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# When Poetry becomes Suspicious

## On the need for philosophical activism for global governance

Gaston Meskens

*Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry (CEVI),  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, University of Ghent, Belgium*  
[gaston.meskens@theacademia.org](mailto:gaston.meskens@theacademia.org)

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<http://www.the-possibility-of-global-governance.net/>

## When Poetry becomes Suspicious

### On the need for philosophical activism for global governance

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- 1 Governance beyond rational and moral perplexity
- 2 In search of (support for) the qualities of governance
- 3 The deadlocks of detached political pragmatism
  
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1 Governance beyond rational and moral perplexity

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## Governance beyond rational and moral perplexity

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- Fair and effective sustainable development governance essentially concerns a fair and effective organisation of our human socio-economic interactions
- = An 'exercise' in coordinating complex systems of interlinked socio-economic processes in a dynamic of increasing globalisation ...  
... troubled by the difficulty of negotiating consensus that integrates and balances reasonable but often incommensurable and conflicting interests.
- = (in philosophical terms) an exercise troubled by
  - ↳ 'cognitive complexity' (the complexity of acquiring knowledge)  
'systemic'  
'ontological'  
about the functioning of these complex systems ('causality', scientific foresight)  
enhanced by the many uncertainties, unknowns and unknowables related to the natural, technical and social phenomena that figure in them
  - ↳ moral pluralism  
even if we could and would all agree on the 'descriptive' knowledge base to assess a specific problem, then opinions could still differ about the acceptability of proposed solutions
    - science is needed to describe options, but it cannot clarify the choices to make
    - values may inspire or highlight options, they cannot enforce the choices to make

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## Governance beyond rational and moral perplexity

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Whether as agent with a 'mandate' of scientist, politician, entrepreneur, consultant, activist or citizen, ...

→ dealing with own and other's views on problems and solutions in the context of sustainable development governance

= dealing with the own and the other's *rational and moral perplexity*.

claim It is the recognition of this 'double perplexity' that forms the basis of the ethical approach to global governance

2 In search of (support for) the qualities of governance

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## In search of (support for) the qualities of governance

in theory →

there is a motivation for **a more qualitative and just approach** to the use of knowledge and value-based reference in global governance, which translates as

- policy supportive knowledge generation that, by spirit and method, is **transdisciplinary** and **inclusive** and
- governance that, by spirit and method, is **inclusive** and **process-oriented**, and that also methodologically enables and enforces **transparency** with regard to actors' intentions and interests.

why

is this vision valuable?

[my formulation]

This is the only form of governance that, **by the character of its method**, can generate

- intra-generational **trust** (because its method cares for intra-generational **accountability** and **solidarity**) and
- intergenerational forward oriented **responsibility** and mutual **understanding** (with mutual in the sense of forward and backward oriented)

↘

Accountability: not (only / in the first place) by organising confrontation wrt the implications of our deeds, but by organising confrontation wrt our own rationales.  
**'when the stakes are high, also metaphors need to be deliberated'**

↘

The self-critical and inviting character will make it fair, and its fairness will render it effective. Its effectiveness will be in the fact that actors will trust the policies and measures proposed as they trust the method in which they were assessed and negotiated.

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## In search of (support for) the qualities of governance

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in practice →

transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency are not inspiring or instructing the fundamentals of policy-supportive knowledge generation and global decision making

why not?

The **current rationale** is that, in face of the global environmental, economic and social challenges, **'we know what (science tells us) to do'**, and solving the difficult exercises of 'sharing benefits and burdens' is only **'a matter of political will'**.

on the other hand

It makes no sense to try to 'enforce' this instrumental approach on a world that is not ready for it.

↘

The enabling and enforcing potential of those qualities remains locked into old lethargic modes of knowledge generation and decision making inherited from historical enlightenment and modernism.

↘

Today, global politics is driven by **a detached political version of pragmatism** that ignores the need for a more deliberate discourse on human values and governance qualities.



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## The deadlocks of detached political pragmatism

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### The deadlocks of detached political pragmatism

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In its most pertinent forms, that detached political pragmatism manifests as

- an **obsession** with **systems thinking** and **'evidence-based' decision making**, too often informed by thin managerial interpretations of holism and by positivist-instrumental and business-minded science practices ('the knowledge economy');
- a **narrow conception of the idea democracy**, sticking to divides over obsolete political identities and strategically supported by the excuse that there are 'unavoidable practical limitations' to public participation;
- **nation state 'positionism'** justified on the basis of the 'absolute' but, in light of the global problems, principally irrelevant value of state sovereignty;
- the **fixation on 'economic growth'** as the prime quality criterion for a prosperous society and, in conspiracy with the private sector, pretending that only economic impact should be corrected, not its growth;
- a tendency to **relegate 'responsible action'** to transnational green(washed) **market economy dynamics** that, at the same time, leaves nation state positionisms unaffected;
- a **strategic cultural tolerance** 'in support of multiculturalisms' that primarily serves to protect and defend the integrity of own cultural, political or religious identities, rather than to accept those of others.

4 The possibility of global governance

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#### 4 The possibility of global governance

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- The world is not ready to implement the proposed qualities of governance because the **normative framework to make this approach come true** is in itself **fragmented** and **subject of strategic mediation**.
- ↳ It is pointless to attempt to implement transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency in regimes of science and politics if these regimes are not 'bottom-up' inspired in themselves by a culture
  - that **embraces rational and moral perplexity as advanced enlightened human stances** instead of as weak, defeatist or cynical positions and
  - that sees the spirit of '**deliberate relativism**' as a **spirit that can strengthen a society** instead of undermining it.
- ↳ In a culture of deliberate relativism, the **central attitude** for each involved 'agent' is **not responsibility but reflexivity**.  
  
More specific, it is **reflexivity as both an intellectual skill and a moral stance** that will make people to be prepared to develop and engage in settings for knowledge generation and deliberation that comply with the qualities of governance.
- ↳ In dealing with complex issues in a political context, reflexivity as intellectual skill and as moral stance thus acknowledges the importance of **intellectual solidarity**.

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## Philosophical activism for global governance

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5 Philosophical activism for global governance

Understandings of philosophical activism

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'critical' caring for institutional accountability

'reflexive' caring for cultures of deliberate relativism

'emancipatory' caring for intellectual solidarity

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## Philosophical activism for global governance

### Understandings of philosophical activism

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<u>'critical'</u>	caring for institutional accountability
by way of in practice	hard confrontation of rationales that aim to justify 'power and profit' analytic and 'objective' institutional critique
danger	detached 'cheap' critique
<hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/>	
<u>'reflexive'</u>	caring for cultures of deliberate relativism
by way of in practice	mild ('compassionate') confrontation of how we rationalise our stakes in the totality developing 'advanced ways of looking at the world and at ourselves' seeking confrontation (also 'in the field') and organising rapprochement
<hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/>	
<u>'emancipatory'</u>	caring for intellectual solidarity
by way of in practice	advancing the human right to intellectual development, deliberation and resignation arguing for and organising 'enabling structures' for intellectual solidarity in education, research and political deliberation
danger	'becoming political', paternalist

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## Philosophical activism for global governance

The field of

'critical' philosophical activism, caring for institutional accountability

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From confronting socio-political 'lethargies' around plain miserable situations ...



source: movie "Hell for leather: the toxic trade in leather from Bangladesh to the EU"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A6siB9B4Ak>

...

to confronting the poetry of 'detached political pragmatisms'

- 'a holistic approach',
- 'we have to act together' / 'we have shared but differentiated responsibilities'
- 'inclusive decision making'
- 'green growth'
  
- *'... to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion ...'* (Lisbon Council, March 2000).



<p>5</p> <p>The field of</p>	<p>Philosophical activism for global governance</p> <p>'reflexive' philosophical activism, caring for cultures of deliberate relativism</p> <hr/> <p>→ "Advanced ways of looking at the world and at ourselves"</p> <p>↘ relativism how we (can) reason about 'social systems' The earth-society system is not a neutral given 'out there' but subject of interpretation in itself. What are synergies for the one may be conflicts for the other, which makes it impossible to come to a joint holistic view on the earth-society system in the interest of sustainable development governance.</p> <p>↘ relativism how we (can) reason about 'the benefits and burdens of civilisation' Civilisation <u>implies</u> technological <i>risk</i>, environmental <i>occupation</i>, economic <i>profit</i>, labour <i>instrumentalisation</i>, market <i>dependency</i>, information <i>mediation</i>, heritage <i>depletion</i>, trans-generational <i>burden</i>. But reasoning about these 'artefacts of civilisation' is troubled by cognitive complexity and moral pluralism.</p> <p>Therefore, an 'acceptable' risk, occupation, profit, ... is what an informed democratic society determines as acceptable.</p> <p>↘ relativism how we (can) reason about 'collective identities' Rationales on social, national, cultural and religious identities cannot be used as boundary conditions for fair and effective global governance.</p> <p>The only relevant normative concept of human identity is that of the human individual.</p>
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## A case from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)



United Nations

A/RES/66/288\*



General Assembly

Distr.: General  
11 September 2012

Sixty-sixth session  
Agenda item 19

### Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/66/L.56)]

#### 66/288. The future we want

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolution 64/236 of 24 December 2009, in which it decided to organize, in 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at the highest possible level, as well as its resolution 66/197 of 22 December 2011,

1. *Expresses its profound gratitude* to the Government and the people of Brazil for hosting the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro from 20 to 22 June 2012, and for providing all the necessary support;
2. *Endorses* the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", annexed to the present resolution.

*123rd plenary meeting  
27 July 2012*

6

drafting a

part of

A case from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)  
People's Treaty on Human Rights for Sustainable Development

a global civil society initiative for Rio+20 (see <http://sustainabilitytreaties.org/>)



# Peoples' Sustainability Treaties

alternative pathway for a sustainable transition

PROCESS TEMPLATE THEMES PARTNERS MOVEMENT TREATIES @ RIO+20 MANIFESTO  
CONTACT GUIDELINES FORMAT EVENTS LIBRARY ORGANIZATION

11/11/2011  
7 COMMENTS  
UNCATEGORIZED

HOME

## MEDIA RELEASE

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012, Rio de Janeiro

### PEOPLES SUSTAINABILITY MANIFESTO For Action Beyond RIO+20, June 2012

Released for Endorsement and Support

*The fourteen Peoples' Sustainability Treaties, evolved through a consultative process with hundred of civil society organizations, converged at the Rio+20 to launch a Manifesto on the final day of the summit. They have declared that another world is possible after Rio+20 and pledged their commitment to a transition toward increasingly sustainable futures on earth.*

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drafting a

my approach

## A case from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) People's Treaty on Human Rights for Sustainable Development

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call for an awareness of the insight that a full implementation of human rights would not automatically lead to sustainable development

*... acknowledging and implementing rights for sustainability requires a short term and a long term view. It requires tackling current ecological and humanitarian crises now as well as a foresight on enabling long-term bottom-up possibilities for citizens to give them influence as actor in the socio-economic dynamic and to organise confrontation and critical pressure on policy themselves. In other words: the survival of humanity is as much about saving it now as it is about providing it with capacities to take care of itself in the future.*

- ↳ initial focus on advancing the human right to intellectual development and to have access to political deliberation instead of on institutional critique and 'economic solidarity'
- ↳ "the human right to be responsible"

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drafting a

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my approach

## A case from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

### People's Treaty on Human Rights for Sustainable Development

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caused a lot of discussion (and friction) among the 'traditional' environmental and social justice oriented NGO's

From: [redacted] Sent: di 2012-05-22 0:53

To: gaston Meskens; rights-for-sustainability@googlegroups.com

Cc:

Subject: Re: [R45] Fwd: Input requested in a second round of comments on the zero draft of the 'Rights for Sustainability Treaty'

Dear Gaston, sorry I thought I had responded.

You wrote a well researched social science draft, but I agree with Paul sustainability is no longer a question of theory and philosophy.

It is a question of the *very survival of humanity* and most life, from global warming and climate change now impacting on top of other ongoing global environmental damages. (UNEP GEO4 ,GEO5)

Our right to survive is being ignored by the worst crime against humanity ever.

The central reality and context for all rights today is impending global climate catastrophe.

Governments are working to keep this monumental crime out of the Rio 20, so they can say that they take sustainable development and all it entails (human rights for present populations and future generations) seriously.

We have to force governments to act to sustain our very survival and the survival of almost all life- by making them face what their denial of the global climate planetary emergency is doing. We have to do this now.

They are protecting the suicidal biocidal economy and global banking and fossil fuel corporations that control this economy of death and are still openly conspiring to sabotage any measures to save us. They are doing so as Earth is dying from their heartless plunder.

These governments and corporations must at least be held accountable for destroying our living Mother Earth in order to squeeze a few more years of massive money profits flowing to the global few who have all the money. They have to held accountable now.

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<p style="text-align: center;">6</p> <p>drafting a</p> <hr/> <p>was a way</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <hr/> <p style="color: red;">tension</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <hr/> <p style="color: red;">tension tension</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <hr/> <p style="color: red;">tension</p>	<p>A case from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) People's Treaty on Human Rights for Sustainable Development</p> <hr/> <p>to meaningfully approach the following <b>discussion points</b> among civil society</p> <p>the meaning of the right to have equal access to basic needs (water, food, energy, shelter, ...)</p> <p>solidary social support ↔ the dynamic of an open and fair market</p> <p>the meaning of the 'rights of nature' and the relation with human rights</p> <p>idea of 'rights of nature' <b>dilutes</b> ↔ <b>strengthens</b> human rights connecting rights to responsibilities</p> <p>→ 'it is meaningless to speak of the rights of nature because it is even so meaningless to speak of the responsibilities of nature'</p> <p>the meaning of the rights of future generations</p> <p>protecting future generations ↔ enabling future generations to take of themselves</p> <p>I did not introduce the idea of resignation as a part of intellectual solidarity here</p>
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