



*Don't expect the dinosaurs
to save us from extinction*

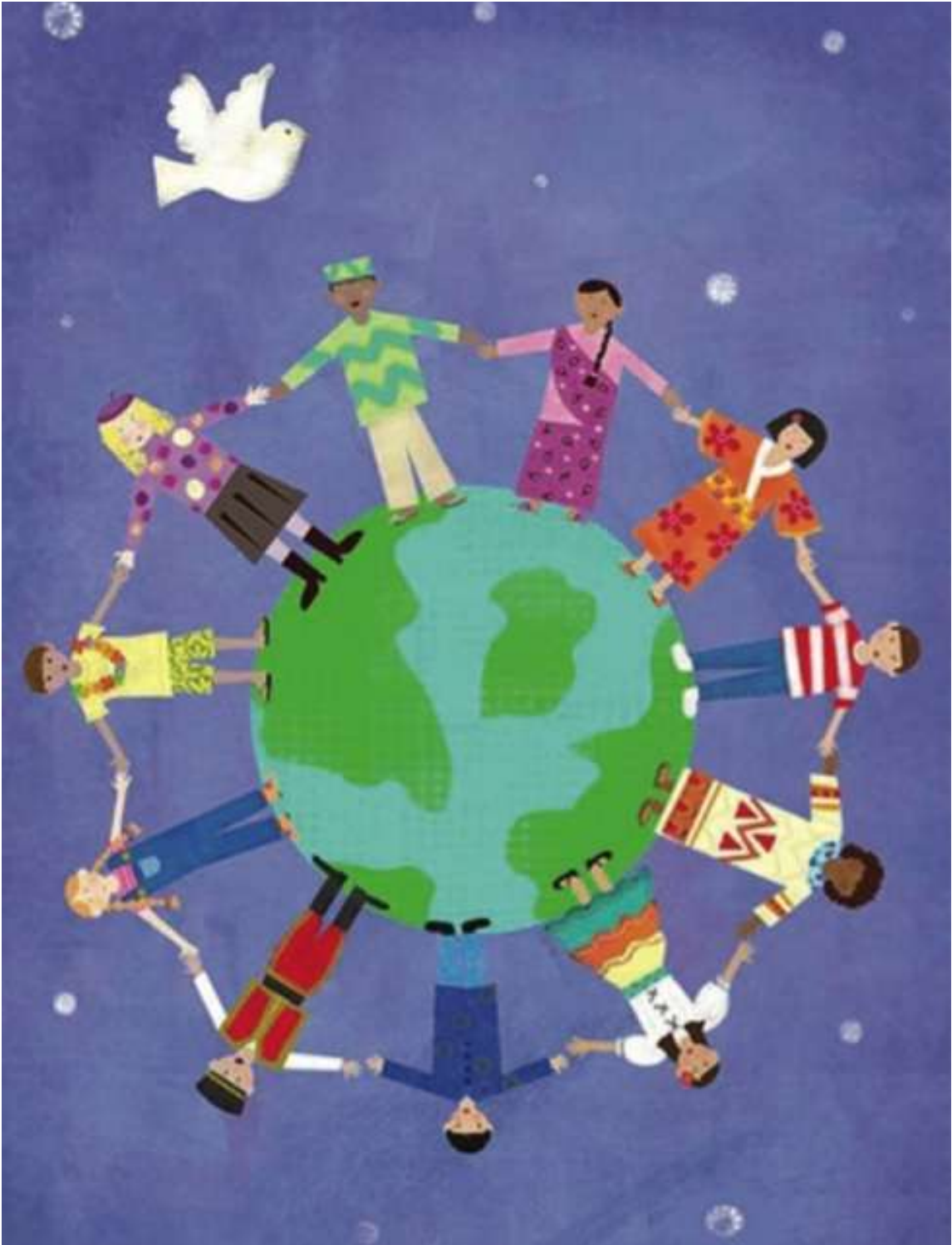
*Essays
by*

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“We possess the means to create a world where every man, woman and child can live free of hunger and discrimination and obtain the health, education and opportunity to reach their potential while ensuring that human development does not squeeze every other life form towards extinction. The challenge for our generation is to work together to promote prosperity without threatening human and environmental health and global security.”

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Introduction

I have spent a lifetime working on environment, peace and social justice issues, they are inseparable. People



often ask me “how have you kept going so long in the face of so many problems and a growing culture of self-centeredness and indifference?” Dogged determination and a playful sense of humour help but more than that I am motivated by deeply held principles. The abuse of animals, other people and the environment come from a place of hurt and ignorance, I’d rather spend my time with people of sound minds and good hearts who understand that there is more to life...much more... than material gain and self-indulgence and that we have responsibilities to each other, other species and future generations.

After all, is said and done, it’s about the kind of person you want to be and self-respect and respect for others provide a solid foundation for a good life. This is my journey with all its struggles and achievements and my only wish is to help make the world a more just and peaceful place, where every man woman and child can live free of hunger and discrimination and obtain the health, education and opportunity to reach their potential while ensuring that human development does not squeeze other life towards extinction. That is my hope and aspiration, these are my ideas, and this is my story. A little background may help you to understand what inspires and motivates me.

I was raised in a traditional Jewish family, committed to education, Tzedakah and community service. I was a popular kid, a good student and athlete, inquisitive and mischievous. The world is fascinating and I wasn’t always satisfied that because things are the way they are then that’s how they should be.

Like most of my generation I was naïve and innocent growing up in the North American world of nuclear tension and plenty, it was a good time to be a kid but we were restless. Our parents, products of their parents, were about order, family and making a living and we wanted freedom to explore our bodies and minds and each other. We wanted to live without stupid, arbitrary rules and with more spiritual depth. We admired those who went with the flow and pursued higher ideas than money or status or fame.

We rejected tribalism and embraced human rights. We wanted new ways to value one another, rather than by wealth and status. We wanted to build a society that allowed each of us to grow as a person, one that thrived on new ideas. We wanted to live in harmony with the earth, the plants and animals, the indigenous peoples, with each other and with ourselves. We thought about our responsibilities to future generations. From our idealism sprung movements for women, natural foods, social justice, animal rights and the environment. We danced and listened to music that inspired activism and altered states of awareness. We wanted life without violence and discrimination and hatred.

I gave up meat at 15 and studied animal agriculture because I prefer to be well informed rather than opinionated. I found little more than disrespect for other life based on some sense of superiority and insensitivity. Later as a graduate student and wildlife biologist in BC and Alberta I encountered much of the same human arrogance and self-centeredness. I studied caribou and grizzly bears and worked tirelessly to protect wilderness and wildlife from destructive human activity. I risked and lost my career as wildlife biologist to stop the hunting of caribou in Alberta and then quietly persuaded the Committee on the Status of Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) to protect them as endangered.

I moved on, recognizing that the future of wilderness and wildlife would be decided in homes and boardrooms not in the woods. While helping the Humane Society of Ottawa return from the brink of failure after nearly 100 years I conceived of a program of education for people of all walks of life. The environmental movement, in my view, was too focused on fire fighting, and needed the support of many more informed supporters. Harmony Foundation was born in 1985, and continues its pioneering and award winning work in education for socially and environmentally sustainable development and in building bridges between business, government and community interests. Over the past 26 years Harmony has created numerous programs and 27 major publications to help individuals, schools, workplaces and communities work together to take positive action.

Thirty-six countries have been involved in our programs and our amazing work in China on sustainable community development and participatory governance over the past 5 years offers many lessons on the importance of Canadians demanding that government and business represent us responsibly on social and environmental issues not simply pursue quick economic returns for the privileged of this generation.

It's been an incredible ride and it's far from over. I remain actively involved in charitable and community work too. As a student I took my "little brother" to meet Secretariat. As volunteers I've helped build animal shelters and new libraries and programs for abused women and children. I've had the privilege of bringing together Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians in cooperative environmental projects and hosting Mohawk elders planting



trees of peace with them. And, it's been no less of an eye opener to do my part on homelessness by raising 50,000 pair of donated socks for those in need in Victoria over the past 5 years.

I enjoy mentoring young people in every aspect of my life and most of all I tell them, "there is so much more satisfaction in a life of purpose and meaning rather than material gain" and you can enjoy life too if you balance your work with family, joy and gratitude." Find a partner in life, who shares your values, I know how much that's meant to me. "Most of all if you carry yourself with humility and self-respect confronting the issues not the other you will succeed. There is

much more to say and even more to do. I hope we will be allies and friends in helping to make the world a better place for all living today and for generations to come. I know much of my generation long ago put aside their

idealism and became as much a part of the problem as the solution, acquiring more material wealth than any in history and raising kids who want even more, and faster and faster.



Michael Bloomfield

October, 2012

In my lifetime, the world's population has more than doubled, energy use more than quadrupled, the overall level of economic activity quintupled and our demands for space, resources, consumer products and disposal sites for our waste have had serious social, environmental, and health costs and they are growing.

Yes, the challenges are great and at times the prospects for the future look bleak. The essays which follow are heartfelt expressions of those concerns but I also want you to know this: if people of good will from all backgrounds and places join together there is hope.

I'm sure we all want a society based on fairness, respect and peaceful co-existence. We all want to eliminate hatred, injustice, environmental degradation and violence. Once we act on this we can change the world!

I hope that you find these essays written over the summer of 2010, and revised over the months that followed, to be thoughtful, informative and inspiring to action. Thanks,

Essay #1

Don't Expect the Dinosaurs to Save Us from Extinction

Earn your success based on service to others, not at the expense of others

- H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things

- Peter F. Drucker

If you were the leader of the world, would you allow poverty, war, hunger, pollution and environmental deterioration? The answer is obvious to any decent person: No! Then why in the world does a newborn today



inherit a place where humanitarian, political and environmental disasters occur daily and worsen with time?

Life on earth is facing a global emergency. Thousands of species are threatened with imminent extinction. Global warming is multiplying this danger and widening the gap between rich and poor. Since World War II there have been 148 wars. Today Sudan, Afghanistan, Congo, Iraq and many others rage on. Conditions of civil unrest and famine are creating large numbers of refugees searching for better lives. In addition, we are now witnessing the swift rise of environmental refugees from poverty-stricken countries where there is not enough water or arable land to provide sustenance for all inhabitants. Some governments are losing their ability to maintain public order and provide

for the most basic needs of their people. In fact, environmental refugees now comprise the majority of migrants crossing international borders. These problems are destabilizing regions of the world and threaten continued and intensified conflict. Natural disasters like the tsunami in Indonesia or Haiti's devastating earthquake only make the situation worse.

Clearly the globalization game has winners and losers. Whether those of us living in the developed world acknowledge it or not, our often ill-begotten privilege, wealth and comfort is only possible because so many others are left clinging to their humble lives like life rafts.

Whose fault is it anyways?

We expect our leaders to carry the great responsibility of securing and enhancing our quality of life and the health of the planet. But we should not be complacent. We all bear responsibility, perhaps most significantly in choosing our leaders. If we do not hold their feet to the fire, then we should not be surprised when they take us where they want to go. Surely we get the leaders we deserve. They are raised and grow in our communities; they go to our schools and belong to our families where leadership development begins. Our children and youth, our

future citizens and leaders, are products of the social and educational environments that we create and provide and support, actively or passively. Our leaders have failed us, sometimes miserably, in solving our problems and providing the promised better lives for more and more people. But perhaps, we have failed ourselves too in choosing our leaders and passively submitting to their short-sighted, self-centered decision-making. Maybe you did not vote for your current government or you live where leadership is imposed not chosen. Fair enough, but how do we help ensure a better world if we are stand idly by and let others pull us here and there like yoyos?

More and more our leaders are like dogs that trot ahead of their masters. To the uninitiated, it would seem that the dog is leading, but one pull here, one pull there, and the “leader” sits down. Do we want leaders of vision and courage who serve our best interests or those who govern by poll and diktat, occasionally throwing us a bone when the polls tell them we are displeased? If not, if we sincerely want leaders of vision and principle, then let us cultivate and recruit them and help them get the job done.

The good, the bad and the untouchable leader

Why do we have leaders? Good leaders, whether elected or bestowed with power through other means, serve the interests of their constituents while engaging them in the search for improvement of their social, economic, cultural, educational and environmental conditions. Great leaders offer a vision for society and the world that will advance and enhance the quality of life today and in the future. They also possess the insight, persuasiveness and determination to bring people together to solve problems and make good opportunities become reality. The best leaders therefore are able, not only to convey their visions to the public, but to engage us in a continuous process of discussion, learning and positive action to find innovative new ways to meet our needs without harming others.

Unfortunately, the leadership that we see today, in Canada and elsewhere, looks little like the ideal. The consequences are painfully evident. In a world of plenty, we have millions of poor children and families facing starvation and health epidemics and displaced by conflict and environmental disasters. Millions more live homeless in the cities of the world, because the greedy and their enablers in the halls of power brought the world economy to its knees and then abused public trust by putting billions in the hands of the very people who created the crisis. Small wonder then that there so much alienation in civil society and despair in much of the world where people are forced to live on less than \$2 per day.

Some of these problems are new and some are old, but all of them persist because today’s leaders seem to no longer aspire to solving complex problems, they simply manage them and pass them on to the next “guy.” The words that characterize much leadership today are dodging, dissembling, hedging, fudging, pretending, prevaricating and generally doing anything in one’s power to divert public attention from bad leadership.

I have had a wonderfully meaningful life. Over the past 30 years, while working for social and environmental causes, I have been disturbed by the steady decline in how people conduct themselves. Please do not get me wrong; I have had the privilege of knowing and working with some great people in government, business and civil society; men and women of integrity and dedication who understand their responsibilities and treat others with respect. But if I had a dollar for every prevarication, lie and deception I have encountered I would be a wealthy man able to do much more. One just needs to be picking the latest magazine or newspaper to find evidence of corruption, deception and collusion in the pursuit of money and power.

If we once had better leadership, where have our revered leaders gone? You know, those unblemished people pursuing only the public good. Perhaps they never existed. It is clear that the political scene today is dominated by people unwilling or unable to think creatively about solutions to social problems, or those whose ambitions seem to lean more to personal gain, money or power. Lawyers and business people enter politics because they most easily can resume their “other” careers and find access to the money needed to run campaigns. Between 1996 and 2004 the cost of the US Presidential campaign quadrupled to over two billion dollars, enough money to operate 10 Canadian universities, buy 40 million doses of hepatitis vaccine or build 150,000 classrooms in Africa. Our society and its elite have become so heavily focused on economic growth and business development that other issues and those addressing them struggle to get on the agenda. As a result we have a disproportionately high percentage of leaders from business and law compounding the problem of single-mindedness and raising the risk of political leaders attracted to opportunities for personal gain and therefore more vulnerable to corruption.

I remember with derision the splendid lunch I sat through in the executive dining room of a major insurance company while the CEO explained why a shortage of funds made a donation impossible. Or the time a senior vice-president of another company, sitting behind an exquisite black walnut desk, gave me the same poverty spiel, not knowing that I knew he was about to fly to Hilton Head North Carolina from Montreal for an afternoon of golf. Oak paneled offices, bloated expense accounts and club memberships may make for happy executives, but not necessarily generous ones. In fact, I think they too often breed a sense of entitlement and callous indifference to the “little people,” as the CEO of British Petroleum described the working people suffering from the catastrophic Gulf of Mexico oil well rupture.

And what of our political leaders found at splendid lunches with their friends from business and who share their sense of entitlement? Whose interests are they serving? Others hide behind unconquerable mountains of bureaucracy. Sitting comfortably behind their desks, far removed from the daily problems the average citizen faces as a result of bad public policy, they prefer managing problems to solving the underlying issues. What do you think happens if you write a letter to the Minister? As an experienced letter writer I can report that the common answer from the Minister’s secretary, or some government official with an incomprehensible professional title, is patronizing double-talk or simple thanks for writing. Accountability, transparency and accessibility are the platitudes of our time.

Money matters

Of course we need to provide reasonable compensation for public service but who decides what is fair and appropriate? Is it appropriate that elected officials by and large decide their own salaries and benefits without public oversight? Is that why salaries for Members of Parliament have risen substantially over the past 10 years? Was it our choice that our political leaders and their senior bureaucrats have become the new aristocracy, with salaries and gold-plated pensions that dramatically exceed not only what the average taxpayer receives, if he or she even has a pension, but rates in the private sector? Why we were not infuriated when the Minister of Finance suggested raising CPP rates and when asked about their pensions, Members of Parliament said that was not the issue? And what about the private sector? Do you know that in 1970, a company CEO made about 24 times the salary of his or her average employee – today, it is 275 times. In other words, today’s CEO earns more in one workday (there are 260 in a year) than the typical worker earns all year.

Is that fair, especially when we learn that the average family has a lost economic ground over the past 20 years? Of course, if you are one of the lucky few people enjoying vast material wealth, privilege and advantage you probably do not care to talk about it or maybe you just do not care at all. Beware though; in some places such disparity has gone from resentment to violence. Workers at a state-owned iron and steel plant in Jilin China attacked and killed a senior manager during a protest of the factory. As I have described elsewhere, the business of exploitation is not just a hindrance for creating a better world, it is also breeding ground for dangerous, unstable situations and may lead to violence.

Back to basics: Democratic principles

Canada prides itself of its democracy, which rests on a number of honourable principles: accessibility, accountability and transparency. Increasingly our leaders fail to honour these principles in a desperate attempt of self-perseverance. When was the last time a minister resigned to be accountable for a failure in his/her department? Why is it so damn difficult to get information? For example, British Columbia claims it spent one billion dollars on the Olympic Games, cynically understating the costs which should have included the 655 provincial employees who “volunteered;” the contributions compelled from crown corporations and the many other hidden costs. Why does accessibility seem to be so much easier for the rich and powerful?

A democracy is only truly democratic if all citizens have the opportunity to participate. The principle of accountability holds that the leaders, whether elected or appointed, are responsible to the citizenry for their decisions and actions. Transparency requires that the decisions and actions of those in government are open to public scrutiny and that the public has a right to access such information. All three concepts are central to the very idea of democratic governance. Without accessibility, accountability and transparency, democracy is impossible. These time-honoured principles are not unknown to our leaders, so why do they keep trampling on them?

Taking responsibility for human fallibility – or not

Let’s be fair. Accountability comes with responsibility, and we have entrusted our leaders with great responsibilities. However, we should not expect our leaders to be accountable for every little misstep by them or their staff. People are not infallible, are they? But wait, when did we last hear one of our elected representatives admit to mistakes they had made or react to a change of position as a sensible reconsideration rather than a flip-flop? Our local, provincial and federal politicians have for too long embraced an absurd and somewhat desperate belief in infallibility.

The irony is that democracy rests on such an ability to acknowledge and respect different perspectives, argue for one’s standpoint, but face criticism and engage in constructive debate about the possible flaws in one’s reasoning. We honour our democracy when we do not trust that one person or a select few, as in dictatorial states, will be able to make all the right decisions and take all the right actions without ever committing a mistake. Ideally we safeguard against such mistakes or try to diminish their consequences by public engagement in debates about the reasonable objectives and feasibility of the visions, decisions and actions of our leadership.

Today however, our leaders and the governing bodies they represent are so afraid of liability that they would rather never admit to a mistake than apologize for their human fallibility and constructively engage civil society

in correcting such mistakes. Our leaders are also tainted by the idea that admitting to mistakes is a sign of weakness. “Gotcha” politics may be good sport but it is not good governance.

We should take responsibility too!

There is no doubt that Canada and the world are facing severe problems that threaten to bring us all to ruin. Why is nobody protesting this state of affairs? We can easily envision the benefits of public participation, but why are we, the public, so apathetic?

Some of us are too busy playing with our new techno-toys and others are legitimately pressed pillar to post with work and family responsibilities. And, there is no doubt that some of us are pacified by bread and circuses, those government programs meant to distract us from the real problems our society faces.

The religious fervor with which the torch was met was astonishing, even if one was unaware that the tradition was started by Nazi Germany to glorify the Third Reich. Anyone who opposed such a great nation-building event was pilloried as a kill-joy at least and a traitor at worst. Before the Olympic Games many people engaged in a variety of campaigns protesting the incredible spending on a commercial sporting event, when BC and Canada faced serious social and economic problems. Surely the money would be better spent on more important things. This willingness to get involved was encouraging. But as soon as the Olympic Games began everybody was out in the street celebrating. Those who were responsible for the over budget spending, could happily watch from their seats – largely paid for by taxpayers – and bask in their glory as people eagerly spent even more money on beer and tickets to attend the Olympic events. All the cuts on social, culture and environmental programs forgotten because we threw a great party at the expense of our most vulnerable.

As Ghandi said: “a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable.” How are we doing? Is our leadership challenging to aspire to greater achievement meaningful in science, art, conservation and social justice or simply encouraging to spend our way to glory and happiness?

I know there is much fatigue after so many disappointments from so many insincere leaders seemingly more interested in power and wealth than the public good. Poor leadership and bad public policy bears some responsibility for this apathy. Perhaps we are also living too comfortably in our privileged part of the world to care. Duped by the media and public spending on self-affirming celebratory events rather than social and environmental problems, many have abdicated their responsibilities to govern our leaders. But let’s not get complacent. While public participation depends somewhat on great leadership and a real commitment on behalf of our leaders to be accessible and accountable and open to criticism, public participation also requires a genuine and strong will on behalf of the public to get involved. It is our job to help them do a better job and let them know when they do not. Otherwise, we are leaving our fate and the world’s to others, and if we do not get involved we cannot complain when bad choices are made on our behalf.

Essay #2

Charitable Giving: What Motivates Philanthropy and Volunteerism?

You must be the change you want to see in the world

- Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948)

Growing up learning to give

As I have written elsewhere, we get the leaders we deserve. They are raised and grow in our communities; they go to our schools and belong to our families where leadership development begins. We are lucky in that some of the world's most powerful people learned as they grew up to be a positive force in society and support sustainable development. Bill Gates is an example of this. Bill Gates has possessed the title of richest man in the world for many years. He is also one of the world's biggest philanthropists. More than a decade ago, he decided to start handing over the a big portion of his wealth to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, so that “the people with the most urgent needs and



the fewest champions in the world, grow up healthier, get a better education, and gain the power to lift themselves out of poverty,” as it says on the foundation's website. Bill Gates doesn't have his enthusiasm for philanthropy from strangers; in fact he conducts much of his charitable work together with his father, Bill Gates Sr. In 1994 he and his father set up the William H. Gates Foundation, which is today the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates Sr. Involvement in his son's charitable show that giving for the good of society and the progress of humanity is a learned behaviour. Big companies or empires such as Microsoft are not necessarily innovative on their own or their CEOs do not necessarily assume the responsibility for doing good with their money just because they have so much of it. Being conscious about our moral obligations to give to those in need is largely something we learn by growing up surrounded by people that cultivate that attitude in us. Unfortunately not all leaders in business had as conscious parents as Bill Gates.

I have been involved with charitable organizations throughout my adult life, as fund-raiser, donor, advisor and volunteer. I am most impressed by individuals and organizations who give their time and money without seeking reward or recognition, those who only want to help make their community and world a better place and to help those in need.

In my view all forms of charity are not equal. The medieval philosopher Maimonides listed *Eight Levels of Giving* that outlined the morally most superior way of giving through to the morally most inferior. The highest level of charity is to anonymously “give an interest-free loan to a person in need” the lowest level is to “give in sadness”. This means that gifts (monetary or non-monetary) given to the recipient in a

dignified, respectful manner rank above gifts given out of pity, begrudgingly or with self-interest, such as seeking praise and approval.

I was raised in a family where the Jewish obligation to perform charity, was a core principle. Most Jews embrace *tzedakah* by contributing a portion of their income to charitable organizations, making donations on special occasions and sharing food with strangers on Jewish holidays. As opposed to philanthropy, which is completely voluntary, *tzedakah* is a moral obligation, which must be performed regardless of financial means. I believe such behaviour must be taught and modeled and reinforced through constant repetition.

In this essay I want to consider 1) where charitable giving in the form of corporate philanthropy and personal volunteerism ranks on Maimonides' ladder of *tzedakah*, and 2) our moral obligations to help those in need. I also want to explore how current practices too often corrupt these admirable motives.

The need for giving in the world today



Obviously charity makes a difference to the recipient, reducing hardship and offering hope and compassion. Moreover, the quality of life of other people affects our own. Remarkably, a number of scientific studies show significant health benefits, physical and mental, for those who perform acts of kindness generally agree that doing something to help someone else makes them “feel good.” That’s great but the intention for helping others is not to benefit ourselves. Whether you are Jewish or not, it is worthwhile to consider our moral obligations to others.

In our inter-dependent world humanitarian and environmental tragedies in one place quickly spread across borders bringing epidemics, conflict and instability elsewhere. The sooner we accept that humankind in its many faces and places is really one big family, connected by history, biology and the future the more peaceful the world will be for us and generations to follow.

Donors see the fruit of their charitable work when the improved quality of life for others leads to increased social, political and economic co-operation around the world. Still the answer to the question: “Why should I give to charity?” requires careful consideration. What is charity? Who is a worthy recipient of our charity? Which charitable causes are the most important? Is everybody, rich or poor and in-between obligated to give? How much money is acceptable, adequate, and admirable? How about volunteering and in-kind donations?

In today’s world, supporting charitable causes is not just a personal act of compassion or religious obligation. It has become a responsibility for government and business as well, and the challenges are that great. Therefore, the reasons major organizations and corporations undertake philanthropy should be critically examined too. What motivates major corporations, small companies, government agencies, foundations and individuals to give to various charitable causes? Would you be surprised to know it may not just be the passion for a social or environmental or health cause that impels them to do such things, but also the potential financial benefits or improved reputation philanthropy entails? In other words, we

may see a number of philanthropic practices today, ranging from the highest to the lowest rung on Maimonides' ladder. Charitable giving is meant to alleviate humanitarian needs, promote social welfare, and otherwise contribute to the greater good. Are those aims undermined and corrupted by donations made with ulterior motives? Let's take a look.

Why give to charity?

By law, a registered charity is an organization established and operated for charitable purposes. It must devote its resources to charitable activities and meet a public benefit test showing that:

- Its activities and purposes provide a tangible benefit to the public.
- Those people who are eligible for benefits are either the public as a whole, or a significant section of it, in that they are not a restricted group or one where members share a private connection, such as social clubs or professional associations with specific membership.
- The charity's activities must be legal and not contrary to public policy.

Canada's growing number of charities represents a host of public and private interests. Some promote human welfare, others animal welfare or environmental protection. Some support local projects, restoration of a heritage site for instance, while others are engaged with much larger issues, such as climate change, global health or human rights.

Charities are created by people with a passion for a cause or an issue. Their dedication is infectious and attracts the support and participation of others. Looking at the human tragedies and natural disasters and the scale of social and environmental problems around the world, it is hard not to feel impelled to do something to secure a better future for ourselves and our children and their children.

In modern times it is increasingly understood that giving is a social obligation as well. The western world provides financial aid to the third world, often a percentage of the national GDP. This is done partly in recognition of the fact that many of the problems in the third world and especially human tragedies such as hunger, epidemics and natural disasters are in some part caused by the history of western exploitation in third world countries and our disregard for the environment, particularly in places where our cheap consumer goods are made. Yet, third world aid is far from an adequate response to the human tragedies or the environmental degradation we witness around the globe. First, because the money provided is not enough, and second, because the aid is not accompanied by fair trade agreements and other attempts at promoting equal opportunity for everyone to improve their quality of life.

While this kind of charity is today institutionalized at an international level, what are the reasons for third world aid? One would hope, is not just the guilty burden of a long history of wrongdoing that western countries carry, or simply acknowledgement that the problems the third world faces impact all of our lives. That perpetuates charitable giving as an indication of superior moral standing when it should be a selfless contribution to heal the world and solve real social, human and environmental problems.

After nearly 40 years of working for one cause or another I have no illusions about that. Corporate philanthropy is very important but we must ask ourselves what motivates corporations to give to charity and why over the past 25 years has it become dominated by marketing. Individuals and organizations may be passionate about an issue, but do not necessarily have the means or expertise to solve the problem on their own. Therefore, they need to persuade others to donate money or volunteer time and expertise. Some

corporations are very generous, but too often only in return for benefits they receive as donors. Here is the rub. In a culture where “what is in it for me” is a common refrain, corporate charitable giving often ranks on the lowest rungs of Maimonide’s scale.

I once had a senior executive with a beverage company tell me, “I respect what you are doing and your commitment to the cause but you need to show me how you can help me sell more beer in the next quarter.” In other cases sponsors who support a commercial sporting or entertainment event are given the same tax credit as those who support hospitals or disaster relief.

The carrot or the stick?

Should charity be voluntary or obligatory? There are many ways in which human welfare is promoted through enforcement. Taxation is a way of enforcing everybody’s equal or differentiated support to national security and social welfare, depending on the system of taxation. Obligatory service requires young men and sometimes women to spend a considerable amount of time contributing to national security and social welfare. Can it truly be charity if it is compulsory or must it be a matter of personal choice? Compulsory giving ranks third last on Maimonides ladder: “One gives another after the latter asks”. In other words, the donor would not have given his or her money or time if he or she had not been asked or obligated explicitly to do so. The morality or interests of the donor does not compel him or her to give.

If compulsory giving is not charity then what about giving for concealed motives? Over past 25 years I have watched as philanthropy and marketing merged. Far too many companies, governments and others have used charities, some as willing partners, to promote their own organizations, products and agendas. Charities do a remarkable job managing their affairs in ways most businesses could not imagine, efficiently managing the money raised while compelled by regulation to spend 80% of what they raised as donations within 12 months. Over and over again they must find new ways to keep the attention of often fickle donors who demand performance and pandering that can be beyond reasonable. Now I do not mind giving tokens of appreciation or generous thanks for support given, it is the right thing to do. But it is not the place of a charity to promote organizations and products. They have their own work to do and this process is certainly going to favour a high profile event like the Olympics over, let’s say battered women and children: not much of a photo-op there. There are, however, possibilities for corporations to connect with charities in a more positive manner.

One of the business leaders I most admired in my career, Allan Taylor, former Chairman of the Royal Bank of Canada, once said in a speech to his peers: “Don’t treat the charities you support as ships passing in the night, build lasting relationships.” Far too often, this is not the case when the cause of the year is embraced only to be abandoned the next year as a new cause gains favour in the ever dominant marketing department. Logo gratification is not philanthropy.

Trends in charitable giving in Canada today

Over the last 25 years, my work as Executive Director of Harmony Foundation has exposed me to the many challenges that charities in Canada encounter in trying to obtain corporate support for their work and projects. Given the multitude of charities that exist in Canada alone, the competition is fierce. It is no longer enough to simply ask for support for a good cause. Corporate philanthropy has become big

business and charities are faced with the challenge of contributing to showcasing and promoting business in return for the donations they receive for their charitable work. This would be an opportune time to discuss a number of trends that I believe are harmful to Canadian charitable organizations and in the interest of full disclosure, I must tell you have at times frustrated and even infuriated me in my work.

Head-Office Dodge: In this scenario, corporations limit most or all of their contributions to their head office, perhaps favouring a few other areas. This approach favours large cities, particularly those which are commercial centers. Residents of smaller communities may purchase products or services or invest in these companies but are unlikely to see contributions to their hospitals, schools or other important local programs or facilities. Consumer power comes from being informed about the charitable work of corporations in your locality. Support companies that support you. This means you should support businesses that support community groups and other charities important to you. Be very wary of buying on-line from companies who take your money, but don't give back to the community.

FTA/NAFTA Effect: The main effect is due to the movement of company decision-making to the U.S. and the treatment of Canadian operations as business units of global operations. Generally, this means that U.S. head office policy determines charitable contributions in Canada. As a result, Canadian charities must obtain U.S. charitable status to compete with U.S. requests. Several corporations have made it clear that the percentage of gifts to Canada does not reflect the percentage of revenue generated by their Canadian operations. In fact, one company advised that less than 2% of all donations leave the U.S. for all other countries, and Canada simply is not a high priority.

Government Withdrawal: Government support for charitable organizations and community projects has generally declined at all levels and increasingly emphasizes short-term, high-visibility projects. For example, favouring river clean-up campaigns rather than long-term education and restoration projects that solve the problem. Increasingly international grants are tied to economic goals rather than to humanitarian needs. The \$58 million spent on the Canadian pavilion at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai is probably more than what was spent on all the environmental, social welfare and human rights projects in China during the decade.

Competition with Government Foundations: Charities are now in direct competition with government foundations set up to support specific government functions. Not only are donations to these groups given a greater tax break, one suspects an incentive exists to give to the government foundations because of a perceived or real possibility of advantages such as political access.

Philanthropy as Marketing: Over time the mantra "we must marry philanthropy and marketing" came to realization as companies and governments directed their support to organizations and activities most likely to promote their interests, even at the risk of lesser societal benefit. Companies fail to distinguish between big-ticket sponsorship events (like the Olympics) and organizations with an authentically charitable mandate. In this scenario preference is given by donors to visibility rather than societal good. Why give to campaigns to fight poverty or child abuse when a contribution to a sporting event offers better profiling without the risk of being associated with misfortune? Government policy encourages this approach when it fails to distinguish between marketing and philanthropy in its tax regulations.

Corporate Consolidation: For example, a bank takes over a trust company, but their donations budget is consolidated into one pot that is smaller than the two original funds combined.

Corporate Foundations: These foundations are established to administer funds and process funding requests, which in the past were typically handled by a management committee. They seem to eat up available charitable funds through administration costs and self-promotion.

Tax Credit Chop: The switch in Canada from tax deductions to a tax credit reduced the tax benefits of making donations. Today the average Canadian donates less than \$600/year.

Charity Begins with Politics: Individuals get a better tax break for donating to a political party than a charity. Are our hospitals less important than our political parties?

Corporations sell in Canada, but do not have their production operations here: As a result, they do not consider Canadians as members of their operating communities and effectively shut the door to potential funding. Canadians should make informed decisions on which companies they support. Internet companies are particularly poor performers.

The Global Marketplace Empowers America: Canadians happily support their American pop culture heroes; attend their films, sporting events, and concerts, buy their music, watch their television, while stars and corporate sponsors amass millions, perhaps billions, of dollars. Do Hanna Montana, Ted Turner or LeBron James return our affection, or does their support overwhelmingly benefit Americans?

Redefining charitable work: A charity is defined in the dictionary as "a fund, institution, or organization for helping the poor, reducing suffering or contributing to meeting other important social needs". Regardless of the merit of their work, is an organization like the Fraser Institute or Greenpeace really a charitable organization?

Tied Giving: Increasingly, corporations tie their gifts to charitable organizations to product promotion. For example, high tech companies supply technology to educational facilities that train future employees or purchase other services. There is nothing wrong with these gifts, in fact I am sure they are welcome, but is it charitable if they get promotion in return or demand that the products of competitors be prohibited? If you pay \$10 for a membership to a registered charity and they send you a newsletter you are not entitled to a charitable receipt because you received some benefit in return.

The Reorganizing Shuffle: Donations suspended while donor reorganizes its giving program.

Please understand that I respect those people and organizations whose donations enable groups that work for children, homeless, seniors, education, the environment, social welfare, culture and many other worthy causes. My concern is that just as charities are not allowed to participate in partisan political activities to maintain their status we must protect charities from commercialization.

What can you do?

I do not believe that giving should be compulsory, choosing to donate to a charitable cause should be a matter of personal conviction about the importance of social, humanitarian or environmental problems, cultural and educational and health needs and so on.

While it is important to do your best to make sure your donation makes a difference far better to risk some money on good intentions than to be part of a stingy, self-centered society which ignores the needs of those less fortunate and our responsibilities to each other and the future.

Perform your due diligence but rest assured legitimate charities perform invaluable services far more efficiently than government or business, despite the many regulations and political and market pressures which make their work more difficult.

I've often thought about what I would offer if the government of the day sought my advice on the most important actions that could be taken to maximize the benefits of charities to society and ease the burden they have of raising and managing funds often under suffocating regulations.

1. Increase incentives e.g. greater tax credit
2. Eliminate preferential treatment for political parties
3. The more you give the greater the credit
4. Governance
5. Perform your due diligence

You can volunteer too, many do. Volunteerism is sometimes mentioned as the 4th sector, because the hours and effort, which volunteers put into various projects amount to a real economic contribution to society – 4th that can be measured statistically. Giving money to charity is not the only way of supporting good causes, making available your volunteer efforts is just as valuable. But did you know that the average Canadian family only gives about \$500/year to charity? Or that volunteerism is on the decline? I often hear from volunteers, especially students, that their peers ask them why they give their time away when they could use it to earn more money. Furthermore, it seems that something is always offered in return for volunteer efforts (appreciation packages, free lunch, a promise of “you will acquire leadership skills” etc.). Where are the good intentions if even volunteerism has been reduced to an act of self-interest? Think about which ways you can support, if it is not by donating money, donate your time, but have your heart in it.

For your consideration

- Why is charitable giving important?
- Why do corporations give? Why should they give?
- How can we persuade more corporations to give more and for society's benefit?
- Why should private individuals give?
- How do you choose which causes we support?
- How much giving is enough? How do we determine if an individual or an organization has given sufficient?

Essay #3

Democratic Rights and Responsibilities



What is the role of government?

We tend to think of government as the ultimate civil authority, prescribing rules and regulations that everyone must follow. In fact, the government should serve society. We elect people to represent us. The government is and the bureaucracy serves to help the government fulfill its mandate and exercise the power with which they have been entrusted by the people.

However, in Canada today we see a tendency for government and its institutions to become increasingly self-serving. Our elected representatives seem to have forgotten from where they derive their power and that their primary responsibilities are to the people not to their party or special interests who fund their campaigns and careers.

They were meant to exercise power for the greater good and to provide opportunity and protection for all citizens not for personal gain for themselves or their cronies. They certainly were not meant to enrich themselves or compromise their effectiveness and yet almost half of all Canadian MPs are collecting income over and above their salaries, often from corporate directorships and professional fees. As John Ivison in his recent article *Moonlighting Hinders Senate's Work*, says: "It's a wonder senators like Pamela Wallin (a director of Porter Airlines, CTV globemedia and Gluskin Sheff, not to mention Chancellor of Guelph University) and Michael Meighen (a director of five investment companies and Chancellor of the University of King's College in Halifax) find the time to turn up for work on Parliament Hill at all." It is interesting to note that in the Mayan civilization, leaders were expected to give up all personal wealth in order to be dependent on the people they served. I wonder how many government officials today could survive on a system based on mutual respect and support.

The question is, what are we going to do about it? We can shout to the TV from our couches that government has forgotten its responsibilities and bureaucrats and elected officials are a bunch of crooks. We can neglect to vote, that increasingly the case, and do little or nothing else to exercise our democratic rights and responsibilities. Or, if we care about maintaining our democracy we must participate in it. Unless we contribute to its upkeep and maintenance we put it and our freedoms at risk.

In this essay I want to talk about the benefits of public participation in governmental processes and provide you with some examples of how we can enhance our quality of life by participating much more actively in shaping society.

What can we learn from the Six Nations?

The people of the Six Nations, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, call themselves the *Hau De No Sau Nee*, which means “People Building a Long House.” Together the *Hau De No Sau Nee* comprise the oldest known participatory democracy still active in the world.

Their history of governance contains a great deal of life-promoting intelligence for those of us who believe government truly dedicated to liberty and happiness for all life. Their governance structure, which is based on a philosophy that preaches reason and consent of the governed, not coercion, should inspire us today as it did in the past. The original United States representative democracy drew a great deal of inspiration and content from the Six Nations.

The peoples who came together to form the Iroquois Confederacy were the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk and the Tuscarora nations. They understood that unity would bring peace among them and bring strength in fighting European intruders. United, they were highly successful in defending themselves. The alliances the Iroquois Confederacy made as equals with European nations and the cosmology which frames their constitution – the Great Law of Peace – provide them with a clear political framework to guide contemporary relations with settler society. The process of involving all members of the community, men and women, was long and complex and everybody’s interests were honoured when decisions were made regarding the direction of society and its maintenance and defense. Members of the Six Nations would come together in longhouses and chose their leaders based on in-depth discussion, presentations by the candidates and finally consensus among all the individuals present. At the time, the Six Nations was a face-to-face community. It is of course more difficult to develop consensus in a large impersonal modern bureaucratic state. Today the Six Nations community has over 20,000 registered residents.

Richard Williams, executive director of the American Indian College Fund, reminds us that: “The political structure of the great Iroquois Confederacy served as a model for democracy among the American founding fathers, who wrote the Constitution based on “we the people,” something unheard of in the aristocratic, feudal societies of Europe. A governance structure based on elaborate system of checks, balances, and supreme law was an enormous move forward in human society. And, it is interesting to note that there is no word for “I” in any American Indian language.” The Six Nations have practiced an impressive and inclusive governance structure for over 800 hundred years, based on the concept of unity, so why can’t we?

The ladder of citizen participation

In today’s representative democracy, different from the direct democracy of the Six Nations based on consensus, it is imperative that we ensure public participation or the democracy may wither and die.

In 1969, Sherry R. Arnstein opened the discussion on redistribution of power in her famous article *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* with this sentence: “The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you” (p. 216). Unfortunately, while the popular understanding of public participation in governance processes is that it is good, our democratically elected leaders do not always encourage it or adhere to its principles. In fact, they sometimes corrupt them, cynically pretending to be open to public participation while they actively

attempt to thwart it.

Arnstein's ladder helps us to understand how this happens. Her reference to a poster made by French students in 1968, brilliantly illustrates the critical difference between going through an empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. The poster pinpoints the fundamental point that participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for community members. It allows power holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. Status quo is the same and community members watch as their governing leaders continue with projects that have not been decided or designed by the community itself and does not benefit them, or only benefits some members of the community.



In English the poster says: *"I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, and you participate...they profit."*

The Ladder of citizen participation goes like this:

The bottom rungs of the ladder are **manipulation** and **therapy**. These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. In the name of citizen participation, people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support. Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by power holders.

The next rungs are **informing** and **consultation**. They represent a form of "tokenism" to community members that are allowed to hear and to have a voice. However, when they are promoted by power holders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But they aren't granted any real power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, and hence no assurance of changing the status quo. Inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. But if consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The most frequent methods used for consulting people are attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings, and public hearings.

The next rung, **placation**, is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow community members to advise, while power holders retain the right to decide. An example of placation strategy is to place a few hand-picked "worthy" poor on boards for community action projects. They allow citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retain for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

Further up the ladder are levels of citizen participation where community members have increasing power to make decisions for themselves and their community. Citizens can enter into a **partnership** that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders.

At the topmost rungs are **delegated power** and **citizen control**, where community members obtain the majority of seats in decision-making bodies or full managerial power. No one in a nation has absolute control, not even the prime minister (because we don't live in a dictatorship). But community members can demand and have a degree of control over community projects or programs that guarantees them to be fully in charge of policy and managerial aspects.

The benefits of public participation

I have come to believe that at the heart of sustainable community development is a personal commitment every person must make to live within the limits of the environment in which he or she lives and to recognize and take responsibility for the ways our lifestyle choices affect others and the planet. If this commitment is made, then for each of us, our daily practices begin to reflect this, and day-to-day decisions increasingly will result in sustainable outcomes.



This kind of individual commitment cannot happen en masse, of course, unless leaders engage citizens in dialogue-based policy and decision-making. As citizen participation increases those affected are more likely to understand and support the reasons for these policies. Furthermore, citizens are more likely to incorporate these actions into their everyday lives because they had an opportunity to participate from the beginning.

By encouraging citizens to participate, the process of sustainable community development produces another benefit: local citizens bring a rich pool of knowledge and talent - professionals, concerned residents, academics, and community group leaders all have something unique and valuable to contribute and there are many examples around the world where local residents have played valuable roles if not lead wonderfully creative and successful sustainable community development initiatives.

There are numerous benefits of citizen participation. Economically, citizen participation is estimated in value at between eight and fourteen percent of GDP in countries that have been studied. Also, were it not for citizen participation, many services would not be offered to citizens, or they would be far more costly to the community. Socially, citizen participation yields considerable benefits. First, by participating, each citizen exercises his or her choice to do so. This alone produces a positive benefit because, as citizens, we have the need to have the information and skills to make good choices. Further, by participating, citizens contribute to the greater good of the community in ways that are both enjoyable and personally fulfilling. Another benefit of participation is that citizens have a chance to learn and grow, to achieve something and be recognized for their good work and to work together to build a sense of community based on mutual respect. Through participation, citizens gain an increased sense of community, which is naturally unifying. As citizens work together to make decisions or complete a project, a community naturally becomes a more harmonious place to live.

The vicious cycle

Even our leaders contend that public participation is a good thing. Recently, leading up to the G8/G20 in Toronto leaders of the world welcomed public participation in the discussions they were about to have. But in fact, protesters and community groups who wished to do this were shown to a field far away from the meeting site. The displacement served various purposes. For one they justified the enormous and very unpopular public spending on security measurements for the meeting. Officials may in fact have been happy when some violence erupted and all criticism of the security budget was silenced. Secondly, while world leaders were quick to give the media a spiel about their encouragement of public participation, which in turn made great headlines and positives reviews of the meeting, in reality they didn't support actual public engagement in the decision making processes.

The discrepancy between official commitment to public participation and leaders' actual fear of it creates a vicious cycle. While scared politicians become increasingly detached from the society they are supposed to serve, the public becomes increasingly alienated from politics and democracy. We see the evidence of this in low voter turnouts at every single Canadian election or referendum. What we are experiencing more generally is an apathetic, apolitical attitude among Canadians. The attitude is not surprising: when our leaders are neither accessible nor accountable, what is the point in trying to reach them? When public participation is reduced to "tokenism" in Arnstein's sense, why should we care? While our leaders may have lead us down in their pursuit of power and wealth, we have also let ourselves down when we gave up trying to engage our leaders in conversation or protest their bad decision making

and incapability to take actions needed to make the world a better, safer and more prosperous place for everybody.

Realizing the benefits of public participation in community decision-making does not happen overnight. Successful leaders are those who realize that sustainable community development is a long-term commitment and depends not only on their leadership but the active support of local residents. We need fresh new ideas and innovative leadership to help transform urban growth into a positive movement toward long-term prosperity, social justice, and ecological stability. As our friend and mentor Maurice Strong might say, our very survival depends on it!



Essay #4

What are the Roles of Education and How Can We Be Supportive?

Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants.

– John W. Gardner



Paideia was the name for the public education system in ancient Greece. Its primary purpose was to create well-informed citizens able to contribute to society, in this case the world famous Greek participatory democracy. I am sure this noble objective once inspired our public schools too. However, today its objectives and execution look very different, as support for our public schools has declined and their mission transformed from developing well-informed citizens to training future employees, investors and consumers.

Paul Woodruff writes in his insightful book “First Democracy,” that while Athenians believed that basic education should include reading and writing, music and physical training, the objective of *paideia* was much more fundamental. It was a way of teaching children and youth to exercise good judgment, justice and reverence and participate in the city’s political, public and foreign affairs, all central to the effective functioning of Greek democracy. In other words, it was through education that Greece was able to continuously produce well-informed citizens who cherished and were able to actively contribute to society, ensuring its vitality and survival.

We may ask ourselves in which ways the objectives of *paideia* are the same as those of Canadian public schools and if contemporary schools fulfill those objectives as *paideia* did for the Athenians. This requires a discussion of the basis of general education, the place of public education in society and the consequence of imposing certain teaching methods and curricula on students. Perhaps our education system is failing us in producing informed and active citizens because we ourselves have forgotten what it means to be well-informed and committed citizens. We must therefore ask ourselves anew what should be the role of education in our society and how we can support and improve it?

Why does education matter?

Education must be a priority if we wish to raise well-informed, capable and productive citizens. This means that our children and youth go to school so they can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to live and work in Canada and contribute to the development of our society and the world. School must be a place where students learn about society, its core principles, history and social values as well as acquiring concrete academic skills such as reading and writing, math and science.

The values that are transmitted to children and youth through education should reflect the ideas and concepts upon which Canada was founded as a nation and those that continue to serve us well as we increasingly become a multi-cultural society. It is of utmost importance that we ensure that our children and youth acquire the understanding, knowledge, skills and commitment needed to ensure that our political, economic and social systems remain democratic, serving all of Canada's citizens, not simply its rich and powerful. New Canadians bring rich cultural and social legacies and our schools play a vital role in helping them to join us and us to welcome them. Our schools are fundamental to the maintenance, strengthening and evolution of the principles that make Canada the envy of the world: democracy, civil rights, prosperity and the rule of law.

Who is responsible for the education of our children and youth?

Many of us too easily to embrace the argument that education is the responsibility of our school system and the professionals we pay to run it. That, in my view, is to place far too little value on our education system and our responsibility for it, not to mention risking diminished benefits from a neglected education system. If we agree that education is a priority and that our society depends upon capable, well-informed and productive citizens, then each of us bears responsibility for the education of our children and youth. It is not enough to put the responsibility in the hands of others and complain about it when we do not think they do a good job.

That is not to say that we want our schools to become a battleground of competing ideologies and causes. But the curriculum, teaching methods and teachers we choose have a central role in transmitting ideas and information that will inform our young people throughout their lives. Do we in fact teach children democratic skills? In a globalized world they need to learn to engage critically with the internet for instance. The internet is a hub for polarized opinion, and without basic understandings of the fundamental principles of fruitful debate, our children will to easily get sucked into this world.

Education is a powerful tool. Do our schools reflect the fundamental democratic values of our society and prepare our children and youth for participating in and contributing to it? Do they prepare our young people to think, to reason, to debate and do so both with conviction and respect for other ideas? Are we wise to entrust such enormous responsibility to parents, politicians and teachers or should everyone with an interest in the sustainability of our society have the opportunity to get involved?

Remember our Greek forbearers, they believed that education should not only include the three R's but physical training, arts and music and the tools for democratic participation. We all should be concerned when our young people are increasingly denied all but core curriculum because of funding cuts. And, at the same time, money is made available to celebrate the Olympic Games as if hero worship and crass commercialization of amateur sport is a priority.

It is okay when parents and kids go door to door to raise money for some special event but to be forced to do so to provide essential equipment or programs is a sad commentary on our political and economic priorities. The Trojan horse in all of this, of course, is to open the doors to corporate sponsors whose generosity I do not belittle, but which comes at a price. Do we want captive audiences of young people subjected to lifestyle advertising to be part of their education? Are soft drinks and snack food and chubby children symptomatic of a bigger problem?

There may be other problems looming! Some people find it unjust that they pay for the education of other people's children through their taxes. Our education system is expensive, and since there are not tuition fees for attending public schools, Canadian taxpayers pay for it. Is it unfair that people without children, or people with children that are too young to go to school or have already graduated, should contribute financially to the education of other people's children? No, it is not. Every one of us benefits from being part of a civil, educated, and just society. Societies were not formed on some user pay principle but rather to pool our efforts and resources to enhance services, assets and security. Some of us use our transportation system more, for others it is recreation or perhaps the courts if we do not invest in raising fully socialized and contributing citizens. When other people's children grow up, they become our neighbours, co-workers and fellow citizens offering us every type of service imaginable. They might even become our politicians or the teachers of our children's children. Is it not our responsibility, and indeed in our best interest, to ensure that all children receive the education they need to fulfill the roles and responsibilities in society we expect of them? The most obvious way for us to assume this responsibility is by supporting our school system financially through taxes or otherwise.

Learning in the school of life

We can contribute to the education of our young people in other ways too. Education does not only take place in the school, from 8 am to 4 pm on weekdays. In ancient Greece *paideia* was the general education that children and youth received from the entire Athenian community. Young men (women and slaves were effectively excluded from Greek democracy) would talk to grown men of all classes and learn the basic values of Greek democracy, folk wisdom and practical skills through their conversations and interactions. Today, we can still appreciate that children acquire lots, if not most of their knowledge in what we call "the school of life."

Children, that have not yet been completely indoctrinated to dread "work" and enjoy "free time" eagerly absorb knowledge and practice various skills throughout their day. Parents know that they are responsible for providing not only love and care, but also the conditions for learning to their children. Other adults that are in contact with children and youth are maybe less so aware of their pivotal role in the education of these "students" and their responsibilities in that regard. As neighbours, relatives, after school care providers or simply community members, we all have a responsibility to educate Canadian children and youth. We may not possess specialized skills or knowledge that children get from elsewhere, but that is not really that important. We are all able to answer questions about the fundamental values of a democratic society and include children in learning the skills acquired to participate in democracy by engaging them in discussion.

Moral education and the “bucket theory”

Morality is the basis for an ethical way of conducting oneself towards others. Philosopher Robert Carter writes: “Moral principles are binding on everyone alike and must pay no heed to the desires, aims, and goals of an individual out of relation to others and the greater social context” (Carter 1984:5). This seems like a very basic idea of morality, but perhaps not so easily acquired.

The world would probably look very different if we, our politicians and economists, leaders and educators, and all members of our global community strived towards morality. We are faced with a world where humanitarian, political and environmental disasters take place on a daily basis. We need to prepare our children and youth to face this world and take moral responsibility for making it a better place to live.

Morality requires tolerance and openness towards other points of view than one’s own. Morality is therefore also essential for democracy, because dialogue and debate are the driving forces behind democracy. Moral education should be the basis for schooling in Canada and an ideal we strive to instill in students. Not just because we want our children and youth to behave responsibly in our deteriorating world, but also because they need a solid foundation in morality to be able to embody the values of our democratic society.

Unfortunately, morality, in the philosophical sense of the word, is not on the curriculum in our schools today. Robert Carter complains that in universities, graduate students receive *training* rather than *education* (Carter 1984:36). The difference between training and education is the objective scope of the teaching and the teaching methods used. Training is what you need to work productively within a specific profession. Through training the student may acquire “expert” knowledge or skills they can apply in a certain field. It is important for society to have a number of experts and professionals to keep the economy running smoothly and provide citizens with all the services and goods we need to go about our daily lives. However, in ancient Greece they understood that expertise is not enough for sustaining a political democracy. Participation in democracy relies on other skills and abilities to exercise sound judgment and debating different points of view. You need education “in the school of life” and as a member of the community, to learn the values and moralities that enable you to participate in democracy and being a responsible global citizen.

But how do you teach morality? Philosophic education, like teaching morality, relies on teaching students how to think and debate. Morality requires tolerance and concern for others. Via education students should learn how to express such tolerance and concern. Critical thinking skills are fundamental in this regard, so it should be our education system’s first and foremost task to teach such critical thinking skills. One way is to teach students to question authority. This does not mean to cultivate anarchists, but to teach students that in a matter there are usually a variety of viewpoints, and somebody’s call to authority does not necessarily make them right. Questioning authority from a relativistic viewpoint does not mean that all arguments are right. But in order to discuss the matter it is important that students learn to exercise sound judgment and critique the values and evidence behind somebody’s call to authority. Socrates, who was a teacher to many young Athenians, valued this pedagogical aim of making his students “see for themselves.” He did not tell them the facts of (Greek) life, but taught them how to debate what the values and moralities of society were and should be. In Canada we should foster this kind of critical thinking as well, by teaching students how to understand and interrogate many different sides to an argument.

The opposite of moral education is teaching according to the “bucket theory.” Karl Popper, another philosopher, describes it as a teaching method in which the mind resembles a container, into which the teacher tries to store as many facts of knowledge as possible. This kind of teaching is based on the idea that learning is best done through memorization of already established answers, rather than through dialogue about unknown answers. Students are taught neither morals nor critical thinking according to this theory and method, because such skills can only be required through an application of democratic values in the schooling system.

The place of private schools in Canada today



Accessibility is a founding principle of public schools, which are free for all Canadian children. However, increased dissatisfaction with the public education system and drastic cuts in provincial funding for education make many parents send their children to private schools. What is the lure of private schools and how can public schools adequately respond to the increased popularity of private schools? How should society respond? Education should be for everybody. All Canadian taxpayers support the Canadian education system economically, so it is important that everybody has equal opportunity to benefit. Don't private schools defy this ideal?

It is important to recognize that parents may chose private schools, and may chose specific private schools, for a number of reasons. Some parents cannot afford to choose. The cost of sending your child to a private school can range from \$4,000 to \$26,000 per year. In addition, many private schools require students to purchase textbooks, uniforms and in some boarding schools food and lodging. While the cost in itself neither guarantees a better education nor seems very attractive to parents, many private schools offer an alternative approach to education, which parents cannot get in public schools. The Montessori model, for example, focuses on respect for the student and the development of self-confidence, while the Waldorf model emphasizes a holistic approach to learning. Other private schools attract parents because they promise to prepare their students better for an academic career than public schools or have a profile with strong emphasis on either creative or academic subjects. Finally some private schools cater to a specific group of families, for instance international schools that attract diplomat families or schools where all learning is done in a different language, for instance French or German. To some parents, private schools offer students a clear value system, which can be missing in the public system that must in a greater sense adhere to the “one fit for all” model. Many private schools pride themselves on shaping students into well-rounded individuals, in addition to ensuring their academic success. Boarding schools in particular are geared toward developing self-confidence, independence and life-skills.

Public schools, on the other hand, are intended to cater to all students and often do not have the resources to offer special programs to students and parents looking for an alternative approach to learning. Due to curriculum regulations, public school teachers are also not free to experiment with different teaching methods. They have to follow national standards in the testing of students' performance and capabilities for example. Furthermore, due to limited funding, public schools usually have bigger class sizes than

private schools and they may not be able to offer the same individual attention to each student as many private schools prioritize. Parents may choose to send their children to private school either because they think their child has special needs that cannot be fulfilled in public schools or because they believe strongly in a certain teaching method that is not offered in the nearest public school.

Private schools have a reputation for being an elitist institution. Indeed, since parents must pay tuition fees out of their own pocket, many families are effectively excluded from private schools. Some parents may also believe that sending their children to private schools gives them a heightened social status, or that their children should only play with other children from the same class and cultural background as themselves. In recent years many private schools are making an effort to contradict this trend. Bursaries are available for low-income families that wish to send their children to a specific private school. Some private schools actively try to attract children with different cultural backgrounds. International schools are one example of this, but some schools, such as Bayview Glen located in Toronto, even boast multiculturalism as one of their founding principles. However, because public schools continue to be “free for all,” some parents may actively choose to send their children to public school, even if they could afford private school. They want their children to play and learn with children from all kinds of family backgrounds or they want their children to get to know other children from their neighbourhood.

In a democracy, general education is absolutely necessary for cultivating well-informed, well-rounded and capable citizens that are able to actively contribute to society and democratic processes. General education must be accessible for all. Without general education some will be left behind and will not be able to participate in democracy. But is the solution to prohibit private schools? If it is true that the public education system is failing us in transmitting democratic values and critical thinking skills to our children, are we really best served with obligating all Canadian families to participate in this system? I do not think the solution is to ban private schools. Instead, we have to create a public school system that is so good that no parents see any need for sending their children to private school. There are many private schools that base their teaching in educational models that could easily be adopted by public schools and would satisfy the needs of all students in all their uniqueness. Interestingly, the alternative education trend is also becoming popular in the public system, which is looking to enhance its competitiveness with the increase in private school enrolment over the past 40 years. We also need to prioritize public education and ensure that schools are adequately funded so they do not need to cut down in staff or services, the result of which is a poorer education for our children.

Is there a way that we can take the best from both worlds, the public and the private school, and create an education system that is inclusive and accessible to everybody regardless of their financial means, cultural or religious background, special talents or interests?

What would a great school look like?

Most of all we need a school system that develops informed, committed and capable citizens willing and able to work together regardless of their background. Separating kids by social, economic or cultural background is unproductive and foolish. We need a well-funded, dynamic system that fulfills the needs of all children, in all their uniqueness, and brings them together in a common cause. I believe a great school looks something like this:

- A school that is free for all.

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- A school where students learn critical thinking skills. These skills should not only be applicable in the different kinds of work they may go on to do, but are essential for living in democracy.
 - A school that instills free thinking in children and teaches them to question authority. If students are fed propaganda they become docile citizens, able to receive instruction, but unable to creatively participating in developing society and further democracy.
 - A school where children are able to explore their interests and improve their talents. All children are talented one way or another, but careful and loving guidance is essential for motivating children to realize their potential.
 - A school that expands beyond the classroom and actively includes the entire community in the education process.
 - A school that prepares children and youth to confidently face the challenges and responsibilities of being global citizens.

Questions you might ask yourself

- Should schools teach certain values or instill free thinking in students?
- What is the role of education in fostering global citizens and democratic practitioners?
- What are our responsibilities (as parents, teachers, politicians, tax payers and community members) to create the education system we want?
- What is the worth of tests?
- Should we teach children to navigate the world as it looks or should we teach them how to change it?



Essay #5

Economic Imperialism

Never underestimate the power of the purse and the malleability of our politicians. Companies have always ranged from those committed to ethical performance to those willing to get away with murder.



Early attempts to articulate principles of operation addressed responsibilities to customers, employees, the community and stockholders. Among the first companies to establish more formal standards of conduct were companies reeling from the US defence contract scandals of the 1980s. In response, and perhaps to stave off public and government demands for corrective action, companies developed voluntary compliance mechanisms as a demonstration of efforts to clean up their messes before the courts did it for them.

However, the credibility of any code of practice depends on whether or not it is taken seriously by respected industry, labour, public and government agencies and that, in turn, hinges on the effectiveness of monitoring, transparency and accountability. Finally, do subcontractors and foreign contractors comply? In other words, are practices the same around the world or does said company cut corners away from home?

Today, the responsibility for ethical business conduct is greater than ever. According to *Fortune Magazine* and the World Bank, 63% of the world's largest 100 economic entities are corporations. Remarkably, Wal-Mart, BP, Exxon Mobil, and Royal Dutch/Shell Group all rank in the 25 largest economic entities in the world, above countries that include Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Denmark, Poland, South Africa, and Greece. Let's look at one well studied example of how things can go terribly wrong when too much unregulated power lies in the hands of one of those entities.

Shell in Nigeria: A 21st century horror story

A series of repressive and corrupt governments in Nigeria have been supported and maintained by western governments and oil corporations, eager to extract the country's fossil fuels. As powerful people and corporations fight over the "black gold," immense poverty and environmental destruction have resulted. While the story told to consumers of Nigerian oil in the developed world is that oil companies are a positive force in Nigeria, providing much needed economic development, the reality is very different. Oil



development seriously threatens the traditional livelihoods of local communities. Due to the many forms of oil-generated environmental pollution evident throughout the Niger Delta region, farming and fishing have become impossible or extremely difficult in affected areas, and even drinking water has become scarce and polluted. Malnourishment and disease appear common. The presence of oil companies has had additional adverse effects on the local economy and society, including loss of property, price inflation,

and irresponsible fathering by expatriate oil workers. The military harshly cracks down on organized protest by communities who are protesting the situation.

Shell Oil, in particular, has been blamed for worsening the political, social and environmental instability in Nigeria through payments for land use, environmental damage, corruption of company employees and reliance on Nigerian security forces. Violence in the country kills some 1000 people each year. With over 50 years of presence in Nigeria, it is reasonable to say that Shell has become an integral part of the violent conflicts in the area and disputes over the consequences of human and environmental disasters. The actions of Shell and the voracious hunger for economic gain feeds into and exacerbates conflict. In response to criticism of their business practices in Nigeria, Shell had said that they remain “committed to corporate social responsibility.”

What is corporate social responsibility and how does it influence the role of multinational corporations in the world? As noted above, multinational corporations often wield more power than developing nations, and the economic growth they generate make them powerhouses in the global economy. In the process they have gained enormous political power, These domineering enterprises, with the acquiescence or facilitation of powerful political supporters, are often able to undertake profit making endeavors, with little or no regulation and often without meeting social and cultural responsibilities to local communities and the environment commonplace in developed countries. This is particularly true regarding the extraction of natural resources in developing nations.

Shell Oil’s emphatic statement that they are committed to corporate social responsibility is hard to take at face value and it clearly highlights how problematic it is when businesses set their own standards for ethical behaviour, while they remain unaccountable to international codes of conduct. Shell may offer an especially oily example but they are far from alone. Union Carbide and Bhopal, India, Hooker Chemical and Love Canal, Japan’s Chisso Corporation and Minamata Bay, Chernobyl, and Chevron Texaco head a long list.

The challenges of globalization



It would take another essay to fully examine the positive and adverse effects of the inescapable process of globalization. In the proverbial American dream the newspaper boy can become the president and every man can, if he works hard enough, make his own fortune. The reality is far starker for the millions of migrants that cross borders from South to North every year in pursuit of their dreams. In fact, multinational companies are the biggest winners in the globalization sweepstakes, moving wherever conditions are most favourable, meaning cheap labour, lax regulations and compliant government officials. Thus, they are both a driving force in globalization and perhaps its greatest beneficiary.

Outsourcing is one child of globalization, exploiting the economic and social inequalities in the world. Companies know that their products can easily be produced at a lower cost, material and labour, in

underdeveloped countries. They also know that governments, starving for economic development, are willing to give considerable tax breaks to set up shop in their countries. Desperate governments are often willing to compromise the health and safety of workers in foreign owned companies, and disregard their human rights, just to increase employment numbers. The environment is the least of their concerns. If multinational corporations promise economic development, these governments rarely care if the environment or people suffer as a consequence. Poisoned air, water and food are simply the price of progress.

There are too many sad examples of how multinational companies have negatively impacted indigenous communities in their hunt for enrichment of their stakeholders. In Ecuador, for instance, Chevron Texaco has been met with lawsuits due to the cultural and environmental destruction they have caused in the eastern half of the Ecuadorian Amazon, which is one of the richest bioregions on the planet. Oil extraction in the Amazon over the last thirty years has led to contamination of the waters and land, deforestation, and resulted in sickness in indigenous communities, threatening some communities with cultural extinction. The jungle of Ecuador will be extinguished in its entirety within forty years at the present rate of deforestation. However, the oil extracted and sold in the global marketplace is the foundation of Ecuador's economy and is therefore promoted by the Ecuadorian government as the key to development. Citizens of Ecuador and Peru filed two class action suits against Chevron Texaco in a case that has become known as "the anti-globalization trial of the century." Although environmental contamination and human rights violations are central to this case, the fundamental issue underlying it is corporate responsibility, in particular, the accountability of multinational corporations operating in developing and underdeveloped countries where regulation is often far more lax than the standards the corporation operating in North America or Europe would be held to.

Of course, there are companies that do try to conduct business ethically and understand the importance of contributing to building educated, healthy, prosperous societies. An example is American Apparel. The company manufactures, distributes and retails clothes in over 20 North American and European countries. The company's main factory is located in downtown Los Angeles and employs 5000 people, who earn above minimum wage. It is the largest garment factory in the United States, operating at a time when most apparel production has moved offshore.

General Electrics is another major company, which has won awards for the ethical standards they set in their field of business, latest by Ethisphere, as the world's most ethical company. The company base their ethical conduct on a concept of corporate citizenship, an idea which in itself speaks to how the General Electric family sees themselves as part of and responsible for a larger community. The goals of General Electrics' ethical behaviour are positive: making money (not just for themselves, but also for the societies they operate in and their employees); making it ethically (complying with the laws in the countries they operate in); and making a difference beyond the formal requirements. One way General Electrics is meeting their goals is by being a pioneer in philanthropy. In 2009, General Electrics leveraged its philanthropic resources to extend benefits to communities around the globe to focus on two central themes, education and healthcare. Total giving exceeded an estimated 220 million dollars to community and educational programs, including more than 100 million dollars from the General Electric Foundation.

Unfortunately, this kind of business practice does not represent the norm. General Electrics is a pioneer in philanthropy, because so many other multinational companies do not live up to their standards. Furthermore, society should not rely on individual businesses to decide to do good because most will not

make such a decision. We need to place higher demands on all businesses to willingly or unwillingly consider the ethical aspect of their practices.

Business codes of ethical conduct

Fortunately the very process of globalization has heightened expectations about corporate performance and what companies can or should contribute to environmental and social progress. Much is being demanded of companies because they are prime movers in making globalization happen for better or worse. The days of making huge profits at the expense of the environment and public health are coming to an end. Communication is such that news is shared widely about abuses and failures and more or more people insist that a meaningful portion of these huge fortunes be invested in human development and environmental protection.

Companies can and increasingly are expected to contribute to raising the living standards in the countries in which they operate, not simply generating employment but contributing to education, health, culture and the environment. The only effective response is for businesses to demonstrate that they are both responsible and accountable not just to shareholders, but to society as a whole. This means that business must be more accessible, transparent and accountable.

Many companies respond to these challenges by means of explicit business principles that set out their commitment to act as responsible members of society and conduct their business accordingly. Barrick Gold, for instance, a multinational gold mining company writes on their website: “Barrick is committed to making a positive difference in the communities in which we operate ... From exploration to reclamation, Barrick conducts itself with the highest ethical standards and a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility.” Through their Corporate Social Responsibility Charter the company outlines its commitment to business ethics, the environment, employee health and safety, and community development. These commitments are furthermore accounted for in an annual Responsibility Report that describes and evaluates the company’s activities in relationship with its corporate social responsibilities.

While these principles sound good, the company is effectively unaccountable for them. In fact they have been accused of and harshly criticized for causing severe environmental and human damage, among other things due to cyanide spills in their mining sites. Since they have defined their principles for ethical behavior single handedly, they are in control both of defining the criteria for what their contribution to society should be (or shouldn’t) and for setting up the procedures to account for whether they live up to these stated principles.

National and international standards for ethical business practices

- What are some examples? There are different level declarations: individual company, business associations, national and international such as OECD, UN, World Bank?
- . The codes can deal with corruption, human rights, the environment and other important issues.
- Sometimes businesses are required to sign on to become a member of their business association.
- The problem with most declarations is that they are not enforced legally or otherwise.
- We have to consider in whose interests the declarations are made. For example, if they deal with bribery, they do they look out for business interests or society.
- At the very least, businesses should abide internationally by the codes of their home countries.

Who is responsible?



It would be convenient to think that multinational corporations are simply guilty as charged, and alone carry the responsibility for ending exploitation of those that are already the underdogs of globalization. We could prosecute business owners for their crimes against humanity or sue them and force them to pay for their sins. But the reality is more complex.

First of all, businesses are run by people. Multinational corporations have powerful stakeholders, not least their investors. Investors are themselves often businesses, for instance banks. But you may be surprised to know that other kinds of organizations, such as Ontario Teacher's Federation, also invest in multinational corporations. This means that the members of the Ontario Teachers Federation or the clients of different banks (and we all belong to one, don't we?) are indirectly supporting certain multinational corporations through their membership of these corporations' stakeholders' organizations. In other words, if you are a member of Ontario Teachers Federation and pay in to their pension plan, you are contributing to the investments they make in a number of multinational corporations.

People at all these levels, those who drive a certain business on a day to day basis, their investors and their investors' employees and members, are all responsible for ensuring that multinational corporations conduct ethical business. The good news is that these same people hold significant power to place demands on the businesses they support to conduct ethical business and contribute to the good of society, while stopping all exploitation. Businesses are dependent on their investors and other stakeholders to survive. They do not need to decide the order of the day and we should not let them. Each company's principles for ethical business conduct should not be written up at board meeting, by a few select company partners, but should be of concern to the company's investors and the consumers of their products as well.

Ultimately, consumers who buy products from unethical businesses are equally responsible for their conduct in the production of these goods. As an individual, this is an area where we can most readily assert our opinion and influence the companies we support through our purchases of their products. Unfortunately, our addiction to cheap consumer goods has made us guilty of exploitation too. But it is never too late to become a conscious consumer and chose the more expensive fair trade coffee over the cheap store brand for instance. This is where you can make a difference today!

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): How can we make it happen?

There are different levels of CSR, also known as corporate citizenship, sustainable responsible business or corporate social performance. Essentially, it is the conscious inclusion of an interest in the social good into corporate decision making and business practices, and the honoring of a triple bottom line: People, Planet, Profit. CSR is when corporations in some measure integrate social responsibilities to their employees, the environment and the communities they work in with their business model. They are most often accountable for their responsibilities through self-regulation. In an ideal world, CSR would function as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby businesses would monitor and ensure their support to law, ethical standards, and international codes of conduct. Consequently, businesses would embrace

responsibility for the impact of their activities on the environment, consumers, employees, investors, communities and all other members of the public sphere. Furthermore, businesses would promote social good rather than their own wealth by encouraging community growth and development. But as we know, many corporations merely adhere to the low ethical standards of the countries they operate in or their own principles.

We can't leave it up to the businesses to engage in ethical behaviour out of their own goodwill. Investors in business have a responsibility to place demands on those businesses' behaviour and consumers should demand the same. Government and international bodies cannot continue to develop codes of conduct that are presented as mere pleas for multinational corporations to consider their impact on the environment and local communities. Multinational corporations have social and environmental responsibilities to the peoples and environments from which their enterprises profit that demand legal remedy when breached. The international standards for ethical business practice need to be legally enforceable so they don't lose their power.

But while we are waiting for this to happen, there are other remedies we can use to influence business to engage in ethical behaviour. Public opinion, consumer behaviour, and investor demands weight heavy on corporative decision making processes. After all, without public goodwill, without investors to put money into their projects and without anybody to ultimately buy their products, where would business be?



Essay #6

Plutocrats, Businessmen and War

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

- President Eisenhower before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1953

Introduction



A newly released report “Cost of Major U.S. Wars” compares the expenses for wars over the past 230 years, from the American Revolution and until today. The result is that the expenses for the so-called war on terror, meaning all military activity post 9/11, have now exceeded the costs of World War II. So far American taxpayers have contributed 1,046 billion dollars to interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places and thousands of lives. The estimate is based on the cost of military operations only and does not reflect the cost of benefits to veterans, war related debts and so on. In reality the cost of war is even higher than the abhorrent amount estimated by the report that the US Congress released on June 29th, 2010.

What is wrong with this picture?

We all know that war is gruesome and detrimental to the welfare of nations and citizens of the world. However, what the US Congress’ newly released report clearly shows is that war is also extremely costly. As warfare gets more technologically sophisticated the price goes up. The fact that taxpayers in the US are pouring exorbitant amounts of money into post 9/11 military activities has neither helped the US “win” more wars nor diminished the extent of violent conflict in the world or their detrimental effects. Warfare fosters further conflict, which in turn demands more expenditure for military activities, as well as rebuilding of societies and the lives of scores of innocent people harmed by war.

Why then would anybody be interested in war? It seems clear that nothing good comes of it. Yet, with sixteen active wars in the world at the moment, a dozen more in the works or recently ended, and twenty-seven armed conflicts that have led to thousands of deaths, the world is not a more peaceful place than it was in earlier “barbaric” times. The answer to the question above is frightening: war is big business and while thousands die, some greatly enrich themselves and benefit from other people’s suffering. In this essay I will weigh the costs of war (and what comes after) and discuss the cynicism behind some people’s attraction to war as a profitable business.

Before I do that I ask you to understand that I do accept, with regret and a heavy heart, that some wars are just and unavoidable, such as the fight to stop the world from Nazi enslavement and genocide. However,

more frequently war is motivated not by some moral imperative but something far more basic: greed or fear or hatred of the other.

The costs of war vs. the cost of a healthy society

The bottom line is that military budgets around the world cause great deficits. Regardless of who claims to have won, the cost of arms, military personnel, the loss of civilian lives and rebuilding make all warring nations losers in the larger scheme of things.

While more and more money is poured into conflict, the world faces health and education and environmental deficits that should worry us more than how to most efficiently kill each other. What is the sense in spending huge sums of money on mutual destruction, when we could build healthier, happier and more just societies by putting the money into advancing health care, education, and the environment? War only worsens these pressing crises, leaving countries in ruins, without resources to care for the injured people or the environment. Rebuilding and rehabilitation is costly, but since the money has already been spent on destructive arms, there is often little money left to get countries back on their feet in the aftermath of violent conflicts.

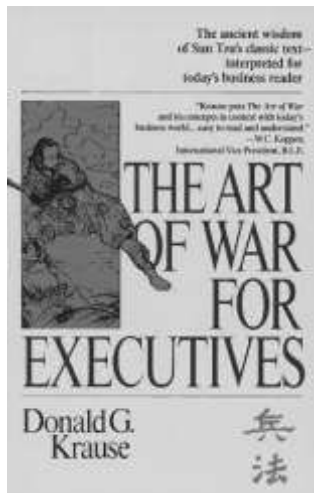
Even the so-called winners are far from left with a surplus on the health, education and environmental budgets. Perhaps there is no such thing as a winnable war. The US has dominated most wars over the past century, but at exorbitant cost to the American people in material and lives. One may wonder how the new American health bill, which is supposed to ensure health-care for all American's, will be financed when so much money is being poured into maintaining US military dominance around the world.

The US military budget for 2009 was 515.4 billion dollars. This does not include many military-related items that are outside of the Defense Department budget. Overall the United States government is spending about 1 trillion dollars annually on defense-related purposes. Of course, the argument does not only revolve around the US, as money spent on arms and military interventions all over the world continues the same vicious cycle of leaving low the budgets to improve social goods such as health care and education. Total world spending on military expenses in 2006 was 1.158 trillion dollars. Nearly half of this total, 528.7 billion dollars, was spent by the US, which accounts for 47 % of the world's total expenditures on arms. This should make us think critically about the economic aspects of the idea that war is a business in which the suffering of many is profitable to a few.

We need to contrast military expenditures with the money we spend on education, the environment and social welfare. They do not even compare. The money we spend on war could help build a better world – free of war. So where is the rub? Let's look at some of the disturbing reasons.

Who wants war?

Hard as it may be to understand, some people do want war because of the personal and financial benefits they derive from it. While war represents the horrors of death and destruction to most, some have dollar signs in their eyes when the talk is on war. Some people, including politicians and businessmen, are so entangled in both the political, moral and economic aspects of war that they may no longer be able to distinguish between these motivations.



An example of such a person is arms broker Adnan Khashoggi, a Saudi national who despite his involvement in numerous military scandals, continues to enjoy privilege and popularity among the western elite, who make him rich by engaging in his sleazy business. Khashoggi's family was no stranger to unethical connections and business. His father was the personal physician to King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern state of Saudi Arabia. He also made lots of money from doing business with Muhammad Bin Laden, Osama Bin Laden's father. Perhaps inspired by these dealings, Adnan Khashoggi dropped out of Stanford University; the lure of the arms business was too great. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia had oil money and wanted to build up its military. Adnan Khashoggi became the link between American weapons manufacturers and the Saudi kingdom, earning him the title of the richest man in the world in the 1980s.

While we may reasonably say that someone like Adnan Khashoggi is a war criminal, how has he been able to become so close to western high society and world leaders? He portrays himself as a passive player in a world where rich, powerful and greedy people were more than happy to have someone like him around. He is not ashamed to say that the end justifies the means, and that making money from contributing to other's suffering through arms dealing is a noble end in itself. Unsympathetic as we may find him and his morals, he is merely symptomatic of a much larger problem. He is perhaps right that he is not the disturbed one – the blame is to be placed on a sick system in which arms dealing is a legitimate and very profitable business.

A report from 2008 disseminated by Human Rights First, a New York based NGO, examines the many problems with contracting security measurements and indeed military interventions to private contractors. The greatest problem is that private contractors who engage in war on behalf of war-faring nations are by and large unaccountable for their behaviour. As long as the job gets done, the methods used generally are not questioned. It is a horrible reality show in the crudest possible way that war is today a business, regardless of the human lives that are risked and ruined in armed conflicts. Arms brokers like Khashoggi and private security companies enrich themselves while civilians are killed, traumatized and impoverished by war.

While the war business may carry its own inner and self-interested logic to arms brokers and other stakeholders, this idea and such behaviour only escalate conflicts around the world. It is only too well known that rich and well-armed countries such as the US have generated income through selling weapons to many other nations at war, sometimes to both parties of a conflict. This behaviour is not only unethical, it is dangerous. Natalie Goldring, executive director of the Program on Global Security and Disarmament at the University of Maryland, explains the vicious cycle this way: "We have armed unstable regimes with our most sophisticated weapons, and have then used the widespread proliferation of the weapons as the argument for producing the next generation of more expensive weapons."

War breeds more war, but unfortunately, too many world leaders see this vicious cycle as an opportunity for personal gain. Douglas Mattern of the New York based War and Peace Foundation has said: "The war business is the world's ultimate criminal activity," but how can we prosecute and ultimately stop the criminals when they are our leaders in politics and business?

The real costs of war

Technology has always been a part of warfare. Neolithic tools were used as weapons before recorded history. The Bronze Age and Iron Age saw the rise of complex industries geared towards the manufacture of weaponry. However, it was not until the 19th or 20th century that military weaponry became sufficiently complicated as to require a large subset of industrial effort solely dedicated to warfare. Firearms, artillery, warships, and later aircraft and nuclear weapons were markedly different from ancient or medieval swords. These new weapons required years of specialized labor, as opposed to part-time effort. What are the consequences of these changes? War looks markedly different today from before, it is more destructive and detrimental not only to soldiers and their families, but to increasingly so to civilians. New weapons of mass destruction kill efficiently and anonymously, the push of a button can wipe out entire communities.

What we are witnessing is what President Eisenhower called the “military-industrial complex” in his farewell address to the American Nation on January 17, 1961: “We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.” The complex refers to the relationship between government, the armed forces and the industries that support them. These relationships include political approval for research, development, production, use, and support for military training, weapons, equipment, and facilities within the national defense and security policy. In other words: a sophistication and commercialization of the weapons industry. Attempts to conceptualize something similar to a modern “military-industrial complex” existed before Eisenhower’s address. In 1956, sociologist C. Wright Mills claimed in his book “The Power Elite” that a class of military, business, and political leaders, driven by mutual interests, were the real leaders of the state, and were effectively beyond democratic control. This development is of course symptomatic of an increasingly normalized perception among the social elite of warfare as just another form of business.

Acknowledging that war is the result of complex intertwinements of political conflicts, military actions and industrial interests, we may appreciate the far reaching consequences of war, both on the localities that “host” the battles and on those societies that send their armies to far away places. As an example, the Iraqi war will affect the global fight against poverty, because of the huge cost of the war and its aftermath. It will also degrade health care and other needs in the US. The fundamental question we need to ask ourselves is therefore whether the production of arms and the destructive wars that they are used in, are really worth it.

Is it really worth it?

War is always justified by its purveyors as self-defense, preemptive or reactive. Sometimes it is, but far more frequently this rhetorical strategy simply obscures the fact that all war is an act of aggression, resulting in death and destruction. More importantly, is it important who threw the first stone when we are mourning our dead? While some people are enticed to continue warfare to revenge those who killed their loved ones, for the rationally thinking person there is no logic to war. There are no good reasons for us to want to kill each other, even when we get caught up in the details of specific conflicts. When we think about war in the larger scheme of things, the immense economic, political, social, humanitarian and environmental costs of warfare should deter us from wanting to be part of or support any such thing.

As discussed above, a number of stakeholders in different wars may have personal, economic interest in continued conflict. Those who fuel wars and direct military actions far away from the battlefield, benefit

from the suffering of others. Their rationalization carries its own disturbing logic as these people driven by a self-interest disregard the value of human life and the environment. In a cynical sense war is not only worth it to these people, it is desirable. But what about the young men and women who are sent to war, either in defense of their own territory or in faraway countries? They, and their families who are left behind, are contributing their efforts to causes that they may not even care about or understand. They have been told that they are fighting for their country, for other worthy countries or even for peace, but those are just rhetorical strategies meant to make them forget about or ignore the horrific consequences of their actions.

War was always cruel and resulted in death and suffering, but the premises for warfare have changed. When two opposing armies fought each other on the battlefield, the impact of the war was often limited to the dead and maimed soldiers and animals and those who cared for them. Today the intricacies of warfare have far reaching consequences and most of them impact the lives of civilians that may have little or no stake in the conflict. It is well known that the number of deaths in wars today account for more civilians than soldiers. Although statistics differ, it is estimated that a total amount of 50 to 70 million people died in World War II, the deadliest war in recent history. Civilians killed totaled from 40 to 52 million, including 13 to 20 million from war-related disease and famine. A total of 22 to 25 million soldiers died, including deaths in captivity of about 5 million prisoners of war.

Are human lives and the survival of humankind not worth more than a vague concept of “winning” the war or the money military industries and arms brokers make of such conflicts? Surely, everyone who has lost those that they hold dear in war would rather have their loved ones back than seeing politicians and generals declare victory. And for those of us who do not experience personal losses in war, we suffer the indirect consequences of seeing human lives and economic resources being wasted in war, when we have many other more important concerns about the health and well-being of our families, communities and world. The challenge to each of us then is to work together to build a civilization of humanity, respect and human rights, and drive the arms dealers and their partners in politics and business from positions of influence and power to the rubbish pile of history where they belong.

Russians love their children too (Sting 1985)

In Europe and America, there's a growing feeling of hysteria
Conditioned to respond to all the threats
In the rhetorical speeches of the Soviets
Mr. Krushchev said we will bury you
I don't subscribe to this point of view
It would be such an ignorant thing to do
If the Russians love their children too

How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy?
There is no monopoly in common sense
On either side of the political fence
We share the same biology
Regardless of ideology
Believe me when I say to you:
I hope the Russians love their children too

There is no historical precedent
To put the words in the mouth of the President
There's no such thing as a winnable war
It's a lie that we don't believe anymore
Mr. Reagan says: we will protect you
I don't subscribe to this point of view
Believe me when I say to you:
I hope the Russians love their children too

We share the same biology
Regardless of ideology
What might save us, me, and you
Is if the Russians love their children too



Essay #7

Have We Dismantled The Ivory Tower Yet?

It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot, irreverence to their studies; they are not here to worship what is known, but to question it.

– J. Bronowski

The beginnings



The first university in the world, in the sense of a higher-learning, degree-awarding institute was The University of Bologna (founded 1088). For a long time, the traditional university was an exclusive club for professors and students from the upper strata of society. They taught and studied in isolation from the rest of society, leading to the proverbial depiction of the university as an “ivory tower.” The university produced the learned elite of the nation, and society had to adapt to the elite. Research was the privilege of the professors,

determined to a large extent by personal interests and their contacts among each other. The isolation of the university was so extreme in some cases that those who were part of the institution and structured its activities barely understood or particularly cared about problems in the real world.

After the Enlightenment things began to change. While much of the foundation for the progress of humankind emanated from universities, the many scientific achievements, ideas and inventions of self-taught experts and scholars working outside academia were recognized as important too. In fact, many of these entrepreneurs were recognized for their important contributions and welcomed into distinguished circles of science and learning.

In more recent times, certainly in North America, universities opened to a wider cross-section of society, thanks to public pressure and government enticements. Post World War II more and more people sought higher education, which government support made possible for a much larger section of the population. New universities sprung up and the long-standing institutions opened themselves to the unwashed. Expanded space and affordable and subsidized tuition sealed the deal with academics and students rushing to take advantage of these new opportunities. All sorts of new programs were created to serve public demand and interests. Scholars in physics, medicine and mathematics were joined by colleagues in new disciplines, ranging from environmental science to sports management.

Such open-mindedness and utility, and a bit of pop culture, must have galled the old guard, but support grew for public universities serving society’s needs. What happened to this bold new approach?

Universities today

In practical terms, the value and success of our universities should be measured by relevance to the lives of the people and societies meant to be served. Not just its professors and students, but society at large. This is not an argument for more courses on golf management or the Beatles, but the full benefit from a university can be obtained only if the university and society are closely linked together. In other words, the needs of society have to be at the center of the university's activities, with a flexible mandate to adjust to changing needs.

How are we doing? It is a commonly held view that rather than serving society our universities are self-validating circles of elitism and privilege drawing heavily on public resources to perpetuate themselves and to support their corporate and political benefactors. Every student you meet today, rich or poor or in-between, seems to graduate with a mountain of debt and worries. Government support has declined appreciably; universities favour researchers who attract grants over teachers who build society. Our universities are again working in direct contradiction with the espoused desire to better serve society.



Society looks nothing like it did when the first university was established. Democracy is now the dominating ideology in the world, and most countries are home to a multitude of ethnic, religious, political and cultural groups. That is the case of Canada in particular, which prides itself on being a “mosaic” of multiculturalism. Have our universities followed this development and matured with society? Or are the ghosts of privileged professors and students long gone from our universities lurking in the hallways haunting for the past?

In this essay I argue that the academic world has not managed on its own to adapt to a new pluralistic and democratic society and that we need some creative new ideas and incentives to encourage them to better serve society, not just the rich and privileged. As Peter F. Drucker said, “the future has already happened,” but we are still waiting for the universities to catch up. We need to re-examine the role of the university in Canada today, and ask if its primary purpose is to serve faculty and students or society at large. Should the needs of society be at the center of a university's activities, and can they adjust to changing needs?

Who does the university serve?

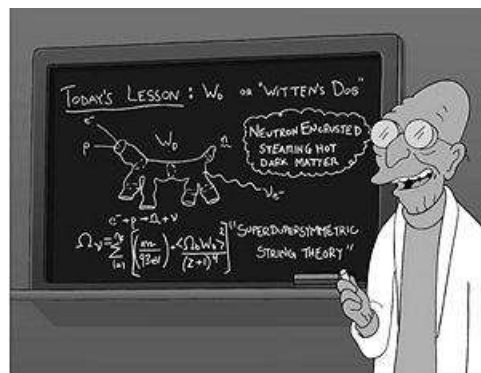
The primary purposes of our universities, it is generally agreed, are to:

- 1) Advance understanding of nature and society and enrich humanity's accumulated scientific, cultural and social knowledge and heritage,
- 2) Disseminate knowledge and as a major part of that action, educate students as well-informed and productive members of society, and
- 3) Serve society through education, research and problem-solving.

In addition, each institution should take an active role in the communities within which it is located.

Society needs knowledgeable and competent citizens to fulfill a variety of roles including participation in a maintaining a vibrant democracy, economy and society. We need to push the boundaries of thinking and doing to respond to the challenges and opportunities of our time. However, the university is increasingly turning out highly specialized workers only able to fulfill only very specific roles in society, with the objective of enhancing economic growth. Of course we need skilled professionals in science, business, education, health, environment etc., but more importantly we need citizens who can engage with a variety of issues in the world and work together to come up with new ideas and methods for solving problems. Our universities must not primarily be about cultivating highly specialized workers able to function only in their specific disciplines.

Despite all of the rhetoric about multi-disciplinary education and breaking down the silos, our universities continue to promote specialization and discourage the comprehensive learning and thinking needed to address the complex challenges of our world. I do not dispute that higher education must cultivate the knowledge, competencies and skills necessary to function within one's profession, but inadequate knowledge of the inter-relationships with other fields of endeavor reproduce inefficiencies and conflicts common in today's society. Worse still, a society increasingly pre-occupied, indeed obsessed with economic growth is ill-prepared to address the myriad social, environmental and ethical problems facing us as a global civilization or in our own lives.



There is, in many cases, a need for extensive restructuring of qualifications and programs to make curricula more congruent with the knowledge, expertise and skills needed in a changing world. A utilitarian approach to higher education strips higher education of its considerably wider social value and functions. It reduces the value of everything to its efficacy for economic growth and does not bring social equality and development, a healthier environment or peace. Corporate funding of research most clearly illustrates this and will be discussed below.

Corporate funding of research

Universities and their researchers have always needed the support from benevolent sponsors or public interest (and government funding) to realize their various projects. In newer times, however, it has become quite common for large corporations, for instance pharmaceutical companies, to fund research projects that relate directly to corporate interests. This is very problematic and has been criticized widely by the academic community. This critique, however, has not stalled the process; rather, corporate funding for research and corporate branding directly to students seems to be more prevalent today than

ever before. When corporations tie their money to certain research projects, project goals and even dominate the outcome and findings of the research, the ability to think critically and provide society with new knowledge that should be the purpose of the university, is effectively curbed.



Unfortunately, the normalcy with which corporate funding of research is perceived today has resulted in an internalization of this discourse by researchers. Researchers may subconsciously be aware that certain projects or perspectives will only be funded with difficulty because they go against corporate agendas, and the researcher may not even put forward a project proposal. Whereas tenure appointments supposedly protect researchers from corporate influence (because a professor with a tenure appointment has a job guarantee and does not need to appeal to the goodwill of funding agency to do his or her research), this is often not the case. Corporate influence in fact often skews the attention of professors away from their teaching responsibilities and towards the prospects of having powerful stakeholders in business support their research.

Arguably there are both pros and cons to corporate involvement with the university. Some collaboration may also be more fruitful than other. As an example, one may say that other than the actual funding corporations may provide for university facilities or programs, corporations represent the real world that students will encounter post- graduation and can offer students work experience that prepare them for life post -graduation. The widespread co-op programs in Canada, where students undertake internships with businesses, government agencies or non-governmental organizations, are an example of this. However, it seems that this connection to the “real world” that corporative involvement with university and students offers, is really a connection to the very same corporations and not society at large. Corporations have a vested interest in preparing students for work in *their* organization, and branding their product to students directly. They have much less interest in teaching students to critically approach problems in the world, which are often created by or involve those very same corporations. We must consider the fundamental value of a university education to students. It is not the vocational training, which most people receive once they work and acquire experience post- graduation; it is the ability to think critically and approach complex problems in a reflexive manner.

Community involvement and “expert worship”

Society needs academics to critically reflect on and provide solutions for social, economic, political and environmental problems in the world. Just as the problems of the world are interconnected, the academic reflections and proposals for solutions that universities provide should be interconnected across disciplines. The traditional division of various research streams into departments and faculties reflect an organizational concern of university directors and administrations. However, this division is artificial when it comes to the research interests of professors and students, and in some ways counter-productive in fostering well-rounded academics able to face the complexities of global issues. Of course much interdisciplinary work is being done at universities, but we need to consider the fundamental premises of having academic research subjects divided by narrowly defined disciplinary boundaries. It is time to consider the value of research centers that incorporate a variety of disciplines, and not only to reflect the complexity of the research subjects in the real world.

There is another reason too. In order to live up to the objective of community involvement, the university needs to foster connections with community members and accessibility to academic research for them. However, the idea of the university as an “ivory tower,” or an exclusive club for the social elite still taints university practices. Research centers focused on community involvement may still be a dream, but there are many good reasons to try to make it come true. One is that the universities should reflect the democratic principles upon which our society is founded and ensure accessibility for the communities they serve. Another is that the universities would be enriched if they recognized that many “commoners”

possess of valuable knowledge that could contribute to the work done at universities, if only this knowledge was validated.

Anthropologists have recognized the value of local knowledge a long time ago. People, situated in their communities and living in close connection with their social and natural surroundings, often have the best solutions to many local (and globally connected) problems. For all the knowledge so-called “experts” may have acquired through studies, they often lack an intimate connection with the lived experience of social, political, economic and environmental problems that local people have. Despite this, “expert-knowledge” is often valued above local knowledge. What is worse, experts are believed to have the answers to questions even outside their area of expertise.

There seems to be an artificially high status connected with a university degree, a great example of which is the different status attached to GPs and medical specialists. While GPs do very valuable work and are making a difference in many people’s lives on a local scale, medical experts that spend years studying specific diseases or learning how to perform surgical procedures are thought to be “better educated” and enjoy a higher status in society. What is wrong with this picture? While medical specialists are indeed experts in their area of study or practice, they should not enjoy legitimacy beyond what they know. GPs are indispensable. Their knowledge of how to deal with clients and their familiarity with the community they work in makes them deserving of the designation as experts as well.

Higher education and “expert knowledge” hence seems to enjoy an artificially high status in society, at the expense of “folk wisdom.” This is also a funding issue. When professional degrees are lumped in with university programs, this is a move towards “academizing” knowledge and skills that are really best developed and situated within communities and local knowledge processes. Society is guilty of complacency, when nobody lobbies for increased funding for training programs or learning experiences outside of the university, but accepts that all educational resources should be located within the university.

How can universities best serve society?

The university can serve society by doing what universities do best: cultivate well-informed, well-rounded students able to think critically and reflect over various issues. Doing this would enable students to participate actively in our democracy and contribute valuably to finding solutions for the many problems facing the world. However, in order to do this the first and foremost task of the university today is to ensure accessibility.

One way to do this would be to establish a number of small universities around Canada, closely connected to the communities in which they are located. Universities seem occupied with growth and fame and many resources are poured into big universities in the cities that have the possibility of obtaining this. But learning does not depend on either size or fame. On the contrary, small universities would have many advantages, not least their connection to local communities. They would also be able to offer programs and courses of particular relevance to the local communities they serve.

Another issue is tuition fees. Even if higher education is subsidized by the government and many students are able to apply for bursaries or obtain student loans, the fact that all students (or their families) have to pay considerable amounts of money for education effectively excludes a number of Canadians from ever getting a university degree. This is also a question of equality and the national priority in ensuring this. If we look to Scandinavia, all higher education is free of charge (just as elementary schooling is) and students furthermore receive a monthly government stipend that enables them to pay the rent and immerse

themselves in their studies without having to maintain full time jobs on the side. Surely, some people may not wish to go to university and should not have to. Other educational opportunities, including vocational training and apprenticeship should be widely available. But society has a vested interest in providing higher education for all citizens and the first step in ensuring that this happens is to make education free for all.



Essay #8

Our Relationship with Other Life

Are humans special or divine as depicted in religious doctrine? Or do humans function similarly to all higher order animals? The question has been debated by philosophers throughout time.

The prevailing view that humans are superior to other animals is a corrupted idea that has allowed us to ignore the tremendous pain and suffering we have caused and our responsibility for it. This idea derives from Christianity, Judaism and other faiths, which see our relation to other animals as one of dominion not domination or willful exploitation. What dominion really means, according to these traditions, is a great responsibility, to treat other animals respectfully and safe-guard their well-being. They do not confer on us the right to arrogantly do as we please, using other animals for food, recreation, clothing, transportation and medical experiments with little or no regard for anything but our own ambitions. Our continued exploitation of animals testifies to our own ignorance of what it means to “rule the world.” In fact, we may speculate how it is possible for such an intelligent species as the human species, to continue to dig our own grave by mistreating our natural environment to the point of destruction and disregarding our relationship with other life. Other animals differ from us in a number of ways, but we are similar in so many others. Like humans, animals are living, sentient beings capable of feeling fear, pain, hunger, thirst, loneliness and kinship. Therefore, it is increasingly argued, they deserve to live according to their own natures, without harm, abuse, or exploitation from humans. Some believe that these intrinsic values afford animals rights of some kind and ought to confer legal rights.

Animal rights and human obligations

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In brief, it recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family to justice, security and education as well as freedom of thought, conscience, religious expression, and peaceful assembly and the right of each person to a standard of living adequate for their and their families’ health and well-being as well as the opportunity to exercise these rights free of persecution and discrimination.



Should animals enjoy the same rights? Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher and a long-time advocate for animal rights, wrote in 1977 that all animals are equal. However: “The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical *treatment*; it requires equal *consideration*” (Singer 1977:3, emphasis in original). Most animals live simpler life than humans and their needs and interests differ from ours, but they still hold the fundamental same rights as us to be treated with respect. Tom Regan goes further arguing that animals have “inherent value” and cannot be regarded as a means to an end. Regan points out that we routinely ascribe inherent value, and thus the right to be treated with respect, to humans who are not rational, including infants and the severely mentally impaired. To be consistent, we must similarly ascribe it to non-humans.

Animal rights advocates, arguing from an utilitarian point of view, argue that animals have moral rights. Utilitarianism in its simplest form advocates that we base moral decisions on the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Because animals have the ability to suffer, their suffering must be taken into account when we consider how to make the greatest number of living beings on the planet happy and healthy. To

exclude animals from that consideration, they argue, is a form of discrimination that they call “speciesism,” a term coined by Peter Singer.

Are people concerned about animals crack pots? Hardly! The idea of animal rights is supported by such noted legal scholars as Alan Dershowitz and Laurence Tribe. Toronto lawyer Clayton Ruby argued in 2008 that the movement has reached the stage of the gay rights movement 25 years ago. Animal law is now routinely taught in the majority law and veterinary schools in Europe and North America and a broad spectrum of philosophy and ethics courses.

If we can accept that we all are animals at the most basic level and that all animals are equally entitled to live free of cruelty and mistreatment, it is only a small step to understand that it does not require much knowledge of other animal’s lives and behaviour to bestow them equal rights to exist on this planet on their own terms.

You are what you eat – a personal testimony



As someone who became a vegetarian 45 years ago, as a teenager unwilling any longer to participate in the slaughter of animals for food, I began a life-long struggle to understand not only their rights, but, more profoundly, our obligations. We cannot talk about animal rights without talking about human obligations.

This is the case for all of us, because we all use animals for our own benefit. Not only do we have more or less complete control over animals, increasingly we control their very existence.

Food animals and those we use in a wide array of experiments, sleep, eat and move around in conditions completely under human control. Although we would like to think that wild animals roam around freely, let’s not kid ourselves, when it comes to biodiversity worldwide, the news generally is not good. As of 2007 The World Conservation Union listed 16,306 species of animals and plants as threatened with extinction. The facts are that humans dramatically encroach on and limit animal territory through the expansion of our populations and urban settlements. Coupled with environmental disasters, logging, mining, and many other industrial and recreational activities we are pressuring all wild species and driving some to extinction. Tigers are unlikely to survive in the wild another 20 years and they aren’t alone. The animals near extinction include Canada’s own caribou and every species of our closest ancestors, the great apes.

Maybe we should think of our relationship to other animals as that between parents and their children. Animals depend on us for sustenance, care and protection, just like our children do. As Gandhi and others have said in one form or another, “as individuals and a society we will be judged by how we treat those who are under our protection.”

Who am I to speak about animal rights? It began once I realized what was lying on my supper plate and chose to become a vegetarian and has continued and grown as I pursued my studies and career in animal science, veterinary science and wildlife biology. I have seen their pitiful lives in the city pound and on factory farms and heard their screams in laboratories and the slaughterhouse. I have studied animals in the wild and seen these magnificent creatures draped over the front of trucks heading the city to be mounted on someone’s wall. While I can’t speak directly for other animals, I hope through this essay to give them a voice and advocate on their behalf, to convince you and others that all living beings, humans and other animals alike, have a right to be treated respectfully and that we need to recognize and take responsibility

for animals in factory farms, research facilities and other keeping places.

A call for action

More and more people are becoming aware of our alienation from nature and environmentalists, vegetarians, animal lovers, gardeners and people like you and me are trying to fix it. As exciting as these new movements are, growing human populations and our growing appetites and waste present huge challenges. Can we “save the environment” and save wild species from extinction if we continue to demand our current material quality of life? In fact, despite many good efforts, animals of the world are today experiencing the worst moment in human history. Their forced relationship with us is proving detrimental to their very survival.

Despite the pessimistic outlook, we must not give up. There are many things that can be done in order to improve our relationship with other life. So let’s take a closer look together at the different ways animals are part of our lives and how we can improve their treatment while society wrestles, I hope, with their rights and our responsibilities. Please consider the following caveats when you make up your own mind about animal rights and human obligations.

Our interaction with nature: Nature is not a museum. It is where we live and raise our families and make our homes. We cannot differentiate our own increasingly urban lives from the lives of those who live “in nature,” because we depend on the natural environment as much as all others, human and other species. Some people tend to think of nature as a recreational area, but overcoming our own alienation from the natural environment is not really about “getting out in nature.” We are part of the world and have to consider what we want our role to be in its many ecosystems. If we want to ensure the sustainability of various ecosystems, which in effect also means our own lives, we have to take responsibility for the role we play in nature.

It is mind-boggling how much land has been put under concrete or is destroyed in other human activities. This speaks to a disturbed mentality that sees us and our actions as separate from nature. Only fools spoil their own nest. Locally, help preserve parks in your community and create habitat for other species. Nationally and beyond don’t support, as consumer or investor, organizations and activities which destroy habitat. Is cheap palm oil for our cookies and cakes worth the loss of the orangutan because we destroy their habitat by planting palm tree plantations? Does the shrimp you like to eat really taste that good if you know that many dolphins and other fish were killed catching it? Exert your consumer power and don’t buy sea food, which is well-known to have by-catch.

Protection of ecosystems: Some of the positive development that we have seen in recent years regarding animal rights is the campaigning to save certain species from extinction or mistreatment. Popular movies such as “Free Willy” have made many people aware of the brutal reality of animals in captivity. Astrid Lindgren, author and humanitarian, defended children’s rights and animal welfare and in 1998 she lobbied an animal rights bill into law in Sweden. Celebrities such as Paul McCartney have campaigned for stopping the killing of seals in Canada. However, these admirable efforts will fail without our support.

I spent the early part of my career as a wildlife biologist in Alberta and British Columbia working desperately to save caribou and other wild species from the ravages of logging, mining, oil and gas development and many other industrial and recreational activities that are driving most wild species to the status of threatened, rare or extinct. I’ve witnessed the sickening sight of animals chewing their leg off to

escape a trap or caught deep in a pipeline trench condemned to die. I've seen magnificent elk or caribou shot and left dead along the side of a road punched open by companies extracting natural oil and lumber and minerals to feed our voracious appetites. I've watched hunters drive with the heads of magnificent animals draped over their trucks heading home as trophies to their manhood. There is a great educational need for making people aware of the importance of protecting habitat and the consequences of increasing human activity in wild places and for making the connection between human activity and the loss of wild things and wild places. It is my hope that if people start realizing our own place in various ecosystems, they will understand that the fight for animal rights is also a call to ensure our very own survival, because we are part of these systems as just another animal living on this planet.

Animals used for human recreation: Our many zoos, circuses and aquariums contribute to the fact that most people unfortunately do view nature as some kind of museum or art gallery, with various species on display. Most of these institutions argue that they have educational value, but regardless of the affinity children may feel for the dolphins they see in the Vancouver Aquarium, San Diego Zoo and Ringling Brothers Circus, these are commercial enterprises. What is worse, the "education" they provide reinforce the idea that humans are superior to all other animals and that animals exist for our enjoyment, whether as food on the dinner table or "clowns" in the aquarium. The worst of their lot are little more than prisons for tormented souls.

In 1810 the so-called "Hottentot Venus" (aka Saartjie Baartman, a woman of the Khokhoi tribe in Southern Africa) was on display in a London "freak show" for the white upper class to enjoy and dwell in their own superiority to this "beast." Today we are appalled by the racism inherent in this example from "the olden days." I look forward to the day we also consider our modern zoos circuses and aquaria archaic institutions from a bygone era.

Protection of companion animals:

I always have enjoyed the company of animals and anyone who does should recognize them as valued companions, not animals kept for amusement or domination. Unfortunately some, driven by a belief in our superiority to animals, thrive on control and power. These people call "their" animals pets, underlining their ownership over other living beings. On the other side, some animal rights activists reject any keeping of animals for these very reasons. We give animals shelter and protection and affection and they give us companionship, which has well known benefits for our health and happiness. Is it an equitable relationship? That depends, but more importantly, is it humane?



I have spent many years in the humane movement, even a short stint managing the Ottawa-Carleton Human Society. I witnessed some terrible abuse and some wonderful examples of compassion and kindness. In an ideal world all pedigree breeding of animals would be abolished. There are just too many dogs and cats without homes, living desperate, short lives on the street. Many of these animals get killed every year because people let their dogs and cats breed indiscriminately. In Ottawa thousands of cats and dogs were killed every year, because nobody would take them. Add up the death toll in the thousands of cities and towns in North America and it numbers in the millions. In the developing world and the dark

underbelly of our cities euthanasia is mercy killing, when compared to the pain, suffering and deprivation of the streets.

What can you do? Support stronger legal protection of companion animals and prohibition of puppy and kitty mills. Reject the vanity of purebred animals and give a home to an animal in need, languishing in a shelter or struggling on the street. Demand mandatory sterilization to reduce over-population. And, when you give a home to a companion animal know that it is a responsibility for life.

Experimental use of animals: For many people the use of animals for research purposes poses a tough question: what has greater value, the lives of the animals that are being experimented upon or the lives of the humans that benefit from the research? I don't have a definitive answer to that question, I am not sure one exists. While I despair knowing that a group of monkeys are being injected with the HIV virus to test possible cures, I can't deny my compassion for human suffering. My problem is that medical research has become an industry and the animals simply tools. We must make much more ethical decisions about what is so important that it justifies the deprivation and pain we cause, and consequently use far fewer animals with much more compassion.

There are a number of intermediate steps, which must be taken immediately to improve the lives of research animals while we struggle with these big ethical question and search for alternatives. We need more substantive regulation. Research animals must be kept in comfortable and humane conditions and killed only if absolutely necessary. Too often they are discarded with the syringes used to poison them, as if they were garbage. Researchers have utmost responsibility to care for the animals they use for their experiments and not inflict unnecessary harm or stress on them. Punishment should be severe for violators. We also have to consider carefully when it is indeed absolutely necessary to conduct any animal experimentation. Not all research saves human lives and there are plenty of examples of animal testing that serve less than honourable purposes. Testing of cosmetics on animals for instance can hardly be said to save human live.

Finally, we must guard against callousness and a boys club mentality. Earlier in my career I was part of a government sponsored team reviewing animal based research. We visited a university in Ontario and spent the first being wined and dined by its leadership. After all, colleagues treat each other with utmost respect. When we finally were allowed to do our work we were shocked to find a psychologist studying the relationship between vision and balance. He sewed shut the eyes of a group of cats for months to find the obvious. Worse, he left them unattended under anesthetic overnight. When a few of us complained we were reminded of our oath of secrecy and our collegial bonds. Only when we threatened to go to the press was the project terminated. The researcher should have been prosecuted but that would be bad for "business," so nothing more was done. I dare say this was not an isolated example evidenced by one scandal after another, which comes out of these labs despite security like the pentagon.

Industrial scale killing of animals: We were never meant to be more than opportunistic users of animals but our 21st century technology and appetites mean large scale killing without reverence for the lives taken or the participation of those on whose behalf the animals are killed. That can't be good for learning respect and compassion or valuing the lives of other animals.

As a result, millions of cows and pigs and chickens in factory farms live and die under horrid conditions. Our oceans are being depleted of fish because of big trawlers that not only scoop up millions of fish as they rip through the marine environment, but kill millions of by-catch, such as dolphins and turtles and

birds. Wild animals are being hunted and trapped, some for food and some for the grotesque enjoyment of hobbyist hunters.

Farmers, fishers, hunters and others who are part of the industries tend to make two kinds of arguments in defense of their actions. Firstly, they argue that because they are involved in this kind of activity they care for the animals they kill. As a biologist trying to protect dwindling herds in Alberta hunters told me that the only reason people would care about the caribou is if they are hunted. In other words, if they couldn't hunt them, people would cease to care about protecting the caribou population in the area. Such an argument is of course selfish and delusional. Secondly they argue that human enjoyment of meat and recreational hunting weighs more than the lives and wellbeing of the animals that are being killed.

The laws that regulate these industrial and recreational killings of millions of animals are clearly inadequate, focused on human privileges, not on our obligations or animal rights. Think for instance about the despairing difference between the fine you would receive for stealing a CD and the insignificant fines for animal cruelty. How is the difference justified? Clearly, animal welfare is not valued nearly as much as our own material possessions. Most likely the judge will reduce the punishment for mistreating or killing an animal to that animal's retail value. This shouldn't come as a surprise when our criminal code regards animals as property, in regulations unchanged for many, many years. Clearly if we only value animals as food or property that attitude diminishes our respect for their lives and wellbeing.

Make sure that any animals that you are responsible for, and that includes the animals you eat, are treated humanely until their death. You cannot surrender this responsibility to the food processing system or the puppy mill owner. Because of their intrinsic value, animals deserve respect, and that includes being treated humanely, and slaughtered humanely when we choose to kill animals. Cruelty is a crime whether it is committed against an animal or a human. It is indefensible. Even those who argue that animals do not suffer pain in the same way as humans because they do not have the same mental capabilities as people, would have a hard time defending cruelty against certain handicapped people, despite the fact that they supposedly have less developed or restricted mental capabilities than other people.

Should we be hardliners or pragmatists?

While it is clear to me that most of our agricultural and industrial practices concerning animals are inhumane and our heavily animal based diet harmful to public health and the environment, mandating vegetarianism and disbanding of animal agriculture is unrealistic. However, it is long past time we, in law and practice, gave other animals the respect and protection they deserve. Turning our back on these issues is callous and destructive. Animals are not simply food or property; they are sentient beings that should be treated with respect.

So let's be pragmatic and look for immediate improvements of disturbing and destructive practices while we are trying to reach for higher ideals. Hardliners may reject this approach, arguing that their refusal to enter a research facility where animals are being experimented upon maintains their integrity intact and that of the cause. However, they should realize that such refusal to engage with the problem is in fact a way of turning our backs on the animals that suffer.

Some of the most harmful practices need to be abolished, trawling or recreational hunting for instance. There is no pragmatic way or reason of improving this outdated brutality. We need to apply the same sober evaluation to each practice, realizing that while some can be improved, some are too detrimental to improve and we need to take more drastic steps. This evaluation is a moral responsibility; it is yours and mine as well as for government and business and the international community. Animal cruelty must be eliminated too: there is no reasonable way of defending our continued consumption of veal or foie gras, and such products must simply be banned. There is no pragmatic solution. Instituting such measures is a social responsibility, however, as a consumer you have a responsibility too to refuse meat produced under inhumane conditions.

Where abolition of certain practices will be detrimental for the people that work in those industries we need to help them find alternatives and to move on. Just because something was once tolerated or makes money, like slavery or infanticide, it isn't justification enough to carry on harmful practices. What we see today, however, is the continued subsidizing of certain industries, such as oil and gas, while fishers committed to eliminate by-catch receive no governmental help. This situation speaks to the one sided interest in the economic output of certain industries and the complete disengagement with the protection of animal rights.

Finally, a word about people's common adaptation of a pragmatic stance: Too often we see that people commit to cleaning up the worst practices of abuse and then think that a pragmatic compromise has been reached or that we have come as close to the ideal as possible. To exemplify: we all know that cars are some of the worst sinners in pollution and that our world is under threat because of this. When the hydro car came out people seemed to think that we had found the perfect solution to the problem and that anybody driving a hydro car could do so guilt free. While hydro cars represent a vast improvement in our thinking around transportation and pollution, they are only one step along the way to a cleaner world. The invention of hydro cars does not represent an end-point in itself, but is a pragmatic, intermediate solution to a continued problem. We need to evaluate this kind of thinking critically too when it comes to animal rights.

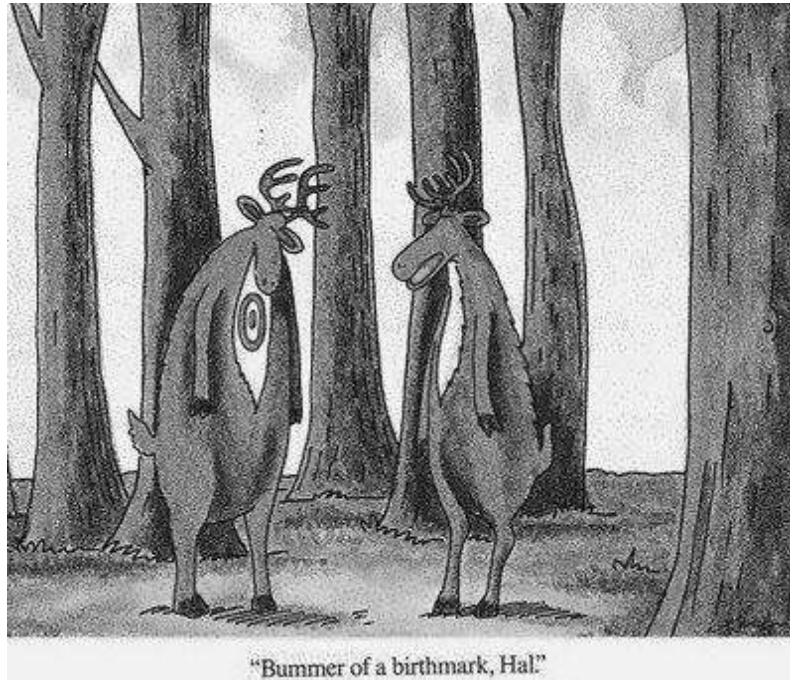
How would your life change if you committed to respect other life?

Most people would like to know how their lives would change if we actually institute some of the changes I have proposed. Maybe you will be surprised to know that the majority of the changes we would see would be positive and would not deprive us our quality of life. If we committed to respecting other life, we would see many positive changes in our relationship with nature. These changes would in turn create ripple effects and we would even see ourselves enabled to relate to one another in a more positive and respectful manner. By elevating our consciousness of our relationship with and responsibilities towards other life, we would grow as a society and as individuals.

Practically the cost of certain food items would go up. Furthermore some people, such as recreational hunters, would need to find new hobbies. But these are small sacrifices compared to the positive changes we would experience. Since industrially produced food is unhealthy we would furthermore experience a higher quality of life and possibly also save many tax dollars on the public health system.

The world does not need us to survive; in fact we are in the midst of killing ourselves through our uncontrolled economic growth which comes at the price of our natural heritage. This heritage is not just ours, we share the world with many other species, and we have no more right to live healthy and happy

lives than they do. We can intellectually conceptualize these mechanisms and that very ability should remind us of our responsibility to do better and improve the lives of all living beings. Even if you don't think you owe it to animals to treat them better, you owe it to yourself and your fellow human beings: we lack respect for each other when we forget about the intrinsic value of other life that we share the planet with.



Essay #9

Where Do We Go from Here?

We don't inherit the world from our parents we borrow it from our children

- Native American proverb



The world is a place of beauty and wonder facing some very tough problems. I have devoted my life to searching for ways to encourage and work with others to take positive action to make the world a better place and I take no pleasure from presenting a discouraging picture of the contemporary world and our prospects for the future. I remain hopeful that embracing the truth may shake us out of our complacency and move us to work together to find solutions. We have deceived ourselves for too long and the relatively small and seemingly manageable issues encountered early in my career, have been overtaken by exponentially more complicated problems that are inextricably linked. Where we once struggled to get recycling on the public agenda or to save some whales, today we are confronted by existential threats from climate change, poverty, the dramatic decline of marine and land eco-systems and the widespread dislocation of people which results from violent conflicts around the world.

Our leadership by and large has not proven to be up to the task of solving our many worrisome social, environmental and humanitarian crises, not even the small ones. And we haven't exactly helped by acquiescing, that is by quietly accepting, mediocre leadership and not exercising our democratic rights and responsibilities. Public participation and personal responsibility are essential to healthy societies and successful decision-making about their priorities and practices. It is impressive when we come together to achieve greater freedom for ourselves and others, and to help those brought low by natural disasters. Together we do have power for positive change.

While we can put some faith in our public education system and universities, they too must do much more to cultivate critically thinking citizens, prepared to engage with pressing problems in the world. Our complacency has allowed education to become an exercise in memorization and indoctrination rather than a critical learning process. Our universities need to find ways to better serve society in meeting its challenges rather than giving priority to corporate and political donors and their own pampered elite. We

too carry responsibilities for education and public policy, but no less to ensure that the companies we support as investors, consumers, and employees do not compromise the greater good in pursuit of their own benefits (social, political or economic). We need to hold them accountable for their actions at home and around the world and through our actions make them understand that corporate social responsibility is more than a scheme for making more money.

Apathy is defined as a state of indifference; individuals suffer an absence of interest or concern in emotional, social, or physical life. Do we live in an apathetic state? You bet we do, and while poor leadership is partly to blame, apathy and willful ignorance of the consequences of our actions are major contributing factors to the problems confronting us. It is therefore incumbent upon each of us to be well-informed participants, not opinionated bystanders, if we want a better world, one of peace, prosperity and justice for all made up of healthy places to live.

Maybe the truth is that we are happily pacified by sit-coms, sports extravaganzas and the latest high-tech gadgets. Maybe the problems are so overwhelming for some of us that we are paralyzed with inaction. Or perhaps we like living our relatively cushy lives of material comfort and don't really care that much about the consequences for others than our privileged leaders. Perhaps some of us even have ambitions to join them. Self-interest and ignorance are two sides of the same coin; we chose to be ignorant about important issues facing ourselves and others because the truth is inconvenient. Let's at least be honest about who we are and what we stand for even if looking in the mirror exposes a self-centered life of comfort and luxury at the expense of others: other people, other species and future generations.

There are dedicated men and women of integrity in public life and business and I have had the privilege of working with some. Unfortunately, too many others are little more than trained seals or pigs at the trough that could care less about you or me, let alone the next generation. It is therefore our responsibility to demand more of the former and discourage and depose more of the latter. That is if we want more than self-interested leadership, fixated on political power and personal gain. Let's stop passively deferring to leadership and experts who lead us astray, an unproductive and dangerous habit. It is no more effective to rely on a mainstream media dominated by corporate values or an alternative one rife with conspiracy advocates. Inform yourself and get involved!

For millions of people life already is a struggle for the necessities of life, living on less than one dollar per day. Every hour more children than can fill a jumbo jet die from water-borne disease. The lack of adequate food and water impoverishes and shortens the lives of millions more, leading to growing unrest and migration. Indeed environmental refugees now exceed political ones in number and desperation. Over-use and contamination have damaged water, land and air, compromising human development and causing unprecedented rates of extinction of plants and animals. The question is what will we do about it?

The grand bet

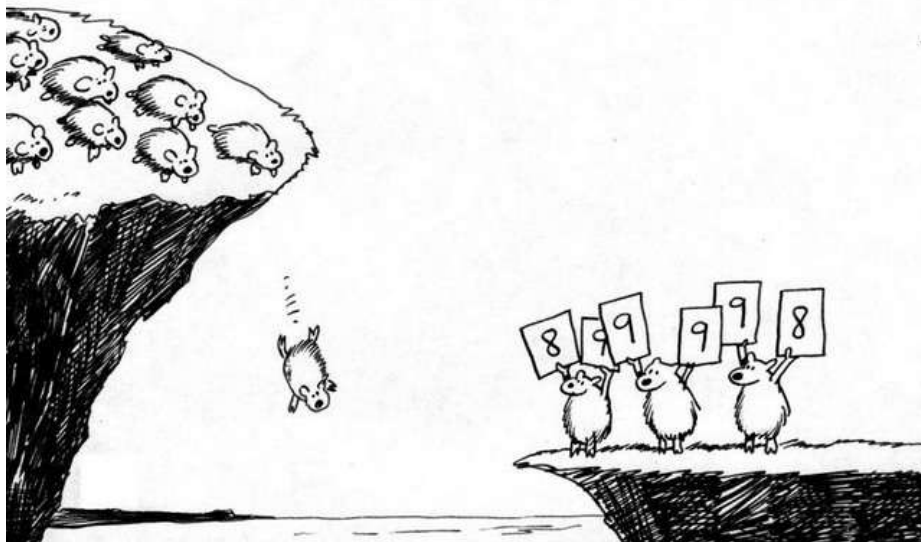
We have made a huge bet and fundamentally, we now are faced with two choices:

- 1) We can continue on our current path, believing that as long as the economy grows and technology is advancing all things are possible for us in this world, and in any case, human ingenuity will save us in the nick of time.
- 2) Alternatively, we can, accept that we have created serious social, environmental and humanitarian problems and adopt just and sustainable practices which reduce the threat to our generation and don't compromise the future.

If the first choice is right and the Earth's capacity to support us is unlimited, growth may be our salvation. If it is wrong, food production will decline, wild weather will increase, nature will disappear and our cities increasingly will be armed enclaves surrounded by pollution and grinding poverty.

If the second choice is right, we will pull back from the brink and find ways to live, which sustain a decent life for everyone. If it is wrong, our economies may operate below full capacity but we will secure ourselves and the future.

What's your bet? Before you answer, consider who will pay the price if we are wrong. It's unlikely to be we humans living today in this prosperous part of the world. Our bet is against those less fortunate and, of course, our children and grandchildren. What are we waiting for? We know the problems, we have the means to deal with them, and future generations will judge us harshly if we fail to act.



If we truly want a sustainable future we need to create school and public education programs which give hope to our young people and prepare the world's citizens to respond to changing environmental, social, and economic realities. Resources really are not the issue. We possess the means to create a world where every man, woman and child can live free of hunger and discrimination and obtain the health, education

and opportunity to reach their potential while ensuring that human development does not squeeze other life towards extinction.

The disappearance of past civilizations clearly warns us of the dire consequences of pursuing our unsustainable path. In today's highly interdependent world local breakdowns have global impacts. The expanding human population and the intensity of the pressures on the earth's resources and life-support systems threaten the future of life as we know it.

However, just imagine if the peoples of the world committed to work together for development based on sound environmental practices and progressive social programs; to reduce waste and greenhouse gases, improve air quality, conserve water and energy, improve public transportation, increase green space, adopt environmentally sound planning and purchasing programs and support healthy food production. Well educated populations living in healthy environments offer our best prospects for the future. We just need to find the compassion, creativity and foresight to make it happen.

A short primer for action

It should not come as surprise that I believe we can only save ourselves and the planet if we accept our responsibilities to each other, other species and future generations – and take action now to dramatically improve our behaviour. We don't have jump off the cliff or flee to outer space to save the world. We have the means and the talent to improve things if we get our priorities straight.

People often ask me what the most pressing issues are and what they can do about them, so here is my list. You may have others, face them, get involved and keep going to the best of your ability. As the sage Tarfon once said, "It is not our responsibility to carry the whole load nor it is our prerogative not to do our fair share." Coupled with the adage that "every one of us must be the change we want to see," it would clear that the future is in our hands. We have responsibilities to other people, other species and future generations. And what can you do to live up to these responsibilities? I urge you to do something. When it's all said and done, living a life of meaning is the best you can get.

Michael Bloomfield's top 10 most compelling issues:

1. **Climate change.** The evidence is compelling that burning fossil fuels is causing significant, perhaps irreversible, changes to our climate. We need to press for greater action to find safe, healthy alternatives and adopt them in our own lives as quickly as possible. Drive and travel less, much less, avoid disposable plastics and buy as locally as possible.
2. **Diminishing biodiversity.** Biodiversity is the diverse sum of all life on Earth. We know now that all life is interconnected and the loss of some of that diversity affects all other life. Each animal and plant has value regardless of its benefits for us and they are many. We obtain food, clothing, medicine and much more from plants and animals and the health of the world's ecosystems tell us a great deal about the health of our lives. The threat to bees and other pollinating insects is but one example of the consequences of the rapid growth of human populations and our toxic habits. Without them many of our food sources would be lost and it is estimated that the world loses 5-10 wild species each day. Eliminate poisonous materials from your home and garden and never dispose of drugs and chemicals down the drain. Plant gardens to provide food and homes for helpful birds and insects and demand that government and business make it a priority to reduce toxins in food and land and water.

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3. **Clean water.** Adequate water must be considered a human right, yet many people in the world cannot access it. Oppose commodification of water or commercial control of its delivery. Support efforts to make access a human right and programs that respond to humanitarian needs.
 4. **Uncontrollable population growth.** Religious and cultural beliefs make population control more difficult and we must be sensitive to legitimate arguments that the issue is per capita consumption, not population. Support efforts that encourage both effective population control and a more equitable distribution of the world's resources.
 5. **Poverty.** Most people in the world live on less than \$2/day. This inhumanity is caused partly by consumer habits in wealthy countries that rely on cheap labour, weaker labour and environmental practices in developing countries to provide high volumes of low cost products. Be an informed and conscientious consumer, don't buy products from companies and countries that participate in these practices.
 6. **Warfare.** Is the money we spend on killing each other well spend or should we use it to build healthy, harmonious societies? Promote peace and respect and demand that our governments do the same. Don't support companies, as investors or consumers, involved in the weapons industry. Yes, at times it is legitimate to defend ourselves from aggression, let's not be naïve, but most people know the difference between self-defense and conflicts of opportunism.
 7. **Inequalities.** A global divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is not only undignified, it fosters conflict and leads to increased poverty as well as acts of resentment and desperation. We have choices as individuals and nations to treat others fairly and with respect.
 8. **Corporate domination.** We cannot build democratic societies and foster public participation if any sector of society has too much control. Today large, typically multi-national corporations have excessive influence and power. Their economic agenda dominates social, environment, educational and cultural policies. Support local businesses, demand that other societal values are respected and supported by government and let's re-think our obsession with money as the prime indicator of progress and happiness.
 9. **Increasing self-interest.** People are to a lesser and lesser degree assuming their moral obligations of giving to those in need and treating other people and animals with respect. Volunteer, join a group promoting random acts of kindness, take the time to say hello or extend a courtesy, smile.
 10. **Building sustainable communities.** In order to live a healthy life of, prosperity and happiness, we need to learn how to live together and work together based on mutual respect and understanding.

How can we take action?

There may be more than one solution to these problems. Let's not choose suicide. At our best, we are an incredibly creative species and my hope is that we can save ourselves before it is too late. Stephen Hawking's recent suggestion that we leave planet Earth and start over somewhere else, offers a somber commentary on the state of the world and a good laugh. Clearly if our own destructive habits cannot be overcome here, why would our prospects be better elsewhere? And, who decides who goes and who gets left behind? It does not take much imagination to guess that the rich and privileged would continue their lifestyle in outer space leaving behind the forsaken masses. Oh what fodder for fund-raising cocktail parties in space. And what happens the next time we spoil our nest we move again like nomadic people searching for a new home?

While Stephen Hawking and other geniuses contemplate such fanciful dreams, I suggest that those of us with more common sense get to work to fix the problems we have created on Earth. It is not too late, and in fact, there is plenty we each can do as individuals to help this process. I hope you will join me in, as a minimum, considering your own role in creating a life of peace and prosperity for all human and animal kind.

Get off the fence and take action: The first step towards a more responsible life is to get involved. Find a cause that is important to you and get involved in positive action. Oppose militarization and warfare; get involved with your neighbourhood kids and contribute to their general education; be mindful of the food you eat and work to improve the lives of animals that have suffered or died for you among others.

Make informed choices: On a daily basis you have the opportunity to "vote" for a fairer and more harmonious world as a consumer, investor. As Margaret Mead wrote "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."



Final Thoughts



A healthy future depends upon informed people working together for positive change; transforming harmful patterns of development into a positive movement for long-term prosperity which is ecologically and socially sustainable.

In a world of plenty millions of people live on less than \$2 a day, every hour more children die from water-borne disease than can fill a jumbo jet; over-use and contamination of water, land and air impedes human development and causes unnecessary loss of life, while the extinction of other species occurs at an alarming rate.

At the root of these global crises is our failure to take seriously our responsibilities to each other, other species and future generations.

Today, in our highly interdependent world, we are faced with two fundamental choices: we can selfishly continue to overuse and damage the natural world that supports us and deny the rights of others to live decent lives or we can adopt healthy, sustainable lifestyles that will secure the future for everyone.

Just imagine if the peoples of the world committed to work together for development based on sound environmental practices and progressive social and economic programs; to eliminate waste and reduce greenhouse gases, improve air quality, conserve water and energy, increase green space and support healthy food production while investing the cultural, health and educational assets rather than polluting industries and war.

Make no mistake, continuing our wasteful, polluting ways will mean food resources will decline, wild weather will increase, nature will disappear and cities will boil in pollution, conflict and grinding poverty.

Before you choose take a moment and reflect because we are not only choosing our future but that of our children and grandchildren and generations to follow. We are choosing to help or ignore those less fortunate and deciding the fate of every other form of life on Earth.

The crucial challenge for our generation, therefore, is to meet our needs without compromising the lives of others or future generations.

We possess the means to create a world where every man, woman and child can live free of hunger and discrimination and obtain the health, education and opportunity to reach their potential while ensuring that human development does not squeeze other life towards extinction. We just need to find the compassion, creativity and foresight to make it happen.

The sooner we accept that humankind in its many faces and places is really one big family, connected by history, biology and the future the more peaceful the world will be for us and for generations to follow. Please join the many wonderful people in your community and around the world working together to create a more just and sustainable future.

Each of us may be more capable in some ways than others, but none of us are as capable as all of us are together. And always remember, “Traveling together in a boat none of us has the right to drill a hole under our own seat.”

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It’s the Only One We’ve Got button: Michael Bloomfield button collection
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Once while the sage Choni was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a (carob) tree. Choni asked him, "How many years will it require for this tree to give fruit?" The man answered, "It will require 70 years." Choni asked, "Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?" The man answered, "I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted for me. So will I do for generations to come."