**[WHAT CAN VALUES DO FOR GLOBALIZATION?](http://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-can-values-do-globalization)**

TONY BLAIR — APRIL 2009

* Global Business

Can globalization thrive without a **strong** foundation of moral and social values? Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair **argues** that all human systems rely on certain fundamental values to function well over the long term, and that applying this understanding to globalization could produce tangible benefits.

**Q: You’ve said that “globalization needs values to succeed.” What can values do for globalization?**
I believe that globalization is overall a good thing and could be an even better thing. It has led to a huge increase in wealth, in communications, and in the spread of knowledge. In any event, globalization is here to stay and the pace of globalization will only increase, not slow down. But glo­­balization has many critics and some of their criticism is justified. In particular, it can’t be denied that globalization’s un­doubted benefits are not spread around fairly and with justice and that, as currently manifested, globalization actually harms certain communities. So a greater sense of values, a greater sense of the common good, underpinning globalization would not only be a good thing in itself but, by making globalization work more equitably, would win a more widespread acceptance of it. There also needs to be a deeper un­der­standing of other cultures’ values, not only those of the West.

**Q: Looking at the economic side of globalization, what values do you propose that could lead to improved performance of the global financial system?**
I don’t want to oversimplify here, so I ac­knowledge that there were many different causes of the current crisis of the financial system. But if we look at the causes, some of them at least were due to a basic discon­nection between the system itself and certain fundamental values — values which are fundamental to any system if it is to run well, whether that be business, political, or social. Some parts of the system seemed to operate in a bubble of their own without any or much regard to what we might call the common good. Sustainability is a much needed value which again seemed to be lost sight of in the search for the short-term gain. Trust has been broken — trust in the system by the public who are affected by it, and confidence, too, very often between different elements in the system — so confidence needs to be rebuilt, and a sense of responsibility.

**Q: How do you decide what values are helpful? How do you avoid the ap­pearance of imposing Western values on other cultures?**
As I’ve just said, certain core values seem to be basic to the proper functioning of all or most systems, and history shows that if those values become too attenuated or ignored altogether, the systems tend to collapse. I don’t think this is a question of imposing Western values on other cul­tures, but it seems to me that certain core values are common to all the great faiths, values such as the ones I’ve outlined above, plus, for example, respect for our neigh­bor. But in order for the system to work properly we have to respect the particular values specific to each culture, even if we may not agree with them entirely and wish to open up a debate about them.

**Q: Does the idea of shared values across national boundaries imply that we all must be global citizens to some extent? Is this already happening? Can an em­phasis on values enable beneficial changes without requiring restructuring of major institutions, such as the UN or WTO?**
Indeed. If you look at some of the big problems we face, they can’t be tackled by in­­di­vidual nations acting alone, however powerful they may be. Climate change is one such example. The current economic crisis is another. As I’ve said elsewhere, these issues have to be tackled by coun­tries acting together. In respect of the world economy, look how out of date, and with such speed, the concept of the G8 has become. It’s now, quite rightly, supplemented by the G20. Climate change is even more an issue which cries out for a global response. And I believe that increasingly people realize this, though there’s still some way to go, not least in the way in which the international institutions respond. So, yes, I believe that some restructuring is neces­sary to reflect better this growing con­sciousness of a shared citizenship and common responsibility.

**Q: Is there a danger that the stronger the set of values, the more they might exclude those who think differently? Is it possible to create strong values without creating conflict?**
There is such a risk, I agree. But I think the answer is to recognize and respect the fact that different cultures have different values and that those values have their own integrity. But, in addition, we need to recog­nize that there are some values common to all great faiths and most cultures and to build on that in what we do. And of course we need to recognize and respect that even when cultures share values, they will often have different ways of being expressed. So I’m not arguing for some sort of homo­genous set of universal values; rather, for seeking out the common ground and maxi­mizing it. Also, we should never fall for the myth that values like freedom, human rights, equality, and justice are “Western” values. They are universal.

**Q: In a speech at Yale, you said that values must include not just democracy and freedom but also justice. Does this require that wealthy nations be willing to give something up or make hard choices to benefit the whole?**
Yes. It would be unrealistic to deny that there may be some hard choices. That happens already to the extent, for example, that countries sign up to agreements which prevent them from protecting their own industries. So it’s not unprecedented, but I believe that by making the system more equitable, this actually over time produces benefits for both richer and poorer countries, producing a win-win situation. For example, we know the suffering that is often caused by illegal immigration for those trying to escape poverty in their own lands, with death or economic exploitation by human traffickers. And we know the social tensions which can be caused in the receiving countries by illegal immigration. So if poor countries are enabled to provide more work for their populations, then the flows of immigration, both legal and illegal, into wealthier countries will decrease.

**Q: You have a particular interest in religious faith. How can faith contribute to globalization?**
Faith motivates billions of people around the world today — that is a hugely powerful and influential force. What is more, all great faiths teach in different ways about the importance of the common good, the importance of caring for one’s neighbor. We saw in the Jubilee Campaign, for example, how people of faith could combine together in such a way as to compel governments to do much more to tackle debt relief. If the power of numbers, plus the power of moral conviction and a good cause, can be harnessed together, a huge amount can be achieved.

**Q: You have also said that “spiritual capital is an important part of social capital.” What do you mean by spiritual capital? How does it contribute to more tangible forms of development?**
I believe that spiritual capital includes developing a greater sense of conscience, a greater awareness of the needs of one’s neighbor, and a greater sense of a purpose which is larger than that which humans can devise for themselves. If this can be translated into right actions, which it can, then so much the better for the world.

**Q: You are interested in better understanding the deeply held ideas and convictions that motivate people. How do faith and values motivate you?**
Establishing the Faith Foundation which bears my name is one example of how faith and values motivate me. I believe strongly in the power of religion to do immense good in the world but I also recognize that religion has a hugely destructive power if misused. So my Foundation and I work to increase understanding and respect between, and for, the great faiths — respect and understanding being essential values if we are to make the globalized world work better. And I believe that this is entirely consistent with my faith, which has as one of its core commandments the will to love one’s neighbor.

**Q: Can values change the world?**
Self-evidently. Look at Martin Luther King, for example, the anniversary of whose death we commemorated last year. There was a man whose sense of biblical justice compelled him to pursue a dangerous path, so dangerous that he was killed, but it was instrumental in changing American society, righting a most terrible injustice and indirectly enabling the election of your first black president.