Conclusion

Based on the replies from these respondents' surveys, we would suggest the following as important hypotheses for future survey work:

1) There is a small set of core moral values that is cross-cultural and universal.

The Forum participants converged strongly around three top values (Truth, Compassion, and Responsibility). These three were frequently chosen together. Three more (Freedom, Reverence for Life, and Fairness) were chosen one hundred times or more. So crosscutting were the three top values, in fact, that only rarely did they serve as points of distinction among people. In other words, the choice of these top three was not keyed to gender, language, nationality, or religiosity. Nor does it help predict responses to other survey questions.

Does this mean that, since these values are so widely held, knowing a person's values tells you nothing important? Not at all. If you know that someone's values are shared by most other people, you know something essential about our commonality. Shared values are an indication of the sort of ethical atmosphere in which we act. Holding them probably indicates a desire to behave in accordance with them—to act, that is, in ways that most people would describe as *ethical*. But they don't predict any particular behaviors. Instead, they provide a means of evaluating our own and others' behaviors.

A knowledge of our shared values can also be used to provide a framework for proposing positive change in the world. If the governmental policies, social movements, and personal acts of kindness that we support can be shown to be consistent with a core of values shared widely beyond ourselves and our close associates, they may gain acceptance more quickly. Such knowledge is also useful in pedagogy: The presence of this core provides a powerful rejoinder to those who ask, "Whose values will you teach?" Based on this survey, one answer could be, "Our global values—the ones held in common by individuals all across the world's cultures." Finally, such knowledge is useful in combatting a sometimes pervasive sense of ethical and cultural relativism. Those who insist that

each individual has his or her own set of values, or that cultures are wholly differentiated by the values they inculcate, may need to rethink those assertions in light of the powerful global convergence noted here.

These data show that those respondents for whom Fairness is a priority tend to . . . guard their rights more, and they are skeptical of emotion as a grounds for decision making.

2) One value, Fairness, does differentiate respondents from one another.

Fairness, while selected by more than 100 participants, is not truly in the central cluster of values. Those who choose Fairness are slightly less likely than other respondents to choose Truth, Compassion, and Responsibility. And only 12 people who chose Fairness consider it the *most* important value. Respondents who choose Fairness tend to be less trusting of religion and religious figures, more business oriented, and more apt to endorse strictly rational rather than emotional or empathetic attitudes.

Fairness, then, occupies an odd place in this geography of values, chosen fairly frequently but not tending toward the center of the values universe for these respondents. Those who selected Fairness represent a sizable minority concerned less with outcomes than with processes—although not *primarily* concerned with matter of process, given that so few rank it in first place. They call our attention to the importance of fair, impersonal processes when we go about seeking goals consistent with other values. These data show that those respondents for whom Fairness is a priority tend to behave differently from other respondents. They guard their rights more, and they are skeptical of emotion as a grounds for decision making.

3) Individuals holding the same core values may nevertheless use very different moral principles to resolve their dilemmas.

The choice of dilemma resolutions did not correlate to the choice of values in any systematic way. If we are interested in predicting an individual's choice among several morally defensible positions, in other words, we will not be benefited by knowing that person's values. Instead, the best way to know what someone will do in response to a given dilemma is to check what he or she did in a previous dilemma. Among our participants, there was a noticeable consistency in decision

principles across the four dilemmas, and when a resolution could be clearly tied to a decision principle (such as selecting a middle ground that maximizes the happy outcomes appealing to utilitarians), respondents tended to choose the pair together (i.e., the middle-ground resolution and the utilitarian principle) in all their responses.

But if people choosing different principles share the same core values, can there be any coherent relationship between values and moral philosophies? Perhaps not. And perhaps there should not be. The very fact that values do *not* correlate with resolution principles may be vitally important. Moral philosophies cannot, apparently, be ranked in an enduring and general system according to their fundamental goodness. If the reverse were true, people with the most broadly shared values (like Compassion, say, or Truth) would be found to gravitate toward one principle (say, the Kantian principle), while others with less widely held values could be dismissed as "mere utilitarians." Such a finding would reflect a hierarchy of principles, allowing us to argue (for example) that *really* moral people are of course Kantians. That this is not the case gives great impetus to the argument that the three resolution principles presented in this survey constitute equally valid ways of making moral decisions. People who share common moral values, in other words, may still arrive at different moral conclusions without either party's being unethical. This finding supports the common observation that very good people around the world sometimes differ profoundly on courses of action they consider to be "moral."

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4) Single individuals may engage a variety of resolution principles as they move from dilemma to dilemma.

While it is true that the best predictor of an individual's selection of a resolution principle is his or her earlier record in selecting principles, that predictor is still not a very good one—though perhaps better than any other we studied. When they desire, individuals do shift principles from dilemma to dilemma. Were that not the case, the responses to our four dilemmas would have shown nearly identical percentages—a kind of straight-ticket voting, with (for instance) a "once a utilitarian, always a utilitarian" attitude. In fact, the 74 percent of respondents who chose the utilitarian principle in the first

dilemma had dropped to only 30 percent by the third dilemma—while the 11 percent who opted for the Golden Rule in Dilemma 1 rose to 54 percent in Dilemma 3.

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5) The Golden Rule is far more widely used than the categorical imperative.

Interesting, too, is the strength with which the Golden Rule comes into play here. As mentioned earlier, until recently many American ethics textbooks have essentially ignored the Golden Rule, focusing on only two principles—utilitarianism and the categorical imperative—in teaching ethical decision making. The fact that the Golden Rule was the favored choice in two of the four dilemmas here, and that such a substantial group of these respondents chose it as their primary decision-making principle (more than one third in every dilemma except the first), confirms the importance of the Golden Rule as a practical principle vigorously put to use on a global scale.

6) These respondents, whatever their backgrounds, are willing to put their values into practice across a broad range of moral boundaries.

In general, respondents were unwilling to erect barriers to their moral inclusiveness—to say, "I put my values into practice only for this or that group or set of activities, but beyond that I owe no moral obligation." Instead, there was overwhelming support for the following ideas:

- people with values other than my own could still make ethical decisions;
- I could live at peace with people with fundamentally different values; and
- my values strongly shape my decision making across a range of activities, from raising my children to spending my money.

Not surprising, however, there were areas in which moral boundaries *were* clearly operating:

- Participants apparently felt there was a "close-in" group of family members, educators, and clergy who were most apt to make decisions according to values similar to their own—differentiated from more distant groups (less likely to use their values) that included businesspeople, journalists, government officials, and military officers.

- While many respondents were comfortable attending school or sharing a park bench with people having different values, they were much less comfortable inviting them to dinner or having their children marry them.

Are these boundaries universal? Or do they vary depending on the values chosen by the participants? These respondents (not surprising, given their education levels and their interest in attending a global forum) tended to operate within moral boundaries that were fairly broad. Nor were there many large gaps among members of subgroups—although the slightly constricted moral boundaries of those choosing Fairness, and the more expansive boundaries exhibited by those choosing Respect for Elders, create interesting distinctions.

Among these participants, then, it does not seem accurate to assert that, although they hold the same values, they live them out in very different ways, extending them only to small subgroups depending on their culture. Nor is it true that their choices of resolution principles applied to the dilemmas are related to their responses to the boundary questions.

In fact, the commonality of responses here adds weight to the argument that there is a fairly universal global ethic, within which individuals are free to select various philosophical principles for decision making—an argument that awaits further testing among different demographic groups around the world.

7) The most common source of authority for knowing right from wrong is personal experience.

On the face of it, this finding suggests hubris: If I myself am the highest authority for what's right, does that not suggest a proud solipsism that is deaf to the guidance of traditional moral discourse? Far behind this ethical self-reliance, after all, these participants ranked a reliance on God's word, science, or government. Is there nothing beyond the self to offer moral direction?

But given that there was little correlation to demographic variables—given, in other words, that respondents from all backgrounds, educational levels, and religions still chose personal experience as their guiding moral authority—the responses may reflect something else. These respondents may be telling us that ethics, if it is to be a meaningful force in one's

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life, must be made personal, tangible, and experiential. It cannot be determined by theological precepts, social interactions, scientific logic, clerical advice, or governmental policy, but must be (in Alexis de Tocqueville's ringing phrase) a matter of "habits of the heart." What's more, they may be reflecting a deep impatience with centuries of "imposed" morality, whether from paternalistic politicians or morally neutral scientists.

Whatever the reasons for their choice, one point is clear: With few exceptions, the values chosen by respondents bore no relationship to their chosen sources of authority. That finding may, of course, be an artifact of this population, who are

Voices of the Global Future

Socrates Olympio
High-school senior, Ghana
"Most of the problems in the world today [arise] because we refuse to regard ethics as part of our daily life. Morality and values have lost face, have lost their place in our world."

Nozomi Sakurai
High-school senior, Japan
"What's important is that all the different people have to come together to survive and pass [across] the bridge to the future. Right now some people really have that vision. But we're lacking a sense of the importance of ethics, which leads to disagreements, arguments, wars."

Antony Taylor
College student, United States
"Our families are crumbling. And that's why you see the United States having problems respecting other peoples' ethics and morality in the world. People who aren't comfortable with who they are, or confident in who they are, are the people who seek to criticize and change other people—and in this case, other countries."

Katica Boric
High-school senior, Chile
"I think that ethics and values are the base of the society. But the problem is that every single person has a different concept of values. Everyone has different truths."

Tammy Williams
High-school student, Australia
"I think society in general, all throughout the globe, has a basis, a foundation of ethics."

Tamer Sallam
High-school graduate, Egypt
"Definitely there's a difference [among cultures]. But we believe in freedom of speech and of the press, and we believe in democracy, and still we're looking for the balance between freedom and order. So we're more or less the same."

Dionne Klein
College student, South Africa
"The people of our generation don't have a clear picture as to what ethics is. They don't have a definition of ethics. They've [only] got a vague idea or perception of what they think ethics should be. It will be very hard for them to accept ethical values from leaders who have disappointed them in the past.

"The role that the future generation has is to find the true meaning of ethics, and actually create a standard whereby we can live."

themselves viewed as sources of authority by many others. These respondents, in fact, were so unanimous in their self-reliance that the influence of others on their decisions and values was virtually nil. That is probably unusual.

8) Television is generally unsuitable for, and incapable of, providing any useful moral instruction.

With broad unanimity, these respondents dismissed television—one of the most pervasive media in the global culture—as unable to teach their own values, or any other valuable things, to children. That finding held true across nationalities, genders, age, education levels, and choices of core values.

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Only educators gave significantly higher marks to television than others—although, since the marks were all low, it is more accurate to say they gave marks that were slightly less low. Educators may have a more nuanced appreciation for the strengths and limitations of the technology, may be more adept at spotting the uses to which television can be put, and may be more willing than others to sift through the programming to find content that has educational merit.

What does *not* emerge, however, is any sense that cultures deeply imbued with television produce individuals with values, dilemma-resolving abilities, or moral boundaries significantly different from those who live in less televisual cultures. By their very natures and life-styles, however, these participants are probably not heavy viewers. On the complicated question of television's impact on moral values, then, this survey sheds only some light.

These conclusions are best understood by recalling the context of this study. Participants at a global forum may be presumed to differ from other people in several significant ways. Education, social status, concern with moral issues, and willingness to take action to address social problems separate them from the general population. Particularly different, perhaps, is their faith in themselves and their own experiences as the principal source of moral authority. This single finding could be rippling through their responses to other questions in ways we cannot fully appreciate until we know just how different these participants really are.

The best way to find out is to ask more questions of more people. This survey lays down a baseline against which

similar surveys can be measured in the future. Will different populations respond in different ways? Will country-specific surveys turn up sharp distinctions among cultures? Will there be more commonality among the values chosen by specific cohorts and educational levels all around the world than among the entire populations of single countries? Will certain religions, economic systems, or political ideologies be found to have their own unique and distinguishing set of moral values and attitudes?

Answering those questions may help us address other, larger issues. Will the results from such a survey finally put behind us the nagging suspicion that we can't teach values because we each have a different set? Will they lead us to find ways to cut to the core of our commonalities and build a basis for conflict resolution and mediation? Will they give impetus to the assertions about global oneness that are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its offshoots? Will they cause us to respect the ethical authenticity of others even when they arrive at moral conclusions different from our own?

If the answers to such questions about moral values and attitudes lie hidden in the results from a global values survey, it seems highly worthwhile to use this methodology to pursue the lines of reasoning opened up, however narrowly, in the exercise reported here.