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Global Ethics

Some weeks, an issue seems to home in on us from all sides. It's a strange phenomenon, but convenient in helping to connect the dots.

A friend passed along a Globe & Mail article on an interview with Sam Harris, author of the recently published book *The Moral Landscape*, which postulates that science can answer questions of right and wrong, good and evil. [The review](#) below the article pointed out that Marxism and eugenics, seemingly brilliant and fact-based at the time, went sideways and resulted in two of the most lethal regimes in history – Stalinist and Nazi.

One point that Harris made in the interview strikes a chord, though: "I think the greatest challenge facing our species is to build a global civilization based on shared values. To do this, we will need to think about questions of right and wrong and good and evil in a common framework, purposed toward human flourishing."

I had just finished reading Udo Schaefer's "[Beyond the Clash of Religions](#)", which said much the same thing from an entirely different angle. At the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago almost 20 years ago, the great majority of participants agreed that "there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic." In a speech given to the Parliament, theologian Hans Kung said, "The force of religious convictions must be applied to overcome the global problems of humankind. But this can happen only if the religions stop wearing one another down in disputes, fomenting conflicts and preaching fanaticism, and reflect on what is common to them. If they do that, the power of religions would benefit all humankind."

Then there was the audio book, picked a few days ago fairly randomly from the library, on "Building Better Families" by Matthew Kelly. The author makes the point that our culture has no vision, no agenda, other than consumerism. In effect, it actively works against building families, or anything else, based on values.

The clincher that closed the loop in this train of thought was a quote that surfaced a couple of days ago while I was looking up material from the Bahá'í Writings on a completely unrelated matter. But it definitely relates. The quote presented a vision of the future, predicting the birth of a civilization in which people would be educated in such a way "that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or

vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamoured of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world..."

Ethical training is as ancient as human society; it's part and parcel of raising a child within any culture. With the degree of interaction around the world constantly increasing, it's not hard to foresee a general consensus gradually forming on global ethics. The process of adopting those standards will no doubt remain the same long process as it always has been, through the training of children. If we build better families, based on common values, we build a better world.