



August 2021

## Response to Comments

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Can Human Solidarity Globalize?](#)

Richard Falk

I am dazzled, and somewhat overwhelmed, by the depth, sparkle, and diversity of the responses to my introductory essay. It is not possible for me to do justice to the many important lines of analysis, aspiration, and assessment set forth. My attempt here will be to identify those points that significantly challenge or elaborate upon my presentation of the basic problematique of human solidarity by reference to a few underlying questions:

--Why has the attainment of human solidarity of global scope, resting on cooperative problem-solving and policy formation, and embodying an emancipatory ethos become more necessary than ever before in world history?

--Why are the obstacles to the formation of human solidarity at the global level so difficult to overcome?

--What are the most hopeful pathways to expanding human solidarity given the grim realities of the Anthropocene?

--Is there time to overcome and transform the obstacles so as to achieve the necessary and desired degree and orientation of human solidarity?

--Can human society act with sufficient resolve individually and collectively in these settings in view of the inherent uncertainties about future developments and in light of entrenched interests of various elites in retaining present political, economic, ecological, ethical, and cultural frameworks?

## Filling Gaps and Acknowledging Deficiencies

*Capitalism:* For several respondents, including [Biljana Vankovska](#), [Valentine M. Moghadam](#), [Radmila Nakarada](#), and [Akeel Bilgrami](#), the decisive obstacle to achieving the desired and necessary degree of human solidarity at the global level was the obstructive impacts of capitalism. In particular, the disruptions of pre-modern community could be attributed to the ways in which market forces generated win/lose relations among individuals and societies, rewarding the pursuit of self-interest and promoting consumerism without the slightest regard for the public good. Such an atmosphere was not conducive to cooperation at any level beyond that of the state, and was even deficient with respect to the wellbeing of national citizenries, evidenced by unsustainable forms of inequality and massive displays of alienation.

There was some ambiguity throughout the discussion as to whether the root deficiency was capitalism, as such, or the current phase of capitalism, known as “neoliberal globalization” and characterized by the lack of a significant challenge from socialist values, the weakness of post-industrial organized labor, and a post-Cold War consensus that disseminates the view “there is not alternative” (TINA). The former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso lamented publicly that neoliberal globalization is “the only game in town.” China in particular has learned to play that game to perfection despite framing its approach misleadingly as “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

We are left with haunting questions. Are there strong enough emergent social forces to reform capitalism so that it achieves social equity and ecological equilibrium? Will the degree of reform be sufficient, assuming it happens, to facilitate the global solidarity dimensions of the Great Transition?

*Statist World Order:* Other respondents, notably [Luis Cabrera](#) and [Lawrence Wittner](#), argued that the most fundamental issue is the politics of fragmentation that results from the statist nature of world order, and its supporting notions of sovereignty, nationalism, and national security. From such perspectives, global solidarity on behalf of humane problem-solving will not be possible without a more centralized and robust normative and institutional architecture of global governance. Translated into more concrete ideas, this means respect for international law without the current right of exception claimed by leading states, given constitutional status in the UN Charter by granting the five prevailing powers in World War II permanent membership in the Security Council and a right of veto in the only UN body with the power of decision. In effect, for geopolitical actors, compliance with international

law remains discretionary, and there is no pretense of accountability for wrongdoing. Furthermore, it would require more capabilities and autonomy for international institutions to implement global solidarity imperatives in accordance with humane and ecologically responsive world order values.

*Regressive Global Solidarity: New Fascisms:* Some commenters remind us that global solidarity can also take a regressive turn toward fascism. The rise of autocratic leaders dedicated to chauvinistic forms of nationalism accentuates the current failures of ethical response by most states to the global migration crisis that is almost certain to become more severe in the years ahead as equatorial and coastal regions become uninhabitable, or nearly so, and hundreds of thousands of climate refugees roam the earth.

*Responsible Ecocentricism:* There were several respondents who felt that my advocacy of “responsible anthropocentrism” was deficient insofar as it failed to recognize the organic identity of the human species as ecologically bonded with the rest of nature, making human solidarity insufficiently radical if anthropocentrically conceived regardless of how responsible it purported to be. [Upendra Baxi](#) asserts our need to recognize and value our “companion species,” and [Alexander Lautensach](#) proposed the ideal of “patriotism of Gaia” as preferable to my more modest plea for “a patriotism for humanity.”

The reasoning behind such a rejection of anthropocentrism resonates, yet I am not persuaded. It strikes me as a characteristic of most forms of being even at the level of the gene or microbe that there is a selfish side of beingness that is stronger than either the altruistic or ecological side. The most that we can hope for as a species is to be responsible toward our future, which means to act as a guardian of nature and the earth based on implementing the precautionary principle with respect to ecological risk and the pleasure principle with regard to the preservation of the beauty, diversity, sociability, and sustainability of nature. In my usage, “responsible anthropocentrism” comprehends that human fulfillment arises from non-material sources, principal among which are love and spirituality, and that current manipulations of human wishes induces forms of consumerism and materialist indulgence that jeopardizes the ecological web on which all forms of life depend.

*Identity:* There were two persistent themes expressed on issues of identity. The first, explored deeply by [Catherine Keller](#), [Martha Van Der Bly](#), [Jing Lin](#), and [Charlene Spretnak](#), unsurprisingly all women, assert the need to get beyond the self/other or we/them dichotomies, and discover the wonders of relational thinking resting on I/thou interactions, in some cases drawing on religiously grounded ways of being and knowing. The second theme, articulated by [Michael Karlberg](#), [Michael Narberhaus](#), and [David Featherstone](#) (among others), is somewhat more cautious and conventional and insists that global solidarity will encounter resistance if it does not preserve the nested solidarities of family, neighborhood, and nation.

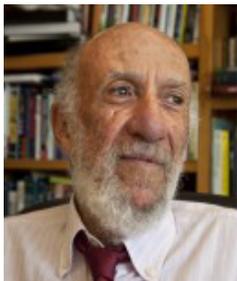
*Social Movements:* Several contributors to the discussion, including [Jeremy Brecher](#), [Jackie Smith](#), [Valentine M. Moghadam](#), [Francine Mestrum](#), and [Lawrence Wittner](#) called attention to the relevance of past transnational social movements that exhibit a global orientation. Such movements involving labor conditions, human rights, environment, and disarmament have emphasized civil society impulses to circumvent the nationalist privileging of state boundaries—a defining feature of modernity—in pursuing goals based on humanistic, and more recently ecological, values. What we can learn from such experience—its limitations as well as its successes—is of relevance to the current struggle to achieve the more ambitious forms of global solidarity embedded in the Great Transition worldview, which Brecher believes will happen only as a result of what he calls “a global nonviolent insurrection” by people against those governing elites currently exerting dystopian forms of control.

## Conclusion

I am mindful of many other motifs explored in the discussion. We are, at once warned that “the worse is yet to come” while [Lester Edwin J. Ruiz](#) reassures us about an imminent “sense of wholeness” will give rise to “a culture of dwelling not possession.” Let me end with the “realistic” hopelessness of [David Barash](#) set off against the more biopolitical confidence expressed with premodern animistic verve by [Zillah Eisenstein](#): “Global solidarity is coming because the planet requires it.” Such an implicit comprehensive dialogue among likeminded participants reminds us of both hopeful pathways and formidable obstacles exhibited by the apocalyptic and emancipatory uncertainties pervading the future of the human condition at this juncture of planetary history.

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## About the Author



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