

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars, and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education, and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action. Okay, hello. So welcome again to our Earth Charter podcast.

Today we have the honor and the pleasure of having a conversation with Ron Engel. Ron Engel was involved in the drafting process of the Earth Charter back in the 90s. He very much involved also in the IUCN Ethics Working Group. Professor Engel is Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics. So thank you, Ron, for joining us today.

Good to be talking to you, Mirian.

So Ron, let me start with the first question here. If you can share with us, you have been in the study of ethics for so many years. Would you share with us why did you get interested in the study of ethics? Why, how, and when?

Okay, that's a long, long story. Let me just maybe try to give you the arc of my life, which extends over a number of decades now. I was born in the 1930s, came of age in the post-World War II period in the United States. And I think my first serious encounter with ethics came in the civics classes that we had in high school. In the United States, following the Second World War, there was a period before the Cold War when the aspirations for founding ethically serious and significant democratic societies was a major concern, certainly in education and also in civil society and really in the political parties generally.

So our civics classes, this was at the time of the founding of the United Nations. This was we had UN clubs in our high school, and we captured or introduced, I mean, it's remarkable, that's probably not true anymore. What captured our imaginations and our commitment really was the hope or possibility of personal citizens assuming the role of citizens who were seriously concerned about building a democratic society that had freedom, equality, and solidarity at its heart. The three great, of course, flags of democratic life, red, white, and blue, that came out of the enlightenment, out of the various democratic revolutions across the world.

It was many centuries. But it was a very idealistic, very committed, and our teachers were at that time, many of them returning veterans from the war who had a new appreciation for what they were trying to fight for in the Second World War, and of course, the terrible experience of fascism and so on in that period.

What an incredible time to be in primary school, in school in the US, with so much hope of building not only the US, but the whole world in a new order after the World War II, in the beginning of the UN. So you're receiving your civics class better than.

Yes, that's you got it exactly right. And so we had a lot of practice in school, through student government and preparation of citizenship. We did studies of our community. And anyhow, I could go on quite a bit about that. I found confirmation of that within the liberal Protestant community that I joined in my teens, which is the Unitarian Universalist

Church, which is a very progressive or liberal Protestant community. And they, you know, the leaders of that particular community, which I identified with for many years, were of that, also of that mind.

So that was the beginning. And then, however, as the 1950s progressed and we moved into the 60s, we discovered that these values that we had been taught were not necessarily being carried out in the society at large, particularly around matters, for example, of race.

So seeing this inconsistency between what you thought and what you saw in reality, that's part of your interest.

Yeah, and I'll have to tell you a variant that's perfect because I had a very personal experience as a young teenager. I was asked to speak before the Parent Teachers Association of the School.

And I felt 1954 and I gave a little talk about how the high school needed to be racially integrated. And immediately the principal of the school who was sitting in the audience popped up like a chicken of the public and turned to his, the parents who were sitting there and said, I want you to know that this is not the policy of this school, what Ronnie Engel has just said. Amazing, yeah. 1954 and where in the US? In Northern Baltimore, the inner suburbs are just at that point. Baltimore, like other American cities, of course, was expanding with the post-war, World War II economic boom.

And we lived in a little row house in, you know, probably lower middle class, my family, I won't go back and all that. But there was, you know, I also had strong family support for these strong democratic aspirations. And we discovered, you know, we discovered in our innocence that this was not necessarily at all the actual belief of many of our neighbors. And at the same time, I've got to say that we had been exposed to, you know, the atomic bombing of Japan and people in our world who were very prominent, Einstein, Albert Schweitzer.

These were people that we read about and lived. And the despair over the nuclear buildup between the Soviet Union and the United States and Europe was very much of a moment. And we realized then that peace was not so easily won, given obviously what was happening and what had happened. And that the United States was responsible for the use of atomic weapons, which we deployed. And then the environment. So we had justice, democratic aspirations for social justice, the world, the Cold War, and what that meant about any possibilities for international peace.

And then we had the environment coming on. And as a very young kid, when our community was first built, I mean, this is a story repeated over and over again. We were on the edge of the city, adjacent to beautiful countryside. We had relatives who had farms, small farms, were self-sufficient. You know, it was just a Maryland, the state of Maryland was a beautiful place. And but we experienced with the post-World War II economic boom and the growth in population and consumerism and the automobile and so on, that this environment was destroyed.

Yes. So the whole context in which you were living after the war, the beginning of the UN, the racial discrimination in the US, all of that helped to spark your interest to this challenge and issues. So let me say one thing, Ron. You have been involved so much in the study of ethics for most of your life. However, many people perceive ethics as something that's too abstract, not practical, not useful. And these are the kind of people that stress the importance of that we should all be focused on action.

So I see ethics as an instrument of social transformation. And I would like to ask if you could share with us what you think of that and maybe to start by saying what is ethics and why that is important.

Wow. That's a large subject, of course. Let me just say before we leave the other background that ethics, of course, came immediately in my reaction to racial injustice, to nuclear war, the possibility of use of war, and to the environmental desecration and deterioration of nature in our immediate world.

But also we were hearing more and more about what was happening around the rest of the world as well. So I've always been a, Marian, an advocate for the position that we learn a lot about what is, we hope to be, the right ethics in reaction to what we see as the wrong actions. In other words, you, a child, I think, learns justice almost immediately because children have a way of spotting unfairness, if you've noticed, in your own children. They also can be moaned the hurt of an animal. I remember my father telling me, like Schweitzer, actually, another very interesting experience.

He didn't realize it was Schweitzer's experience. But when he shot with a slingshot, a little bird and killed it and it fell down at his feet, he then had a whole new appreciation for why you should not do that. Because he saw the consequences of immorality or, you know, of unethical appreciation of nature. And that certainly many, obviously we know many, many, many stories of veterans that came back from war that were gun-ho to go out and fight. And once they actually killed somebody, they began to worry about, very seriously, about what it meant to engage in military action.

So the energy, a lot of the energy for what is the good and the true and the right comes from our experiences of seeing it negated. And clearly with the George Floyd situation, which has just occurred as you and I, just a few weeks before you and I recording this, that's an incredible example. We're clearly on video with somebody being badly, badly treated and really murdered. And the outrage across our country and even across the world was Kindle. So we, I think we, it's both, Emmanuel Kant said that ethics is both a carrot as well as a stick.

You need the ideals and you come to those ideals in many ways out of your, they, out of your experience. And then also you need the kick of seeing how they are denied. So the real, the real struggle is morality versus immorality. And the various, I think to a large degree myself, the various kinds of statements that we have such a relativistic world are really misplaced. I find that very largely across human history and that there's wide agreement on the fundamental elements of what consists of what is involved in justice.

There certainly is wide agreement on the aspirations for peace, for security. And there's wide agreement on the increasingly and at various stages in our history, maybe even more in the 1800s than right then later. I mean, these, these things come in and out of the social history of our world. Wide agreement on the need for respecting and caring for the environment. So now with regard to ethics, and let me just say this, this quickly, because this is really kind of the pattern in which I, I worked and which I came to gradually in my years of teaching and research and writing and so on.

Ethics is usually divided between principles of the right of justice, of distribution of the goods of the world, so that each person gets his or her proper due or treatment, fairness, principles of equality is fundamental in that regard. And rights, the whole tradition of human rights comes out of the understanding of ethics as primarily a matter of justice. On the other side, much as the, as least as much ethical thought and experience has been based upon what is good. What is the good life? What are the qualities of the good life?

What are the virtues that we should be practicing or can practice? Care, compassion, concern for the well-being of others, honesty, integrity. That's, you know, it's often called virtue ethics, but it's finally based upon our experiences of what is good in our life. One, I have added another leg to that stool, which is covenant. And gradually over my years of teaching, which were both within the fields of philosophical ethics as well as religious ethics, I came to an appreciation of the importance of covenant to bring those two together into an integrated approach.

What do you mean by covenant in this sense?

Covenant, let me see, the best, the best model that you could use, maybe for many people, maybe not adequately for others, but let me just try, is the marriage vows that are traditionally exchanged. I know they're not the same around the world, of course, but nonetheless, a good number of the families that are founded in the world still participate in some kind of marriage covenant in which each party makes a vow to the other that he and she will support, care for, love, and be faithful to that person in sickness and in health.

And as the classical covenant that my wife and I made in our marriage said, until death do us part. It's an ultimate commitment, and it's not a contract. A contract is a quid pro quo. You don't go into the marriage ceremony and say, look, if you do the dishes, I'll sweep the floor, or you do this and I'll do that. And if you don't do it, then the whole thing is over. I, as a minister, actually, had that vocation as well as a professor. I have led a number of marriage ceremonies, and a couple of couples have had that idea of their marriage, and I've had to disabuse them, but that's been a hold of very long at all.

A marriage contract is not going to last very long because sooner or later, one of the others is not going to do exactly what he or she said they were going to do. And it has to be based on much deeper than that.

So how do you see a covenant with regards to ethics?

Okay. So the covenant is made unilateral. That is, again, it's not a quid pro quo. I don't make my covenant with you depending upon you make it to me. We make it in the

presence of each other. I pledge my faithfulness to you, care for you, concern for you, affirmation of your intrinsic value, your dignity.

And in order to, for us, I then outlaw the ethical content of what that covenant will be, and it will consist of a certain understanding, of course, of justice, of my concern that you receive equal benefits of our marriage together. And you are free as a person. This is a democratic marriage, I'm talking about. You are free as I am free. And a great deal of our marriage will be dedicated to sharing with one another, speaking freely and dialogue about our situation. And then there are the virtues.

In other words, covenant then, and the virtues have to do with care and honesty and faithfulness to the other person. So the covenant brings together both the ethical ideas of justice and the ethical ideas of what is good and what is virtuous. And they're founded finally in the experience of goodness, love, that the couple experienced when they first fell in love, who decided finally to make a marriage cover. Now, on that basis, I would say, and that has been used, that's very deeply embedded within the Christian and the Judean traditions, but it also is present in Confucianism and other faiths.

I think you just mentioned about IUCN, the International Union of Conservation of Nature. You were quite involved in the caring for Earth document. I understand that you played a leading role in the adoption of a world ethic for living sustainably, which was then the foundation of the Second World Conservation Strategy called caring for the Earth, which was released in 1990. Can you share with us some highlights of that process? What did that mean in the actual content of caring for Earth? Because we are so involved in that process back in the 30s.

Yes, yes, yes. Well, those were some of the best years of my life, Mirian. And that's how I met Brendan Mackey, who's been such a significant supporter of the charter, a member of the draft committee. And it's how I met Stephen Robbicoe, actually, who came to be the chair of the draft committee. There's a lot that goes into that. Let me just say in 1984, I had a sabbatical. I had just finished a book on one of the major environmental and social struggles in the United States, which took place outside Chicago, and a long century-long struggle for the preservation of an area which would be a commons for all the people in Chicago.

And I've had racial and many other implications, but it also was the center for the science of ecology in the United States. So it was a very important period. And I worked several years on that book, published it in 1983. And then I said, what in the world is going on in the rest of the world? And I was led to UNESCO, which, like you, I so profoundly value UNESCO. And for a year, I was given a sabbatical, and I attached myself as a consultant to UNESCO on their biosphere reserve program and their World Heritage sites around the world.

And my wife, for the first time, we had a chance to travel in different parts of the world and to meet many of the people that were working with UNESCO, including a good deal of time in Africa. And when I came back and reported back to UNESCO, one of the leaders there, Michel Bates, said, Ron, you ought to go to IUCN. I had never heard of IUCN, believe me. This was a whole new world, and they gave me directions because we

were heading down to Switzerland anyhow. And so one day, I knocked on the door of IUCN's headquarters.

For your audience, the World Conservation Union is an incredible organization, very similar to the international labor organization. It consists of government and civil society members. So it's a center for dialogue and for policymaking that includes both governments and civil society, just built right into the whole thing. And they've taken leadership for international conservation issues, and they go back many years doing that. So I arrived. We arrived in Glam, knocked on the door, and announced ourselves.

I found myself in conversation with Kenton Miller, who was at that time the director general and Jeff MacLeod, who was the chief scientist, both of whom were Americans. And in fact, Kenton Miller grew up in Chicago and learned his ecology in the Indiana dunes that I just finished this book on. So we hit it off very quickly. And then he learned that I was studying and teaching ethics, and he said, well, ethics is becoming a major factor in our organization now. This was 1980.

Look at this. 1984?

Yes. Well, the first essay ever published on environmental ethics in any academic journal, English-speaking journal certainly, was 1976. So you can see how new this stuff was, how new it was. And I was beginning to write essays on environmental ethics. This was a whole new field. And people couldn't understand it. Ron, you were fighting for racial justice. Now you're talking about the environment. Aren't you kind of just leaving behind the real issue and going off into this nature thing? And of course, as you know, Mirian, we had to point out and learn ourselves how deeply interdependent social justice, environmental, ecological integrity, and world peace are.

They're just matters. They are so interdependent in each way. And I find one of the most powerful aspects of the Earth Charter is precisely that. It integrates these great different major sessions as sides of our global problem, at any rate, I went to IUCN and was invited to come to the Madrid General Assembly in 1984 and address the assembly on ethics. They had never had anyone do that. So I did. I prepared very hard for it. And I gave a speech on the centrality of ethics to the work of the World Conservation Union.

And I've just got to say, it wasn't my particular rhetoric. It was in the spirit of the times. I was overwhelmed after that speech with people volunteering to come together and create some kind of an ethics working group that would do that.

And that was the beginning of the idea of the IUCN World Conservation Strategy.

Precisely. Well, the first strategy, the World Conservation Strategy, which the kind of thing that IUCN does, these major policy statements, as you know, was 1980. Robert Prescott Allen wrote a, and he inserted in that just a couple sentences about the need for a new ethics if the World Conservation Strategy was going to mean anything.

And then remember, the World Charter for Nature was brought to the UN by IUCN, by the Legal of the Mall Commission, and passed by the General Assembly or adopted by

the General Assembly of the United Nations about what, 1983? So this was a very yeasty period right now. And there was only one upstate, one vote no, which was the United States. Already we had a sign of how the United States was beginning to retreat from its international responsibilities and leadership. But nonetheless, here in Madrid were these, you know, and then the ethics working group, they appointed me chair of this working group, and we began to work on the ethics that would in fact inform IUCN.

That was our task. And we had the chairs of each of the commissions, was members of the working group. I held workshops in the United States and in several other countries abroad. And we had a similar thing to the drafting of the Earth Charter. It was a preliminary run through in many ways, and many of the people that were involved became then active in the Earth Charter movement. And in the course of that, that's when I met Steven Rockefeller, and we had a conference at Middlebury College where he was teaching on caring for the Earth.

Now realize the primary principle that overarches the entire Earth Charter, respect and care for the community of life, was first articulated as the first principle of caring for the Earth. So the carryover was direct.

So the Earth Charter certainly builds on caring for the Earth.

Yes, exactly. It expands it tremendously, but nonetheless, the platform was prepared. I don't think any other document provides as extensive a platform for the Earth Charter that we finally drafted as caring for the Earth. And Steven and I were very close colleagues and became very close in that process.

And we formed in many ways the nucleus for the drafting committee in that process. And IUCN then became a partner. And as you and I experienced, we had this marvelous opportunity of partnership with the Commission on Environmental Law within IUCN who had drafted a draft covenant using covenant now in the more narrow legal sense, which would accompany the Earth Charter or also originally they wanted it to accompany caring for the Earth. And just like the US Constitution followed the Declaration of Independence.

So you had this ethical covenant, and then you have the legal covenant, which takes some of the ethical, the meat of the ethical principles in the ethical covenant and translates it into law, either national or international law.

You moved from the caring for the Earth process in IUCN right into the Earth Charter drafting process, more or less. So you served as a core member of the International Drafting Committee for the Earth Charter. Do you remember this drafting process? Do you remember any specific principle in the Earth Charter while it was drafted? And if you can share a story of a specific principle of the Earth Charter while it was being drafted and how that evolved and thinking around it?

I can and I would love to and I'd love to have you and I just take that text and go over it because that was such a gift for us. I'm sure you agree to be members of that group. Sure. I

was on the telephone with you where I'm sure that Steven sometimes two or three, four days, times a week.

And yeah, I've often thought of that. There's many. Let me just mention a couple. By the way, in the Earth Charter, with regard to the Covenant approach, when you say that the protection of Earth's vitality, diversity and beauty is a sacred trust, that is very much out of the Covenant tradition of efforts. This is something that we are that life is a gift which we are entrusted with. And that's what covenants do. Trust one another with our lives and our future. And that so I it's even though we were not using the language of Covenant as prominently in that period when we were drafting it, nonetheless, in looking back at it, I realized that I was becoming increasingly and we were also increasingly affirming that kind of an approach.

But there was, oh gosh, if you look at the one of the most debated points was this point of intrinsic value if you recur. Right there, respect life, I'm respecting care for the community of life. There it is, overarching first, the major primary ethical principles of the Earth Charter laid out in part number one. And then the first part under that is respect Earth and life and all its diversity and recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

Now in part that's the dead end to the World Charter for nature, which uses that language regardless of its worth to human beings. But intrinsic value was something that many of us wanted to affirm. It was a major topic of an environmental ethical debate.

And what does the intrinsic value mean?

It means that the that the everything has in some sense an autonomy and experience for itself, that it isn't simply an object. It's what, you know, Thomas Berry calls a communion of subjectivities of subjects, not of objects, that the world, even at the most primitive level, every plant, every animal, every sentient animal, but not only sentient animals, they have a life which is in some degree free and purposeful.

They have a they have as indigenous people often said they have a soul, a tree has a soul. And it is therefore it's a vow. Martin Buber spoke, of course, of the eye-vow relationship between humans. And someone asked him at some point, well, do I have a vow relationship to a tree? And he said, yes, of course. If I address that tree as a being that is both separate from me, but also clearly related to me, and yet and I honor it for its integrity, or its, its incredible capacity, its vitality, its beauty, it's got intrinsic value. It's not only the value that I might attribute to it because of some use I want to put it to chop it up for firewood or whatever. It is, in fact, like another human person.

It's a beautiful example. But what then would be the difference between intrinsic value and the way it's articulated in principle one A?

Well, that's the problem. That's the issue. We have a debate back and forth. And if you recall, we were in communication with the Dalai Lama constantly because the Buddhist leadership, the leadership he gave not only for world ethics, but for the Buddhist community

was incredibly significant as we try to do this double thing of reaching as great consensus as we can, but it is still at the same time standing for something.

And, you know, we have a vision. It's not just any vision. It's not just whatever people happen to vote. It's a vision of what we believe is true and beautiful and ethically right. So the Dalai Lama reported, I remember the telephone call coming in from Steven one night and he said, we can't use intrinsic value in some of the earlier drafts. We had it. And I said, oh dear. And he said, yes, the Dalai Lama call.

And he said that some of his scholars said that would not be affirmed by Buddhist philosophy. Now you and I, at least I cannot enter into the debate of what is appropriate or inappropriate Buddhist philosophy. But in fact, we got a veto on intrinsic value. So we went back and forth for a good hour trying to decide what to do. And Mirian, at some point I said, Steven, let's just say value.

Let's just say value. And I remember Steven say, my God, yes, that's what I'll be. And that's what it was.

Because then I think that the key message that the principle one A wants to address the concept is there. It didn't lose anything in fact. And I think that what we need to look at with this specific example is the importance of dialogue and listening and saying, okay, what do we want to say with this concept and finding the right words, but words that will not put off groups or people, but words that were carefully chosen to really invite various groups to feel part of this rather than feel, okay, I'm off because I cannot relate to these or that word.

The only, yes, the only qualification I'd make to what you just said, I certainly agree with. And let's get to that last dialogue point. Um, is that, uh, however, that often for the sake of consensus, we concede the substance and we were not ready in writing the earth charter, right, to concede that every form of life has value. That was the position we took. And there were many, many people ready to argue and say, no, no, that tree doesn't have any value except what I put on it. That's in fact the dominant position. I'm sure even today for most America.

And actually it's something that is very, very much in need for us to help, help say, amplify human thinking that it has value regardless of how I see this or how.

Precisely. The value that I give to that. It meant we take a position, um, a strong position of affirmation of the value of everything, but we didn't insist on a precise articulation of that that would in any way, uh, stand in the way of, you know, very dedicated people like the Dalai Lama, uh, joining it and that, yeah, but at the same time we didn't say, well, not going to, we're not going to talk about, uh, the value at all because there's a lot of people who don't think it has it at all.

We really, you know, we had a vision and, uh, we stuck with it. Another thing that, uh, of course, another example, everything on democracy. I had my hand in one way or another because, uh, democracy and the democratic faith was something that Stephen and I shared very deeply. And, uh, so build democratic societies that are just participatory,

sustainable and peaceful was worked out over a period of time to be sure to, uh, anyhow, there's so, so many, but let me just add one. I remember, uh, that, uh, and I think it's, it seems like a small matter because it's one little word, but nonetheless it is absolutely fundamental and I, uh, was so pleased when, uh, the committee was willing to accept it.

If you look down into the principles, uh, democracy, nonviolence and peace, part four, uh, principle 13, strengthen democratic institutions at all levels. Democracy is through this entire document and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making and access to justice. And then you go over to little C, sub principle C, protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association and dissent.

Descent.

This stands behind the Hong Kong protesters right now. And I added that word dissent.

And I think without the freedom of dissent, you just don't have a, uh, you certainly don't have a democratic society. You have opened the doors to authoritarianism.

And probably many groups or, or groups, uh, you know, you know, you have, you know, groups or governments, uh, would find a little difficult even to work with these, uh, words nowadays, like to ensure the freedom of dissent, uh, to some certain groups.

Yes. Look, this has made the earth charter a pretty, pretty strong statement over against what has been a worldwide, almost movement toward increasingly authoritarian governance, whether they're the left or the right or the populist or whatever you want to call them.

Uh, that, that is a reflection of the seriousness of the crisis we're in. And you certainly cannot have science, serious science without dissent. Science is built on dissent.

So you, you can't have political freedom without dissent. You can't have ethics without dissent.

So that, that wording was easy to be crafted, uh, principle 13 and 13 C.

Oh, we worked on it, if you recall.

It was, uh, actually I was given the responsibility for crafting the first draft of the way forward, the final, uh, part. And, um, I would say there that, uh, and this maybe will take us into the, uh, if you want to talk a little bit about the book that's just been published, um, the, uh, into the importance of dialogue, which you have so well stated, we really made a very radical statement when I look back at it here, the beginning of the way forward as never before in history, as never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning.

This is a, again, uh, running it through my covenantal perspective. Covenants do that. Covenants are made. Um, and then, you know, for many, many years, the modern world has been committed to a covenant of growth and economic, uh, quantity, not necessarily

in quality, but quantity. And it's been committed, certainly the major covenants of many countries, certainly in the United States has been a strong military that can dominate the world.

These are wrong covenants. These are covenants with the Old Testament prophets used to call the Hebrew prophets, called covenants with death. So you have to be struggling for the life giving covenants, the faithful covenants to life. I've used that terminology a lot in my speaking and writing, uh, trying to be faithful to the journey, the evolution of life and to those many, many millions of people that have given their lives that will, uh, for the sake of a greater and more beautiful and just world.

Um, and then we say here, 2000, we're now going to have even a greater start again than marked any of the great epics of the past.

That's really hard to, we need to really have a Miriam a conference on that because what we were saying, as you know, quite effectively was we were now gonna situate the whole struggle for justice and peace now within the environmental struggle for a sustainable planet.

And that was a shift in human civilization, which although it's anticipated by many, many figures in the past, nonetheless is a really fundamental shift. It requires a new covenant. And that is in many ways what the Earth Charter, I would say is.

And it says right here, this requires a change of mind and heart, a new sense of interdependence, universal responsibility. We must develop a sustainable way of life, locally, nationally, regionally and globally. That to me was terribly important.

I worked hard to get the acceptance of the wording that this needs to go on, not only internationally, of course internationally, but it's built on the pillars of each community. So as you may know, and this anticipates again discussion perhaps of the book that's just been published, I've been an advocate for local community and national Earth charters as the feet under which the international Earth Charter, the one we're now talking about, would find its grounding.

Mm-hmm, good. The crisis in the global ethics, in the future of global governance, there's so much in the book. So, can you share with us just the gist of what you wanted to say on the chapter you have on the summons to a new actual age, the promise, limits and future of the Earth Charter?

Yes. I wrote that chapter. After becoming having, having an experience at the 2012 World Conservation Congress and became aware of the new situation in many respects that the 21st century had challenged the earth charter that was adopted in 2000. With. And I argue in that, that we need now to pick up the dialogue that led over a number of decades to the earth charter itself and renew that dialogue. And that meant being self critical. There's no

greater advertisement for the earth charter than to have it understood by its, its admirers and its advocates and its enemies.

That we can be self critical. We can learn, we can grow. And that's what the last section actually the earth charter calls for. We will continue to learn. We will continue to have a dialogue. And so I looked at the earth charter and in a number of ways and laid out what I thought was a couple issues that needed to be addressed. I thought that equality was not adequately represented. The word was not adequately represented. The concept we use the word equity instead of equality and they're not the same.

And that was just one example of a number of ways in which we need to have a ongoing global conversation. I then propose a kind of agenda at the end of 10 items, which I felt would were very vital for the global ethics debate at which the earth charter as the premise inter Paris first among equals. I think of global ethical initiatives in the world today could convene and sponsor if we could find the resources, of course, a really renewed dialogue, such as we had in the 1990s.

Yes, to continue the ongoing dialogue. Do you think do you see the earth charters of global ethic for 21st century?

And why I do if it continues to sponsor that dialogue. I think in many ways it's still a very challenging document, but I do think it needs to be alive if it can be the dialogue. The charter, as it is, is dated. It's dated to 2000 and it does not mention climate change. It doesn't talk about what kind of a global economy we need. Really.

It is not fully adequate to 2020. But how would you ever expect it to be? It's a creature of its time. I think generally 90% of it is still powerful and relevant. But unless we continue to grow it and make it directly relevant, such as I think in the word equality, equality should be not simply a matter of our saying everyone's equal. It should be a goal. We need a world in which we aim to be equal. And equity doesn't say that equity simply says we need to be fair.

That's just one of many examples. The earth charter needs great development in the area of international peace.

It makes very bold statements with regard to how we need to eliminate nuclear weapons. Yes, my God, how are we going to get there? So part of the dialogue is not is on the fundamental principles which, you know, don't need much in updating, but some. And then the real dialogue is on what policies. Right.

So that's that's the gist of that of that essay. It's the challenge to take up that dialogue again. To not say we finished the work. It's over with all we have to do.

So it's good for the audience to see that what you write is not just about the dialogue. It's about the dialogue that you write among the many, many points that you make in the book chapter is used to stimulate or to invite people to continue on this ongoing dialogue to search for values and ethics.

That's the major message. The major message of that book. And it tries to model that dialogue by the chapters that come afterwards and take up and respond.

Now, Ron, you have taught ethics and social ethics for many years. You have taught global ethics or social ethics for many years. And I suppose, of course, throughout these years, we have built a lot of experience. Can you share with us what is your approach in that, especially in a world that people do not have much time to learn or talk or reflect about values and ethics? The world has changed quite a lot.

So I would like to ask you, what do you think is the role of ethics and values in education? How can, what should be the approach of the teacher in bringing values and ethics into an education setting? Again, my way of teaching was always not pontificating and giving long lectures that students then wrote down things in their notebooks and went home and answered little questions about on the test.

I taught largely by dialogue. I also taught... This is a big subject because, as you know and recognize, university education is undergoing incredible transformations today. And the kind of attention to the humanities and the liberal arts which support ethics has been diminishing for some time. So students do not have, unfortunately, the exposure that they once had to the students. Totally not. There's a vacuum in terms of...

Yes, precisely. And that is, I talk with my colleagues about that all the time, Mirian.

And here, it's true here at the University of Arizona where I now am. And it's just, you know, they're pushed off. The students are encouraged to pursue technical and business commercial interest and careers. And they are not challenged to think about their fundamental values.

But what is the role? What's the role of ethics and values in education?

Well, the ethics of the role is the role of the university or what used to be the role of the university, which is to place under critical examination by every capacity that human beings possibly can marshal of reason and experience.

And the traditions, the great traditions of the world, which again, students are not being introduced to adequately by any means. The questions of what is human life worth? And worth for? What is the purpose of our lives? What is the purpose of our societies? What is the purpose right now of this species in this so-called Anthropocene epoch on this planet? And that's what I kept, and the students were eager to pursue that because they never have an opportunity to talk about such things. Why should we be spending trillions of dollars sending people off into space when we're not taking care of the planet itself?

What is it in our culture that makes us do that? What is it that makes us want to deny the limits of nature, of our own being, of our own physical being, of our own lives with each other, the fact that we have to deal with limits and make as Shakespeare would say, a sonnet is made out of limits. You make a beautiful thing by adhering to the limits of what the sonnet form is. And the same as thing would be said about the earth. We're giving an

earth with magnificent potential if we live within its limits and weave it into a beautiful summit.

But that's all different than sending spaceships to Mars, which is what our president of the United States wants to have happen.

So the role of ethics and values in education being as offering a space for people to consider?

The questions of our ultimate loyalties. To what do we finally remain faithful? That's the question. And I find that the whole human experiment, the whole human history is at stake right now. I'm as indebted. I feel as much obligation to the past as I do to the future generations.

It's a form of modernity right now that's prevailed where we always talk about the future. But my goodness, we have undergone thousands of years of evolution that have brought us to this point. And we have obligations to be faithful to the aspirations of the best of our past to our ancestors. So very, as you know, it's a very fundamental tenet of most indigenous traditions to be concerned for their ancestors. And that is, again, what are we to be faithful to? What is the purpose of this species?

It's not just given to buy more and more tickets. So these are ultimately, and why I've always walked the line between philosophy and theology, these are ultimately religious questions. They're questions having to be the vocation of our species, the calling of our species.

And therefore your approach in an education setting, the classroom, the approach you taught social ethics was therefore through dialogue, stimulating dialogue.

Yes, to put those questions before them and let them find a voice for their experiences. For one thing, to share the experiences that gave them a some kind of an ethical compass in life. Did they get it from their family? Did they get it from a religious text or community? Did they get it from, as I did from public schooling in some way? Did they get it from some kind of social movement they participated in? Did they get it from a poem? Right now, one of the most hopeful things happening at least in the United States is the effervescence of poetry. It's unbelievable. People are writing poems all over the place.

Students, I would have students come in with their most precious poem, the poem they would be shy of sharing, because it's what they would read at night to allow them to go to sleep and get up the next morning. And that it could be from a established text or it could be a poem they wrote themselves. So we did base my teaching and ethics on experience first and then try to bring in the wisdom of the world's cultural, philosophical and theological thought. But that, you know, that that that's a big project and that's a lifelong project.

And I also tried to get them to understand that they were now launching themselves on a life that would be one of search and learning with regard to ethics. They weren't going to get it all down straight right now. And they were going to get directions. They were going

to learn resources. They were going to have companions that they could talk to all hopefully in the future with. But that was going to be a lifelong search and they needed a community. So the earth charter community means the world to a lot of people precisely for that reason, it seems to me.

Well, you certainly have made such an impact in many people's lives. I'm sure throughout your years as a professor, isn't in as an activist, you have offered such a great contribution to the field of global ethics, environmental ethics and certainly to the earth charter movement. So I want to thank you deeply and express my gratitude and the gratitude of many of us involved in their shutter movement to you for your contributions on. Thank you.

And Mirian, thank you for your leadership these many years. Thank you so much.

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