

A Systematic Theory of Universal Ethics/ Common Basic Law for All People, and a Code for Global Moral Education

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Plain language summary (PLS) of

SN Soc Sci 2, 66 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-022-00350-7>

Humanity faces complex, often interrelated challenges and threats, ranging from climate change, poverty, inequality, mental imbalance, crime, and biological, chemical, physical and cyber disasters, to severe civil and military conflicts and even nuclear war. These issues have caused and will continue to cause immense suffering to individuals, families, communities and societies around the world and could ultimately drive humanity to extinction. ‘Our challenge for the twenty-first century is therefore to discover a rational basis for a global ethics, which has a universal normative force, but assumes cultural differences’ (A. Cortina), and to set up this ethics.

There is a clear and urgent need for a new way to democracy, justice, sustainability and peace. This new way could be a common basic law/universal ethics that binds all people and that is taught and implemented throughout the world. Humanity's existential problems cannot be solved with patches or short-term local political gestures.

A basic law for all people/universal ethics would

- 1) provide a common legal/moral language that facilitates intercultural, interethnic and interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution,
- 2) help address and reverse the root causes of our existential threats,
- 3) guide individuals and societies in their decision-making processes, and
- 4) promote a sense of global citizenship and shared responsibility.

Starting from natural law, which, as I show, can be understood in both religious and secular ways, I develop a rational foundation/valid source of authority for an intercultural and interfaith common basic law/ universal ethics. In accordance with these concepts, essential and self-evident principles and norms for human survival and fulfillment are identified and compiled into a simple and practical normative code. The principles, which also serve as a common foundation for global moral education, the UN Universal Human rights and for common law, are the dignity of every human being, the respect for others and as a logical consequence the democratic constitution of society.

The implementation of a basic law for all people/universal ethics is a long-term political task and could be achieved 1) by including it in the compulsory school curriculum of all countries and in UNESCO's agenda of Global Citizen Education and 2) by constitutionalizing it. As with any other law, this will not eliminate environmental destruction, inequity, crime and war, but it could limit them to a level that society can bear.

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Cite this article

Enno Winkler, A Systematic Theory of Universal Ethics/ Common Basic Law for All People, and a Code for Global Moral Education. Enago Academy. 2024/04/10. <https://www.enago.com/academy/guestposts/dr-enno-winklergmail-com/theory-of-universal-ethics/>