

INTRODUCTION

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There's no disagreement today that global ethics is important. I don't know anyone who would disagree that we need to understand and pursue and study and think more about what exactly we mean by global ethics. Let me just raise a few words and you'll know exactly what that means. I say the word Aleppo. It's a human tragedy. It's important. Mosul. Even what goes on in American cities. These are all issues of ethics. And they're all part of the world. Immigration. Migration. These are issues that have an ethical dimension and it is really incumbent upon us to understand these issues in and of themselves and how they affect us. But it is also important to study them from an ethical standpoint because we do have responsibilities as citizens on this planet, of this country, of the United Nations, whatever organization you want to point to. We need to understand these things as ethical issues.

Global ethics is very important, nobody disagrees with it, but I'm going to take a little bit of a different course because most people say when we study global ethics, the emphasis that comes up is that we study the world because we want to know how people are different. It is usually of interest that they may have different ethical systems, or they may think a little bit differently about one issue or another. Why do we need this discussion? Because we need to understand how people are different. There are really a couple of other reasons why we might want to understand global ethics, and how global ethics informs our understanding of the really terrible issues and even the good issues that we witness around this country and around the world.

I study Asia particularly Japan and Korea; a part of the world that I've been going back and forth to for more than 30 years. I believe that when we understand other cultures and other countries, when we understand other peoples in other countries whose ethical issues are informed by a different religion, a different set of traditions philosophical or religious, then we understand more about ourselves. This is really an important insight that we neglect sometimes. When we understand other countries, we understand more about ourselves. I don't think that's controversial to say, but that maybe what we find out is how there are more similarities than differences.

When I went to Japan in the 1980s, everyone thought Japan was going to take over the world, and that the reason the Japanese were so hard to negotiate with was because their ethical systems are different. The

Japanese are ruled by situational ethics. I lived there year after year, studied public opinion, talked to Japanese people, talked to Americans, and what I found was there is a lot more common ground. We missed it because we misconstrued the meaning of difference. We didn't look for those areas that overlap and how we could actually negotiate.

Everyone thought the Japanese market was closed. The truth of the matter is, in some ways it was. It was cost prohibitive for us, but it was also because the Japanese believed that it was ok to protect the market. Whereas Americans said 'it's ok for us to protect our market, but not you to protect your market,' especially when we want our goods to go there. What I found was this little area of common ground that if we actually dug a little deeper, we might have understood a little better and avoided some of the conflicts that we had during that period of time. Global ethics is not just important for increasing our understanding of ourselves and others but it actually, I think, will help us find that common ground we need to build bridges, to build a better society here and elsewhere.