A Code of Honor for World Order Activists

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Richard A. Falk:
A code of honor for world order activists has five major parts. To give an ideological clue as to the nature of this code I would adopt a motto that comes from the Talmud: “Love work, hate lordship, and seek no intimacy with the ruling powers.”

First, the world order activist must totally lack humility. Those who would remake the world must be clear about this mission and its magnitude, yet be unimpressed either by their ignorance as to how to accomplish it or by their present powerlessness to bring their vision into being. Secondly, the world order activist must reject realism as the basis for action. It is essential that those of us committed to eliminating war reject what sensible men who plan arms races and wage wars and run states define as “realism.” The realist has no capacity to envision the kinds of major changes by peaceful means that are both possible and essential. The realist regards the nation-state system with its propensity for war and its increasing tendency towards repression as inevitable. He accepts and tolerates poverty and misery as immutable aspects of the human condition. The world order anti-realist, in contrast, regards these self-styled realists as crackpot realists who seek primarily to pacify the passengers of a sinking vessel of state. World order realists believe that political and behavioral mutations are possible and necessary, that we must work to embody them in history, and that the utopians of yesterday and today are the realists of tomorrow.

A perfect example of the kind of “realism” I would like to eliminate appeared two years ago in newspapers across the nation as a full-page advertisement for Johnny Walker Black Label Scotch, to celebrate the occasion when the Dow Jones passed one thousand. The headline, “Dow Jones: 1,000” appeared in large type at the top of the page. The message said: “Here’s to all of you who had the guts to stay in.” It is taken as the prototype of realism to hold onto a bad thing as long as possible. I didn’t see any Black Label advertisements when the Dow Jones plummeted to nearly 600.

My third precept is that the world order activist must cultivate and display a sense of humor on a cosmic scale, for to be in a world order movement at the present time is to join in a conspiracy of midgets against the ruling giants. Midgets can become relegated to the status of dwarfs unless they have a sense of humor. Power is almost all on the other side. Only the force of history works on behalf of the midgets. And in this sense, this precept connects closely with the banishment of humility from the movement. As a fourth precept, the world order activist must welcome contradictions. All great movements of the spirit must be responsive to the contradictions active in every sphere of human experience. It is, again, only the crackpot realists who are rationalists, behaviorists, who trust overly much in the common sense of flat-world wisdom. The world order movement requires dialectical thinkers who understand that the nation-state system is sinking into historical oblivion because it can’t solve the problems of the present and yet at the same time understand that state sovereignty has never been stronger nor has ever operated, in some respects, as a more positive instrument of reform within the world system.

In this sense statism destroys values that constitute the basis of a movement toward world order, and yet it also remains the main engine for realizing these values. This duality is caused by the intertwining of two elements. The first is the need to transform the state system to render it capable of dealing with the planet as a whole and, second, the need to eliminate the distortions within the state system so that the transformation does not assume diabolical form.

The fifth obligatory precept is that the world order activist must find peace and justice more erotically satisfying than the pursuit of power. Henry Kissinger, my favorite anti-hero, personifies the ethic of realism and is a virtual when it comes to power politics. He is the captain, so to speak, of the S.S. Titanic and he has said, rather somewhat, I think, that power is the ultimate aphrodisiac and although Mr. Kissinger’s credibility is not much greater than that of his former chief, nevertheless I tend to believe that he thinks this is true. I would say, in contrast, that for a world order movement to succeed it must come to regard peace and justice for human society as the ultimate aphrodisiac.

I think that Teilhard de Chardin, the great Jesuit scientist and visionary, thought of the institution of celibacy in relation to the capacity of spiritual pursuits to accomplish an exchange of love objects. And I think that the kind of political mutation that is called for today requires nothing less than the growth of a kind of essentially religious sentiment, in the deepest sense of evolving a new aphrodisiac for its faithful that is radically different from the sort of excitement that animates the anti-heroes of this world.

I’m afraid it’s not enough to simply adopt this code of honor. Three other required substantive elements are needed:

(1) An understanding of what is fundamentally wrong with the nation-state system as the basis for organizing the world.
(2) An understanding of the alternatives to the nation-state system—both the positive and the negative.

(3) An understanding of how one goes from the inadequacies of the present nation-state system toward the more preferred world of the future.

I think the probable world of the future involves drastic global reform—but reform of a negative, indeed of a diabolical, variety. The whole challenge to a world order movement is to convert the probable world of the future into a preferred world of the future.

What steps must we take to move from where we are to where we would like to be? The first is the serious organization of a grass roots world order social movement in as many parts of the globe as possible, organized around the moral vision of what a desirable and possible future can be, and rooted in a critical awareness that governments as now constituted cannot accomplish that transition.

The second, equally important step is to revive disarmament as a serious subject of political discussion and stop being pacified by the kinds of arms control measures that currently emanate from the centers of power. It is only by contrasting what true disarmament would mean with what the Vladivostok agreement does mean that we will begin to comprehend the gap between what we have and what we need to get and the kind of leadership we need in order to get us there.

Saul Mendlovitz:
I take quite seriously Falk's injunction that we probably don't need ideas, that we need converts. I would like to suggest that the way to begin thinking realistically about world order activist steps is to prepare a set of standards we want to reach in, let's say, a two-decade period, and then to try to develop a transition process for getting there. Start with the war system. The present war system—if you take 1962 as a base line and come down to 1974—is now spending well over $200 billion a year. In 1975 it will be about $240 billion (in 1972 dollars). For simplicity's sake, I want to argue that we should think of ourselves in a peace system where we have cut the military budget of the globe to $20 billion a year, and where the direct cost of loss of lives due to large-scale organized violence is down to 10,000 per year.

I state this in numbers because I find that in the discussion of war-peace systems we frequently talk past one another, because one person's conception of what we mean by war and peace is so entirely different from another's that we do not bother to put down a behavioral statement of what it is we want. Numbers themselves are not a behavioral statement, but they are a way of beginning to produce the kind of discussion that is necessary if we are going to move toward some way of knowing whether we're meeting with success or failure. So I would argue that we want to cut back that budget by eighty to ninety per cent on a global level, and that we want to cut down the number of deaths by the same percentage.

Further, if we are going to move from the war system to the peace system, I would argue that we have to move from a military system to a police system. If you expect the nations of the globe to disarm, then you had better provide for a security system—some minimal security system—and you had best look for the kind of police system that will at least insure some kind of tranquility across national boundaries. And, I would add, some form of humanitarian intervention when large-scale organized violence takes place (as in Biafra, the Congo, Bangladesh, and other areas).

If one is going to be serious about system transformation, it is important to think of ourselves as dealing with four kinds of rules in selecting any kind of project or political movement we go into. First, we should select a project which is for the benefit of humankind, however you operationalize that. It should not be for the benefit of your local sector, your local community; it should be for the benefit of humankind.

In suggesting the plans for the benefit of humanity I do not intend thereby to diminish or denigrate efforts at the "local level." (To begin with, I am not certain what the term local means once you know the globe is a new community, but let me not get into that issue now.) Quite the contrary, I believe very strongly that if we were to mobilize a genuine political and economic reform of the U.S. society so that the 20 million people who are below the poverty level would be given adequate levels of material resources it could have an enormously beneficial effect on the global movement for a just world order. The watch is that it need not. It is easily conceivable that we would redistribute wealth and power in our own society and still not do very much on the global level. My sense of the empirical reality is, however, that a genuine movement to eliminate poverty in this society would infuse our own political visions and social imagination. Furthermore, if we did inform our own efforts on the local level in terms of a global vision, then I believe it would have ramifications for the linkage between local and global concerns that would provide for the kind of restructuring we need to bring about something approximating a just world order.

In thinking about projects, one should think in terms of system change rather than system reform. I would argue that you should select projects which are in the range of two to ten per cent of feasibility. There is no sense in getting involved in a project having to do with reform that has a ninety per cent chance of being accomplished, because it is unlikely to change the system, because it is likely to be ameliorative, and it is likely, therefore, to reinforce the present system of wealth and power.

If we really want to do something about the present crisis, then we must select programs which have a one in fifty chance, because those are the only ones that are likely to change the system at all. We must have the courage of non-reality and select areas where, if we could make a dent, it would be a big dent — areas where the inefficiency, the incapacity, the unwillingness of the present nation-state are dramatically revealed. It is most important to indicate the incapacity, the unwillingness, and the non-desire of present national elite structures throughout the world to deal with global problems in a coordinated, comprehensive way.