



Thought Leader: Anne-Marie Slaughter

Thought Leaders Forum, Point B

Anne-Marie Slaughter, Devin T. Stewart

Transcript

DEVIN STEWART: Dr. Slaughter, please tell us about this *Atlantic* article. First of all, we believe the idea might have started with something that happened at Carnegie Council. Do you want to tell us a little bit of background?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: This article that I wrote, called "[Why Women Still Can't Have it All](#)," was actually born out of my experience in the State Department. When I came out of the State Department, I wanted to write it, I was nervous about writing it. What made me decide to write it was meeting with this group of young Rhodes scholars who really clearly wanted to hear something more than, "Hey, you can make it work."

But I revised it over the course of a year pretty extensively. It took a year to write. One key event in the revision was when I came to give a lecture here at the Carnegie Council, and right after the lecture these two older women came up and they were clearly very proud of the fact that I was there and was speaking about foreign policy, and they were very affirmative. But they did say in the conversation, "We just don't know what has happened to the younger generation. They just don't want it in the same way."

Then we went to dinner, and I had this fabulous conversation with these two young 30-something professionals who immediately asked me, "How do you do work and family?" I told them I was writing this article. Then they said, "We really can't find role models that make sense for us." That is in the article. The two conversations helped crystallize my thinking about who I was writing for and what I wanted to say.

DEVIN STEWART: Fantastic. Does this relate to how you see the greatest ethical challenges in the world today?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: That is such an interesting question. You know, I increasingly think that this issue of work/family balance, or as I experienced it—my foreign policy dream job; I have a 14-year-old who really needs both parents fully on deck, making some bad choices, nothing that teenagers don't go through.

But I experienced it as a question of values, as a question of who am I and what do I believe in? As much as I'm committed to my career, I brought this child into the world, my husband and I did, and it is our responsibility to give him the best possible foundation we can for his life. We love him, we care about him, but there is also a question of, what are your values?

I didn't write about it in values terms so much in the article, but I increasingly am thinking about what does it say about us as a society that when people say, "Why did you leave the State Department?" and I say, "Well, my public service leave was up after two years, Princeton gives you a two-year leave, and after that if you don't come back you lose your tenure," that's a reason everybody is comfortable with. They nod. They say, "Absolutely, got that, that's great, go back to being a

professor."

And then I say: "But, you know, even if I could have extended my public service leave, I would have come home because I have two teenage sons and, really, I need to be at home. And indeed, they'll only be home for five more years and I really want to be home." That is not a reason people are happy with at all. They get uncomfortable. They don't want to hear it. It diminishes me in their eyes. You can see the sort of pffff. You know, that's a personal reason, and you're kind of not living up to your professional aspirations.

What kind of society is that? That is crazy. In the world I want to live in and that I think is the world we say we live in, parents' obligations to their children, to their parents, to other human beings that they have responsibilities to ought to come before professional aspirations.

Now, when it's public service, it's harder, because then you're talking about your responsibilities to your own children versus your responsibilities to people around the world where your decisions you make might affect them. But I think it is a question of values.

DEVIN STEWART: Is this what characterizes where we are today in the world, or are there other things you think about that are unique to today's world?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: I think many of the questions we face in the world do actually directly engage a transition from a world of states—and indeed, if you go back to the 18th century or the 19th century, this kind of concept of *raison d'état* [national interest; literally the reason of state], to go back to [Machiavelli](#), is different than ordinary human situational ethics or human ethics, and that in fact we are seeing a whole set of issues, from climate change, to pandemics, to simply the fact that we are going to have 9 billion people on the planet and most of them are poor and trying very hard to live the kinds of lives that we in developed countries take for granted.

Those ethical issues need to be thought about in ways that think about what do human beings owe each other in a society and what do Americans owe people in other societies? We have a creed that says all human beings are created equal. It doesn't end at the water's edge. But of course there are questions of political feasibility there. But what do we owe human beings around the world, and what do human beings owe each other? I think it's a new era of international ethics.

DEVIN STEWART: Do you see the world getting better or worse?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: It's getting better, honestly. I was talking to someone recently, I can't remember who it was, but somebody who said, "I grew up in the South, and if you grew up in the South you think the world is getting better. I grew up in a world that was still segregated, where the idea that you could have an African-American president was so unthinkable, you might as well have said, 'We're going to live in the [Jetsons](#)' age where people are going to fly around in spacecraft.'"

I knew no women professionals growing up. There was one woman lawyer who was a partner in my father and uncle's firm—one woman lawyer. I went to law school and was never taught by a woman law professor. So I see a tremendous progress over my lifetime in ways that have benefitted countless individuals.

And then, internationally, I went to law school at a time where international criminal law wasn't a subject. You could study the [Nuremberg Trials](#), that was a historical event, but that was it. And now you have dictators in the dock, you have just today a Congolese [warlord](#) getting [convicted](#) for enslaving child soldiers. The notion of what human beings owe to each other, what governments owe

to citizens, we've made enormous progress.

DEVIN STEWART: Part of our project is articulating a global ethic. Does that mean anything to you; and, if so, what is it?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: I think there is a global ethic of responsibility, or at least I think responsibility is the starting point for a conversation about a global ethic. So we have the greatest change in my lifetime, I think, in 400 years of international law, the emergence of the [responsibility to protect](#).

The stylized version of international law is you have the [Treaty of Westphalia](#), and that gives rise to states that can effectively do whatever they want within their territory as long as they don't harm other states outside their territory. That is a very stylized view. If you think about in 1945 where you sign the [UN Charter](#), some 50 states, and they say you cannot use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state. There is a discussion about wanting a better world for all, but the legal obligations in that Charter are state-to-state only.

In 2005, 60 years on, you have all the world states, almost 200, agreeing that all sovereigns have a responsibility to their own citizens, and that responsibility means they don't perpetrate genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, or grave and systematic war crimes against their own citizens; and if they do, the world community has a responsibility to step in, to do something about it. Now, that is such a profound change.

I think it's interesting that in [Barack Obama's inaugural address](#) he called for a new era of responsibility. Now, he was talking to the American people and he was talking to us about essentially owning our own debts, owning our own failures, needing to come back together and be honest about our mistakes and what we needed to do. I remember when I heard him I thought, "Boy, he had a good mother, because I spend my time telling my children, 'It's okay to make a mistake, but you have to take responsibility, you have to stand up, you have to own it.'"

I think it's interesting that those two things are very close together, this question of what responsibilities governments have toward their people and then again what responsibilities do the people of one country have to their fellow human beings and others.

DEVIN STEWART: When President Obama was responding to the [financial crisis](#), he had a number of choices to make. He said we have to do all of them, all policy options at the same time. How do you think through making policy priorities? How would you advise organizations, businesses, to set their priorities in the world today?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: It's interesting. Secretary [Clinton](#), in her first major policy address, said she talked to lots of people and they all told her, "Don't try to do everything." Then she said, "So I come into office and we have a global financial crisis and we have [wars](#) taking place and we have nuclear proliferation and we have terrorism and we have the [pandemic](#) of the H1N1 virus and we have [climate change](#). You tell me which of these I'm supposed to leave out, and then we'll set priorities." Her point was you actually can do broad categories, you can say you're going to worry about those 10 things and not another 10 things, but you can't choose one or two or three things.

I think going forward a lot of the best literature on complexity theory and on complex systems more generally says you can no longer predict and plan; you can no longer say, "This is most likely to happen and we're going to plan for it," because we are in a world where small changes have huge effects and we are all interconnected, so we are at the mercy of things—if you think about bird

flu—that happened in the Philippines or in far western China.

So instead of predicting and planning, you have to essentially prepare yourselves to know as much as you can know and to respond and adapt as fast as you can. That's about resilience, it's about diverse perspectives, and being very open to rapid innovation as you respond, a lot of trial and error. But it's a very different mindset than the one that says, "Okay, we're going to identify the top threats, we're going to figure out what's going to happen, and we're going to plan to meet them." That's just not going to work.

DEVIN STEWART: This is interesting. Just as a side note, [Joichi Ito](#) said a very similar thing. That sounds very interesting. Also, "pivot" has become a big buzzword in the administration, as you're well aware of.

What would you like to see happen in the next 100 years in the world?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Secretary Clinton always said that what we wanted was a world in which every human being had an equal opportunity to live up to his or her god-given potential. That's the way Secretary Clinton phrases it. I heard her say that often when I first started working for her. I didn't know her that well, so I was trying to figure out what guided her.

I thought: That's really right. We can't control outcomes, and efforts to control outcomes have done very badly. But the idea that there are human beings all across the world who have all sorts of talents and potential but that some of us have so much greater capability to try to realize it—whatever happens in the end, you can only try—and others have none.

That disparity is becoming worse, because today if you can live up to your potential, technology means suddenly I can teach at Princeton but I can teach at the University of Tokyo and I can teach in Brazil and I can teach in Japan and I can reach 35,000 people on Twitter and millions more potentially. So you're so much more advantaged. But of course those who are disconnected and who don't have the opportunity to live up to whatever their potential is in the first place are that much further behind.

So I see it, on the one hand, as a time of enormous hope and enormous democratization, the ability of people to make themselves heard and pursue their dreams and their talents, but also one of tremendous division if we can't steadily and continually try to keep leveling the playing field. That's an overused cliché, but it's basically to give people that equal starting point.

DEVIN STEWART: Is that the thing that worries you most in the world today?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: What worries me most is that in human history we typically only really take action after cataclysm. First we get the League of Nations after [World War I](#), we get the United Nations after [World War II](#). We don't even outlaw war until we've fought two horrifically horrific wars, one of course which [ends](#) with a nuclear weapon. Now you see the proliferation of nuclear weapons in ways that really should worry us deeply.

I worry terribly that someone will have to break the nuclear taboo before we will find the will to truly disarm as much as we possibly can, possibly all the way. Or similarly, obviously, something like a biological weapon, which is truly terrifying, and we only see it in movies—well, that's not true; we've seen minimal attacks.

So I worry that if human history holds, the stakes of those cataclysms are higher and higher. Or even

with climate change, do we really have to have a city wiped out from flooding or from sea-level rise before people realize this is real? We need to be far better at preventive action without what is human nature, which is you don't worry about what's unpleasant to think about until it's in your face.

DEVIN STEWART: You talked about this reassessment of responsibility between the states and the people. What are the implications of this ethical question? What happens if we don't figure out the relationship between states and the citizens? What's at stake?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: The first thing that's at stake is that technology is empowering individuals not only to find out more and more about their governments, and often then not to believe their governments, but to actually think about organizing themselves in very different ways so that really things we take for granted, and have for at least 400 or 500 years, that the way you organize a people is there's a territory and a people and a government and the government is in control—not at all clear to me if people realize, "Wait a minute, we can organize ourselves and provide our own services. Actually, the whole [seasteading](#) movement is this idea that you can go to sea and create communities at sea that will be self-governing communities that do not look anything like a country that is recognized by the United Nations."

So there either has to be a new social compact where, maybe through open government, much more radical transparency, much wider and continual participation in democracy or in governance generally, that technology allows; or we might see some profoundly disruptive changes in the ways human beings decide to organize themselves. Hard to imagine that you'd get there without conflict.

I think the steady decline of trust in government is something we see all the time in polls, but there hasn't been much alternative. Now, in various ways—of course, across the [Arab world](#) you're seeing people saying, "We've had enough"—I think you could see some pretty radical change in developed countries as well.

I just have to say, even if we stopped climate change tomorrow, the changes that are already in place are causing people to migrate. You see the desertification of the Sahel; you see the flooding in low-lying countries. That will cause millions, and possibly tens of millions, of people to move. That is the oldest conflict known to man. People's land is no good, they move. Very rarely in human history have the people who have already been there said, "Come on in, let's share." That is a source of tremendous conflict. We need to be thinking about that now, even while we try to stop, mitigate, and adapt to climate change.

DEVIN STEWART: Do you think that would spur a debate about which countries should accept these migrants?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Absolutely.

This is the great contradiction in the American creed and the creed of universal human rights. If you have the misfortune to be born in the Maldives and they are under water, or in Bangladesh, at some point you say: "Wait a minute. Why do I just accept my fate? It's a question of birth. Why can't I go to higher ground? Why can't I come to your country?"

We are reaching planetary limits, and that is obviously a first in human history, that we are now affecting forces on a planetary scale, and we are going to have to address that for all of our survival.

DEVIN STEWART: What does moral leadership mean to you?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: It's funny. When you say "What does moral leadership mean to me?" the first thing that I think of is taking responsibility. I really do believe profoundly that honesty and taking responsibility for what you've done, what you haven't done, and for what you owe to others is essential.

Again, as a parent, we have these conversations all the time. It's actually one of the joys of parenting, but also one of the ways that parenting changes who you are, because you say to your child, "You have to take responsibility." And they say, "Why?" You say, "Well, it's the right thing to do." And they say, "Why?" And you have to articulate your own value structure.

But it means not hiding. I think about this often when I pass a homeless person. I don't always give money. I try always to acknowledge the human being that is before me. Sometimes I have money to give; sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'm not sure really that money is the right thing. But I do feel that I have a responsibility to look at that person and say, "You are a human being and I see you as a human being and I feel terrible for your plight, however you got there," rather than pretending that's a sack of clothes on the sidewalk and walking on by.

At an institution you have to be honest about what you can fix and what you can't. But even when you can't, you have to acknowledge people's pain or that something is wrong. You might not be able to fix it.

The same is true for leaders. There are things we can't do, even with all the power of the United States. But then we shouldn't hide from it. We shouldn't turn away and pretend that something else is happening.

I wrote earlier this year that if we're not going to come to the Syrians' aid we should be honest about that, because then they need to know that, rather than pretending we're going to.

I don't think we can fix everything, but I do think moral leadership is a great deal about honesty and responsibility.

DEVIN STEWART: I'll give the question that you get all the time: Why? Why should we not hide and why should we take responsibility?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: To me it's part of what makes us human. It is part of being endowed with the capability of understanding ourselves as individuals, but individuals who cannot exist without other individuals, without a society, and being given the faculties to understand that about ourselves. Animals understand that they are part of a tribe, but they can't reason about it in the ways that we can. So then what do we owe to others? We cannot survive without them.

I do a lot of research on connection, on the basic human desire for connection. We are hard-wired for it. [David Brooks's](#) book *The Social Animal* really gets it, a tremendous amount of the neuroscience, the psychology, the sociology of how human beings have evolved, and they have evolved through connection to others.

The boundaries of that connection—because we are also individuals; we are not just members of a hive or a tribe—so what do you owe yourself or what can you legitimately take for yourself and what do you owe others is a fundamental dimension of the human condition.

DEVIN STEWART: As you know every well, [Andrew Carnegie](#) was a big advocate of peace. Is world peace possible?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: I think so. We've come so far. I try to explain to my students that when Iraq *invaded* Kuwait in 1991, this was something that was very shocking, certainly to my students then, or even my students now, that a country sent arms across a border into another country.

Now, I'm half Belgian, and the Belgian experience in Europe has not been a very happy one. It's a flat country between many big countries. In my mother's lifetime, obviously she fled as a refugee from German-occupied Belgium, to France, to Switzerland, and ultimately to England. She remembers German tanks going by. That was something that was terrible, but nobody thought it was illegal. Yes, that's what countries did for millennia, that if you had arms and you wanted somebody else's land, you could take it.

Now, that's not true. In fact, we have lots of great data that shows that conflict has steadily reduced. That doesn't mean that for those individuals in [Congo](#), in [Syria](#), in many countries around the world who are still suffering conflict, that that's not terrible. But for millennia people thought war was just an ineradicable part of the human condition. And yet, most Americans will not experience war in that way, most people across the advanced industrial world, and many, many other countries that are still developing. There is much more peace.

So yes, I think Andrew Carnegie was absolutely right when he was looking to see what had been past and what he could look forward to with the [Hague Peace Conferences](#) and then the League of Nations and then the United Nations and then where we go from here, a world at peace.

DEVIN STEWART: You've convinced me, that's for sure. Very logical.

Finally, who is responsible for the things that you've talked about today? Who is ultimately responsible? Is it great powers?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: It's all of us. We are all responsible. Those of us who live in democracies are responsible for the governments we choose.

We have an obligation, I think, to be engaged citizens in the world. Again, that does not mean that we always come to others' aid.

When I *last spoke* here at Carnegie, I was talking about the responsibility to protect. I remember a young woman in the audience said, "Well, why is it always up to the United States?" She was saying, "Look, I can't get a job, our infrastructure is crumbling, our health care system is the most expensive in the world and does not provide to millions of Americans. We have all sorts of problems. Why shouldn't we be taking care of our own?" It was a perfectly legitimate question, and a right question.

I would say: Yes, the American government is funded by Americans, it is a government of and by and for the people, we do have our primary obligation to our own citizens. But all of us have to understand, both for instrumental reasons, because we are deeply connected to everybody else, and for moral reasons that we must understand ourselves as being part of this larger world and, again, at least opening our eyes to what's happening and doing what we can.

There are places where we can, there are places where we can't, but we can't drive by or close our eyes. It is really incumbent on us as a powerful country—but even if we were not the United States, I would say as ultimately human beings who believe that all human beings are created equal.

DEVIN STEWART: That sounds like a commercial for our institution. Thank you.

Is there anything else?

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Andrew Carnegie offered Princeton a lake or a law school. We took the lake. I rowed on the lake. I feel very connected. I walk on the lake, I run on the lake. I have a particular debt to Andrew Carnegie.

DEVIN STEWART: We have a debt to you as well. Thank you.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: I would love to have heard [Anthony Appiah](#). Anthony spends his life thinking about it. He's a political theorist. I'm just a humble foreign policy practitioner.

DEVIN STEWART: I can do a little summary and send it to you.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: That will be great. I'd love that.

DEVIN STEWART: He had similar points to you, actually.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Good. He has this whole wonderful moral cosmopolitanism. It's a wonderful, wonderful book.

DEVIN STEWART: He's an incredible writer.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: He is. He's really wonderful. And he exudes moral authority. It's wonderful. I do a lot of thinking, but he has this kind of deep reflectiveness that philosophers do that is wonderful.

DEVIN STEWART: And he is a gentleman.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Oh, such a prince. And he was actually. His Ghanaian family is royalty.

DEVIN STEWART: That makes sense.

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER: Yes, it does. Once you know that about him, you realize—I just found that out recently that he is a son of kings.

Point B Podcast

"There are things we can't do, even with all the power of the United States. But then we shouldn't hide from it. We shouldn't turn away and pretend that something else is happening."

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