Human Beings Growing Toward Moral Maturity

Humanity is struggling to emerge from a long history of cruelty, barbarism, and savagery. As Jonathan Glover shows in his book *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, we are not very far along in the quest “of the human species as it struggles to escape from its brutal past.” The use of technology in mass exterminations, the dehumanizing of “enemies” and closing of our hearts against the “others,” the lack of compassion for those of different nations, races, or religions have been rampant phenomena throughout the 20th century to the present. Glover is not optimistic that “either torture or cruel punishment is certain to fade away as the human race grows up” (2000: 41 & 39).

But grow up we must, for time is rapidly running out before our savagery, combined with awesome technologies of mass destruction, obliterates the entire hope, beauty, and promise of our human project. The psychologists and philosophers of human development have reached a broad consensus concerning the stages of moral, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive development. Upon reaching adulthood we are capable of continuous growth toward becoming ever-more “worldcentric.” We are capable of becoming ever-more “integrated” and “integrating” persons, embracing the vast diversity of humanity and other sensitive living creatures with an encompassing love, compassion, kindness, and friendship. We are capable of replacing violence and fragmentation with the harmony of compassionate unity in diversity.

The resources open to us to enhance this growth process include philosophical reflection, meditation, holistic education, and institutional reform. People are more easily led to the dehumanizing of others, to a lack of care for others and hardness of heart, when they are devoid of all or some of these resources. Lack of access to these resources can result in cultures and institutions that promote bigotry, fear, narrowness, ethnocentrism, racism, and the dehumanization of others that accompany these responses.

The socialist imperative is the imperative of our emerging human maturity in which we discover that we are one humanity in whom reason and love must develop to the point where we make the Earth a decent home for all its children. However today, as philosopher and psychologist Erich Fromm points out, the only oneness recognized by the present Lords of the Earth is our planet as both a battleground for global wars and a giant marketplace for capital accumulation. Philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm declares that we need a new, worldwide “socialist humanism” in which economics is placed in the service of human flourishing and well-being:

The one world is one, so far, inasmuch as it is one potential battlefield, rather than a new system of world citizenship. We live in one world, yet in his feelings and thoughts contemporary man still lives in the nation state. His loyalties are still primarily to sovereign states and not to the human race. This anachronism can only lead to disaster.... The alternative of socialism or barbarism has become frighteningly real today, when forces working toward barbarism seem to be stronger than those working against it. (1962: 171-173)
For Fromm, we need a new renaissance of worldwide socialist humanism in which our “new technical powers” are used “for the sake of man”: “it is a new society in which the norms for man’s unfolding govern the economy, rather than the social and political process being governed by blind and anarchic economic interests” (ibid. 173).

The socialist imperative is the moral imperative at the heart of human maturity: our personal individuality is not separable from our common humanity. Our love and compassion have grown to identify with the entire world, its human children and its living creatures. Education, economics, politics, and institutions need to be directed toward making our planet a decent place for all to live. We need one world with a world parliament that has the mandate and the vision to actualize a democratic socialist, loving, and sustainable environment for the entire Earth.

It is not only the new human maturity emphasizing the development of our reason and our love that advocates democratic socialism, the socialist imperative is also the moral imperative found at the heart of all the great scriptures of the world: the imperative for love, compassion, kindness, and friendship. It recognizes the moral demand at the heart of our human situation to recognize our common humanity with others and organize our institutions in such a way that protects and enhances the human dignity of everyone. In Christianity it is the universal love (agape) taught by Jesus. In Vedic religions it is the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family).

With the growth of critical self-awareness among human beings especially since the 15th century, and prominently since the “Enlightenment” of the 18th century, the moral imperative found at the heart of the great scriptures of the world is being progressively disentangled from the dogmas, rituals, mantras and institutional frameworks of these religions. From Immanuel Kant’s 18th century affirmation of human dignity independently of all religion to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, it is now become possible, for the first time in history, to proclaim universal ethical principles independently of all religious scriptures: “recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”

The democratic revolutions of the 18th century embodied the revolutionary idea of the equality of all citizens and their inherent “natural rights” existing independently of governmental authorities (which might deny those rights). The U.S. Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson (a follower of British philosopher John Locke) declares: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The first generation of human rights was born: the rights to freedom, civil liberty, religion, assembly, habeas corpus, and due process of law. However, the 19th century with its industrial revolution saw the vast expansion of the capitalist system, with the so-called “right to private property” enshrined in laws that allowed the owners of factories to employ child labor, pay starvation wages to employees, force labor to work for 12 hours per day, and build factories replete with dangerous and unhealthy working conditions. This economic system created masses of extremely poor people living in horrific conditions struggling to survive while being exploited in every possible way to enhance the profits of the owners.
Moral outrage permeates the writings of Karl Marx and many other 19th century revolutionary critics of this horrific system of exploitation and degradation. Scholars such as José Miranda in his book *Marx Against the Marxists* (1986) show that the so-called “materialist” interpretation of Marx that repudiates the moral dimension in favor of historical forces operating independently of morality is false. Marx was steeped in the Bible and animated by a much deeper moral love and compassion than the “Bourgeois morality” that he repudiated.

The Socialist Imperative recognizes our common humanity, our “species being” as Marx called it, and the imperative of society to organize itself in ways that optimize human equality, dignity, and freedom. In this respect, the socialist imperative is fundamentally identical with the democratic imperative, for democracy is also the organization of society around human equality, dignity, and freedom. Our collective understanding of the moral requirement to recognize our common human dignity, emphasized by Kant in the 18th century, was now expanded in the 19th century with the birth of “second generation” rights: the rights to the conditions that make possible our individual human flourishing and development: education, health care, sanitation, and the basic necessities for life such as food, clothing, and shelter.

The U.N. Universal Declaration of 1948 includes both generations of rights. Article 25 declares: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” The moral discourse of humanity and our ‘species being,’ now divorced from formal religions and forming the ground for a universal ethical discourse, affirms that economics and society must be organized to preserve human dignity and opportunity for all, even for the least privileged members of society. Human beings continued to grow toward moral maturity.

The worldwide recognition of multiple global crises during the 20th century activated understanding that there is a third generation of human rights. It is not enough to have civil liberties and one’s basic needs satisfied if there is constant war, fear, and violence nearly everywhere on Earth. It is not enough to have liberty and well-being if the global climate is collapsing all around us portending ever increasing disasters throughout our lives.

Human beings have a right to peace, and a right to a protected and wholesome planetary environment. Human rights become a coherent set of ideals surrounding our common humanity and our universal human dignity. One cannot have some of these without the others. All these rights (and our corresponding responsibilities) form an integrated whole. Human dignity demands institutions that honor this dignity.

2. The Socialist Imperative

The 4th century Greek fathers of the Christian Church understood the socialist imperative that was taught by Jesus the Christ: St. John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) wrote: “Do not say, ‘I am using what belongs to me.’ You are using what belongs to others. All the wealth of the world belongs to you and to the others in common, as the sun, air, earth, and all the rest.” (Cort, 1988: 45) St. Ambrose (c. 340-397) wrote: “God has ordered all things to be produced so that there should be food in common for all, and that the earth should be the common
possession of all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it the right for a few.” (Ibid. 47)

In the 18th century, social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was to agree with St. Ambrose concerning the system of scarcity imposed when the resources of the earth became “the right of a few”:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying “This is mine,” and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: “Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.” (In Martin, 2008: 147)

Historian and Christian thinker Richard Henry Tawney in his book Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (1926) writes: “Compromise is as impossible between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and the state idolatry of the Roman Empire” (In Cort, 1988: 173).

Christian thinker Enrique Dussel in his book Ethics and Community (1986) declares of sinners: “They totalize themselves, asserting themselves to be God, fetishizing the divinizing themselves. They fall into idolatry.... The act by which one asserts oneself to be the end of other persons—as factory owners think they have the right to the factory’s profit even though that profit be their workers’ hunger transformed into money—is idolatry.... These modern “gods” are the product of the “logic” of sin, of the domination of one human being over another....” (1986: 19). For Dussel, the dominant world capitalist system creates a pseudo-morality for itself in order to justify and cover up its vast regime of domination and exploitation. This conventional morality is the negation of the socialist imperative taught by Jesus to love one another in a spirit of harmony and sharing.

For philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952): “The ultimate problem of production is the production of human beings. To this end the production of goods is intermediate and auxiliary. It is by this standard that the present system stands condemned.... The means have to be implemented by a social-economic system that establishes and uses the means for the production of free human beings associating with one another on terms of equality” (1993: 170). Economics and social institutions need to support the quest of each person to develop his or her potential. This is the socialist imperative. However, for Dewey, capitalism reverses this imperative by sacrificing human beings to the drive for private profit.

For philosopher Michael Luntley, in his 1990 book on The Meaning of Socialism, capitalism destroys the capacity of people to pursue the good (including their own potential for development). It systematically obstructs moral pursuit of the good. It introduces an “atomism” in which each possesses a “negative freedom” to pursue his or her own welfare at the expense of nature and the community. It repudiates that normativity in which society collectively supports the development of each of its members and their cooperative effort to actualize justice, freedom, and truth within our human situation.

In his book Natural Law and Natural Rights (1980), philosopher of law John Finnis identifies seven intrinsically valuable goods some combination of which makes for a fulfilled and worthwhile human life. These are life,
knowledge, practical reason, friendship, aesthetic experience, play, and religion (in the broad sense of a discerning a meaning to existence). Finnis mounts a powerful critique of the utilitarian doctrine that there can be some instrumental means to “achieving the greatest good of the greatest number” (a justification often used for capitalism). Unrestrained competition in a “free market” does not create the greatest good. Rather it actively interferes with our common human pursuit of what is good. The fullness of any human life involves the ability to develop and participate in these goods along some or all of these multiple lines, and the common good of society involves the organization of economics and institutions to make this possible for all citizens.

Capitalism violates this common good. None of these intrinsic goods (“natural rights”) is identified as wealth or possessions. All of them require a genuine “community” that goes much deeper than the formal contractual basis of capitalist society: competing commercial persons and entities making legal contracts with one another. A “community,” Finnis insists, can only be completed when it is bound together by a constitution that “completes” the union, granting rights and responsibilities to all citizens and pursuing the common good of them all. At the planetary level, only a global social contract, with economics and institutions predicated on the common good of all, can complete and vivify the human community. This vision of the “completed community” is the democratic socialist vision.

For political philosopher Bernard Crick (1987):

Socialism has both an empirical theory and a moral doctrine. The theory is that the rise and fall of cohesion in societies is best explained not by the experience and perpetuation of elites (which is conservatism), nor by the initiatives and inventions of competitive individuals (which is liberalism), but by the relationship to the ownership and control of the means of production of the primary producers of wealth…. The doctrine asserts the primacy and mutual dependence of the values of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, and it draws on the theory to believe that greater equality will lead to more cooperation than competition, that this will in turn enhance fraternity and hence liberate from inhibition, restriction and exploitation both individual personality and the full productive potential of society. (79)

Just as John Dewey argues that the institutions of society should be directed toward the actualization of our human potential so Crick asserts that both individuals and the productive potential of society are enhanced by socialism. We have allowed wealth and power to dominate our so-called free societies to our own detriment. Contemporary social thinker Terry Eagleton writes: “We know that socialism has established itself when we are able to look back with utter incredulity on the idea that a handful of commercial thugs were given free rein to corrupt the minds of the public with Neanderthal political views convenient for their bank balances but for little else” (2011: 28). Donald Trump, now President of the United States, is a case in point.

Political thinker Andre Gorz affirms:

For socialists it is a question, to an increasing extent, of organizing society and sociability as spaces for individual emancipation and development.... Only through such solidaristic association and voluntary co-operation can individuals free themselves from their subordination to the uncontrolled logic of capital and market forces to become actors in the creation of a new society. To fight for socialism means concretely to claim the right of
individuals to freedom, equality, physical integrity and self-determination, by acting so that the social conditions which conflict with this right are remodeled. (1994: 41)

Socialism does not mean central planning by some unaccountable elite. However, global society must tame the “uncontrolled logic of capital” in the service of planetary maturity. Democratic socialism at this point in history will be a market socialism. It will combine the reputed efficiency of markets with the moral imperative that institutions and economics support the development of our higher human potential and pursuit of the good. Christopher Pierson writes:

The core principle of the market socialist position is easily stated. At its simplest, market socialism describes an economic and political system which combines the principles of social ownership of the economy with the continuing allocation of commodities (including labor) through the mechanism of markets.... [Market socialists] offer an alternative model in which markets are combined with varying forms of the social ownership of capital. Amongst its supporters, the market is recommended not only as a way of attaining greater economic efficiency under socialism, but also as a way of securing greater individual liberty or a more equal value of liberty, of increasing democracy and of enhancing social justice. (84-85)

The socialist imperative, therefore, involves the moral imperative to organize our institutions to enhance human freedom and well-being. This is clearly not done when the wealth of the world is sucked up by a tiny minority of extremely wealthy persons and corporations. It is not a matter of government planning of everything. This is merely a red herring put forward by current ruling class propaganda to serve their own interests. As Gorz asserts above, capitalisms’ “uncontrolled logic” devastates human communities and the environment worldwide. You cannot have uncontrolled and perpetual “growth” on a finite planet, and you cannot have the 1% sucking up the wealth of the planet, if we want a decent future for our children.

As Michael Harrington asserts in his 1972 book Socialism, socialism is not simply about an economic theory that says that ownership must be in the cooperative hands of people for the common good of everyone, it is also about “a truly new order of things” in which human fulfillment within the framework of a protected natural world is the foundation of our institutions and economic arrangements. For several thousand years, Harrington affirms, human beings have struggled in the “desert” of scarcity, deprivation, and unjust distributions of wealth. We have gotten used to this “bitter experience; we do not dare to think that things could be otherwise” (1972: 272)

But Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origins of Inequality, quoted above, rings true. We have allowed the few to claim “private ownership” of what belongs to us all as our birthright: to live with freedom, peace, and well-being within a protected planetary environment. The few will always intone the mantra that this is impossible, that scarcity and deprivation are the natural human condition. But those who are morally awake and mature know that divine compassion, love, justice, and freedom need to become incarnate within our human condition.

We know that the socialist imperative embodies these principles. Our task is to end the wretched slavery, poverty and misery that plague our human condition where the few live well at the expense of the many. Our task, in the words of Jesus the Christ is to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth. Our task, expressed in the words of Article 28 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is to actualize this: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” We are far from such a “world order” because we lack a global social contract.
3. Our Global Social Contract

Just as we have seen Michael Luntley affirm that no common moral good for human life can arise from the “atomism” of capitalism, so the moral imperative that actualizes our third generation rights to peace and a protected environment cannot arise from the atomism and fragmentation of the system of so-called “sovereign” nation-states. Every nation believes it has the “right” to militarize because it is faced with potential enemies. In doing so, each fragmented nation-state becomes an unwitting enemy of humanity. Human beings have a genuine and unalienable right to a world order that actualizes all three generations of human rights, including peace, that is, to a world order united to create our planet as a decent home for all its citizens and other living creatures.

Today people who are born into small, poor nations appear to be born into a prison camp. They cannot travel beyond their tiny borders. No one wants them, and their chances for a flourishing life are severely restricted within their own nation, subject as it is to exploitation and domination within the global capitalist system and under the powerful imperial nations. Today, people born anywhere, whether in a large or small nation, are forced to pay for a militarization that violates their right to live in peace. How many people in the world today who are not making a profit from the war system want to have war rather than peace?

The apparent necessity of this planetary war system is a direct result of the fragmentation and atomism of the system of territorially bound so-called “sovereign” states: as Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, and many others recognized. No state is willing to allow enforceable laws above itself. Every state embraces this lawless world system of war, scarcity, suspicion, secrecy, hate and fear. Many nations claim the “right” to build nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, claiming the need for “self-defense” while increasing the terror of those at whom these weapons are aimed.

The capitalist system of domination and exploitation profits immensely from this war system. Great wealth is extracted from the development, manufacture, and sale of weapons worldwide. As many thinkers have pointed out, the capitalist system is intricately linked to the system of militarized territorial nation-states. The socialist imperative is the imperative to unite humanity around the principles of universal justice, equality, freedom, peace, and environmental sustainability.

It is not only the scourge of capitalism that prevents us from leaving the desert of historical scarcity for the promised land of human fulfilment. We cannot escape from the desert as long as we embrace the parochial concept of a world divided into absolute territorial fragments. The very existence of this fragmented, militarized world clearly violates Article 28 of the UN Universal Declaration. It violates our rights to peace and a protected planetary environment.

As many thinkers have pointed out from the 17th century to the present, the system of “sovereign” nation-states is intrinsically a “war-system.” In the early 21st century, we now know that we are one world, one humanity, one universal set of moral imperatives, and one interlinked destiny. Why do we continue to cling to the atomism and fragmentation, centuries old, that violates these truths?

Neither the word ‘capitalism’ nor the word ‘socialism’ appears in the Constitution for the Federation of Earth. Yet, the Constitution announces the socialist imperative at the very outset, in its Preamble. It proceeds to
construct a world system that institutionally embodies these principles in a practical, organized, democratic manner. The Preamble states:

Conscious that Humanity is One despite the existence of diverse nations, races, creeds, ideologies and cultures and that the principle of unity in diversity is the basis for a new age when war shall be outlawed and peace prevail; when the earth's total resources shall be equitably used for human welfare; and when basic human rights and responsibilities shall be shared by all without discrimination....

The principle of unity in diversity declares that the wonderful diversity of humanity, its languages and cultures, must be embraced in a political, economic, and institutional unity that preserves and protects that diversity. We are all legal world citizens under the *Earth Constitution* with all the rights and responsibilities guaranteed in Articles 12 and 13. The socialist principle is articulated here in three dimensions: first war shall be outlawed and peace prevail. The socialist imperative is the imperative for social cooperation on behalf of the freedom, equality, and community of all people: a society and economy dedicated to the right of each person to develop her or his life potential. The right of peace is a necessary component in this equation.

Secondly, the Preamble states that the “new age” will be one in which the “earth’s total resources shall be equitably used for human welfare.” Again, the socialist imperative is affirmed. This planet and its resources must be equitably used for the benefit of all, not the 1% who own more than 50% of the world’s resources, not the richest 15% who currently own 85% of the world’s resources.

Third, the Preamble states that “basic human rights and responsibilities shall be shared by all without discrimination.” This affirms the socialist principle that our common human dignity must be protected and cherished through concrete economic and social institutions that guarantee all people equally both freedom and well-being. We have both the “rights” to well-being and the shared “responsibilities” of freedom. The basic idea of democracy, the basic requirements of universal moral principles, and the socialist imperative are one and the same. We are tasked as human beings to take back our planet Earth from the 1% and make it a decent home for all persons and other living creatures.

The *Constitution* sets up a World Parliament of three houses: a House of Peoples with 1000 representatives elected from equal districts worldwide, a House of Nations with 1, 2, or 3 representatives appointed or elected by each nation, depending on its population, and the House of Counsellors with 200 representatives, 10 each from 20 world regions who will represent the whole of the planet and the common good. The mandate of the World Parliament for each and every representative, however, is not to represent the parochial interests of their constituencies but to address the global problems that are beyond the capacity of nations to handle: disarming the nations and ending wars, protecting universal human rights, diminishing social differences, and protecting the planetary environment. The World Parliament is socialist in this sense: its mandate is the good of everyone within an economic and institutional framework that makes this possible.

The basic premises of the *Earth Constitution* focus on human dignity and the rights of everyone to live in peace, security, with all the basic necessities required for this, within an environment that sustainably supports life, with the clean water, air, and land required for healthy living. These basic premises are identical with those of socialism. The reason for this is that socialism is most fundamentally a moral conception, whereas capitalism is a self-proclaimed amoral system governed by what it claims are “objective economic laws.” This claim to being “amoral” covers up the fact that capitalism is objectively immoral. It objectively violates human rights, human
dignity, human freedom, human equality, and human fraternity, as well as our rights to peace and to a protected sustainable environment.

The list of “specific powers” granted to the Earth Federation government in Article 4 includes the following: “Place under world controls essential natural resources which may be limited or unevenly distributed about the Earth. Find and implement ways to reduce wastes and find ways to minimize disparities when development or production is insufficient to supply everybody with all that may be needed.” The Constitution is permeated with this imperative: “to supply everybody with all that may be needed.” If we really mean “all” when we say “all,” then we are taking our stand on the democratic socialist imperative.

The Constitution affirms a market economy directed to the satisfaction of basic human needs, with global public banking providing necessary income and financing to all on the basis of their ideas and ability to work, not on the basis of collateral or previously accumulated capital. It establishes a market socialist democracy directed to the common good of all the people on the planet and future generations.

In the list of 19 economic and social rights given in Article 13 (which includes a number of rights to a protected, sustainable planetary environment) there is one that may initially strike us as odd: “Assure to each child the right to the full realization of his or her potential.” But this is fundamental to the entire framework of the Constitution which presents a set of institutions designed to achieve exactly this: the dignity and fundamental rights of each child must include a global social and economic framework in which that child can realize his or her potential. Like global democracy, and like the universal moral principles of equal justice, love, and compassion, the socialist imperative means “all” when it says “all.”

Unless we can unite together under a global social contract as presented in the Constitution for the Federation of Earth, the chances of actualizing Article 28 of the Universal Declaration, or of obeying Jesus the Christ’s commandment to open the way for receiving the Kingdom of God on Earth, appear slim indeed. The immoral, fragmented, and anachronistic institutions that dominate our world actively defeat morality, justice, and environmental sustainability at every turn. Both capitalism and the system of so-called sovereign nation-states are atomistic, fragmented, and immoral, both in their conceptions and in their observable consequences. They cannot be evolved; they must be transformed through founding a world system based on the democratic, moral, and socialist imperatives from the very beginning.

We must understand that we no longer need to wander in the desert of scarcity, injustice, and immaturity. We must rise to planetary maturity and affirm that we can institutionally ascend to a real fulfillment of our human project. We can enter the Promised Land only if we keep our eyes steadily on that vision; or at very least, we can establish the necessary institutions that make this vision possible. Unless we take this stand now, the future looks bleak indeed. Nothing less than this indicates the significance of our present historical moment with its opportunity to affirm our global social contract under the Constitution for the Federation of Earth.

Works Cited


