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Sigurd N. Skirbekk: "Future Predictions — Human Rights"

Wendell Bell: "What Ought We Do to Construct a Good Future?"

Sigurd N. Skirbekk: "Rejoinder to Wendell Bell"

Summary

According to Professor Skirbekk sociologists are able to predict future human conditions in a more sophisticated manner than by merely prolonging statistical trends. Sociology opens up for analysing processes determined by structures which go beyond the intentions of actors; in addition sociology provide information regarding functional limits to structural processes. On this basis Skirbekk predicts that the widespread support for the contemporary version of the UN Declaration of Human Rights will cease during the next century, partly because of the unintended consequences of a morality that is one-sidedly based upon individual rights, partly because of uncontrolled demographic development, and primarily because population rights will collide with ecological limits. According to Skirbekk, these challenges make it necessary to elaborate another basis for global norms than those agreed upon in 1948.

Professor Wendell Bell presents a more optimistic view on behalf of the UNDHR and argues that several articles in the Declaration could plead for a more responsible response to demographic and ecological challenges. The Declaration, he argues, may serve as a guide for the future well-being of humanity.

Future Predictions - Human Rights.

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About Predictions

We are approaching the turn of a millennium. At this moment in time it is natural for us to take a broader view of contemporary culture and its future prospects than what is usual in political debates. It is time to ask whether appreciated values in dominant cultures are in themselves adequate for our common understanding of the vital challenges that lie ahead.

At the present time, many books and predictions concerning our expected future are being published. The majority of these predictions, not written by sociologists, seems to be based either upon trend prolongation - our living standards will increase ever more; or upon wishful thinking — all wars will be replaced by negotiations. Some predictions appear to be written as scientific fiction for entertainment and sale.

In contrast to classical writers, contemporary sociologists have been somewhat reluctant to publish predictions concerning long-term modernity. There may be reasons for this modesty. But it may also be argued that sociologists have more to say about long-term social processes than many others. The relative strength of sociology, in comparison to trend research, is partly based upon an access to a wider spectrum of data. Sociological theory can also offer models for understanding processes beyond the intentions of individual actors. This makes it possible to predict a turn of trends, when a functional optimum has been passed, or when a dominant culture is no longer functional. In combination with data from other sciences, sociological theory can state premises for predicting a future change of ideas, even in fields where dominant ideas are at present imbedded in contemporary culture. One such field concerns the conditions attached to our acceptance of human rights.

Contemporary Status of the UN Declaration of Human Rights

When speaking today about human rights, we usually mean the Declaration of Human Rights, passed as Resolution 217 by the United Nation's General Assembly the 10th of December 1948, including later ratified articles to the same declaration.

There is a vast literature concerning this declaration and how it should be interpreted (Renteln, 1990; Cranston, 1993; Laqueur and Rubin, eds. 1997; Skirbekk, S. 1997). Regardless of these discussions - for instance if the articles are to be understood as formal rights for the individual or as substantial duties for the government - it is safe to say that the declaration has never had a broader support among nations than it has today. This is a relative judgement concerning its status in previous years; it is not an attempt to ignore the reports informing us that a majority of the member nations in the UN have broken some principles in the declaration, not least those expressed in Article 5: No one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

For the first time in history a majority of human beings today live in states which, at least formally, are founded upon democratic principles. Contemporary concepts of democracy are generally based upon the rights of the individual, while they were previously based more upon what was considered the collective will of the people. This has been beneficial for the spreading and acceptance of the principles found in the UNDHR. The same can be said in regard of the terms for membership advanced by large organisations such as NATO and the EU.

Humanitarian organisations as well as cultural groups and media agencies have more or less taken for granted the principles of the UN declaration. Opponents of the declaration are generally seen as spokesmen for inhuman and undemocratic rulers, an opposition that confirms more than it contradicts the political picture as seen by the architects of the declaration.

We must not forget that 1948 was a year when powerful and inhuman dictatorships were close at hand. The politicians who voted for the declaration at that time all had fresh memories of atrocities in countries ruled by Hitler's and Hirohito's armies, they knew what was going on in countries under the rule of Stalin and they saw the emergence of newer dictatorships further east.

1948 was also the year George Orwell wrote his novel *1984*. Seldom has a famous futurologist novel been so wrong in its concrete predictions. Nevertheless, the novel tells us something about the fear for the all-mighty state at that time. This fear for the totalitarian ruler later became a part of an ideology for Western political defence, at the same time as the respect for the UNDHR became part of the same ideology. The fall of the Soviet empire, from 1989 onwards, has been interpreted as a victory not only for Western principles, political and economical, but also for cultural individualism as expressed in the UN declaration.

In addition to the political processes favourable for the status of the UNDHR, development of communicative technology has made it easier for people of the media to expose violations in remote parts of the world and to tell about it to larger audiences. In public debate hardly anyone today will go against the principles stated in the UN Declaration.

In spite of all this, it is possible to argue that the status of the UNDHR will undergo a radical change in the next century, probably during the first half of the next century.

Unavoidable Challenges

A profound change of ideas seldom occurs merely as a change of fashion, or as a result of argumentation alone. Cultural changes can usually be traced back to some kind of conflict and to a generally-felt embarrassment with established principles in dealing with unavoidable challenges. In order to explain previous changes or to predict future changes it is necessary to look both for challenges that might cause embarrassment and for the status of different pro and contra arguments.

The first question should then be: What are the unavoidable challenges for the next century, with relevance for the status of the UNDHR? Several answers could be given, but it is

relevant to focus on three issues: The *ecological* challenges, the *demographic* challenges and the challenges posed by *moral anomie* and cultural disorder.

The ecological challenges concern partly our over-consumption of natural resources, particularly those resources that are not renewable in a foreseeable future, such as species in the rain forests and the available oil resources. It also concerns our interference with nature's ecological systems, partly as a distortion of nature's ability to renew the living conditions we take for granted. Changes in the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, changes in temperature determining ice melting, sea level and sea currents may be examples of such processes.

Addressing the demographic challenge means first addressing the question of what is the expected growth of the number of people on this planet, particularly in those areas which even today may be regarded as overpopulated. In addition the lack of balance between a strong increase in the number of people in non-Western countries and a weak decrease in Western countries can create certain tensions with relevance for the status of the UNDHR.

Some figures can illustrate this challenge. The human species reached the first billion in number around 1800. The second billion was passed in the early 1930s. When the UNDHR was adopted in 1948, the world had two and a half billion people to feed. The third billion was reached in the middle of the 1950s; the fourth billion came by the middle of the 1970s; the fifth billion by the end of the 1980s and the sixth billion is expected to be passed by the turn of this century. By the middle of the next century UN demographers expect that this planet will have to feed between nine and ten billion people.

This is a tremendous growth in the number of one species in a short period of time. Even more problematic is the distribution of the expected population growth. The UN Demographic Office expects the population growth to take place almost exclusively in the poorer countries, in addition to a previous strong increase in these regions: Between 1930 and 1990 the so-called developing countries increased their population from 1.3 billion to 4.1 billion. According to the UN demographers, Africa might experience a five-fold increase of its population during a three-generation period, from 414 million in 1975 to 2140 millions in 2050. Asia as a whole is expected to increase its population from 2.4 billion to 5.2 billion in the same period. In the less developed countries of the world, population is estimated to increase from some 1.7 billion in 1958 to some 4.7 billion in 2050 (UN, 1998).

In addition to these challenges which might appear relatively concrete, as they can be illustrated by figures, future generations will also face considerable cultural challenges in the decades ahead of us. Considering the status of the UNDHR, it is particularly important to address the moral challenges on a local as well as on a global scale. There are reasons to predict that the question of moral anomie will become a central issue during the next century and that this will affect the general support for a Declaration which thus far has been somewhat one-sidedly concerned with the rights of individuals.

Expected Tesponse - First Phase

The challenges mentioned above cannot be completely overlooked by politicians and public spokesmen. But these challenges may be faced in a more or less adequate manner. As long as the challenges are perceived as special issues, there may be reason to believe that specialists

in various fields will be able to meet them. As long as the challenges are not seen as indirectly caused by an anthropocentric and individualistic culture, the main ideas legitimating this culture on a global scale will hardly be disputed. During a first phase the principles of the UNDHR will not be questioned.

Most of the public world is still living in this first phase. But there are scientists and other people who question the ecological, demographic and moral wisdom of a one-sided worship of individual human rights (Ophuls 1992; Hardin 1993). These people, however, are still few. Politicians and cultural agents seeking popularity, people of enterprise seeking profit, common people seeking comfort and self-fulfilment, all have motives for ignoring the critics. Specialists and experts of various kinds can give the public a relatively good conscience by emphasising moderate measures with which to meet future challenges.

Economic expertise will most certainly be demanded to deal with demographic challenges. There is a vast literature concerning relations between economic levels and procreation patterns. Most of this literature, however, is based upon experiences from Western societies. It is not at all obvious that data from these countries can be transmitted to societies with a different cultural setting. The so-called *law of demographic transition*, assuming a functional self-regulation of the balance between number of births and deaths, after a period of transition, is likely to prove inadequate to explain differences in fertility in different parts of the world. It is difficult to employ this "law" to explain why for instance birthrates in Italy have fallen from nearly 3 to a present level of 1.2 children per woman, while in an African country such as Ghana birthrates have only fallen from 6.4 to 5.4 children per woman during approximately one generation.

One could attempt to meet ecological challenges by initiating a range of research programmes and proposals, in addition to international expert conferences such as the one in Kyoto. This may lead to changes in public laws regulating waste and pollution, and to various campaigns directed towards public attitudes and behaviour. But there is every reason to predict that the proposals actually effected will prove inadequate for controlling the challenges that will face the generations to come (Meadows and Meadows, 1992).

The same can be said about diagnoses of moral anomie. In spite of many indicators of an inadequate moral commitment to deal with the obligations of welfare expenditures, and in spite of an increase in registered crime and serious public violence, these are seldom regarded as the unintended consequences of a culture centred around individual freedom without a balance in supraindividual order. Troublesome people are more often seen as deviants, as individuals who have developed an undesirable character because of an inadequate socialisation into a culture supposed to be good and expect to foster civilised behaviour.

But, in spite of all kinds of cultural self-immunisations, such undesirable developments can be expected to continue to increase. In short, there is every reason to believe that the kind of response first given to the challenges mentioned will not be the final response.

Expected Response - Second Phase

When a diagnosis proves inadequate for dealing with unavoidable challenges, pressure will increase for further discussions, and for delving deeper into the possible causes of a

dysfunctional adjustment. In a second phase, premises for diagnosis have to be widened, from a focus on particular cases and deviant behaviour to those structures related to the dominant culture. The cult of individual freedom for self-realisation can no longer remain a sacred domain when diagnosing the challenges presented by ecology, demography and anomie. A widespread ecological maladjustment cannot be regarded solely as a consequence of greedy individuals, but must rather be seen in relation to an economy of consumption, a state policy based upon spending and a cult of human rights endorsing the right to multiply according to own wishes (Ophuls, 1997; Hirsch 1995; Meadows and Meadows 1992). In short, the diagnosis of maladjustment can no longer be kept apart from the principles of the UNDHR.

As the UNDHR becomes part of the political debate, two tendencies can be expected to develop. Some people, belonging to privileged groups in the West and elsewhere, will probably use the UNDHR to legitimate their own life style, claiming that miseries around the world are caused by people without respect for the human ideals formulated in the UNDHR. Other groups, particularly in non-Western countries, can be expected to become more sceptical to the claimed universality of the UNDHR. They may regard the UNDHR as specifically formulated by Western people, and tailored to fit a Western individualistic philosophy and morality.

While Western morality has been based upon principles of individual responsibility, conscience, guilt and the possibility of being forgiven for sins. The Eastern moral code has more often been based upon loyalty to family, honour, shame and the possibility of restoring honour through negotiations or a just revenge. For Eastern morality the Western ideas of individual freedom can be seen as a justification for antisocial egotism. More books addressing these themes can be expected to appear: *What the Rest can Teach the West* (Mahbubani, 1996). The inclinations to overlook processes promoting an ecological crisis can be expected to face a stronger critique.

The most profound confrontation over the question of the universality of the UNDHR will probably be related to the principles of a population policy. The discussion concerning population policy in China may be seen as the first example of a contradiction between demographic responsibility and the ideas in the UNDHR. The measures employed by Chinese authorities to limit population growth in the most populous country in the world can certainly be criticised on the basis of several articles in the UNDHR. But the demographic challenges facing China, as well as other large countries, can also be seen in a perspective of ecological concern, and in a perspective of giving average citizens a better standard of living.

However, China can also be seen as an example of a hidden dilemma in the argumentation of those who claim that increased living standards will solve the demographic problem: If a voluntary limitation of birth rates is dependent on high consumption, this argumentation runs counter to environmental considerations. According to some ecologists, a humanity of six billion would need five planets like our own, just to have enough ecological space to take care of the waste these people will produce if they all should enjoy a high Western standard of living, and be able to do so without disturbing any vital ecological system (Fugelli, 1994; cp. also Daly and Cobb 1989).

This kind of development does not necessarily lead to demands for a revision of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. But the UNDHR will become more disputed, and it will no longer retain its status as a general guide to political morality. This will lead to a new phase of responses.

Expected Response - Third Phase

A comparison of future demographic conditions in countries such as Pakistan and China, the one having complied with UN prescripts, at least concerning procreation rights, the other initiating a population policy on their own terms, may well lead to the conclusion that China did the right thing. Other countries might at a later time, even be compelled to enforce a stricter population policy than China has done. The Australian futurologist Mike Slee some years ago produced a script for an ecological television show called "*After the Warming*". In his last programme he predicted that by 2030 involuntary sterilization might become public policy in several countries, because of overpopulation (Cohen, 1995).

In a situation where realistic solutions to global challenges can no longer be regarded as a question of complying to principles of individual rights, the UNDHR may appear obsolete, or seen as a set of human ideals which can only be realised under certain living conditions. We can expect demographic expertise in most parts of the world to speak against previous interpretations of the UNDHR. To the extent disagreements over the validity of the UNDHR will run parallel to a conflict between Eastern and Western ideas of morality, a relative decline of Western dominance during the next century will be a factor of importance for predicting the outcome of such conflicts. Besides, an ongoing Western intellectual debate over the scientific arguments for human uniqueness is also likely to weaken the support for the principles of the UNDHR (Kennedy 1996).

In this phase it can be expected that politicians and other public agents will openly discuss the contradiction between ecological limits and demographic development on the one hand and the anthropocentric principles of the UNDHR, such as Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. If interpreted substantially, this implies that not only do all people have the right to have as many children as they wish, governments are also obliged to take care of everyone born. Moreover, this obligation has wide implications. Article 25 in the UNDHR states: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

A turn from an anthropocentric to an ecological frame of reference will inevitably change the burden of proof among those who criticise and those who defend the moral universality and moral superiority of the UNDHR.

In such a situation the Preamble of the UNDHR will not be accepted as a sufficient guarantee of moral superiority for the declaration. We could here cite: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". The contrast to this recognition has been stated as a horrifying alternative: "Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind..". Such references will prove fragile as binding arguments for newer generations. The cult of the UNDHR may be regarded as a new mode of the emperor's new clothes. And when the emperor becomes unpopular, many ill-mannered children might be heard shouting that he is naked.

At this time, if not before, the defenders of the declaration will face a crisis.

Old Darwinism or New Order

An implicit argument in favour of the UNDHR has been the conviction that the declaration, in spite of its shortcomings, stands as a barrier against the deluge of destruction: If the UNDHR falls, so will all rules governing decency across borders. Mankind might be thrown back to the law of the jungle or a Darwinian struggle for survival.

This fear has never been completely realistic. Most people were able to behave decently to one another, at least most of the time, even before 1948. But it may be true that people in a world of modern communications and international dependence need certain moral rules surpassing the norms of their nations. Political and economic globalisation requires global norms. But these norms are not reflected in the present articles of the UNDHR.

A first principle for global norms adjusted to a world of ecological limits must concern limits to the human species with regard to procreation and consumption. It may be a matter of politics to choose between a large population within a politically regulated area and a low consumption per capita in that area, or a higher living standard combined with a lower number of consumers. But no political system wanting to maximise both can claim support from others when it faces an ecological crisis.

Some universal norms relative to the interhuman level could also be formulated. Even if most attempts to find a philosophical basis for a universal code of ethics have failed, it might still be possible to find certain indisputable principles for what must be regarded as universally *unethical*. Such a negative ethic can be based upon empirical knowledge about what will damage our common human nature (Singer, 1979; MacIntyre, 1981; Dupré, 1993). It might at least be possible to find rational arguments for limiting what one person may do to another, and still be regarded as a rational and moral person.

Philosophical research has made important progress in recent years, not least in regard to the understanding of rationality. Rationality has a communicative character, in addition to other qualities (Skirbekk, G., 1994). This means that no rational arguments for social authority can be based upon assumptions of other people as being merely non-communicative beings. The consistence of rational arguments makes it impossible to claim authority for defining other persons merely as social objects, such as commodities or slaves.

The precondition of rationality in all argumentation makes it possible to distinguish between what could be called a legitimate and an illegitimate form of political authority. This has implications for the kind of rule that may be sanctioned. Even if it may be impossible to say that one particular form of society, culture and morality should be universally valid for all people, it is possible to assert that all social order must accept *rationality* as part of their legitimisation. And since rationality is *communicative*, and in certain respects also critical, it becomes impossible to claim universal authority and at the same time defy a rational critique of this authority.

Global norms can never be so concrete as those norms specific to civilisations, which cannot be so concrete as those on a national level. Social norms on a local level and on a family level will certainly be both more constrained and more informal than strictly legal norms.

There are persons who desire more than this. Some wish for a revitalisation of some political ideology as a substitute for a detailed UNDHR. We should think twice before we accept these desires.

Falling Back upon Ideologies or Civilizations

What has been referred to as the communicative status of rationality has implications for the status of those political ideologies claiming universality. We have experienced several of them during the last century. In the end they have all had their immanent rules and tactics for invalidating reason and fundamental criticism which are necessary for vital corrections. The tragedy of genocide cannot be explained without taking into account the character of ideologies (Apel, 1973).

The party leaderships in so-called communist countries have used the Marxist postulate of priority of social existence over consciousness as an excuse for reducing political critique to a posture of class. Since these leaders regarded themselves as representatives of the most advanced class structure, opposition to their understanding could be interpreted as the superstructure of a less-advanced class structure. Rational critique of the system could in other words be dismissed as being historically reactionary.

National socialism used biological inheritance, or "blood", as a prime explanation of differences in political opinion. Since Nazi leaders regarded themselves as spokesmen of the purest and most advanced race, rational critiques of their policy were explained as an expression of polluted blood or of lower-race qualities.

Even branches of liberalism have used a pseudo-science as a tool for rendering critique harmless. Spokesmen of an older laissez-faire liberalism could perceive criticism of their system as merely envious expressions by people who had failed in the competitive market. Spokesmen of the newer liberalism have also used certain psychological arguments to denounce criticism of their ideology (Rummel, 1994, 1997). For them personality and opinion are psychologically perceived as a combined unity, and since they generally regard themselves as anti-authoritarian personalities with the correct democratic opinions, critique of liberal principles can be seen as mere expressions of authoritarian personalities (Skirbekk, S., 1976).

The last form of ideological denunciation of rational arguments has also been directed towards people who have criticised the liberal implications of the UNDHR. The preamble to the Declaration is an example of such ideological self-immunisation.

Instead of regarding a unified globalisation as the solution to challenges too great for the nation state, we should perhaps rather see an actualisation of the units of civilization as the most realistic in a foreseeable future. The work of Samuel Huntington on civilisational entities, each based upon different cultural premises in various forms of social life, could then be recognised as important. Huntington argues for the necessity of accepting civilisational

borders, and for a future peace among nations as dependent upon the relations between core states in each civilisation. He also pleads that it would be a false, immoral and dangerous assumption to argue for one civilisation as valid for all people (Huntington,1996: 310).

A respect for cultural differences on a civilisational level will also imply an acceptance of modernisation according to various projects. This kind of variation may be vital, not only for political peace in a near future, but also for the long-term survival of the human species.

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What Ought We To Do to Construct a Good Future?

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Introduction

Professor Sigurd N. Skirbekk's thoughtful paper deals with an issue that deserves greater attention by social scientists than it has received in recent decades. This is the question of how we can construct a good future. Contemporary sociologists, just as most other social

scientists, have limited their inquiries by their belief in the false dogma that moral propositions or value judgements themselves cannot be warranted or discredited by objective methods (Bell, 1997, vol. 2; Lee, 1985). Thus, they are often silent on the most basic questions of policy and social action, such as: What is a good society and how do we know? What behaviour or social arrangements lead to human well-being and freedom? What should people do in order to create and maintain thriving societies that meet the needs of all their members? Which human values (and sociocultural practices based on them) lead to good and long lives for individuals now and in the future, and which do not?

Human Rights in the Next Century

For example, Professor Skirbekk asks whether values in dominant cultures are adequate for the century to come and beyond. He describes the fairly general acceptance of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, after some debate, was reconfirmed in June 1993 at a World Conference on Human Rights meeting in Vienna. But he sees several coming challenges to it - the ecological, the demographic, and the moral. These challenges, he forecasts, eventually will result in declining respect for ethical norms as defined by the Declaration.

Professor Skirbekk, quite rightly, warns us about the threats to beliefs in human rights. Given the contemporary failures in many, if not most, countries to live up to some of the articles in the Declaration, there is certainly no cause for complacency even today, much less so as we face new challenges of the twenty-first century. Nothing that I say in this paper should be understood as detracting from my conviction that all of us who believe in "the inherent dignity" and the "inalienable rights of all members of the human family" have a duty to constantly bear witness to the level of human well-being and to work toward "freedom, justice and peace in the world."

Having said that, I believe that there are more optimistic outcomes for the UN Declaration than those foreseen by Professor Skirbekk, outcomes that strengthen our conviction that the Declaration is, in fact, a good guide for the future well-being of humanity. I'll confine myself to only a few points.

Human Rights and Sustainable Development

To begin, we can question Professor Skirbekk's view that there are necessary conflicts between the Declaration and sustainable development and population control. It would take too much space here to go through the Declaration article by article, but how, for example, do prohibiting slavery and proclaiming that everyone has rights such as equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, not to be arbitrarily deprived of his or her nationality, to marry a person of his or her own choosing, to take part in the government of his or her country, to rest and leisure, to an education, to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to take a few examples, necessarily conflict with sustainability?

Also, even those articles that deal with material aspects of life, that might bear on level of consumption for example, are not necessarily incompatible. Article 22 that deals with social

security and economic rights is explicitly limited by the "resources of each State," and Article 25 that deals with the right to a standard of living states that it ought to be "adequate" for health and well-being. Such "adequacy" hardly legitimates "unlimited production and consumption of goods," as Professor Skirbekk claims. Rather, "adequacy" is compatible with curbing wasteful consumption in economically developed societies and adopting values of frugality, saving, and sufficiency rather than seeking the excesses of great material wealth. In fact, some segments of the most developed societies may already be in transition to a "postaffluent" society (Gappert, 1979; Inglehart, 1990).

Additionally, many of the Declaration's articles, if implemented, are likely to support both environmentally friendly behaviour and further reductions in the birth rate. For example, Article 26 dealing with the right to an education, if widely fulfilled, would reduce ignorance and illiteracy, and could result in a significant change in attitudes towards the environment, considering that there are now more than a billion illiterate people worldwide.

Equally important is the achievement of true equality for women, because it would have beneficial effects not only for the women so liberated themselves, but also for the health and quality of life for their children and, possibly, for their husbands as well. For example, we know from the World Fertility Survey that some women in many less developed countries are now having more children than they want and that many do not wish to have any more children. Given freedom of choice and access to modern methods of birth control, such women would be able to achieve the lesser reproductive goals that they already hold.

Additionally, women, if liberated, would have more choices than they now have, including opportunities for pursuing life goals and careers other than motherhood and child care. This could reduce their fertility levels still further. Pursuing educations and occupations of their own choosing, more and more women would delay the age at which they get married, choose to have their first child at a later age, stay single or divorce their husbands more often, and aim to have totally fewer children in their lifetimes than they would under present conditions (Bell, 1997, vol. 2). There is no need to use coercive methods that trample human rights in order to reduce the rate of population growth. In any event, to use coercive methods is the wrong moral choice.

Trends

Professor Skirbekk reminds us of the dangers of relying too heavily on the projection of current trends into the future. But it is dangerous, too, to ignore them. Although the world's population is still growing, it is doing so at a decreasing rate of increase, even in many less developed countries such as Bangladesh. Recycling is increasing, and, in the case of paper, it may reach a global recovery rate of 46 per cent in 2010 (Brown et al., 1998: 144). The world market for pollution control technologies and other environmental goods and services now is larger than the global aerospace and arms industries (Brown et al., 1998: 150), and on Wall Street the money folk are learning that "companies that outperform their peers environmentally will also outperform them on the stock market" (*The New York Times*, 19 July 1998: Bu7).

Of all the very real problems that threaten the future of humankind - from global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer to resource depletion and pollution to food production and

water scarcity - none is currently so immediately urgent that it cannot be satisfactorily solved in the near future by global cooperation, by peaceful and democratic regulation, and by applying appropriate technology and management. IF, that is, we humans continue and intensify our efforts to create and implement effective solutions.

Rights, Duties and Future People

With respect to values, Professor Skirbekk says that it "is difficult to argue for moral duties in a supra-individual manner at the same time as individual freedom and rights are seen as prime values in dominant culture." He argues that what "may be felt as morally right on an individual level cannot form the premises for an adequate moral conduct on a macro level."

I have a quite different view. First, duties to society are included in the Declaration. This is explicitly so in Article 29 where it states that everyone "has duties to the community." But it goes beyond that. Every individual right in the Declaration also implies a duty. For example, if everyone "has a right to freedom of opinion and expression," then everyone also has a duty to uphold that right both for him- or herself and for others. Thus, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also contains an implied subtext of a Universal Declaration of Human Duties.

Second, the "everyone" who has such rights includes "all members of the human family" both now and in the future. Such rights are not only for people who were living in December 1948 when the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 217. Such rights apply also to you and me and to all members of the human family now in 1998. They also apply to all such members of the human family who will be living in the year 2000, or the year 2025, or the year 3000, that is, to all future members of the human family.

Thus, the Declaration obliges people now living to act responsibly so that future people can exercise and enjoy their human rights too. Present people, then, have an obligation to maintain the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth indefinitely into the future. For the ultimate violation of human rights is to deprive people of their lives -to destroy, for example, their air, their water, and their capacity to produce their food.

Third, some of the articles in the Declaration do deal to some extent with the macro-social. For example, they do so in articles dealing with duties to the community; participation in government; freedom of peaceful assembly; promotion of understanding, tolerance and friendship among other groups; and respect for the rights and freedoms of other people. Beyond that, the Declaration recognises that it does not contain all ethical principles, but, rather, is to be limited by "the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society."

Today, we know fairly well what those "requirements of morality" are, and we know also that they contain not only support for individual rights and freedom but also support for the norms that make organised social life possible. Moreover, more often than not the two are compatible, because individual freedom and security are served not by social chaos and anarchy but by social order and predictability (Edgerton, 1992).

Finally, I would like to call attention to the fact that the UN Declaration has been confirmed and deepened ethically through the work of the Parliament of World Religions (1993; Rung,

1991). Meeting in Chicago in September, 1993, more than 200 leaders representing more than 100 of the world's religious faiths signed a statement, "Towards a Global Ethic." It contains moral principles fully consistent with the UN Declaration.

Such moral principles, obviously, are not distinctively Islamic or Christian, Buddhist or Hindu, Asian or Western, African or Latin American. They are human values, reached, often independently, from a variety of different societal origins after millennia of human experience (Bell, 1997, vol. 2; Brown, 1991). Moreover, for the most part they pre-date the origins of the various religions themselves, having been selectively incorporated into religious doctrines from the surrounding, then-existing societies and cultures as such doctrines were being first formulated, just as were truth beliefs about the nature of the world (Meeks, 1993).

But, certainly, such principles are not a final summary of some ultimate global morality. They represent a current progress report, an invitation to improving them through critical discourse on a global level. Such discourse, based on reason and objective evidence, can contribute to understanding and agreement and, eventually, to the continued evolution of a global morality, a morality that necessarily incorporates a concern for the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth, now and indefinitely into the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can agree with Professor Skirbekk that we ought to remain open-minded about the utility for human well-being of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It ought to be considered problematic and it ought to remain under study, open to possible revision as the human condition may change.

Professor Skirbekk has carried out such a preliminary study. But many of his criticisms of the Declaration are debatable. It is not clear, for example, that there is any necessary incompatibility between human rights and sustainable development. In fact, quite the opposite may be the case, if the rights of future people are considered.

Also, duties to society are included in the Declaration, because every right in the Declaration contains an implied duty. Thus, there is a subtext to it that can be read as a "Declaration of Human Duties."

Most important, the Declaration applies to the human rights of future people as well as to people now living. Therefore, the Declaration obligates present people to act in ways that allow future people to enjoy their rights as well and not to act in ways that would deprive them of a life-sustaining environment.

And, finally, it is not at all clear that the good of the larger community is necessarily in conflict with individual freedom, first, because some individual freedoms (e.g., right to an education, equality of women) may lead to benefits for the human collectivity, and, second, because freedom itself is importantly dependent on the order and predictability, the personal security, and the cooperation provided by the larger community.

Thus, there are reasons to believe that, as it stands, the Declaration, at least for the present and near future, is a good guide for the well-being of the human community.

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Rejoinder to Wendell Bell

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Let me first thank Professor Bell for having presented a fully prepared paper as a comment on my presentation. Even if we certainly could agree on several of the

issues mentioned, there are others where we will appraise the challenges ahead in a different way.

I do agree that the UNDHR mentions individual duties to society and not only individual rights, I should perhaps have been more explicit on this point. Article 29 states that "Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible". In a next passage this Article specifies the kind of moral limitations the individual citizen should accept to "the exercise of his rights and freedom": "Everyone shall be subject to only such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedom of others and of meeting the just requirement of morality, public order and general welfare in a democratic society."

This Article thus defines the recognition of freedom for other people and for public order, morality and welfare as the sole legitimate limitations to individual freedom. Such a definition may suit a liberal philosophy, but it is not sufficient for sustaining our natural means of recourse. I am afraid this liberal ideology will in the next century prove to be as unreasonable and inadequate as other ideologies have proved to be in this century.

I do not believe that most of the articles in the UNDHR will necessarily conflict with this sustainability. But there are certain others that do, or that might easily be interpreted by groups and governments in such a way that adjustment to living conditions within viable ecological frames will become very difficult: Article 3 and Article 25 are formulated in such an anthropocentric way, and phrased in such a strong language that serious ecological limitations to the proclaimed rights can easily be disregarded, or interpreted as politically suspicious.

Article 22 certainly states that the rights of the individual should be "in accordance with the organization and resources of each State". But these resources are not described as long-term considerations for the material resources a state can offer. The unsaid assumption seems to have been that these resources will increase forever, and that each generation is therefore entitled to take out for itself what is available in its lifetime. If ecological considerations had been in the mind of the politicians of 1948, they would certainly have said so.

It is true that Article 26 declares a right to education, and that a reduction of ignorance and illiteracy can be expected to lead to a certain change in the number of children wanted by women in many countries. However, we have not observed an end to population growth as an automatic consequence of higher education or, for that matter, as a consequence of a higher standard of living — contrary to predictions of the so-called "law of demographic transition". A higher standard of living per capita, which is also an expected consequence of more education, should, from an ecological point of view, preferably have led to a reduction of the total population. The overall picture varies from one country to another. But generally

speaking, reduction has not taken place to a degree that could balance the long-term consumption volume in different parts of the world, that is the product of consumption per capita times number of capita. On the other hand, traditional poverty combined with education is not a solution. One explanation for why families in more wealthier states "choose" to have fewer children, is that higher wages and a better welfare service have become a functional alternative to children as a working force and old age security. But welfare services require public taxes and a certain level of productivity.

It seems a very Western or Eurocentric way of looking at universal rationality to assume that all other people will follow our pattern of a decreasing population, when given education and technical means for such a reduction. This results in a disregard for the value preferences inherent in different cultural and civilisational traditions around the world, even if a certain decline in reproduction patterns can be expected everywhere.

Technology can certainly solve many problems, but it is hard to imagine how technology alone could solve the ecological problems created by technology. The hope for technological solutions is typical of what I have described as phase one.

Professor Bell indicates that it is immoral to open for forms of population control other than those that can be based upon individual voluntary decisions. And maybe it is. The problem is that we have few realistic alternatives in a foreseeable future that are easily defensible from a moral point of view. Abstaining from interference with other peoples' choices, which may give us a good conscience, may be an alternative that leaves the next generation with even harder alternatives to choose between. We are in fact facing moral dilemmas in choosing between different forms of immorality, we do not face a simple choice between good and bad.

The following question must be asked: Will the humanistic intentions of politicians in our generation create the best guarantees for peaceful living conditions in the generations to come, or should we rather regard the whole idea of a liberal and humanistic world to be dependent upon conditions which can hardly be maintained by liberal means alone?

This very issue was discussed at an international ISFIT-student conference in Trondheim, Norway in 1994. The introductory discussants at that event were the leaders of the Cairo population conference the same year, Dr. Nafis Sadek and myself. We both saw problems in the population development on a world scale. But, whereas Nafis Sadek limited herself to prescribe gentler measures, such as economic aid, education and women's rights, I had the role of advocating measures that would run counter to the UN principles. I saw more hope in a Chinese than in a Pakistani population policy. Interestingly enough, in the debate that followed all the Scandinavian participants supported Nafis Sadek, while I was supported by the Pakistani delegation.

Vitae

Sigurd N. Skirbekk is professor of Sociology at the University of Oslo, where he has been Chairman of the institute. He has written in the field of cultural theory, about Human Rights and about the inadequacy of contemporary ideologies facing future challenges, including the book *Psychoanalysis and Self-Understanding. A Critique of Naturalistic Interpretation of Man*. Duquesne University Press 1976.

Wendell Bell is professor Emeritus of Sociology at Yale University, where he also served as Chairman of the department. Among his publications are *Sociology of the Future. Theory, Cases and Annotated Bibliography*, together with James Wau, Sage Foundation 1971 and *Foundations of Future Studies* published 1997 by Transaction Publishers. He is member of the World Future Society and the World Future Studies Federation.