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A New Discipline: Development Ethics

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A NEW DISCIPLINE: DEVELOPMENT ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

After World War II, development was viewed as a straightforward economic problem: a matter of identifying and quantifying the composition of economic growth packages. Growth targets would be planned, resources mobilized to reach them, and the institutional apparatus for investing, financing, managing, and producing activated. This array of organized activities would yield "development," measured as higher national income and greater output. Eventually, it came to be recognized that many social, cultural, political, and psychological determinants affect a nation's prospects for successful development. Its work force has to be trained, its people motivated to desire the fruits of modern production and to accept its discipline, and cultural beliefs changed.

Early practitioners took it as self-evident that economic development is, everywhere and for everyone, a good thing; that technology should be harnessed to all human activities because it boosts productivity; and that specialized modern institutions are desirable because they foster economic growth. Studying development was not a philosophical inquiry into value changes, but a technical examination of how to mobilize resources and people most efficiently and fashion the institutional arrangements best suited to growth. Development was the proper object of study for economics. Within the economic discipline, it was the value-free "engineering" stream of theory, methodology, and analysis which prevailed. Amartya Sen (1987, pp. 2-3) explains that:

economics has had two rather different origins, both related to politics, but related in rather different ways, concerned respectively with 'ethics,' on the one hand, and with what may be called 'engineering,' on the other... The 'engineering' approach is characterized by being concerned with primarily logistic issues rather than with ultimate ends and such questions as what may foster 'the good of man' or 'how should one live.' The ends are taken as fairly straightforwardly given, and the object of the exercise is to find the appropriate means to serve them.

Sen (1987, p. 3) traces the ethics-related tradition to Aristotle, for whom, "[T]he study of economics, though related immediately to the pursuit of wealth, is at a deeper level

linked up with other studies, involving the assessment and enhancement of more basic goals...Economics relates ultimately to the study of ethics." Sen (1987, p. 7) laments that "[T]he methodology of so-called 'positive economics' has not only shunned normative analysis in economics, it has also had the effect of ignoring a variety of complex ethical considerations which affect actual human behavior and which, from the point of view of the economists studying such behavior, are primarily matters of fact rather than of normative judgement."

Development is above all a question of values and human attitudes, self-defined goals, and criteria for determining what are tolerable costs to be borne in the course of change¹ (Goulet 1971). These are far more important than optimal resource allocations, the upgrading of skills, or the rationalization of administrative procedures. Moreover, developmental processes are full of contradictions and conflicts. Development is an ambiguous adventure born of tensions between *what* goods are sought and *how* these are obtained. Innovations create strains between new demands for information, material goods, services, and freedom, and the effective capacity of societies to meet these new demands.

Ethical judgements regarding the good life, the just society, and the quality of relations among people and with nature always serve, explicitly or implicitly, as operational criteria for development planners and researchers. Development ethics is that new discipline which deals *ex professo* with such normative issues.

Development generates value conflicts over the meaning of the "good life." Competing models of the "good life" are proposed in such works as psychologist Eric Fromm's *To Have Or To Be?*, the French novelist George Perenc's *Les Choses*, (*Things*), or Ursula K. LeGuin's science fiction novel *The Dispossessed*. In the latter work, two models of community vie for the loyalties of people. One is a society which prizes collaboration, friendship, health and a high degree of equality achievable only in an austere regime of disciplined resource use. The other model prizes comfortable selfishness and competition and depends on abundant material resources.

¹ A "value" is defined here as any object or representation which can be perceived by a subject as habitually worthy of desire.

A second value question bears on the foundations of justice in society. Does a just polity rest on inherited authority, the rule of the majority, or a social contract? Should civil and political rights assuring individual freedoms enjoy primacy over collective socio-economic rights regarding needs being met and the common good of society being pursued? Are human rights instrumental goods, or ends in themselves worthy for their own sake?

A third value question centers on the criteria to adopt toward nature. Should nature be viewed simply as raw material for Promethean exploitation by humans, or as the larger womb of life in which humans live, move, and have their being, and whose rhythms and laws they must respect? Is the dominant human stance toward nature to be extractive and manipulative or harmony-seeking?

Although development ethics has only recently become formalized as a specialty within philosophy (Crocker 1991), it has had noteworthy precursors who analyzed development in value terms.

PRECURSORS

Gandhi

Gandhi, who is neither economist nor ethicist, formulated a vision and practice of development for India centered on values of non-violent cooperation among social agents. He emphasized responsible trusteeship in the ownership and administration of wealth, production by the masses over mass production, village development, and the provision of basic needs over the multiplication of wants.

Gandhi's implicit model of development has been schematized by Amritananda Das (1979, p. 59), a student of Gandhian economics, as follows:

1. It is based on the ideal of the development of a collaborative economic system and of its pattern of institutions.
2. These institutions comprise (a) cooperative groups of small farmers and artisans, (b) the cooperative institutions of credit and marketing, (c) large-scale private-

owned and state-owned industries organized on the trusteeship principle, and (d) large-area infrastructure systems run by the state.

3. The coordination of the economic system is in terms of three types of planning processes: (a) the area development plans of local communities and clusters, (b) the marketing and reinvestment planning of the cooperative structure, and (c) centralized planning of large industries, the three processes being made to interact in a hierarchical indicative planning system of cluster/district/zone levels.
4. The objective of planning is visualized as the attainment of a zero structural unemployment state in the shortest possible time.
5. The acceleration of the growth rate of employment is seen as being achieved primarily by investment reallocation and the encouragement of appropriate technical innovations, rather than by the raising of the rate of investment.
6. The resource mobilization for the small-scale sector is visualized as taking place through the reinvestment planning of the cooperative agencies, local infrastructure needs being met by local resource-raising at the cluster level and public resource mobilization relating only to large-scale industry and infrastructure.
7. Investment in large-scale industry and infrastructure is to be kept to the lowest level possible consistent with the small-scale sector growth plan.
8. The growth is visualized as taking place in a semi-autarchic context, at least till such time as the international trade and exchange system becomes free of its present exploitative character.

Gandhi advocated an investment strategy which maximized employment and fostered a collaborative economic order. He demanded of central planning to create conditions favorable to economic decentralization. By centering his analysis and policy prescriptions on the values affected, Gandhi was acting, in effect, as a development ethicist.

Lebret

A second influential precursor of development ethics is the Frenchman, L.-J. Lebret, founder of the *Economy and Humanism* movement in 1941 (Lebret and Moreux 1942). For Lebret underdevelopment is the symptom of a worldwide crisis in human values. Accordingly, development's task is to create, in a world of chronic inequality and disequilibrium, new civilizations of solidarity. This creation he calls the "human ascent," (Lebret 1951) an ascent in all spheres of life -- economic, political, cultural, personal, and spiritual. It calls for new patterns of solidarity which respect differences and the elimination of privilege and domination.

Although rational resource planning, judicious investment, new institutions, and the mobilization of the populace are necessary to achieve development, such measures do not suffice. More necessary is overall cultural revolution in the values human beings hold. Satisfying an abundance of false needs at the expense of keeping multitudes in misery does not constitute authentic development for Lebret. Rather, a sound hierarchy of needs must be established for every society.

Lebret distinguishes three categories of needs (Lebret 1954, 1961):

- Essential subsistence needs (i.e., food, clothing, housing, health care, and the like).
- Needs related to comfort and amenities which make life easier (i.e., transportation, leisure, labor-saving devices, pleasant surroundings, and so on).
- Needs related to human fulfillment or transcendence, whose satisfaction confers heightened value on human lives (i.e., cultural improvement, deeper spiritual life, enriching friendships, loving relationships, rewarding social intercourse). These may also be called "enhancement goods" because they ameliorate human societies qualitatively and find their expression in cultural or spiritual achievement.

The policy implications flowing from this vision are obvious:

- Development efforts should give priority to assuring sufficient goods of the first category to all persons. This priority ought to guide investment decisions, the types of social institutions adopted, the mechanisms of world circulation systems, and the allotment of scarce goods to competing groups.
- Sufficiency at the first level must not be pursued to the detriment of goods related to human fulfillment. Lebrecht insists, however, that the satisfaction of basic subsistence needs is the prerequisite upon which human creativity and expression normally depend if they are to flourish.
- The second category of goods, ranging from goods which are relatively useful to those which are luxuriously wasteful, is not totally useless but should be clearly subordinated to the others.

Myrdal

A third precursor of development ethics is the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal. Myrdal wrestled with the conflict between the demands of objectivity in social science and the need for value-based interventions in the pursuit of development. How could development interventions avoid being arbitrary and biased, but rather "objective" or scientifically valid, based on a positive economic analysis of facts and conditions. As Myrdal (1969, pp. 3-5) writes:

[T]he ethos of social science is the search for 'objective' truth...

The most fundamental methodological problems facing the social scientist are therefore, what is objectivity, and how can the student attain objectivity in trying to find out the facts and the causal relationships between facts? How can a biased view be avoided?....

The social scientist faces the further problem: how can he be in this sense objective and, at the same time, practical? What is the relation

between wanting to understand and wanting to change society? How can the search for true knowledge be combined with moral and political valuations? How can truth be related to ideals?

We shall find, the logical means available for protecting ourselves from biases are broadly these: to raise the valuations actually determining our theoretical as well as our practical research to full awareness, to scrutinize them from the point of view of relevance, significance, and feasibility in the society under study, to transform them into specific value premises for research, and to determine approach and define concepts in terms of a set of value premises which have been explicitly stated.

Because he was a development policy planner as well as an economic theorist, Myrdal's epistemological anxieties transformed his way of "doing economics" (Myrdal 1968). "We will have to master the complex problems that exist in reality by whatever tools are available," he writes. "This should not be taken as an excuse for dilettantism: it is our duty to develop our skills to the highest possible degree in order to solve the scientific problems before us. The student must try to improve and adapt his skills to suit the particular problem he is tackling; he must not be content to limit them narrowly to one of the traditional disciplines. In my own professional life I have sometimes wandered far from what is usually considered economic theory, my original playground" (Myrdal 1969, p. 11).

Economic analysis, says Myrdal is radically flawed: in the name of value-free objectivity it abstracts from reality, and it uncritically extrapolates concepts from Western to non-Western societies. "The use of Western theories, models, and concepts in the study of economic development in the South Asian countries," he writes, "is a cause of bias seriously distorting that study" (Myrdal 1968, v.I, p. 19). Among concepts central to economic analysis which are especially inapplicable to developing societies he numbers: employment and unemployment, savings and consumption, the supposed spread effects of investment, and the notion of output. The aggregation of magnitudes which is central to economic analysis, he argues, is meaningless in South Asian developing countries. Assessing Western economic procedures for utilizing data, Myrdal (1968, v.I) concludes "that their categories are unrealistic.... while in the Western world an analysis in 'economic' terms -- markets and prices, employment and unemployment, consumption and savings,

investment and output -- that abstracts from modes and levels of living and from attitudes, institutions, and culture may make sense and lead to valid inferences, an analogous procedure plainly does not in underdeveloped countries" (pp. 19-20).

ETHICS AS "MEANS OF THE MEANS"

Not all ethical approaches are adequate to the task of integrating the diagnostic and policy domains of development with its value realms. Abstract deductive ethics cannot do, because the discipline of development is an art, not a science, dealing with decisions and actions taken in domains of high uncertainty. Ethics must enter inside the value dynamisms and constraint systems of development agents, thus becoming a "means of the means."

Many ethicists are content to portray ideal ends and to pass adverse judgement on the means used by politicians or planners to mobilize social energies at the service of these ends. This approach fails because it remains outside the real constraints and criteria of decisions invoked by decision makers, who make and unmake social values.

Genuine ethics is a kind of praxis (Bernstein 1971) which generates critical reflection on the value charge of one's social actions. Unlike the purely extrinsic treatment of means, ethical praxis conditions choices and priorities by assigning relative value weights to essential needs, power relationships, and criteria for determining tolerable levels of human suffering in promoting social change. Alternative development strategies, programs, and projects have varying impacts on populations victimized by poverty, economic exploitation, or technological marginalization. An ethic of social justice needs to harness concrete instruments in support of the struggle conducted by populations and societies at the bottom of the economic ladder. It is a hollow and hypocritical exercise to speak rhetorically about human dignity unless one builds social structures that foster dignity and eliminate obstacles to it.

Ethics is concerned both with the ends and the means of human action. How it deals with means is crucial. Ethics must transmit, from within constraints surrounding decisions and actions, critically selected value allegiances and criteria. The greatest danger faced by development ethicists is to play the role of plantation preachers in the days of slavery:

supplying good conscience to the rich while providing spiritual "other-worldly" solace to the victims of unjust structures. Hence development ethicists do not discharge their obligation merely by harnessing human aspirations to such developmental goals as growth, modernization, or global competitiveness. To do so is to treat more basic values in instrumental fashion, seeing them as mere aids or obstacles to development goals which are themselves uncritically accepted as ends. Ultimately, it is development itself which must be critically subjected to the value tests of justice, human enhancement, and spiritual liberation. These values pass judgement on development, not vice versa.

DEVELOPMENT ETHICS: TWO PATHWAYS

In new and rapidly changing settings, development poses three ancient philosophical questions: what is the good life (i.e., the relation between *having* goods and *being* good), what are the foundations of justice in society, and what stance should human groups adopt toward nature? "Development" provides one particular answers to these questions. Yet the very goals of modern development, and the peculiar answer it offers to these ancient philosophical questions, are at issue. Consequently, development ethics is summoned to a task beyond mere instrumental norm-setting in processes of change. Needed is a critical questioning of the very nature of development and of its declared goals: a better human life and societal arrangements which provide a widening range of choices for people to pursue their common and individual good.

In formulating the new discipline of development ethics, its pioneers have traveled two different roads. The first road runs from engagement as planners or change agents in development practice to the formal articulation of ethical strategies. The second road originates in an internal critique of conventional ethical theory and moves outward to the elaboration of a distinctive ethics of development as normative *praxis*.

Along the first road, ethical strategies are derived from the varied development practice of national societies, of opposition social movements experimenting with alternative counter-strategies, and of ethicists' own activities as a development practitioners (Goulet 1991, 1992, 1995). The basic mode of study employed is phenomenological analysis, i.e., the methodical reduction or "peeling away" of values and counter-values contained, usually

implicitly and in latent form, in the policies, programs, and projects proposed and carried out by development agents.

This first stream delineates development ethics:

- as a new discipline with distinctive methods and research procedures;
- as the constitutive source of general principles which guide the formulation of ethical strategies;
- as ethical strategies in specific sectors of development decision-making and action; and
- as the supplier of normative standards for evaluating development performance.

In the second pathway to development ethics is a specialized domain of theory and practice which links up with studies of environment, world order, and other trans-disciplinary realms as peaks in a common mountain chain of concerns.

This second stream conducts formal ethical analysis of such issues as (Dower 1983):

- the foundational justification of rights, needs, capacities, and entitlements;
- the ethical assessment of policies as these affect special categories of persons victimized or marginalized by current development practices;
- evaluations of competing economic, political, and social systems; and
- new conceptions of security posed by the militarization of societies, environmental stresses across national boundaries, new patterns of migratory and refugee flows.

The New Discipline

As noted earlier, professional ethicists were late arrivals to the stage of development studies. For many years development's value dilemmas were treated only peripherally by a few economists. A 1968 textbook on development by the Canadian economist Benjamin Higgins urges that "the philosopher needs to be added to the development team; without

a clear concept of the philosophy of development, the team becomes a simple ad hoc mission" (p. 369).

The systematic *ex professo* study of development ethics, however, except by a few philosophers working in isolation (Goulet 1974), had to await the birth in 1987 of the International Development Ethics Association (IDEA). At IDEA's founding in San José, Costa Rica three streams of ethical theory converged: Yugoslav *praxis* humanists searching for a non-dogmatic brand of Marxism, Central American analytical philosophers applying methods of symbolic logic to issues of technology and social change, and USA analytical philosophers looking beyond Western theoretical sources to craft applied ethical norms to guide action in spheres of global relations and public policy. The three groups shared a common view of ethics' mission: to diagnose vital problems facing human societies, to guide public policy choices, and to clarify value dilemmas surrounding these problems and policies. This threefold reflection they undertook to conduct around value questions posed by development. Thus, with the creation of IDEA, development ethics gained formal recognition as an interdisciplinary field both within development studies and within philosophy.

The discipline of development is, in Lebre's phrase (1959, p. 40), the study of how to achieve a more human economy. The expressions "more human" and "less human" must be understood in the light of the vital distinction between *plus avoir* ("to have more") and *plus être* ("to be more"). Societies are more human or more developed, not when men and women "have more" but when they are enabled "to be more". The psychologist Erich Fromm (1976, pp. 15-16) observes that people always choose one of two modes of living:

The alternative of *having* versus *being* does not appeal to common sense. *To have*, so it would seem, is a normal function of our life: in order to live we must have things. Moreover, we must have things in order to enjoy them. In a culture in which the supreme goal is to have -- and to have more and more -- and in which one can speak of someone as 'being worth a million dollars,' how can there be an alternative between having and being. On the contrary, it would seem that the very essence of being is having; that if one *has nothing*, one *is nothing*.

Yet the great Masters of Living have made the alternative between having and being a central issue of their respective systems. The Buddha teaches that in order to arrive at the highest stage of human development, we must not crave possessions. Jesus teaches: 'for whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?' (Luke 9:24-25) Master Eckhart taught that to have nothing and make oneself open and 'empty,' not to let one's ego stand in one's way, is the condition for achieving spiritual wealth and strength.

For many years I had been deeply impressed by this distinction and was seeking its empirical basis in the concrete study of individuals and groups by the psychoanalytic method. What I saw has led me to conclude that this distinction, together with that between love of life and love of the dead, represents the most crucial problem of existence; that empirical anthropological and psychoanalytic data tend to demonstrate that *having and being are two fundamental modes of experience, the respective strengths of which determine the differences between the characters of individuals and various types of social character.*

The true indicator of development is not growth in production or material well-being but qualitative human enrichment. Quantitative increases in goods and services are no doubt needed, but not any kind of increase nor growth obtained at any price.

Development ethicists borrow freely from the work of economists, political scientists, planners, anthropologists, and other specialists. Ethics places each discipline's concept of development in a broad evaluative framework wherein development means, ultimately, the quality of life and the progress of diverse societies toward enhancement values expressed in their cultures. To ethicists, it is axiomatic that **how** development is pursued is just as important as **what** benefits are gained.

Development ethics functions as a kind of "disciplined eclecticism." Four traits characterize any intellectual discipline: the *systematic* pursuit of knowledge in ways which are *cumulative*, *communicable*, and *testable*. Development ethics is *eclectic* in its choice of subject matter but *disciplined*, in its study of it. Behind all its operations lies a clear

mission: to diagnose value conflicts, to assess policies (actual and possible), and to validate or refute valuations placed on development performance.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary development thinkers are prey to unending and perplexed self-questioning. Books proliferate, asking what are development's goals (UNESCO 1988); what alternative strategies must be adopted, either in pursuing development or in rejecting it (Griffin 1989; Vachon 1988); how to rethink the Third World (Galli et al. 1992), its politics, (Manor 1991) and development itself (Apter 1987); what are Third World options and its hopes for "another development" (Rweyemamu 1992); and whether fifty years of World Bank and IMF global financial management is enough (Danaher 1994).

Economics itself, the original development discipline, is likewise subjected to a plethora of critical self-interrogations. We are alternatively warned of the end of economics (Buarque 1993); summoned to become thoughtful economists concerned with rationality, moral rules, and benevolence (Meeks 1991); to reflect anew on economic rights (Paul et al. 1988; Ekins and Max-Neff 1992; Ekins et al. 1992); to practice humanistic, real-life, or green economics; to get beyond our obsession with quantity and engage in the economic pursuit of quality (Power 1988); to adopt a new economics around the moral dimension (Etzioni 1988); to overcome the crisis of vision in modern economic thought (Heilbroner and Milberg 1995).

A new development paradigm is in gestation, centering on human development as the end and economic development as the means (UNDP 1994, p. 17ff). Development's philosophical questions have now regained center stage: what is the good life or human flourishing, individually and societally, across the divide of multiple cultures and value systems? What are the foundations of life in society, in a polity, what Illich (1973) calls conviviality -- the joy of living together in society with others? And what stance must humans take toward nature so as to render development sustainable? (Pirages 1996)

Issues of environment, peace, security, demography, human rights, equity, and meaningful existence constitute a vast agenda offering to development ethicists unlimited materials for diagnosis, analysis, and prescription.

Development ethics' essential task is to render development decisions and actions humane. Paul Streeten (1994, p. 13) considers that "[I]t is development itself that interferes with human development." Stated differently, the task of development ethics is to assure that the painful changes launched under the banner of development not result in antidevelopment, which destroys cultures and individuals and exacts undue sacrifices in suffering and societal well-being -- all in the name of profit, some absolutized ideology, or a supposed efficiency imperative. The discipline of development ethics is the conceptual cement which binds together multiple diagnoses of problems with their policy implications, this through an explicit phenomenological study which lays bare the value costs of various courses of action.

More fundamentally, however, the primary mission of development ethics is to keep hope alive (Carter et al. ed. 1993), for by any purely rational calculus of future probabilities, the development enterprise of most countries is doomed to fail. The probable future scenario is that technological and resource gaps will continue to widen, and that vast resources will continue to be devoted to destructive armaments and wasteful consumption. By any reasonable projection over the next fifty years, development will remain the privilege of a relative few, while underdevelopment will continue to be the lot of the vast majority. Only some trans-rational calculus of hope, situated beyond apparent realms of possibility, can elicit the creative energies and vision which authentic development for all requires. This calculus of hope must be ratified by development ethics, which summons human persons and societies to become their best selves, to create structures of justice to replace exploitation and aggressive competition. A basis for hope is suggested by René Dubos (1978) and other sociobiologists, who remind us that only a tiny fragment of human brain-power has been utilized up till the present. This means that Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans can invent new, more authentic models of development. In *The Coming Dark Age*, Robert Vacca (1973) gloomily forecasts a world with no future. Development ethics corrects this view by reminding us that futures are not foreordained. Indeed the most important banner development ethics must raise high is that of hope, hope in the possibility of creating new possibilities.

Development ethics pleads normatively for a certain reading of history, one in which human agents are makers of history even as they bear witness to values of transcendence (Goulet 1974b).

This long view of history, and of development as a historical adventure, is the only guarantee that development processes will ensure a future. Solidarity with the planet of which we human agents are the responsible stewards, and with future generations, is the ethical key to achieving a development at once human and sustainable.

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