

Global Ethics and Education in Tolerance

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The Crisis of Education

A theologian would be ill-advised if he tried to teach pedagogy to the pedagogues. And indeed it is not my aim to proclaim some way of teaching – even less so after a period of pedagogical experimentation that produced one new model after the other. Rather I would like to buttress the efforts of pedagogues and educators from the viewpoint of ethics at a time when many people talk about an educational crisis. But in so doing I would also like to confine by remarks in two ways:

Against Lamentation and Moralizing

I do not wish to join in the lamentations of cultural pessimists of various shades who argue that present-day youth is as rotten as never before. It is a complaint that has been repeated many times since the days of Plato. Nor do I wish to join in the public moralizing of prominent churchmen who – themselves living in celibacy – do not grow tired of dealing with questions of sexual morality and sex education. Let us not torment ourselves with this kind of morality! Nor will there be any cheap shots at schools or politicians who are being blamed for the crisis.

At the same time there is to be no playing down of the ethical problematic, as if the call for a new ethos that can be heard so frequently these days were to be turned into a new “ethics wave.” Rather this call must be seen as a perfectly understandable response to the ever more obvious crisis of the “modernist project.” This project had at first rightly promoted the emancipation of the individual before it flip-flopped into individualistic arbi-

trariness and unrestrained choice that cause individual unhappiness and social ills. The enormous progress that has been made in the field of science, technology, and the economy, but has in many cases also reached its limits today, sadly did not bring us, as had been expected, a commensurate moral advance of humanity.

Against Regulations and Codification

While I do not wish to join in on the lamentations and moralizing, neither would I like to plead for incessant *regulations* and *codifications*. Legal norms and laws, to be sure, are necessary, but they do not make a personal ethical position dispensable. As if a legal system could survive without an ethical foundation! As if a social and political organization could create ethical ties on its own! Neil Postman may have exaggerated when he argued in his book *The End of Education*¹ ("end" in the sense of "terminal point" as well as "goal") that school and education were devoid of any purpose today, i.e., that both lacked ideals and a vision and had succumbed to the false prophets – of science, of technology, of economic utility and of multiculturalism. He may have overdrawn the picture, but by asking after the *raison d'être* of our schools, he nevertheless raises a very pressing question. True, "we can let trains go on time; but why all the trouble if they do not go where we want them to?"²

The problem is, of course, exacerbated if the hypothesis of various social scientists is correct that the young generation of our postmodern age is subjected to a process of "*tribalization*." The roughly fifteen million people who belong to the cohort of the 13-25 year-olds in Germany – so the argument continues – are increasingly fragmenting into innumerable "tribes," "groups," "sub-groups," "cliques," and finally "loners." Depending on what "tribe" one is dealing with, tens of thousands would go during the same summer to the Convention of the Evangelical Church in Hamburg or to a "Ravers" love parade in Berlin or Zürich; they would attend the "chaos days" in Hanover or a soccer match or wherever else they might travel.³ If these groups and sub-groups have all developed their own norms of behavior, their own dress codes, their own sign and speech codes, if, in other words and according to this hypothesis, youth in our postmodern age is no longer bound together by

the sense of community and belonging of the one and only youth movement, what then is it that still holds the younger generation and, indeed, society as a whole together, once this generation will finally operate the levers of power?

To be sure, according to a recent study by the *Deutsches Jugendinstitut* in Munich, German youth has again become more achievement orientated; but, faced with the scramble for jobs and the rough climate on the labor market, it also remains without a sense of direction. In these circumstances it may be helpful that programs and periods that allow young people to prepare for a career are on offer. Certainly it is understandable that calls are particularly emphatic to provide orientation, forward perspectives, and ethical foundations in society and among pedagogues today. Educators who are dealing with children and adolescents day in day out are often horrified to discover how many of their charges have lost those foundations that were once self-evident, i.e., norms, rules, yardsticks, and ideals. Allow me to illustrate this by reference to a problem that preoccupies all of us very much, i.e., youth and violence.

Youth and Violence

Youth and violence go together ever since the street battles of the rockers in the 1950s and the student rebellion of the 1960s. However, through the mass media, we have entered a new phase of social history that cannot be relativized by reference to the robber knights of the late Middle Ages who were also violent or the barely more moral entrepreneurs of Manchester capitalism in the nineteenth century. Rather it is a specific symptom of our post-modern age that the representation of violence in the media has, since the 1970s and 1980s and even more so in recent years, assumed alarming proportions. I am thinking here of the broadcasting, on a massive scale, of violence and cruelty with a realism that was previously unimaginable. It is a portrayal of violence that also reaches young people in the films of predominantly "private" television and on videos-tapes that can easily be copied; moreover, there is also a kind of television news-reporting that is to some extent voyeuristic. These representations of violence that do

not mention pity or humanitarian feelings or love of one's neighbor must be added to all the other temptations of youth, be they old or new (drugs).

The Media Reinforce the Predisposition towards Violence

Of course, this temptation must not be exaggerated, as if the more or less coincidental or occasional viewing of a violent film or video immediately results in permanent damage. However, we should also not belittle the impact, as if – in line with a now discredited “theory of catharsis” – readiness to use violence would be reduced through an addictive consumption of violent videos and through habituation; as if the viewing of torture, rape, sado-masochistic scenes, or manslaughter had ever made a single person more pacific. According to recent research⁴, the opposite is true: the predisposition to use violence and to act aggressively is released and stimulated by violent images, even to the point of committing a crime.

It is easy to see the causal link between violent scenes in films and videos and the readiness of young people in terms of a *reinforcement of this predisposition*, especially if we consider the following four points, i.e., compensation, identification, imitation, and projection.

As for (1) *compensation*, young people who as children have suffered from low self-esteem, who have fears of appearing weak and powerless, and in particular adolescents who were the helpless victims of adults and their severe punishments, are able to compensate their feelings of weakness with the help of (forbidden!) violent videos by developing fantasies of their own power and the power of their clique.

As for (2) *identification*, particularly youths whose self-esteem has been undermined are able to identify with the actors; but whereas adults would normally identify with the victims, they would identify with the *perpetrators*. Like the actors, they would be “cool” and hard-nosed; they would see themselves as Rambos and Terminators who overcome all enemies and dangers and who remain victorious in the end. Young people are particularly prone to adopt, in barely noticeable ways, patterns of behavior they have seen on TV as part of their own repertoire (see the “Monday syndrome” in school play-grounds).

As for (3) *imitation*, it is known how people become accustomed to violent images, how they adopt the actor's strategies of justification (in films the ubiquitous notion of emergency defense or emergency rescue) and thus neutralize their own behavior. Imitation is thus facilitated. Research with prison inmates has demonstrated that they are particularly prone to imitation. They deal with such trash differently from people with no criminal record. Inmates watched more attentively, recognized more clearly how far an action was realizable and, in certain cases, imitated a particular crime step by step.

As for (4) *projection*, people whose self-esteem is disturbed are highly satisfied if they can project their own darker sides onto others, i.e., minorities, the infirm, and people rejected by society. A person can upvalue himself, feeling that – as a white male, a German, a native – he belongs to an elite group. This is why it is not only among certain underprivileged strata, but also among ordinary families of petty bourgeois background (more in provincial towns than in cities) that we find sympathetic attitudes for a right-wing milieu and for skinheads. These are the strata who – facing many problems that fail to articulate – fear competition and social decline.

It Depends on the Individual

The destructive potential of videos that are inhumane, sadistic, misogynist, and xenophobic, that glorify violence and espouse it as the only solution to conflict, is considerable. It has had a major share in generating the view, held not merely by armed gangs in Frankfurt or Berlin, but also by many other young people, that violence is a legitimate means for asserting their interests. This is why many large citizens' initiatives⁵ rightly demand TV programs which, if not completely free from violence, are nevertheless more humane; they also want to stop all paid advertising in the context of programs showing violence or human misery. In other words, they advocate a responsible treatment of violence by the TV networks and the effective implementation of existing legislation.

Another major result of recent research in this field has to be highlighted: it is *dependent on the individual* who consumes this trash whether the violence seen will lead to long-term damage and

personality changes. What I am referring to here is not just the individual psychological situation, i.e., whether the videos are consumed alone or in a group, whether they are viewed as an escape or as a means of abandoning oneself to a make-believe world. What I mean is above all the milieu of the family, school, and the wider environment – whether the child experiences rejection and insensitivity within the family or warmth, security, and open trust; whether he or she was able to develop a stable self-esteem; whether a strong ego that is capable of coping with the inner and external threats of puberty is also being promoted through school; and, finally, whether the social milieu is likely to approach with hostility or open curiosity what is foreign, unfamiliar, and new.

However, so I ask myself, how is this to be achieved if children who up to the age of 11 or 12 find it difficult, in any case, to differentiate between fictionalized violence in films and actual violence as reported in the news and who are nowadays surrounded by a jungle without points of orientation?

The Jungle without Points of Orientation

Am I exaggerating? Hardly. After all, we live in an age in which a two-year-old is being slowly and calculatingly tortured to death by two 10-year-olds. It happened in Liverpool. And just in that city? We live in an age in which three 11-12 year-olds terrorized a dozen or so families by demanding money over the telephone and threatening murder and rape if the demands were not fulfilled. They did so using a language so brutal that children were at first not suspected of being the anonymous callers. And where did this happen? In Rottenburg near Tübingen. Evidently even the residential towns of bishops and prelates are no longer “havens of innocence.” Those three kids were apparently also responsible for a number of other misdeeds (paint daubings, damage to parked cars) and they belonged to a larger gang of children and adolescents. According to the police, they were unable to recognize their wrong-doing⁶ and even in retrospect thought their activities to be “funny.” Nor did the large prison in their neighborhood act as a deterrent. As one of the 11 or 12 year-

olds put it, nothing could happen to them; after all, it was only from age 14 that one becomes legally responsible.

Is Everything That Is Fun Permissible?

It is not only in the United States and in Britain that both the victims and the perpetrators have grown younger and younger. According to the 1994 crime statistics for Germany, over 100,000 felonies were committed by children between the ages of 8 and 14; over 220,000 were committed by juveniles between the ages of 14 and 21, representing a 20 percent increase on 1993. It should be added, however, that, unlike in the U.S., most of these were not serious crimes of violence, such as rape or armed robbery. These latter crimes increased among juveniles from 83,400 in 1983 to 129,600 in 1992. The figure for adolescent murderers alone was up by more than 100 percent, from 969 in 1984 to 2,202 in 1991.⁷ (I am not going to cite that steep rise in suicides and attempted suicides among young people.)

To be sure, in Germany as elsewhere, the rise in crime has manifold political and social causes. There is poverty and the lack of a forward perspective among many youths; there is also the hidden persuasion by relentless advertising; and there are the scandals and the corrupt behavior of all too many people in business, politics, and sports. However, it is also undeniable that in many cases children and adolescents evidently lack an ethical foundation, a basic training of their conscience and a minimal standard of morality, without which the existing legal system, including the police and the penal institutions, are largely powerless. As I heard Federal President Roman Herzog say during a recent panel discussion, no country is able to pay for a legal order unless 97-98 percent of the population were also willing to *abide* by it.

The categorical imperative to act in a humane fashion was considered to be virtually innate in all of us during Kant's time. In an age in which Nietzsche's man "beyond good and evil" is being so explicitly promoted and put into practice, this idea is clearly no longer self-evident. If everything that is fun is permissible (and this is how certain TV talk shows justify every nonsense, malpractice or perversity), why should young people then not also be free to threaten and blackmail their fellow-citizens; why should they

not be free to smash up bars, defile cemeteries, mug elderly people, and form gangs that wage bloody wars against each other?

Between Authoritarian and Antiauthoritarian Education

It will not be possible to get a handle on the problem simply by putting more policemen on the streets, by tougher sentencing or by increasing welfare benefits. The actual solution starts with us, with our very personal convictions, our willingness to act responsibly and to assume obligations. That is why *pedagogy* should come even before politics, legislation, and the judiciary when we are looking for a reversal of these trends. We need a carefully considered educational approach in schools and families that is neither authoritarian nor antiauthoritarian; an approach that provides young people with spaces for their free development and yet does not refrain from exerting authority; that is considerate and caring, and yet sets clear limits and is not afraid to impose sanctions.

The child in particular should not only be told what his or her ethical duties are; he or she should also be given living examples of what is humane and inhumane, just and unjust, of what is fair and unfair, honest and dishonest. The child must learn in the family, in school, and in church how people deal with each other in humane ways and how one should aim for a resolution of conflicts without resort to violence. Basic behavioral patterns transmitted by the family are frequently responsible for the young people who cannot cope with life, who are unable to find a genuine identity, because parents who are expressly "youthful" and whose tolerance is virtually unlimited do not provide points of conflict and contrast, enabling adolescents to develop their own personality. If children are barely told in their families and schools about the key commandments of the great world religions, if they never hear "Thou shall not kill," "Thou shall not steal," or "Thou shall not tell lies," we should not be surprised if many of them refuse to recognize any norms and live all that happens as "fun." Educators rightly point out that violence prevention must start early and must be part of a long-term project.

For a long time pedagogues like Hartmut von Hentig would not stop polemicizing against the collective repression, the domestication and silencing of the rising generation; they pleaded almost

exclusively for individuality, self-reliance, the capacity to criticize, the preparedness to accept conflict, risk and improvisation. In “adapting to the historical situation” they, too, have meanwhile begun to shift gears. To quote von Hentig: “Following a period of extensive liberties, of the dissolution of social ties and of excess, the rising generation requires a stronger education in self-discipline, community spirit, and sense of duty. We shall have to find a new balance if a particular virtue has become extreme and a non-virtue (*Untugend*); if a love for order has become a compulsion; if the quest for independence has turned into an anything-goes; a sense of justice into conformism; autonomy into egotism; leisure into carelessness.”⁸ Von Hentig is absolutely correct if he now wants to deal with the welfare state by encouraging self-responsibility, with the market by stressing social obligation, with the freedom of the press, of research, and of the arts by protecting personality rights, by respecting life, and by establishing notions of decency.

Indeed, having ethical values is never merely a question that is directed at “youth,” but concerns present-day society as a whole – a society which in an age of a democratically legitimated pluralism of life-styles and concepts of living must constantly pose anew the question of what, ethically speaking, is holding it together. I have already hinted at this: the crisis of values is not just a problem confronting Europe and America, but also the former Soviet Union and China. It is a global crisis. It is for this reason that the question of our ethos quite literally becomes a question of the ethos of the world as a whole. This in turn raises another fundamental problem wherever human beings are involved, i.e., that of the aggressiveness to be found in all human societies. It is an aggressiveness that poses a major challenge for any kind of education.

Education and Aggressiveness

Biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists tend to agree today that it is simply necessary, for animals and humans alike, including children, to develop a certain measure of aggressiveness in order to survive in a given society. For this reason we may wonder

whether aggressiveness is simply our destiny, inscribed in us genetically, so that we should not be surprised if even the religions of the world contribute their share to the *homo homini lupus*; if even they have imbibed a measure of aggressiveness that characterizes the beast inside us.

The Ambivalence of Aggressiveness

There is general agreement today that fundamentally there is truth to *two positions*: Humans are genetically programmed as well as directed by the environment, but in neither case totally so. Why? Because a person who is either completely programmed by his or her genes or conditioned by the environment would no longer be human. He or she would either be an animal or a robot! Positively put (and this is a basic point for all pedagogy), human beings are *free* within the limits of their heredity and their environmental conditioning. But free in what sense? They are free in contradistinction to being dependent on instinct, compulsion, and power; they are free in the sense of having choices, of being self-determined and autonomous; they are also free to both follow a particular instinctive impulse or to resist it.

This means, as far as *aggressiveness* is concerned, that it is inherited and fixed in the genome, just as the theories of Freud and Lorenz had postulated. Accordingly, it is not possible simply to condemn it on religious grounds, to combat it morally, and – so to speak – to legislate it away. In this sense aggressiveness is indeed no more than what Konrad Lorenz – somewhat onesidedly to be sure – called “the so-called evil,” the apparent evil that also has its good side. In what way? Without aggressive energies neither animals nor humans would be able to defend their territory and to create distance between themselves. There just is no living-together that is free of tensions. Without aggressive energies no child would be able to stand up to his or her parents’ restrictions and overprotectiveness. He or she could not develop and grow within a framework of competition with other children; he or she would be unable to learn how to act and react, how to assert oneself and how to stand up for oneself; in short, the child could not develop self-confidence and become independent and adult. In this sense it is simply vital for him or her to go through a phase of aggressive

social exploration as a youthful rebel or rowdy teenager. In this way the child tests and expands his or her space and the adolescent develops an assertiveness that is guided by reason vis-à-vis the resistance encountered in the real world. There is no other way for developing, asserting, and realizing one's personality.

Not All Aggressiveness Should Be Suppressed

All this shows that peace education as it was once conceived is problematical. This is an education that tried to prevent, through sanctions and the imposition of restrictions on a child's activities, a child's aggressiveness, anger, rage, and irritability from bursting forth; an education that attempted to impede the satisfaction of his or her drives, as manifested through play, sports competitions and fisty-cuffs, but also through serious fights. However, such an approach resulted in frustrations that were sooner or later bound to be translated into aggression (or, if internalized, into neurosis). In other words, *an antiauthoritarian peace education purveyed by parents, schools, or the churches that represses aggressiveness of any kind and promotes submissiveness misses the mark*. Aggressiveness may be perfectly valuable; nor does it have to violate another person if it demonstrates individual strength through compelling argument rather than physical abuse.⁹

However, this is merely one side of the coin. Aggressiveness is not completely inherited; it is also *learned*, acquired through conditioning. It is not just controlled by the genome, but it is also tested and shaped within a particular milieu. Aggressiveness – as theories of social learning (Bandura, Walters) assume – is thus also a consequence of, and reinforced by, learning through observation. In the course of his or her socialization that child learns to act and react in earnest. To be sure, the child invariably learns on the basis of inherited learning mechanisms. But this does not mean that he or she cannot (and perhaps even should not) learn something else. Even if humans display biologically determined impulses and drives, they are not, like animals, instinctively fixed in their behavior. For example, in the name of some spiritual or political objective, we are capable of voluntary starvation until death.¹⁰ Similarly, a child is not helpless vis-à-vis impulses that might trigger aggressions. Rather he or she can consciously stop

these aggressions and learn to rein them in. Normally, the community and role models help the child to distinguish which situations require aggressiveness and which ones do not, and to know when a particular drive may be satisfied.

No Toleration for any Kind of Aggressiveness

Recent research has shown that by no means are all aggressions rooted in frustration, as the theory of J. Dollard and N. Miller of Yale University had assumed in the 1930s. As if all aggressiveness resulted from the non-satisfaction of a particular drive so that aggressiveness could be prevented by preventing frustration and by satisfying all drives!¹¹ Any monocausal theory of aggression is also rejected today by socio-biology which sees in frustration no more than one cause among others.

This second aspect of aggressiveness has similarly far-reaching consequences for education. An education that argues that the child should just be allowed "to grow" and that proposes to satisfy his or her wishes as far as possible in order to promote the growth of a human being who feels no aggressiveness and is peaceful, does not lead to a reduction of aggressiveness. Rather it results in the long run in a dangerous release of aggressive energies that have allegedly been held back. What may be thought amusing about a little horror in the nursery, can assume threatening proportions, inside or outside the home, when we are dealing with an egomaniac or violent boy in his puberty or an adolescent. It is a phenomenon that elderly people walking in the street increasingly complain about. However, those are the realities: If a child has every wish fulfilled and his or her immediate family displays extreme leniency and avoids all conflict, the result is not going to be non aggressive behavior, but the aggressive claiming of ever new needs.

Hence it is the reverse of this education that is true: only if a child is shown, early on and persistently, intelligible and fair limits, a clarification will be achieved that is ultimately also desired by him or her; the quest for an aggressive social exploration, that in itself is so important, will decline. Slowly the child learns to respond to threats constructively rather than aggressively. The young person then appreciates as a matter of principle how far he

or she is allowed to go and that being a pure individualist and egoist is impossible. In other words, an *antiauthoritarian peace education that believes in tolerating all aggressiveness, likewise, misses its mark*. It merely turns a blind eye to the dangerous dynamic of aggressiveness which may have very destructive social consequences in the long run; after all, aggressiveness generates further aggressiveness.

The Ethos of Peace as World Ethos

It is undeniable that the religions of the world have been fulfilling a fundamental role for hundreds and thousands of years:

- they have motivated ethical conduct,
- they have made ethical norms more tangible and have illustrated them,
- they have formed the emotional community so vital for ethical conduct.

As we face the threat of a “clash of civilizations,” the world religions are being challenged to secure and promote peace and to help legitimize a common ethos of humanity or a world ethos. Roman Herzog, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, has expressly identified this desideratum when he spoke before the *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels* at a ceremony awarding a prize to the well-known ethnologist Annemarie Schimmel in 1995. The topic was also discussed at a subsequent symposium at his official residence in Berlin. He believes that the divergent cultures still command “quite different intellectual resources” with which to avoid a “global culture war.” He added: “It is worthwhile to try to find the greatest common denominator.” What he called “the search for an ethical minimum that transcends the cultures,” is identical with the notion of a world ethos.¹²

A Challenge for Present-day Education

In September 1993 representatives of all religions agreed, for the first time in the history of those religions, on a joint basic declaration at the world parliament in Chicago. They ratified a “*Declaration concerning the World Ethos*” which contains the minimum

consensus with respect to common values, immutable standards, and basic moral attitudes.¹³ The representatives of all the major world religions, in formulating this "World Ethos," did not wish to create a new global ideology. Nor did they intend to establish a uniform world religion above and beyond existing ones; and they certainly did not mean to justify the dominance of one religion over all others. Rather the meeting wanted to raise into consciousness the fact that, doctrinal differences notwithstanding, there exists already a basic consensus concerning binding values, immutable standards, and personal attitudes. Ethos is thus not to be misunderstood as being a sedative in the face of an urgent need for social reform; rather it is to be seen as a fortification against the disenchantment with parties, politics, and even with the existing constitutional order. It was designed to provide a strong impetus for practical social reforms on the basis of individual responsibility. To quote President Herzog once more: "If we were to succeed in making it (i.e., the Golden Rule) at least to some extent the maxim of practical politics – what a boost it would be for international peace and no less so for individual rights!"¹⁴

The Chicago Declaration is also of greatest significance for present-day *education* because it combines the principle of *simplicity* with that of *concretization*. This means that the Declaration establishes a common ground with respect to one fundamental demand: "All humans (whether man or woman, white or of color, rich or poor) must be treated humanely." This is the "Golden Rule" that for millennia characterized the manifold religious and ethical traditions of mankind and that has stood the test of time. To put it positively: "Do onto others as you would have them do onto you." It is from this basic humane position that we are able to avoid this *sterile and exclusively aggressive attitude* – an attitude that combines narcissism with xenophobia; that ties one's own success to the defeat of another person, one's own power to the powerlessness of the other, and that lacks all sense of partnership and mutual support. This Golden Rule should be the immutable and absolute norm for all spheres of life, for family and community, for ethnic groups, nations, and religions.

This principle can be made tangible with the help of four comprehensive and *age-old imperatives of humanity* that can be found in

most of the religions on this planet. Time and again these principles have been violated, and none of us have exactly been saints. However, what would have happened to humankind without these maxims, that are to be found in the Declaration and that target *especially the young generation*? Here they are:

(1) The obligation to create a *culture of non-violence* and of *respect for all that is living*, i.e., the age-old commandment that “thou shall not kill.” Accordingly the Declaration reads: “That is why young people should learn in family and school that violence must not be the means of dispute with others. Only in this way can a culture of non-violence be created.”¹⁵

(2) The obligation to establish a *culture of solidarity* and a *just economic order*, i.e., the age-old commandment that “Thou shall not steal.” The Declaration puts it thus: “For this reason young people should learn in family and school that property, however, small, carries obligations with it. Its use should simultaneously serve the general good. Only in this way can a just economic order be built.”¹⁶

(3) The obligation to create a *culture of tolerance* and a *life in truthfulness*, i.e., the age-old demand: “Thou shall not tell lies.” This means as far as education is concerned: “For this reason young people should learn in family and school to exercise truthfulness in their thinking, speaking, and actions. All humans have a right to be given the truth and truthfulness. They have a right to the necessary information and education in order to be able to make basic decisions about their lives. However, without a basic ethical orientation they will hardly be able to distinguish between what is important and what is unimportant. Given today’s daily flood of information, ethical standards provide help if facts are being distorted, interests are not disclosed, trends followed, and opinions turned into dogma.”¹⁷

(4) The obligation to create a *culture of equality* and a *partnership between men and women*, i.e., the age-old maxim: “Thou shall not engage in adultery.” Again here is the Declaration: “For this reason young people should learn in family and school that sexuality is in principle not a negative, destructive, or exploitative force, but one that creates and shapes. Its function is to build a community that affirms life and that can flourish only if it is lived with a sense of responsibility for the happiness of the spouse.”¹⁸

However, some people will ask whether a world ethos might be a bit too idealistic and too abstract. Is there anything that has meaning to present-day youth? Isn't morality dead? I would like to respond to these questions and to make a few necessary counterpoints that are part of the overall picture.

In Favor of a New Basic Consensus Among the Young Generation

It is ancient knowledge that processes designed to initiate changes in consciousness must take a medium- or long-term perspective. For this reason it is of utmost importance that we begin to discuss the Declaration on all levels and unlock it for students and adolescents through a special didactic effort. As far as I am concerned, there is no question that this Declaration should be discussed as part of religious and ethical instruction. It should be made an indispensable part of the curriculum.

The majority of today's youth is not opposed in principle to an ethos. According to a 1995 survey of the German Emnid Institute, some 92 percent of the 14-19 year-olds do not consider morals as something old-fashioned; indeed one third of them even regard uprightness and correctness as important elements of their identity. Some 86 percent thought shop-lifting to be immoral. Some 80 per cent consider feeling responsible for the environment as their most important concern, while 60 per cent regard wealth and 50 per cent faith as secondary goals. It is by no means a hopeless endeavor to work for a new ethical consensus, especially among the younger generation.

The first results from schools are already coming in from different places. Let me merely quote here, as tangible evidence, from a high school senior. He is among those who largely reject bourgeois values and norms, but who was introduced by his philosophy teacher to the text of the Declaration in order to help him rethink his aims: "I am a fan of various Death Metal groups that have exerted a deep influence upon me. The provocative and aggressive music fascinates me just as much as the pessimistic, almost nihilistic attitude of the musicians. I also play in a Death Metal band and in my lyrics I primarily express my upset about how evil the world in fact is. This lesson plan influenced me in the sense that I began seriously to question this attitude. I concluded

that this attitude of 'It's too late anyway' is a very easy excuse for withdrawing from responsibility. However, this insight did not induce me to quit my band and to be optimistic ever after; after all, the music provided me with many things (sense of community, friends etc.); rather it persuaded me to use the opportunities I have as a musician and to take responsibility for 'bettering the world.' Thus my idea to donate the income from our next concert (in our case about 500-700 deutschmarks) to a development-aid organization met with much approval among the other members of the band. Most probably a 'Brazil Charity Concert' will take place in the next three months. These ideas do not have much to do with the 'world ethos' of which unfortunately I do not know much so far. ... But in the meantime I have grown curious and will get hold of this booklet" (Frank Nöllenberg, age 18).¹⁹

The World Ethos Foundation tries to make the Chicago Declaration available to schools for use in religious instruction or philosophy lessons, but also to interested groups and workshops. An excellent *draft lesson plan* on the subject with seven different units to be used in religious studies at high schools is available and has triggered a strong response in our Workshop.²⁰ The World Ethos Foundation has therefore resolved to launch a *competition* and award prizes of 3.000 deutschmarks each to the best six lesson plans. The conditions have been laid down and a small panel of religious studies teachers (Protestant, Catholic and non church-affiliated) will judge the entries.

A Long-Term Change of Consciousness

There are thus many ways in which a discourse can be set in motion that must go well beyond the realm of pedagogy. We must address not only teachers and students, but also doctors, lawyers, business people, journalists, and politicians. The World Ethos Foundation can also see to it that the Declaration is published in Eastern Europe where it could not appear without a subsidy. There will be no lack of other initiatives; both the InterAction Council of former state ministers and minister presidents and UNESCO (even if there are perennial financial problems) are interested in spreading the idea of a World Ethos. Nor do we wish to neglect future research about the religious situation of our time,

about world peace, religious peace, and the dialogue between the churches. On the contrary! However, it should also be possible to facilitate an *haute vulgarisation* of these ideas through a TV documentary series, for which concrete plans have already been laid.

Another more distant hope of these manifold efforts to promote “inter-cultural and inter-religious research, education, and encounters” (thus the sub-title of the World Ethos Foundation) could be the following – if I may be so daring to think aloud about something that I will hardly live to see: the fulfillment of a goal that was first raised in the great debate on human rights in the 1789 French National Assembly and that has now been adopted by the InterAction Council, i.e., to put next to the plaque enumerating the basic human rights (*les droits de l’homme*) another one listing basic human obligations (*les devoirs de l’homme*).

World Ethos is everything else but a beautiful idealistic dream. It is a vision, but one that we need if the world order of nations, cultures, and religions is to have an ethical foundation. The World Ethos project has taken root in an astonishingly short time and is proliferating. This demonstrates that the *change in consciousness in matters of ethos* that we are aiming for is well underway. In the past decades we have seen a change of consciousness (that was also ethically inspired) in the fields of economy and ecology, peace and disarmament, relations between men and women, and few people still hold views in these matters of 20 or 30 years ago. In the same manner – and this would be consistent – the coming decades will see a change in consciousness in respect of ethical values more generally.²¹

Notes

1. N. Postman, *The End of Education*, New York, 1995.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
3. See *Der Spiegel*, 33/1995.
4. On the behavior of pupils in Baden-Württemberg and Saxony, see R.H. Weiß, *Gewaltmedienkonsum. Video-Gewalt 1992* and *Sächsische Jugendstudie 1992*. Both field studies may be obtained from the *Oberschulamt* in Stuttgart. See also M. Scheunengrab, *Filmkonsum und Delinquenz*, Regensburg, 1994.
5. For example, the "Initiative Gewaltverzicht im Fernsehen" that was started by the Detmold psychologist K.A. Richter who collected 250,000 signatures. See *Focus*, 26/1994.
6. See *Schwäbisches Tagblatt*, 12 October 1995.
7. Statements by U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, cited in: *International Herald Tribune*, 9/10 September 1995.
8. See H. von Hentig in: *Die Zeit*, September 1995.
9. Intimidating or injuring another person should therefore not *a priori* be included in a definition of aggressiveness. As E. von Gebattel (in: *Lexikon der Pädagogik*, Vol. I, Freiburg, 1952, p. 40) correctly observes: "By studying animals that hunt, or are in heat, or are being pursued and defend themselves or their brood, it becomes clear that there is no primordial desire among animals that aims primarily at damaging or destroying an other animal's habitat. All aggressive actions by animals – even where their destructive effect is evident – represent no more than drives of self-preservation or procreation."
10. I am following here the illuminating analysis of Gabriele Haug-Schnabel in her unpublished study *Das neue Verhältnis biologischer Grundlagen von aggressiven Verhaltensweisen* (1994).
11. See L. Berkowitz (ed.), *Roots of Aggression. A Re-examination of the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis*, New York, 1969.
12. See the Federal President's speech on this occasion.
13. See H. Küng and K.-J. Kuschel (eds.), *Erklärung zum Weltethos. Die Deklaration des Parlamentes der Weltreligionen*, Munich, 1993.
14. Federal President Herzog's speech (note 12 above).
15. *Erklärung* (note 13 above), p. 9.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
19. Quoted in: J. Lähnemann (ed.), "*Das Projekt Weltethos*" in *der Erziehung. Referate und Ergebnisse des Nürnberger Forums 1994*, Hamburg, 1995, p. 392. This volume contains rich material on the various aspects of the question of World Ethos and Education.
20. See P. Wagner, *Die Erklärung zum Weltethos. Vorschlag für die Behandlung im Religionsunterricht in Klasse 10 (Gymnasium)* and W. Lange, *Plädoyer für einen ethischen Minimalkonsens an Gesamtschulen*. Both are repr. in: *Rundbrief des Verbandes der katholischen Religionslehrerinnen und Religionslehrer an Gesamtschulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V.*, 10 (October 1995).
21. A modified and amplified version of this article will appear in my book *Weltethos für Weltpolitik und Weltwirtschaft*, Munich, 1997, a continuation of my *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic* (1991).