Niebuhr names “the new technical-natural fact of a global economy” as one of the forces driving toward world community. It is “natural” because it is the grand transformation of nature. It is “technical” because it is the transformation of nature at human hands with technologies that leave little, if any, planetary nature unchanged.

The global economy is, in fact, a technical-natural “force of universality,”<sup>xi</sup> a force that presents new historical perils and opportunities on a planetary scale.

Niebuhr underscores the novelty of this development. He notes, as we have, that global community as a dream is anything but new. But while, as he says, in principle nothing set a “final limit to the size which communities might achieve,” there has been a practical limit in the past, the limit “that [the efforts of previous generations] could not embody the entire community of mankind.”<sup>xii</sup> That is, they could not do so until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now, however, a new “technical interdependence [has] created a potential world community because it established complex interrelations which could be ordered *only by* a wider community than now exists.”<sup>xiii</sup> A “wider community” thus becomes not only hypothetically possible for the first time; it becomes imperative. We will come back to this after we turn, as Niebuhr does, to a second universal force pressing for world community.

We have already discussed it, so we need only tie into Niebuhr’s pages. Unlike the newly contracting world powered by a global economy, the second force is the old and enduring one of moral universalism. For Niebuhr, moral obligation is universal, so universal that it challenges all ethical particularism—familial, tribal, nationalistic, imperial or otherwise. The reach of moral obligation is, as his brother put it, towards “all that participates in being.”<sup>xiv</sup> Any conception of the moral universe that falls short of that “all” fails the test. Double standards, where some “alls” count much more than others and actually exclude in the name of “all,” are morally unacceptable and, in the end, morally unstable, even if they are the common bent of our “we/they” mentality. We talk big circles, then draw them small, with moral hypocrisy the difference.

Yet even that hypocrisy is, for Niebuhr, testimony to the universalism embedded in human hearts. In a hypothetical exchange with Hans Morgenthau, Niebuhr puts the critical question: “Are nations capable of being loyal to interests and values other than their own ‘national interest’?”<sup>xv</sup> Can nations transcend their own interests, or incorporate them into the interests of a more encompassing community? After agreeing wholeheartedly with Morgenthau that pretense and hypocrisy typically mark the idealistic claims of spokespersons for national interests, Niebuhr says his friend may be overlooking an important factor. Why is this ‘rational’ and ‘moral’ creature so embarrassed by the consistent self-regard of his or her parochial loyalties and communities? Why the consequent hypocrisy of claiming a higher motive and wider interest than the obvious one?<sup>xvi</sup> Niebuhr’s conclusion is that such embarrassment and hypocrisy “may be an index to a residual creative capacity of [human] freedom, neither equal to nor effaced by their stronger impulse of self-regard.”<sup>xvii</sup> Human nature, then, wants to push beyond its achievements to date, and that often means pushing beyond the communities and moralities that have borne even our strongest loyalties to date.

Niebuhr’s conclusion is clear: the convergence of these two forces of universality, “one moral and the other technical,” create “a powerful impetus toward the establishment of a world community,” so powerful that “the children of light regard it as a practically inevitable achievement.”<sup>xviii</sup> (In Niebuhr’s discussion, “the children of light” refer to the idealists and “the children of darkness,” or “the children of this world,” to the hard realists. Niebuhr lifts these types from the word of Jesus in Luke 16:8: “The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”)

But to pick up the discussion again: achieving world community is not inevitable at all and “the children of this world” are again wiser in their generation than the idealists because they understand the power of particularity in history and the moral corruption that casts collective self-interest in positive universal terms and makes the worse case sound the better.

The errant idealists are not of one stripe, however. Niebuhr dismisses some as “naïve idealists” because they imagine that a powerful vision of world community, coupled with education and devoted work, will eventually achieve global citizenship. Such voluntarism, even when coupled to moral rearmament, rarely prevails. It is necessary, as we shall see when we discuss the role of religion, but it is never sufficient.

What Niebuhr calls “sophisticated idealists” are not so easily dismissed, however, since, like “the children of this world,” they recognize that power and the force of institutions is a standing necessity. Thus the need is for an international police force and international courts, together with an array of organizations of governance that draw from widely diverse communities. Here constitutions, institutions and the law are utterly necessary elements. But they are not sufficient either and these wiser idealists err, Niebuhr says, in their confidence that such international institutions and executive powers of coercion are largely the outcome of constitutional processes that can be crafted by lawyers, diplomats, politicians, and CEOs. This exaggerates the degree to which community can be created by plotted, artifactual means. Institution-building and constitutional processes themselves are only “instruments and symbols” of the “vital social processes” that underlie them, Niebuhr writes.<sup>xix</sup> Just as “a head” cannot “create a body,”<sup>xx</sup> government, global or parochial, cannot of itself *create* collective character and communal self-consciousness. What some call a strong “civil society” factor and others call a “social forum” factor is critical to effecting any new community, an expanded collective consciousness and identity rooted in the moralities of everyday exchange. Effective government has to find a way to represent these traditional loyalties and shared values so as to draw upon this existing core of community, a core that government and constitutions cannot, of themselves, generate *ex nihilo*. Nor—and this always disappoints U. S. Americans—can commerce and the stock market.

To say it differently. We need, but we do not yet have, institutions adequately matched to reigning global forces. Moreover, the kind of long-term moral, communal, and spiritual formation that is also required for genuine global citizenship has not yet taken place on a scale and with the depth and breadth that effectively challenges—I use Niebuhr’s terms now—“the persistence and power of the pride of nations” and “the inertial force of traditional loyalties,”<sup>xxi</sup> conditions that obstruct the creation of the global institutions and citizenship that is needed. Two examples Niebuhr could not know come to mind: Bush administration policies amply demonstrate the persistence and power of the pride of nations and empires, while the rise of Islamic radicalism exemplifies the force of traditional loyalties. Each is, on balance, not only obstructive, but destructive, of genuine world community. In short, neither the “technical” requirements for world community, nor the “moral” ones, have been met.

They may still be met. That possibility is genuine for Niebuhr. “No bounds can be finally placed upon man’s responsibility to his fellows or upon his need for their help,” he writes.<sup>xxii</sup> But his provisional judgment is that it will take a long time to create global community since international community at present has “few elements of inner cohesion” and does not “benefit from the unity of a common culture or tradition.” That leaves only two forces of cohesion, and they are minimal: “a common overtone of universality in its moral ideals, and the fear of anarchy.”<sup>xxiii</sup> A third force, namely a common foe, could create real cohesion, Niebuhr goes on to say, and it could do so rather quickly. But his expectation overall is that endemic conflict and threats of anarchy will rule the day as global community stumbles toward the horizon. He even offers an axiom: “the less a community is held together by cohesive forces in the texture of its life the more must it be held together by power.”<sup>xxiv</sup> This in turn leads to his “dismal conclusion” that “the international community lacking these inner cohesive forces, must find its first unity through coercive force to a larger degree than is compatible with the necessities of justice. Order will have to be purchased at the price of justice; though it is quite obvious that if too much justice is sacrificed to the necessities of order, the order will prove too vexatious to last.”<sup>xxv</sup> Or, in another equally dismal speculation: “We may live for quite a long time in a period of history in which a potential world community, failing to become actual, will give rise to global, rather than limited, conditions of international anarchy and in which the technics of civilization will be used to aggravate the fury of conflict.”<sup>xxvi</sup> To the question, now reversed, whether world community is thus *impossible*, his answer is clearly “no,” despite the odds. On the contrary, powerful historical forces push for the realization of global citizenship. But if it comes about, it will only be because “desperate necessity makes it so,” and, in all likelihood, only via “ages of tragic history” along the way.<sup>xxvii</sup>

At this juncture, the question arises as to whether other forces of universality now exist which were not apparent at the time of Niebuhr’s writing. The answer is “yes,” and one of them is hinted at in his comment about “the technical-natural fact of a global economy” and his passing mention of “a common foe” as a force for mind-changing perspectives and collective cooperation. That force of universality is the one we have visited—the planet in jeopardy at human hands. Its cause is not only the existence of weapons of mass destruction—well-known to Niebuhr and much commented upon by him—but the mounting assault on life systems themselves as the consequence of humanly-induced changes in both the biosphere and atmosphere.

Any attempt to capture this planetary jeopardy in a few sentences will fail, but an attempt must be made. The global economy is, as noted, “technical-natural” as a universal force. Humans are transforming nature to such a degree that no princincts of non-human nature, from genes to grasslands to glaciers, are exempt from impact and change,. This of itself might not pose a threat, since the transformations could be benign, even beneficial and sustainable. But in this case—a case building since the Industrial Revolution—the metabolism of “the big economy” (the global human economy) is not matched to the metabolism of “the great economy” (the economy of nature) of which it is inextricably a part and upon which it is utterly dependent. This mismatch of massive metabolisms is the basic cause of unsustainability and the source of forces destructive of much of the community of life and its indispensable abiotic envelope.

The metabolism of what is now supercapitalism on a global scale, with its outside appetite, its focus on short-haul gains, its hyper-active product innovation and turnover, its ever-renewing, growth-seeking markets, and its Midas lust, works in ways that consistently outstrip the metabolism of nature's economy, a metabolism which is enormously intricate, without beginning, middle or end, interlaced, slow, and long-haul. Fossil fuels let the present economy, and industrial socialism and capitalism before it, simplify and amplify human powers while not even bothering to ask about nature's limits and its demands for regeneration and renewal on its own leisurely but non-negotiable terms. Exactly this mismatch of metabolisms, following from the unconstrained use of fossil fuels, is the cause of the accelerated and extreme climate change now gaining traction everywhere. And yet no one other than indigenous peoples warned that modern progress cannot be genuine progress if it is progress borrowed against the health of the Earth and the well-being of future generations.

Are, then, common earth issues on a planet in jeopardy an additional "force of universality" which, when combined with the others, might tip us to global community? Is the threat to life as we know it broad enough and strong enough to be the equivalent of a common threat? Will what some fear as the perfect storm of global resource depletion, the end of cheap energy, and climate chaos, shake us from our complacency and addictions? Is there in our growing awareness of a shared condition and a common destiny the creation of a collective "we" stronger than the "they" of parochial counterforces? We do not know the answer, and will not know it for some time. If Niebuhr is right, the intervening years will no doubt be a time filled with the irony, pathos, and tragedy he saw laced across human history as a whole.

We finish with a coda on the roles of religion and the law in the service of global citizenship. Two axioms from the social sciences guide us. They appear contradictory but are, in fact, complementary. The first is: "What people define as real is real in its consequences" (Thomas's Law). The second is: "Behavioral changes often precede attitudinal ones."

The first says that people act in accord with their perceptions. What they consider possible and appropriate link to their understandings of what is happening and what it means. Construing is deciding.

Both law and religion are vitally concerned with this pan-human habit. Both law want to know how people see things, how they understand what they see, and what they do in response. For religion, this interest can be on a grand scale, since religious "cosmologies" orient human lives to the cosmos and help people locate their place in it. To do this religion uses stories of origin and destiny, symbol systems, ritual practices, teachings and instruction. A whole way of life is entailed, at least for serious devotees.

How our lives are ordered, and how we perceive that in the frameworks of meaning we live by, can sometimes be as critical to change as the technologies we employ. A recent lecture on climate change that by the Harvard scientist Daniel Schrag concluded that any adequate address of climate change required four elements, none of which substituted for the other. The four are: technological innovation, different economic policies and regulations, leadership, and a shift in social norms.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Perhaps all four of, but especially the shift in social norms and economic policies, leads to the conclusion that neither people's "cosmologies" nor their concrete habits, much less the overarching institutional arrangements that belong to these, can be ignored when addressing the eco-crisis. In different words, spiritual-moral dimensions are critical to successful policies and regulations enacted in law and perhaps even to effective technological innovation.

This underscores the role of religion as that follows from our axiom that "what people define as real is real in its consequences."

But let's turn to the role of law. Its role stems from our second axiom: "Behavioral changes often precede attitudinal ones." If people are forced to alter their behavior by way of the structures, systems, and laws that channel behavior, their outlook eventually changes as well, together with many of their values. Moral and conceptual formation, and re-formation, happens not only "voluntarily," as conscious acts of will, but almost unnoticed in consequence of altered institutions and contexts, together with their opportunities, rewards and constraints. (Our axiom arose from a close study of changes in the attitudes of white and Black soldiers in the U. S. Army when army units were integrated by Pres. Truman in 1948, attitudes that didn't change until Black and white were forced to live together.) In short, changed outlooks follow, rather than precede, changed behaviors. The strong role of law here is obvious. Law effectively legislates much morality by sanctioning some behaviors and forbidding others. "Rights" and "wrongs" come pre-packaged by way of statutes and regulations and their enforcement. Ways of life are, in effect, "channeled" by a complex layering of laws and customs. At first blush, it would seem that religion is closer to changing hearts and minds as the strategic means of changing behavior than it is to channeling prescribed behavior and backing it with various powers of enforcement. Yet just as the law is vitally concerned with how people see things and how they understand what they see and feel and give their allegiance, most religions are also keenly interested in the institutional arrangements by which peoples' lives are given shape, and in the place and substance of law as a part of this. "Law," in fact, is a key category internal to religious traditions. The monotheistic faiths of the Peoples of the Book (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) make a great deal of it, to cite but one cluster of traditions. My conclusion is this: in addressing a planet in jeopardy and the task of generations we might call "sustainable global community," religion and law share a large patch of common ground. That common ground includes both "defining what is real and the consequences of that" and pursuing structural arrangements by which some essential behavior is changed even in advance of changed attitudes and outlook. (This is Niebuhr's point about the priority of order and the necessary, though precarious, play of power.) Granted, the emphasis and role of each, religion and law, is not identical. Religion is typically more interested in a transformation of the self that links "inner" change to "outer." The law is typically more interested in direct outcome and is readier to use the coercive powers of enforcement to achieve it. But there is overlap and shared concern, and the differences of emphasis and role are relative, not absolute. In any event, both "inner" and "outer" change is mandatory and neither substitutes for the other. Alliances of religion and law are thus both vitally needed in edging toward global community and a sustainable planet.

*[The oral presentation closes here, for reasons of time. The following will be developed at some point.]*

Here is an example of only one arena of common endeavor for religion and law; namely, the kind of “rights” appropriate to moral and conceptual formation and to the substance of law. What I say is in keeping with the Earth Charter but is not spelled out there. I draw from three sources.

The first is Paul Hawken in his new book, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came Into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*. “Life is the most fundamental human right,” he says, “and all of the movements within the movement are dedicated to creating the conditions for life, conditions that include livelihood, food, security, peace, a stable environment and freedom from external security.”<sup>xxix</sup>

With that premise in place—life as the most fundamental right—we turn to Edith Brown Weiss’ discussion of what moral and legal obligation our generation owes the next? How do we assure that their fundamental right to life-giving conditions is in place?

Her discussion turns on intergenerational equity, for which she posits three principles. (1) Each generation “should be required to conserve the diversity of the natural and cultural resource base” so that future generations have the means to exercise their values and solve their problems. This is the “conservation of options” principle. (2) Each generation should also be required “to maintain the quality of the planet so that it is passed on in no worse condition than that in which it was received.” This is the “conservation of quality” principle. Lastly, (3) each generation should provide its members with “equitable rights of access to the legacy of past generations and should conserve this access for future generations.” This is the “conservation of access” principle.<sup>xxx1</sup> Conservation of options, of quality, and of access—these frame both a common interfaith ethic and a common campaign for the law.

James Nash is the final source. His contribution is vital, since both Hawken and Weiss address rights for humans only. That does not suffice to break the species arrogance and institutional bent that set us on the road to uncreation. The whole community of life, powered by the economy of nature, bears moral claims (to remember the Earth Charter).

Nash outlines these moral claims as “biotic rights.” They are as follows.

1. *The right to participate in the natural dynamics of existence.* This is a right to flourish as nature provides this, without undue human alteration of the genetic or behavioral “otherness” of non-human creatures.
2. *The right to healthy and whole habitats.* The right to flourish on nature’s terms and contribute to the common ecological good assumes and requires that otherkind enjoy the essential conditions which appropriate habitat provides.
3. *The right to reproduce their own kind without humanly-induced chemical, radioactive, hybridized, or bioengineered aberrations.* This right asks human respect for genetic integrity, evolutionary legacies, and ecological relationships. By implication, it demands and defends biodiversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Weiss, “Agora: What Obligation Does Our Generation Owe to the Next?”, *American Journal of International Law*: 202.

4. *The right to fulfill their evolutionary potential with freedom from human-induced extinctions.* Extinctions are a natural part of evolutionary process, but human-induced extinctions are unjust. Humanity's exercise of its power ought not to undermine the existence of viable populations of non-human species in healthy habitats until the end of their evolutionary time.
5. *The right to freedom from human cruelty, flagrant abuse, or profligate use.* Minimal harm to otherkind within necessary usage ought to characterize human treatment of non-human life.
6. *The right to reparations or restitution through managerial interventions to restore a semblance of natural conditions disrupted by human abuse.* Because of human abuse of natural environments in the past, interventions are often necessary to enable a return to an approximation of previous ecosystemic relationships.
7. *The right to a 'fair share' of the good necessary for individuals and species.* "Fair share" is, of course, a vague criterion. Yet it is possible to determine ways in which human populations can coexist with viable populations of humanly unthreatened species and thereby preserve for them a fair share of the shared ecological good.<sup>xxxii</sup> These sources complement, rather than conflict. The basic right to life conditions, the conservation of options, quality, and access for present and future generations, and the embrace of non-human life and its basic needs. There will be enormous controversy and no little conflict in enacting such rights. Rights can conflict and moral revolutions, even when desperately needed, never come easy. But when such frameworks as these are mandated by law, then the arguments are all internal and the claims are all universal within their respective spheres, with powers of coercion waiting nearby. They are not left to the voluntarism of those Niebuhr called naïve idealists. Nor are they left to the opportunism of those who, pleading for self-regulation, act to protect narrow corporate self-interests. Religion's role—an interfaith effort with deep roots in every faith—is to love creation in this way, as well as others, and to offer the appropriate spiritual-moral formation in keeping with that love.]

I close with a dedication. It might have come where dedications should—at the beginning. But you will hear it better now. This is Thomas Berry's dedication in The Great Work: Our Way into the Future.

To the children  
 To all the children  
 To the children who swim beneath  
 The waves of the sea, to those who live in  
 The soil of the Earth, to the children of the flowers  
 In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to  
 All the children who roam over the land  
 And the winged ones who fly with the winds,  
 To the human children too, that all the children  
 May go together into the future in the full  
 Diversity of their...communities.<sup>xxxii</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Evening Service I, Rosh Hashanah, *The Gates of Remembrance* New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978), p. 27.
- <sup>ii</sup> Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), p. 11.
- <sup>iii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires*, 1.
- <sup>iv</sup> Morning Rosh Hashanah service, *The Gates of Remembrance*, p. 102.
- <sup>v</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 133.
- <sup>vi</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 153.
- <sup>vii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, pp. 189.
- <sup>viii</sup> Niebuhr, "Awkward Imperialists," pp. 670-675.
- <sup>ix</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 158.
- <sup>x</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 159.
- <sup>xi</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 158.
- <sup>xii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 158.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 158. Emphasis added.
- <sup>xiv</sup> This is not the language of Reinhold Niebuhr, but that of his brother, H. Richard Niebuhr, et al. in *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry: Reflection on the Aims of Theological Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 38. The point, however, is the same: the reach of universal moral obligation.
- <sup>xv</sup> Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, p. 71.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, p. 73.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Niebuhr, *Man's nature and His Communities*, p. 75.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 159.
- <sup>xix</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 165.
- <sup>xx</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 165.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 163.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 56.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 168-169.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 168.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 168.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 162.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 168.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Lecture by Daniel Schrag, September 13, 2007, James Little Theater, Santa Fe, NM.
- <sup>xxix</sup> As excerpted by Robert Sullivan in his review of Hawken in *The New York Times Book Review* August 5, 2007:19. Hawken's book is published by Viking Press, New York, 2007.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Weiss, "Agora: What Obligation Does Our Generation Owe to the Next?", *American Journal of International Law*: 202.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> James Nash, "Biotic Rights and Human Ecological Responsibilities," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1993): 154-157.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower Press, 1999), dedication page.