The Ethics and Politics of Holism
Embracing a Transformed Future for the Earth
Glen T. Martin

On the occasion of the Grand Global Meet for Achieving Unified Peace Activism
From UN (UNESCO) Civic Educational Initiative to its Practical Implementation
Hyderabad, Bangalore, & Chennai, India, June 18, 23 & 26th, 2014

In the early 21st century the enterprise of ethics appears in bad shape. The three central traditions in Western ethics still endlessly argue over ethical issues without ever significantly addressing the multiple planetary crises that we face on the Earth, from ever-increasing totalitarianism of national security states, to endless wars promoted by nation-state imperialism, to the exploitative domination of transnational corporations over entire areas of the world, to on-going planetary climate collapse and impending civilizational disaster, to the steadily growing threat of major nuclear accidents or intentional holocaust, to the rapid decline of the resources necessary for life, such as fresh water, agricultural lands, and ocean fisheries.

1. Traditional Western Ethical Theories

The oldest of these traditions, Virtue Ethics, goes back to the thought of Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece, was promoted by Thomas Aquinas during the Middle Ages and continues today with such important thinkers as John Finnis and Alasdair MacIntyre. Its basic thought is that human practical reason, when properly developed, discerns the basic moral principles that constitute human flourishing or well-being, such as life, practical wisdom, intellectual integrity, courage, and temperance with regard to emotions and desires. Both Plato and Aristotle insist that society must be organized in ways that promote development and exercise of these virtues. The common good, therefore, or good of the whole of society in terms of maximizing virtue in the population, takes precedence over individual whims of members of that society.

This tradition of ethics can provide a powerful insight into the right and need of every person on Earth to a world in which the conditions for flourishing or well-being provide the framework for society. Yet in a world widely infected by skepticism and relativism, a world of competing militarized units known as nations, and a world of vast multinational corporations for whom profit supersedes all other values, how are the insights of practical reason to be provided for all humanity? Virtue ethics does not appear to provide the resources for developing the planetary economic, social, or institutional systems necessary to address the global crises identified above.

A second fundamental tradition in Western ethical thought is so-called “Deontological Ethics,” primarily associated with Immanuel Kant and his many followers, such as John Rawls and W.D. Ross. Kant discerned the threat to ethics during the 18th century that was raised by the empiricism of such thinkers as Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. Empiricism appeared to show the impossibility of deriving any ethical principles (the ought) from the factual way things are in the world (the is). It appeared to establish a permanent divide between fact and value. The way things are in the world cannot give us guidance as to how to act or what to value. The world is simply an objective set of facts without apparent value in itself. Morality appeared to empiricism as
merely subjective, as merely an emotional human reaction to factual events. In addition, morality appeared to be merely relative from culture to culture. For empiricism there appeared to be no universal objective moral principles that applied to all humanity.

In the light of this empiricist threat to ethics, Kant attempted to show that nothing empirical enters into ethics, that ethics derives from pure reason alone and does not depend on the facts (the is) in order to derive universal and absolute “categorical imperatives” that can guide human action and serve as a framework for the development of virtue. Ethics is purely objective (and gives us absolute “duties”) because it derives from the pure principles of a priori reasoning and not from the empirical emotions, instincts, and desires that also inform human life (our “inclinations”). The two principle expressions of this categorical imperative were the principle of universality and the principle of ends in themselves. The first stated that one should judge one’s every action as to whether it could become a universal principle, applicable to all. Can we universalize the principle of our actions as a law for all persons in this situation? If we can rationally do this, then the action is moral. If we cannot, if I am making an exception for myself, then the action is not moral.

The second primary form of the categorical imperative states that one should treat every person as an end in themselves, never merely as a means. Every person is an end in themselves, that is, has infinite worth, and cannot be used or instrumentalized merely as a means to satisfying my desires or goals. Kant states that this is the principle of dignity—every person has a ‘dignity’ rather than a mere ‘price’—and therefore must be treated with respect (that is, morally), rather than used as a means for my own goals or desires. The categorical imperative governing my actions, then, requires both universality, as a moral law applying to all rational beings, and respect for the intrinsic dignity of each individual rational being. The categorical imperative of pure reason does not derive from the “is” of the empirical world of facts but is nevertheless objective and universal, deriving from pure a priori reason.

Kant made a brilliant and valiant attempt to overcome the threat to ethics posed by pure empiricism. Society and its laws, he thought, should promote freedom and responsibility in such a way as to increase the moral quality of its citizens (Kant 1965). As with Virtue Ethics, virtue involves a progressive bringing of desires and inclinations into conformity with the demands of duty. The categorical imperative has been criticized as giving us principles so abstract and general that they are not much help in deciding specific courses of action. Nevertheless, Kant’s thought has long been associated with the emergence of the discourse on human rights that took place from the 18th century to the present. Human rights assert an intrinsic dignity for each person simply because they are human, and the rights of each person derive from that dignity. As Article 1 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts this: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

This statement is both universal and purports to transcend the different cultures of the world, and it is non-empirical, claiming something about human beings that is not empirically discernable but that inheres in each person (their dignity as a free moral agent) regardless of who they are, their education, background, or culture. As powerful as the developing tradition of human rights has been, the foundation of the claim to rights remains highly contested, and the claim of cultural relativism that the discernment and conception of
rights may vary from nation to nation or culture to culture remains a significant force in today’s world. As with virtue ethics, deontic ethics appears overwhelmed in today’s world by the forces of relativism, by the struggles of militarized nation-states, and by the immense profit-oriented power of multinational corporations. While the UN has made some progress in the monitoring and reporting concerning human rights among the world’s 193 nation-states, little or nothing can be done to prevent violation of these rights by governments, corporations, or rogue terrorist groups.

A third fundamental movement in Western ethics has been Utilitarianism or Consequentialism, an ethical perspective developed by thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in the 19th century and today promoted by thinkers such as Garrett Hardin and Peter Singer. The principle of utility states that “what is right is what promotes the greatest happiness or good of the greatest number of people.” What is wrong is what diminishes the happiness or good of the greatest number. Consequentialism was developed specifically to be consistent with empiricism and the facts. It argues that there are empirical facts about what constitutes people’s happiness or good, although Utilitarians may differ on exactly how to exactly define this empirical good. It also argues that we can measure the empirical consequences of our actions. Hence, we can evaluate a present action on whether it produces greater good or greater harm for the majority of those affected by it. In a world that is now globalized, Utilitarians argue, we need a universal calculus that allows us to evaluate actions, policies, and institutions in the light of whether they are producing a greater or lesser aggregate good for human beings.

Critics of Consequentialism have often focused on at least two issues. First, it does not appear that there is any aggregate good that sums up all the incommensurable valuables about human life. How can we aggregate the value of life, for example, with the value of knowledge, or the value of having enough to eat, or the value of living in a free society? There appear to be a number of goods in human life worth valuing, and it hopelessly confuses the issue to assume that these are commensurable and capable of being melded together in something called the general good. Second, the principle of utility appears to violate our sense that there is something right about Kant’s insight that each person has intrinsic dignity and should never be used merely as a means. If, as utility claims, what is right is what promotes the greatest good of the greatest number of people, then it appears that the rights and dignity of some persons may be violated in the present if we have calculated that the good of a greater number of people will result from this action or policy. For utility, the ends, if they are thought to be good, appear to justify the means, perhaps any means. An entire group of people may be killed, diminished, or exiled, for example, if this will promote the greater good of the whole of a society.

Neither virtue ethics, nor deontic ethics, nor utilitarian ethics appear without serious difficulties in the face of our world crises and the need for a transformed way of thinking and acting on the Earth. We have emerged into a global civilization in the 20th century and we are faced with global crises and the need for a new global vision. Jonathan Glover’s book *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*, shows the failure of ethics of all forms in the 20th century as it chronicles the immense wars, genocides, and systems of totalitarian oppression of that century that destroyed entire nations and peoples, killed over a hundred million people (90 percent of them non-combatants), and led us to enter the 21st century with no better insight into the evils of
war and mass destruction than we had at the beginning of the 20th century, even though today our weapons of mass destruction are capable of wiping out the entire civilization of the Earth.

2. The 20th century Paradigm Shift in the Sciences

It is a fact that the entire conceptual framework of science and advanced human thought has changed during the 20th century, but the ethical thinking and institutional frameworks of human life have not changed. There has been a paradigm shift of major proportions in the sciences, but there has been no comparable paradigm shift in ethics and institutional arrangements. The sciences have discovered the world to be fundamentally different than assumed by our ethical and institutional arrangements. The fact that we continue to operate out of a paradigm formulated centuries ago is in itself a major reason for our global crises and underlines the inadequacy of traditional ethics. We are trying to face global events like climate change or national security from premises that are both false and inadequate in the light of the present planetary framework. These inadequate premises can be discerned to be both a major cause of our worsening planetary conditions and the central reason why we cannot deal adequately with the multiplicity of global crises.

The paradigm that has emerged across all the sciences in the 20th century is holistic to its very core. Science has discovered that the universe we live in is a seamless holistic unity—from the microphysical level through the biological level to the biospheric ecological level to the macro-level of astrophysics encompassing the entire space-time-matter-energy continuum. These revolutionary discoveries entirely displace the early-modern scientific paradigm that developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a number of ways (that I will not go into here) the early-modern scientific paradigm was atomistic, mechanistic, reductionistic, and fundamentally fragmented. One of its consequences is the split, identified above, between the “is” and the “ought”—the assumption that the world is a value-free collection of empirically discernable facts.

Two additional immense consequences of the early-modern fragmented paradigm were the global economic system of capitalism and the planetary system of sovereign nation-states. Capitalism assumes that individuals and corporations are atomistic entities engaged in a rational process of self-interest maximization and that, within a free competitive market, the greatest economic good of the greatest number of people will emerge. We understand today, that this assumption about the atomism of people and corporations and the nature of their rationality is dead wrong. Both people and institutions are embedded in a holism that is invisible to the ideologies of capitalism. And the consequences of this dead-wrong assumption in today’s endangered world are the continued destruction of human beings and the natural environment that supports life on this planet. Arundhati Roy, in her recent book Capitalism: A Ghost Story details the terrible destruction of people and nature that capitalism has wrought in India since 1980 and its relation with the imperialistic forces of U.S. capitalism. Garry Leech, in his book Capitalism: A Structural Genocide shows the mass murderous impact on the world’s poor as they are used as just another exploitable commodity, and used up, and cast aside to die under capitalism’s relentless drive for ever-more profits.

If education is an important key to creating a better future for humanity, then education must not only be for global citizenship but for global citizenship within the new set of assumptions about the world and human life that comprise the holistic paradigm. Education must be directed toward creating a shift in human consciousness, not just a shift in the intellectual assumptions behind our actions (an intellectualized paradigm
But rather to an existential understanding in which thinking and action arises from a new holistic wisdom and unity of consciousness. In his book *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything*, Ervin Laszlo describes several of thinkers who have described this transition:

A number of thinkers have attempted to define the specific steps or stages in the evolution of human consciousness. The Indian sage Sri Aurobindo considered the emergence of superconsciousness in some individuals as the next step; in a similar vein the Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser spoke of the coming of four-dimensional integral consciousness. Ken Wilber’s six-level evolutionary process leads from physical consciousness pertaining to nonliving matter energy through biological consciousness associated with animals and mental consciousness characteristic of humans to subtle consciousness, which is archetypal, transindividual, and intuitive. Ideas such as these differ in specific detail, but they share a common thrust. Consciousness evolution is from ego-bound to the transpersonal form. If this is so, it is a source of great hope. (117)

Laszlo comments that “the human world is growing beyond the bounds of the nation-state system to the limits of the globe and its biosphere. This called for rethinking some of our most cherished notions....” (165).

This is not the place to go into the extensive literature on holism that has developed in the past half century. I have done this in several of my books, including my recent book *The Anatomy of a Sustainable World* (2013). I will limit my remarks to a very few quotes that illustrate what thinkers are deducing with regard to the universe as a whole and to life on the Earth. In a book called *The World View of Contemporary Physics: Do We Need a New Metaphysics?* contemporary physicist Henry Stapp sums of the revolutionary work of physicist Werner Heisenberg:

This classical view of man and nature is still promulgated in the name of science. Thus, science is seen as demanding a perception of man as nothing more than a local cog in a mechanical universe, unconnected to any creative aspect of nature. For, according to the classical picture, every creative aspect of nature exhausted itself during the first instant....

In the Heisenberg ontology, the real world of classical physics is transformed into a world of potentialities, which condition, but do not control, the world of actual events. These events or acts create the actual form of the evolving universe by deciding between the possibilities created by the evolving potentialities. These creative acts stand outside space-time and presumably create all space-time relationships. Human mental acts belong to this world of creative acts, but do not exhaust it. (In Kitchener1988: 56-57)

The holism of the universe is directly connected by Stapp with the operations of the human mind. Human beings are not simply a tiny, isolated species that happen to evolve on an insignificant planet somewhere within a vast, impersonal mechanical cosmos. Rather, the human mind taps into the very foundations of the inseparable unity of the universe. Reason, which under capitalism has only an instrumental function of calculating the means to satisfy irrational self-interest, now links human beings to the very foundations of the cosmic order.

Similarly, transformative thinker Ervin Laszlo in the aforementioned book describes the holism of contemporary biology and ecology. We can no longer assume a fragmentary theory of evolution in which random mutations in genetic material give rise to characteristics selected out in a competitive struggle for survival of species. Rather:

The living organism is extraordinarily coherent: all its parts are multidimensionally, dynamically, and almost instantly connect with all other parts. What happens to one cell or organ also happens in some way to all other cells and organs—a connection that recalls (and in fact suggests) the kind of “entanglement” that characterizes the behavior of quanta in the microdomain. The organism is also coherent with the world around it: what happens in the external milieu of the organism is reflected in
some ways in its internal milieu. Thanks to this coherence, the organism can evolve in tune with its environment. The genetic makeup of a simple organism is so complex, and its “fit” to the milieu so delicate, that in the absence of such “inside-outside tuning,” living species could not mutate into viable forms before being eliminated by natural selection. That our world is not populated solely by the simplest kinds of organisms, such as bacteria and blue-green algae, is due in the last analysis to the kind of “entanglement” that exists among genes, organisms, organic species, and their niches within the biosphere. (43-44)

Scientists are often using the word “entanglement” today to indicate the what German thinker Marco Bischof calls “the fundamental interconnectedness within the organism as well as between organisms, and that of the organism with its environment” (in Laszlo 49). All things in the universe are products of this entanglement, including the human mind and human reason.

Reason, therefore, is not an isolated characteristic of some ephemeral creature that happened to evolve on tiny planet Earth. Properly understood, reason is both a product of this holism and the conscious investigator of the central holistic principles by which the universe operates. As philosopher Errol E. Harris points out in The Restitution of Metaphysics (2000) and other works, the first thing that scientific reason discerns is that every whole necessarily has parts that are coherently integrated into that whole. Whole and parts come together in all the structures of the universe, and within all natural processes, parts are not simply mechanical elements disconnected to the whole but are totally entangled with the whole in a series of “internal relations” in which changes in the part are registered in the whole and changes in the whole affect the parts. Reason discerns both identity and difference within the unitary wholes that characterize our world. Regarding the parts, Harris writes:

Their participation in the system is reflected in the special character of each of them, and their mutual relations determine their very particularity and distinctiveness. Hence their mutual distinction is at the same time a mutual intercommunion, and their mutual negation and affirmation of the identity in which they all share. None of this would be so, however, unless identity and difference were themselves distinguishable and opposed concepts. But they can be so only on the same condition: that they are interdependent and complementary aspects of one unitary system. (217)

It may be that the parts of an ecosystem (e.g., wolves that kill deer) are in fundamental opposition to one another. However, on closer inspection we see that their mutual relations determine the distinctive roles of these parts within the larger holism of the ecosystem. Remove either the wolves or the deer and the entire ecosystem declines. Within the holism of nature the internal relationships of the parts must be understood dialectically, parts may be understood both as oppositional and complementary to one another.

Neither traditional ethics, nor our current global institutions of capitalism and sovereign nation-states are based on this scientific understanding of holism. These institutions in particular are based on the early-modern view of reason, human beings, and human relationships that is atomistic, mechanical, and fundamentally fragmented. If we are to survive much longer on this planet we need to transform human civilization from fragmentation to holism across the board. Both our ethics and our planetary institutions must become holistic, for they are all out of sync with the realities of our universe, of biological life on Earth, and of our specifically human situation.

3. Toward an Ethics of Holism

The ethics of holism is scientific and cosmic, reflecting, as it does the fundamental holistic principle of the universe. Unlike virtue ethics, the ethics of holism understands human flourishing not as anthropocentric, liked to claims about ‘human nature,’ but as truly universal and cosmic. The principle that animates human
reason is also the fundamental organizational principle of the cosmos itself. The universe is not only organized as a series of ever-more complex systems of parts within wholes up to, and including, the ultimate, encompassing wholeness of the cosmos itself, human beings are themselves such wholes as individuals while at the same time parts functioning within the holism of the human species. Human reason both discerns this holism everywhere in nature and is itself a manifestation of it. The drive or nisus or telos within nature is toward ever-greater forms of holism and the drive or nisus or telos within us is likewise toward ethical and intellectual holism.

A fundamental concept in this new ethics is ‘harmony.’ Unlike deontic and Kantian ethics, the ethics of holism does not create a dualism between the mind and body, nor between reason and human inclinations. It heals these terrible dualisms that have plagued much ethical thought for centuries. Unlike the ethics of consequentialism, holistic ethics does not sacrifice the integrity of human beings who can be used as a means for some imagined ideal end. It sees every human being as having intrinsic dignity, a dignity that does not separate us from the rest of the world (as does Kantian ethics) but unites us to the dignity of existence inherent in all things. The human mind reflects the holism of nature and the universe and, in turn, discerns this holism. Fact is no longer separated from value for what is valuable is now discerned by reason as harmony: cosmic, ecological, economic, social, and personal harmony.

3.1 The first principle of an ethics of holism is to realize that the other is you and you are the other on a very fundamental level. The truth of this is revealed in a variety of ways in today’s thought, and it needs to be elaborated and articulated systematically in ways that go beyond this paper. For example, philosophers of language such as Steven Pinker (1995), Noam Chomsky, and Jürgen Habermas have shown the universality of language and its necessary connections with the selfhood of each of us. My self cannot be divorced from the human capacity for language that is part of our universal humanity. Similarly, biologists have shown that all human beings are 99.9 percent genetically identical, and psychologists have shown that an amazing communion of human consciousness is possible between people. On this holistic principle, my relationship with other persons will be internal relationships, not external as currently assumed. This means that my actions, beliefs, and goals affect the other and those of the other affect me. We are internally related with one another and within the whole of humanity. The principle guiding action should be that of harmony, operating at all levels, from the personal to the family to the nation to the world.

The traditional expression of the Golden Rule, found in all the great world religions (see Hick 2008), could perhaps be an expression of this principle. But it would need to go deeper: it is not only a matter of doing to others what you would want done to you, but also the realization that what you do unto others you are doing to yourself. Mahatma Gandhi, in seeing every person as an expression of the Atman, lived from one expression of this principle. Nonviolence is mandatory because the other person in a very real sense is me and I am him or her. Something similar is expressed by Socrates’ famous principle that “it is better to be a victim of evil than to do evil.” There are some excellent statements of global ethics that articulate implications of this first principle, for example, the universal ethics articulated by Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes in their book The Study of Religion in the Age of Global Dialogue (2000: 288-294). They correctly speak of both the Golden Rule and the “inherent equal dignity” of all persons and derive from this the Kantian principle that each person always be treated as an end, never merely as a means.
3.2. But the ethics of holism might well go beyond these expressions to speak of the dignity of the whole. Kant attributed dignity to each person because each is a free moral agent. However, the intrinsic dignity of humanity, of human civilization, and even of the biosphere needs to be recognized. If freedom is the source of dignity, but our personal moral freedom is a consequence of our internal relationships with the whole and its immense journey of evolution, then the whole acquires dignity because of these internal relationships with free beings. And free beings acquire dignity because they are expressions of the whole. Whole and part mutually reflect one another. If human beings have evolved as a necessary product of the entire universe as the cosmic anthropic principle holds in some of its formulations (Harris 1991), then the entire universe has at least an equivalent dignity to that of human beings. This principle of the universal dignity of existence can be the source of a new respect for nature, for living things, and ecosystems. Humans may enjoy a special dignity in that we have human rights and live in the dimension of free moral choice, but natural things participate in dignity as well: they are not merely “commodities” to be exploited by capitalism, nor instruments to be used to satisfy any and all human whims.

3.3. A third principle integral to a holistic ethics is the principle of unity in diversity. Under the present global institutions we have the chaos of global fragmentation without significant unity. My culture, my way of life, my needs, take precedence over those who are different from me. Capitalism fosters a personal acquisitiveness and greed in people while the nation-state system fosters ethnocentrism and divisive patriotism. For holism, in my dealings with others, I must affirm both our unity and diversity. The diversity cannot be devalued to just another aspect of unity. For we have seen that the universal holism discovered by 20th century science recognizes the diversity of articulated parts as just as essential as the unity of the wholes. My ethical action, therefore, must dialectically take into account the inseparable unity that we are as well as the absolute uniqueness of each of us. Action is guided dialectically to simultaneously embrace both unity and diversity, employing in this process the values of harmony and dignity.

3.4. The fourth principle is that of love. Love is the recognition of sameness, interdependency, mutual identity, and intrinsic relationships with the other. Harris states that “genuine rational love must extend to the entire human race” (1988: 163). John Hick (2004) has shown that love, kindness, and compassion are fundamental to the ideal of sainthood in all of the world’s great religions. In Matthew 25, Jesus proclaims that love of individuals and love of God are one and the same: there is an identity between all persons and God. In his Autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi says that we should learn to become one with every creature. The scientific discovery of the unity of the universe, in which mind is just as intrinsic to the holism of the cosmos as are matter and energy, helps clarify these affirmations of the identity of persons and God. Each person is a unique expression of the principle of wholeness that informs every aspect of the cosmos, a unique principle that can be identified with God (Harris 2000: 264-278). One purpose of life is the progressive realization of my unity with the divine ground of being. Rational love embraces not only all human beings but life itself and the transcendent whole that informs the cosmos. The ethics of holism makes clear the convergence of reason and love. If reason is the concrete expression of the principle of holism in the universe, than the universality of love promoted by the world’s great religions is also a universality of love promoted by rational holistic ethics.

3.5. The principles of a holistic ethics could be spelled out in a number of additional specific formulations, but here I will specify just one more: holistic ethics means equality, interdependency, and reciprocity in human
relationships. These ideas have been spelled out in a number of different forms by contemporary thinkers, one of which is the theory of nonviolent communication promoted by Marshall Rosenberg (2005). If one communicates with others from the assumptions of equality, interdependency, and reciprocity, human misunderstandings are minimized, genuine mutual understanding is fostered, and active cooperation between individuals or groups is greatly enhanced. In the ethics of holism, one becomes mindful of feelings, reactions, needs, and thoughts both in oneself and in the other. Holistic ethics is the ethics of mindfulness. It requires a mode of attention oriented towards respect, harmony, truth, and dignity.

Some thinkers today believe that we are experiencing a new Axial age: a species-wide transition to a higher form of humanity: universal, loving, holistic, and cooperative. Spiritual leader Barbara Marx Hubbard, for example, expresses this transformation in the following words:

The universal human is a name for the next stage of human evolution. It may eventually become our name for the new species that is now emerging from within so many of us.... Now, during our current planetary crises, these old codified systems are breaking down and changing. Many people are leaving organized religion and experiencing the awakening of Spirit within themselves.... The signs of our emergence as universal humans include an unconditional love for the whole of life; a powerful, irresistible passion to unite with the Spirit within; and a deep heartfelt impulse to connect with others and co-create a world equal to our love and our capacities. (in Henion 2012: 17-18)

Even though Hubbard puts this in the language of awakening to “Spirit,” and Gandhi puts this in the traditional language of the Atman, Laszlo and Harris put this awakening to the holism of our universal humanity in the language of science, reason, and philosophy. What, then, does the new holism mean for our global order? The question that lies before us at this point is what kind of planetary institutions follow upon the realization of a holistic ethics?

4. Holistic Global Institutions

In the early 21st century it is surprising to reflect that nation-states, by and large, still operate under the principles of so called “political realism” articulated by such thinkers as Hans Morgenthau in his book Politics among Nations, written as far back as 1948. The leaders of nation-states, and the bureaucracies and military organizations who support them, appear to have entirely missed the scientific discovery of holism as the fundamental principle of psychology, society, nature, and the cosmos. Nation-states continue to operate out of concepts such as national self-interest, national economic competition, and amoral power relationships. For the ethics of holism, politics is not a separate realm of power-struggles independent of moral evaluation. Society and politics are extensions of the same holism that embraces personal relationships everywhere on Earth. All persons organize into societies and are simultaneously products of their societies. All societies organize themselves politically to deal with social issues and to make rules that harmonize the activities of their citizens. The ethics of holism reflects this holistic foundation of human life from the personal to the global levels.

Most of those governing nation-states today have not yet realized that the idea of a national “sovereignty,” which means autonomy and independence over both internal affairs and foreign policy, is a fundamental illusion. All the peoples of Earth need one another and are holistically related to one another. All the peoples of Earth are part of one planetary civilizational and human reality. No one is apart from the
whole. Sovereignty in the sense of independence from the whole is an illusion deriving from the long-
discarded early modern paradigm.

Similarly, in the early 21st century, it is surprising to find a global capitalism still operating around the
principle of perpetual growth. On a finite planet with a finite carrying capacity, finite resources, and fragile
ecosystem, perpetual growth is clearly suicidal. In his book *Beyond Growth*, economist Herman E. Daly defines
sustainability as “development without growth beyond environmental carrying capacity, where development
means qualitative improvement and growth means quantitative increase” (1996: 9). Daly writes:

Ecology is whole. It brings together the broken, analyzed, alienated, fragmented pieces of man’s image of the world. Ecology is
also a fad, but when the fad passes, the movement toward wholeness must continue. Unless the physical, the social, and the
moral dimensions of our knowledge are integrated in a unified paradigm offering a vision of wholeness, no solutions to our
problems are likely. (1996: 357)

Capitalism, like the nation-state, denies this “unified paradigm offering a vision of wholeness,” and in
doing so, threatens our very existence on this planet. The two systems are, in fact, inseparable. Economic
elites colonize the governments of their countries and influence both internal legislation and foreign policy on
behalf of their economic interests. Everywhere on the planet the economic interests of corporations are
promoted by the foreign policies of respective governments. The fact is that the ideology of sovereign nation-
states and the ideology of capitalism are hand in glove aspects of the same early modern paradigm that sees
the world as divided into mutually divisive, competitive, and hostile parts, whether these are economic
entities or nation-state entities. Their paradigm intrinsically denies holism. It is predicated on the struggle for
national and economic ascendency or victory over other parts of the system. In the minds of those
conditioned by the early-modern paradigm, it would be suicidal to recognize holism. It would mean giving up
their very identity as separate and autonomous entities.

The obvious realities of globalization have led to a popular discourse regarding “global governance” in
which leading ideologues of the current world system speak of the emerging new forces of global governance,
in addition to nation-states, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organization, international
NGOs, global civil society, transnational corporations, the United Nations, etc. But this discourse of “global
governance” is tacitly designed to preserve the early-modern paradigm and obviate recognition of the
emerging holistic paradigm. For none of these newly recognized forces of “governance” that I have mentioned
is democratic, none is holistic. All are representatives, in one way or another, of early-modern atomism and
fragmentation. Even the UN, as excellent as some of its agencies are, is premised on “the sovereign integrity of
its member states” and has been demonstrably incapable of creating a world of peace with justice for all
humanity.

Today’s globalized world system is the very opposite of holism. Each of these forces I have named is
concerned with its own interests and is merely a fragment apart from any unity in the whole: because no
genuine unity is recognized nor envisioned, only disparate economic, political, cultural, and power interests.
There can be no future for our planet if genuine holism is not recognized: that we are one species, one integral
humanity, living on one finite planet within a fragile interdependent biosphere. The fragmentation of forces
called “global governance” is rapidly destroying any viable future for our planet, for it denies the reality of
holism. This holism must first and foremost be actualized in a democratic world government.
What would global institutions premised on holism look like? Here are some holistic principles that they would need to embody:

4.1. First, all complex societies create harmony through law. The philosophy of law is beginning to realize that enforceable democratically legislated laws are not simply mechanisms of control. In complex societies they are mechanisms of harmony, providing public standards by which people and organizations can know the proper rules for interaction, economics, dispute resolution, undertaking initiatives, etc. A government with the authority for lawmaking binds a society into a unitary community, and the enforceable laws emanating from government establish a harmony within the millions of interactive complex parts called its citizens. The whole and parts are necessary to one another and the many parts are internally related to one another within the framework of the law. Our planet at the moment entirely lacks the rule of enforceable law beyond territorial nation-states and therefore lacks a concrete wholeness that binds all humans together within a harmonious framework of unity in diversity. Planetary harmony needs, more than anything else, the rule of enforceable democratic world laws enacted by a duly elected and representative world parliament. The world cannot create a viable future for itself unless it recognizes the sameness (an enforceable, actualized unity-in-diversity) for all the people of Earth and devises institutions for their participation in the governing of the Earth.

4.2. The harmony of all the societies and persons living on the Earth requires that the world government demilitarize the world and rely on civilian world police, civilian national police, and local police to enforce democratically legislated laws everywhere on Earth. The very existence of military forces is a product of the early modern paradigm that conceives of a dangerous world composed of independent territorial entities who may become my enemies and try to invade, establish hegemonies, or destroy me. Security becomes an ever-greater isolation of the parts in secrecy and military readiness. But real security, both for persons and societies, consists in just the opposite: in cooperative and harmonious living under common enforceable democratically legislated laws. The abolition of the ability of nations to make war, and of the need for secrecy and national security isolation, will foster the common security of all the people on the globe and make possible dealing with climate collapse and other global crises.

4.3. The global political and economic system of the world must be designed for transparency, openness, and participation. This is the only way to promote the trust that is both a product of holism and essential to the promotion of holism in social and political affairs. It will be nearly impossible for the people of Earth to trust one another if there is no transparent global government guaranteeing protection and equality before the law. The ethics of holism demands that people relate to one another with good faith, authenticity, honesty, and intellectual integrity. It also requires carefully designed checks and balances to make sure that no agency, group, or individuals, prey upon the beliefs of others to acquire the inordinate power or wealth that is disruptive of authentic democracy.

Today's governmental and corporate secrecy corrodes good faith and authenticity. People operate from secret motives hidden behind what they actually say and do. Organizations promote slogans and ideas that are deceptive of their real purposes. Arundhati Roy's book *Capitalism: A Ghost Story,* details the way philanthropic organizations and foundations are often used today for political purposes to promote hidden economic and political interests. A world government representing everyone, in unity and diversity, will have no reason for
deception and manipulation. Holistic trust and harmony will substantially increase among the people of the Earth.

4.4. A holistic world system will promote an economics of cooperation, harmony, and mutual respect designed for sustainability, that is, for “development without growth beyond the carrying capacity of the Earth.” Thinkers in this area often speak of the need for economic democracy. You cannot have viable political democracy, they affirm, as long as the rich can colonize the political process. Political and economic democracy form two equally necessary aspects of genuine democracy. The first principle of a sustainable, economic democracy is to take banking, money creation, and a few other key aspects of the global economy out of the hands of the private banking cartels that now dominate the Earth and place these under the democratic control of the world government. The government will then use its banking and money creation powers to provide interest-free lines of credit to local communities worldwide to create jobs for restoring the environment and for converting military personal to public service personnel working to provide clean water, sanitation, ecofriendly industry, health care, social security, and education to all the people of Earth.

4.5. A holistic world system will establish legal personhood and world citizenship for every person on Earth. Legal personhood is an especially important category because our human rights and dignity exist only as platitudes and ideals until they are embodied within a framework of enforceable democratic law. All persons must be equal before the law and have access to courts, civilian police as public servants, and the other institutions of government (such as social security and free health care) that fulfill their rights as legal persons. Under a holistic system, rights and duties are entirely correlative. It will no longer be a matter of my entitlement as a separate and autonomous part in opposition to the rest. The expectation of civic duty will emerge as correlative to my rights as a legal person. World citizenship means my duty to participate in the governing of my world in mutual respect and harmony with all other citizens of the planet. We need not only to educate people today for world citizenship, we need to educate them to see that world citizenship requires enforceable world law to make it actual and effective.

4.6. The institutions of the democratic world government would be directed toward maximizing the individual good within the framework of the common good of the people of Earth. Unlike the situation in present day capitalist nations, the individual good and the common good would not often be understood as irreconcilable opposites. Today, individual self-interest and its assumed atomism often see individual interests as being in conflict with those of society. Holism, on the other hand, sees the identity-in-difference of the individual and society. Once people have understood this identity-in-difference, the common good will be ever-more clearly understood as harmonious with the individual good.

4.7. The world parliament will necessarily empower scientific and educational systems for understanding and monitoring the complex holism of human life and our planetary biosphere and for adjusting human activities to be in harmony with this holism. The biosphere of the world is immensely complicated and its health requires scientists for monitoring the oceans, the fish, the phytoplankton beds, the coral reefs, the atmosphere, the ozone layer, the activity of the sun, the air currents and atmospheric layers, the forests, the wildlife, the deserts, the mountain ranges, the rivers, wetlands, lakes, and ponds, etc. Human reason understands the principle of holism and is responsible for maintaining our planet in its proper, sustainable
balance and harmony. Without democratic world government investing substantial resources into this process, our climate will continue to collapse and our biodiversity disappear into extinction.

4.8. Finally, the world parliament, world administration, and world civil service corps of scientists, engineers, and professionals will constitute, for the first time in history, a self-aware global brain for our planet. Human beings can only take charge of their planetary spaceship through democratic world government. At present the chaos of power-systems vying for influence and ascendency leaves our spaceship adrift and heading toward certain disaster. A democratic world government will establish systems for thoughtfully dealing with global crises and moving the planet into harmony with the biosphere and its human population. It will establish mechanisms for dialogue promoting mutual harmony and resolving conflicts among the peoples of the Earth. It will protect the universal human rights of all people through a legal personhood that expects a complementary participatory citizenship. It will establish the planet as a single unitary community, composed of immense, respected diversities. It will do all this because our planet will now have a global brain—a way for the people of Earth to mutually participate in thinking about, and acting on, the future that we want to leave for our children and subsequent generations.

5. The Constitution for the Federation of Earth.

In my view the best and most practical blueprint for establishing a holistic political and economic system for the Earth is found in the Earth Constitution. Its Preamble explicitly invokes holism in a number of ways, including emphasis on the principle of unity in diversity, and its design establishes a matrix of holistic institutions cooperating with one another and the people of Earth in a planetary regime of harmonious and sustainable economic and political democracy. This constitution is the most important document produced in the 20th century and should be studied in every school, college, and university in the world. My latest book, The Anatomy of a Sustainable World: Our Choice between Climate Change or System Change, studies the holistic design of the Earth Constitution in some detail.

The Constitution was written with the participation of hundreds of world citizens meeting in four international constituent assemblies between 1968 and 1991. It can be found on-line in many places, including at http://worldparliament-gov.org/constitution/the-earth-constitution/. Since 1991, it has been considered a finished document, ready for ratification by the people and nations of the Earth. Its conditions for ratification are divided into three distinct stages, making universal ratification both practical and possible, and its Article 19 allows the people of Earth to begin Provisional World Government in anticipation of, and preparation for, its final ratification. Indeed, the Provisional World Parliament has been meeting since 1983, with its 14th session scheduled for Kolkata, India, in December 2015. It has passed more than 50 provisional world legislative acts that spell out, and empower, the kind of holistic world system that will be actualized under the Earth Constitution.

In the face of the ever-worsening planetary crises that threaten the future of human civilization on the Earth, our best option is to ratify the Earth Constitution. The many valuable agencies of the UN are to be integrated into the Earth Federation government, and empowered with adequate funding and staff to really do their jobs. The Constitution, therefore, will only substitute for the UN Charter, not the UN. The Charter, as is well-known, is undemocratic and unworkable, and structurally denies the holism of the Earth and humanity,
even though certain other UN documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affirm this holism. Article 28 of the UN Universal Declaration declares that “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” The Earth Constitution is the living blueprint for that social and international order.

Under the Earth Constitution, there is a place for everyone and every nonviolent organization. NGOs, UN agencies, global citizens, nation-states, cultures, and the diverse races of the Earth will all be empowered through its fundamental principle of holism. The people of Earth will soon begin thinking holistically, and the economic and social institutions of the Earth will immediately begin to gravitate toward holism. The future requires a deep existential and scientific recognition of our wholeness, of the oneness of humanity, our Earth, and its biosphere. Both the ethics and politics of holism demand this fundamental paradigm-shift. Our best hope for actualizing this future is ratification of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth.

Works Cited

Dr. Glen T. Martin

www.radford.edu/gmartin
Professor, Philosophy and Peace Studies, Radford University
Radford, Virginia, 24142, USA
gmartin@radford.edu

President, Institute on World Problems: www.worldproblems.net.