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Abstract: Processes of social and economic transformation involve great risks and costs and great opportunities for gain. The benefits, costs and risks are typically hugely unevenly and inequitably distributed, as is participation in formulating what are the benefits, costs and risks and their relative importance. The processes of transformation are not inevitable but offer many options and choices. The ethics of development—as an existing and a prospective activity—examines the benefits, costs, risks, formulations, participation, and options. The paper outlines ways of characterizing such work. Definitions are diverse since the work covers very many different intersections of practice and theorizing, at multiple levels. The paper replies also to arguments against discussing ethics of development: claims that it involves only an endless proliferation of different opinions, is an expensive luxury that undermines long-run development, is superfluous if one already works with the capability approach or the human rights tradition, or never makes an impact. Finally, it presents suggestions for how ethical thinking can indeed have (more) impact, with reference to incorporation in policy and planning methods, professional codes and training, academic organization, and public debate and communication strategies.

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1 This paper extends some of the ideas presented in: 1) a public lecture with this title and lectures in a PhD summer school, both at the Universidad de los Andes, Bogota, July 2007; 2) ‘Development Ethics and Human Development’, Human Development Insights, 24, United Nations Development Programme, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HD_Insights_January2009.pdf; 3) Gasper and St. Clair (2010), written with Asuncion Lera St. Clair. My thanks to Asuncion for agreeing to my drawing from some parts of that paper, and for ongoing intellectual partnership, including valuable comments on the present paper.
1. Why development ethics? Responding to existential challenges for present and future generations; the calculi of pain, meaning, and sustainability

Modernity ‘promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are’ (Berman, 1983: 15).

The rationale for attention to development ethics is that processes of social, political, economic and environmental development bring both enormous opportunities and enormous threats for humankind, individually and collectively, and that the associated benefits and costs are highly unequally and unfairly distributed. Many countries unfortunately match the description that Denis Goulet cited for Mexico in the 1980s: a rich country full of poor people. Human powers to transform the human condition have grown astonishingly in the past three centuries, as have the differentials of power and good fortune between different persons and groups within countries and between countries and regions. Ten to fifteen million people a year, for example, are displaced from their place of residence in order to make way for development projects, with often little or no compensation and with severe harm to their well-being. Some drugs for debilitating and often killer diseases are controlled by business corporations that try to sell them at prices dozens of times their cost of production, beyond the reach of the majority of sufferers.

‘Development’ – whether understood as fundamental transformations including industrialisation, urbanisation, globalization, and more; as planned intervention; as improvement in human welfare; or as expansion of valued attainable opportunities – is correspondingly a strongly ethically-laden field. What is all the running and risk-taking for? What is the good life? Why are so many of the materially affluent spiritually poor? Who benefits, who loses? Who decides, who is consulted, who is not?

Some key themes in development ethics have been that, first, the gains of some groups have been directly conditional on planned suffering for others—a theme for which we can take Peter Berger’s label: ‘pyramids of sacrifice’ (Berger 1974); as for example in the suffering of slaves in the processes of generation of agricultural and mining wealth from the Americas, or of rural labourers displaced to become urban proletarians in the industrialisation of Western Europe and Russia. More generally, long term societal development involves enormous investments by preceding generations—such as in the terracing of the Chinese landscape—to the benefit overwhelmingly of later generations, not of themselves. This has been induced in diverse ways besides voluntary contract: through forced labour, physical displacement leading on to capitalist wage-labour, or labour seen as loyalty, duty, honour or self-fulfilment.

Mainstream economics methods use variants and combinations of utilitarian and libertarian values, and a profoundly individualistic world view centred on markets seen as expressions of freedom. Many employ the utilitarian principle of maximising net benefits—the sum of estimated benefits minus the sum of estimated costs, regardless of on whom the benefits or costs fall, sharing Lenin’s readiness to ‘break eggs in order to make omelettes’. Besides the disputes over that formal principle comes the question of
how it is applied in reality. Michael Cernea, the first and leading sociologist in the history of the World Bank, remarks that: ‘we find much in evaluation work that is totally ethically unacceptable’ (Cernea 2006), for example studies that legitimated creating parks for rich tourists at the cost of removing the livelihoods of poor local residents, on the basis of projections of future numbers of tourists that were never plausible. We see here the combination of a cost-benefit analysis methodology that impresses through its apparent precision and sophistication but that can allow poor people to be made poorer for the benefit of richer people, and a practice that exacerbates this feature by its openness to manipulation and its frequent generation of highly unreliable scenarios.

‘Some get the gains, others get the pains’, remarked Cernea (2006), after a lifetime of observation of forced displacement of low-income populations. The creation of national parks, for example, has typically been comprehensively at the expense of the previous residents. Oliver-Smith records the more general ‘abject failure of so many resettlement projects to produce tangible benefits for displaced communities. … [T]he record of dismal failures and concomitant pain and suffering for the displaced continues with depressing regularity.’ (Oliver-Smith, 2009: 17). Even where compensation exercises are present: ‘Overwhelming evidence documents pervasive and multidimensional distortions of compensation in practice’ (Cernea, 2008: 56). Thirty-six out of forty-four dam-related resettlement cases reviewed by Scudder (2005) showed direct material losses to the displaced, quite apart from the psychological and social losses.

Second, good fortune can generate unplanned suffering for others, as when booming incomes in some sections of society or some parts of the world pull food resources out of poorer areas and out of the affordable reach of the poorest people, leading even to famine and death. Amartya Sen elaborated how famines are not necessarily caused by lack of food but by poor people’s lack of market power to command food, which can occur partly as a side-effect of richer people’s greater power to command resources (Sen 1981; Dreze and Sen eds. 1990). He analysed these mechanisms in a series of famines that cost millions of lives, in the 19th century in India and Ireland, the Bengal famines of 1943-4 and 1974, and the Ethiopian famines of 1973 and 1974. Mike Davis (2001)’s account of the late 19th century famines in India, China and Brazil which brought tens of millions of deaths takes Sen’s insight further.

Millions died, not outside the “modern world system,” but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into its economic and political structures. They died in the golden age of Liberal Capitalism; indeed, many were murdered, as we shall see, by the theological application of sacred principles of Smith, Bentham, and Mill. (Davis 2001: 8-9)

Davis recounts how the impacts of climatic shocks caused by el Niño currents in the Pacific Ocean were mediated by new systems of global trade connections and economic ideology. Comparable shocks in the 18th century in China and India had been managed with far less loss of life, by governments that did not believe that starvation reflected immutable economic and Malthusian law and that retained capacity to act on that belief. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with markets left free to determine allocation, some groups in drought-hit areas ended with no enforceable claims over food. Food flowed instead between regions and social groups purely in response to demand from
those with money, locally and internationally, without any compensating public action and resulting in the malnutrition and premature death of millions. Such types of ‘side-effect’ and ‘collateral damage’ are widespread in an interconnected world; they are marginal only in terms of the attention often given to them, not marginal in their occurrence and human significance.

Third, besides this ‘calculus of pain’ (Peter Berger’s term), including between people and across generations, there is what Berger called a ‘calculus of meaning’: how far does the acquisition of and preoccupation with material comforts and conveniences bring or jeopardise a fulfilling and meaningful life? Material means, important as they are for a life of dignity, are insufficient for a truly human life; further, the meanings and use of material things depend on people’s own values.

In addressing the calculi of pain and meaning, the choices we face are not only between a first option called ‘without development’ and a second option called ‘development’, but between many different versions and styles of ‘development’, with reference both to end-destinations and the character of the paths towards them. Much of the suffering along past and contemporary paths of development is avoidable. Societally and globally we have real choices. In Latin America, for example, Costa Rica has long illustrated one distinctive and in many ways admirable path (see e.g. Deneulin 2006). Attention to ethics is important not only in choosing directions but also in understanding options, because people use and are moved by ethical ideas, as we will see for example with reference to the growth and impact of human rights thinking.

Fourth, deserving special attention, given the growth of human powers to do good and to do harm, are the issues of pain and meaning concerning unborn generations and the already born children who are not yet able to participate in societal decisionmaking. Taking their interests fairly into account, and respecting environmental fragility and constraints, can be called the calculus of sustainability.

The Great Transition Initiative, founded by the Stockholm Environment Institute, notes the following areas of critical uncertainties for sustainability: environmental risks, economic instabilities, and socio-political combustibility (Raskin et al., 2002). The three are heavily interconnected, which brings the danger of chain-reaction crises—triggered by climate change, pandemics, financial collapse, mega-terrorism, or key resource shortages—that contemporary institutions will be unable to manage. Karl Polanyi and many others analysed the great developmental transition from rural life to urbanism and from agriculture to industry and market society, and the eventual institutional responses to cope with those enormously productive yet enormously disruptive forces. We now require, concludes the Great Transition Initiative, a second great institutional and cultural transition, to more sustainable societies. Building on analyses done for the Earth Charter and elsewhere it identifies three required major types of value change: from consumerism (the religion of salvation through buying) to a focus instead on quality of life; from individualism to human solidarity; and to ecological sensitivity away from attitudes of domination and exploitation of nature (Kates et al., 2006).
Denis Goulet’s contribution (1971, 2006) was to synthesise and apply all these themes. Goulet, the leader of a self-conscious ‘development ethics’ during the 1960s to 1990s, was an earlier as well as perhaps more profound exponent of the notion of ‘human development’ than the thinkers whose work became embodied in and around the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Human Development Reports since 1990 (Gasper 2008). He articulated a theory of value criteria relevant for development outcomes and development processes, and examined the value-conflicts and costs in typical development processes, such as technology transfer (Goulet 1977). He stressed also the importance of understanding faith-based value systems, as held by perhaps most people around the world, especially in lower-income countries.²

2. What is ‘development ethics’?

2.1: Questions / responses / an academic field / a self-conscious movement

‘Development ethics’ can be considered, in one sense, as a field of attention, an agenda of questions about major value choices involved in processes of social and economic development. It is comparable then to business ethics, medical ethics, environmental ethics and other areas of practical ethics. Each area of practice generates ethical questions about priorities and procedures, rights and responsibilities. In this case the questions include: What is good or ‘real’ development? What is the good life which development policy should seek to facilitate, what really are benefits? How are those benefits and corresponding costs to be shared, within the present generation and between generations? Who decides and how? What rights of individuals should be respected and guaranteed? When— in for example the garment trade, the sex trade, the ‘heart trade’ in care services, and the trade in human organs—should ‘free choice’ in the market be seen instead as the desperation behavior of people who have too little real choice? Besides such issues of policy-level ethics come the innumerable ethical issues, stresses and choices in the daily work and interactions of development professionals. (Glover 1995, Goulet 1988, and Hamelink 1997 give fuller statements of agendas for development ethics.)

Development ethics work has arisen as a follow-on to the emergence of self-conscious professional fields—fields that cover public policy, programmes, organizations, careers, research, education, training, and sometimes proposed codes of practice—of ‘economic development’ and development economics, ‘social development’ and development sociology/anthropology, ‘politics of development’, and so on, and overall of ‘international development’ and ‘development studies’/‘international development studies’. So a preliminary type of answer to the ‘Why?’ question is that every field of practice requires a practical and theorised ethics. Such an ethics, in every case, spans from work which is narrowly technical-professional, to work which is more theoretical-academic, to work which engages with wider publics.

² Goulet (e.g., 1980) drew here on perspectives from the South, as in liberation theology (e.g., by Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez) and from Buddhist traditions (as in Gunatilleke ed. 1983). He warned development ‘experts’ that it may be impossible to plan and implement well without understanding the roles that faith-based values often have in people’s conceptions of quality of life. For subsequent work in this genre, see: Hicks 2000; Marshall and Keough 2004; ter Haar and Ellis 2006; Deneulin & Bano 2009.
The development field is so broad though, that there are limits to the analogy to other areas of professional ethics. The problem arises that development ethics might touch almost everything and so cohere less as an area than business ethics or medical ethics. The same might be argued for the field of human rights, because human rights relate to so many diverse areas of human life. This clearly forms no argument against the activity of thinking in an ethically careful way about problems and possibilities in development policy and practice. It means only that this activity may not form a tidy self-enclosed field. The all-encompassing scope of ‘development’ makes it less a particular specialist area and more a meta-area that aims to link and inform many others.

Second, development ethics can be considered also as the diverse body of work that has tried to address the questions mentioned above, and the various sets of answers that are offered. This includes work from long before the label ‘development ethics’ existed; for example, great 19th century writers like Saint-Simon, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx stated positions on some of the questions mentioned above. (See e.g. the surveys in Lutz & Luz, 1988; Cowen & Shenton, 1996.) It also includes current work that may not use the name ‘development ethics’ but addresses various of its questions, for example the work of Amartya Sen or Joseph Stiglitz. Berger’s famous *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (1974), stimulated by visits to Mexico and critical interaction with Ivan Illich, described itself as political ethics applied to social change in the Third World.

Third, more narrowly, we have work which uses the name ‘development ethics’. Its founder, if any one person should have that title, was the socio-economist Louis Lebret (1897-1966) who led a group called *Économie et Humanisme*, which worked first in France and then in many other countries. The group was formed in 1941 and reflected the experience of the inter-war depression years and a revulsion at avoidable deprivation and suffering in processes of societal advance from which many other people benefit greatly. It sought to contribute to a better postwar world through constructing and applying a more humane vision for economic systems. Through a dialogue between economics, other social sciences, theology and philosophy, *Économie et Humanisme* promoted a forerunner of the present day idea of human development. Lebret was a lead contributor to Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, one of the key sources for liberation theology and its thesis of ‘the option for the poor’ (Novak 1984: 134, in Hebblethwaite 1994: 484). His group had an important direct impact in Latin American thinking more widely. Variants of its themes of humanization of the economy and of human liberation continue in the writings of important contemporary Latin American philosophers and social theorists like Enrique Dussel (1978, 2007).

Similar work emerged elsewhere, including much written in Spanish and Portuguese. Notable for articulating in English these Francophone, Hispanic and Lusophone traditions and connecting them to English language work and to new global networks was Lebret’s student, the American existentialist and social planner Denis Goulet (1931-2006), for example in his book *The Cruel Choice* (1971). Development ethics, Goulet proposed, considers the contents of worthwhile development, the acceptable distribution of its costs
and risks as well as of its benefits, and the ethical quality of its methods of analysis and practice, including the questions of who should decide and who should act.

So a distinct area of work in academic ethics and social philosophy has called itself ‘development ethics’ since the 1960s (see e.g., Goulet, 1960; Goulet, 1965). It attempts to focus philosophy on fundamental human priority issues: How are we (as a society, as a world) going? Who suffers? Who (does not) gain? Where are we going? Some of this work looks largely only at low-income countries, though with reference also to their relations with high-income countries. Other work recognises that high-income countries are not necessarily highly humanly developed; it looks at emptiness and malaise, poverty and exclusion, indignity and insecurity in rich countries too (see e.g. Burgess et al., 2007).

Nigel Dower distinguishes development ethics by its attention to evaluating societal paths. Traditional ethics has asked "How ought one to live as an individual?". Development ethics asks in addition, he suggests, "How ought a society to exist and move into the future?" (cf. Dower 2008). It is thus a central part of social ethics, while clearly not all of it. Dower stated a similar question for world society, in order to define a sister field of world or global ethics (Dower 2007). One might perhaps equally call that field ‘global development ethics’. In addition, ‘development ethics’ and ‘global development ethics’ are not really separable: development ethics includes questions of how different societies in the world relate to each other in the process of moving into the future.

Broader than Dower’s definition of development ethics is Goulet’s: the examination of ‘ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning, and practice’. Its mission is “to diagnose value conflicts, to assess policies (actual and possible), and to validate or refute valuations placed on development performance” (Goulet, 1997: 1168). Over time there has been growing such reference to ethics in discussions on long term and short term development policy: in human rights language and activism, the Human Development Reports, the Millennium Declaration, and concern with business corporations’ responsibilities and with the interests of future generations. Many streams of work in this terrain—including usually the great river of human rights work, or the ‘human-scale development’ thinking of Manfred Max-Neef and collaborators—have not used the name ‘development ethics’ but certainly match its description.

Fourth, it is worth highlighting networks and organizations that have explicitly emphasised a development ethics agenda and tried to institutionalise the field, via publications, meetings, scholarly associations, networks and courses. The International Development Ethics Association (IDEA), for example, formed in 1984 (http://www.development-ethics.org/), was inspired by Goulet.³ It has sponsored a series of conferences -- the latest were at the University of Valencia in 2009 and Bryn Mawr College in 2011 -- and provides encouragement and support to work in this field.

³ Surveys of development ethics, all by authors active in IDEA, include Crocker (1991), which uses all four definitions above, Schwenke (2008) which focuses on the first (practical policy challenges), Crocker (2008) which concentrates more on the second (academic work on such challenges), and Gasper (2004) which combines the first and second. See also Gasper and St. Clair (eds., 2010); this paper’s Annex gives its table of contents.
While highlighting the name development ethics it has been committed to interdisciplinary and policy-relevant work, not oriented only to academic philosophy. Crocker, Penz and others (see e.g., Crocker, 1991, 2008; Aman, ed., 1991; Penz et al., 2011) have linked Goulet’s thinking to other research traditions, including of human development, human rights and deliberative democracy.

2.2: Intersections of practice and theorizing, at multiple levels

There is no single agreed definition of development ethics. This is inevitable, for development ethics lies at the intersection of other fields, each of which brings its own concerns; and the nature of the intersection may change with time. The type of definition which selects and honours one particular type of ethical theory, for example human rights or the capability approach, is too narrow. Both those types of theorizing are important, but they do not provide everything that is needed, as we see in Part Three of the paper; and the same applies to any other single ethical tradition.

We saw already an example of ostensive definition instead, which though less elegant is also enlightening: whatever work has used or accepted the label ‘development ethics’. But we saw also how this is insufficient: much work on the same issues has not used the label. Let us look then at a more structured but still ostensive definition, not trying for a tidy and explicit definition. Figure 1 presents development ethics work as occurring at the intersections between relevant streams of theorizing (‘ethics’), presented as the rows, and relevant streams of practice, presented as the columns (‘development’). Professional ethics is presented also as a row of the table, as having now become in part a territory and tradition of theorizing of its own. Other sources of theory – for example, socialist critiques of capitalism in terms wider than those of only welfare economics – and other spaces of practice could certainly be added. Development ethics includes and interconnects each of these multiple sites of reflection.

The matrix in Figure 1 is a tool to think about work in development ethics, not a facsimile portrait. It lacks a time dimension; there are overlaps between some strands; and sources not highlighted in the table but of increasing importance in development ethics include, for example, climate change and migration, which form sources of ethical questions and examination in just the same way that emergency relief and intervention do.

We can refine the picture of areas considered by adding a third dimension. Besides traditions of theory that seek to respond to streams of practice, we must distinguish at least the following levels of focus: 1. International and global relations; 2. Public policy; national trajectory; 3. Organizational conduct; 4. Personal conduct. Dower’s definition highlighted the second level: national trajectory. But most treatments of development ethics, including by figures like Goulet and Crocker, cover all four levels. Indeed, combination of the different levels is arguably essential: one cannot understand issues and choices at any level without reference also to the other levels. In particular, one cannot understand issues of public policy and national trajectory without reference to issues of international and global relations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOME SOURCES AND STREAMS IN DEVELOPMENT ETHICS</th>
<th>SOME SOURCES IN PRACTICE</th>
<th>Emergency relief, conflict and humanitarian intervention</th>
<th>The world of work and corporate responsibility</th>
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<td>Examples of the resulting work</td>
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<td>Figure 1:</td>
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<td>SOME SOURCES IN PRACTICE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic development policy, programs, projects</td>
<td>“Rights-based approaches” to development (not led by HR theory). Responses to displacement</td>
<td>The entitlements approach to famine and hunger</td>
<td>“Triple bottom-line”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critics of mainstream economics</td>
<td>Sen and capability approach. Haq and “Human Development.” Grameen Bank.</td>
<td>Galtung, Max-Neef et al. on autonomy and participation in one’s community</td>
<td>Harrell-Bond on promoting autonomy in relief programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-being research</td>
<td>Participatory poverty assessment. Ellerman on building autonomy via assistance</td>
<td>Rights of women, children, workers, aged, handicapped, animals</td>
<td>Kantian ethics of obligations; Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral philosophy</td>
<td>Nussbaum’s capability approach. O’Neill’s approach to justice</td>
<td>Liberation theology; Gandhianism; socially engaged Buddhism</td>
<td>Christian relief agencies; Red Crescent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religions</td>
<td>Liberation theology; Buddhist economics, Sarvodaya</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
<td>Oxfam relief MSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/practical ethics</td>
<td>Discerning gender-based social injustice. Gender audits. Unveiling of the care sector.</td>
<td>Work to apply formally avowed rights in practice</td>
<td>Codes of relief ethics; SPHERE standards</td>
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<td>Source: Gasper and Truong (2010)</td>
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After these ostensive definitions, let us look again at Goulet’s explicit proposed definitions (e.g., Goulet, 1988): the examination of ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning, and practice, in order “to diagnose value conflicts, to assess policies (actual and possible), and to validate or refute valuations placed on development performance”. Standard topics in development ethics thus include debates about:

- the values proposed as constituting the meaning of human, societal and/or global development, and proposed as requiring respect, prioritisation and incorporation into legal frameworks and/or public action; including principles concerning what is the human good (and bad), how it is and should be distributed, and by what processes decisions are and should be made;
- evaluation of experience and proposed alternatives (Crocker, 2008);
- methods and methodologies for such discussion, analysis, design, evaluation, incorporation and action.

It is worth bringing out more clearly the context in which these debates arise. Development ethics looks at challenges and costs of processes of development and change in a world context of, first, great possibilities for promotion of human well-being but very incomplete systems of rights and responsibilities to fulfil this potential; second, extreme global inequalities, that constantly affect and distort life and action in ‘the South’; third, extreme inequities globally, in the sense that much of the past record of change has involved oppression in and of the global South and that present-day citizens in the North inherit enormous privileges that they have not individually done much to earn; and fourth, considerable shared risks—of and from climate change, conflict, pandemics, etc.—of harms that will typically hit the weakest the hardest (see e.g. Gasper, 2010).

3. Why bother with development ethics?

3.1. Objection 1: it involves only an endless proliferation of different opinions?

Is not ethics a matter of taste, and do not tastes differ dramatically and incorrigibly? In reality, we observe some considerable and gradually growing areas and degrees of consensus, nationally and internationally, including to a slowly growing extent regarding human rights; and within specific decision-making areas we observe worthwhile potential for fruitfully ‘dealing with differences’ (Forester, 2009).

Peter Penz (1991) and Mozaffar Qizilbash (2002), amongst others, point out that while there are differences between leading perspectives that have evolved and/or been widely employed in development ethics—such as theories of needs, of prudential values, Sen and Nussbaum’s variants of a capabilities approach, and the theories of John Rawls on primary goods and John Finnis on basic goods—these perspectives have extensive areas in common and even more extensive shared implications. Similarly, when Penz (2003) analyses the ethics of forced displacement due to development projects, he shows the strengths of a methodology of applied ethics that ‘focuses on generalisable principles, but does not commit itself to a particular normative theory’ (Penz, p. 142). He uses this

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4 For a much fuller exploration of objections to the enterprise of development ethics, see ‘What is the Point of Development Ethics?’ (Gasper, 2006).
intermediate methodology to build arguments that can command support from many different normative theories, regarding the responsibilities of various foreign agents and domestic agents in cases of actual or threatened forced displacement. In other words, we do not need to establish universal acceptance of one specific detailed ethical theory in order to make progress in ethical choices. Absence of such acceptance does not leave us to rely only on intuition or locally regnant values.

Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz shows similarly how a pragmatic methodology can offer scope for quite widely persuasive evaluations. For assessing the operations of rich country governments and the international organizations that they control, in their dealings with low-income countries, Stiglitz (2005) adopts a set of ethical precepts that he does not seek to prove but can plausibly claim command wide acceptance. The precepts are: honesty (including no withholding of important information); fairness (in the sense of treating similar cases similarly); social justice (in the minimal sense of respecting basic needs, including needs for dignity); and responsibility (including taking into account, and being accountable for, the external effects that one causes). Honesty and responsibility imply that we should make clear the limits of the information and understanding on which we advise, or press, others to act. This has often not been done by the international financial institutions and rich country governments whose relations with developing countries he examines. Instead they have typically relied on their financial muscle to enforce their prescriptions, such as for full mobility of capital, and left the risks to be borne by the weakest parties. They have also not treated like cases alike: the arguments about social dislocation which rich countries have used to block global free movement of labour have been waved aside when used by developing country governments to argue against global free movement of capital. Stiglitz’s review of the conduct of the international financial institutions and international development agencies in the 1990s leads him to a further precept: maintain rather than tear apart the existing fabric of social norms and cooperation. He considers this principle to have been grossly violated in the shock economic reforms that destroyed the value of ordinary people’s pension rights in Russia while distributing enormous wealth to a new priviligentsia. Elsewhere he argues for more and deeper democracy at all levels (Stiglitz 2007).

3.2. Objection 2: it is just an expensive luxury that undermines real development?

The concerns highlighted in development ethics may certainly be valid; and argumentation about responsibilities and responses may in some cases be able to command wide support. Still, what is the relative importance of such concerns? Would a preoccupation with them get in the way of ‘real development’—notably, economic growth—and is that not the best solvent of all such difficulties, the side-effects of scarcity and backwardness? Answering this objection leads us to consider both the relative importance of the concerns as independent values and their instrumental significance.

Using this approach, Penz, Drydyk and Bose (2011) present a system of ethics for cases of threatened or actual displacement. It amends and extends the perspective advanced by the World Commission on Dams (2000). They derive ethical guidelines for local, national and international responsibilities, with special reference to dam projects, on the basis of a proposed synthesis of core values found in United Nations and other work, that they suggest constitutes a widely accepted consensus ‘human development ethic’.
The British historian R.H. Tawney (1880-1962) proposed that:

“The most obvious facts are the most easily forgotten. Both the existing economic order and too many of the projects advanced for reconstructing it break down through their neglect of the truism that, since even quite common men have souls, no increase in material wealth will compensate for arrangements which insult their self-respect and impair their freedom. A reasonable estimate of economic organization must allow for the fact that, unless industry is to be paralysed by recurrent revolts on the part of outraged human nature, it must satisfy criteria which are not purely economic” (Tawney, 1926).

Tawney’s estimate receives support from many polls and studies of well-being, such as in the World Bank’s *Voices of the Poor* project. The three *Voices of the Poor* volumes (Narayan, Patel, et al. 2000; Narayan, Chambers et al. 2000; Narayan and Petesch 2002) presented poor people’s ideas about well-being and ill-being, drawing from views expressed by over 60,000 respondents around the world. The corollary is that economic growth is no guarantee of human well-being. Beyond higher middle-income levels it is not even substantially correlated with either subjective well-being or many aspects of objective well-being (Bruni and Porta eds. 2007).

These findings about felt independent importance have further corollaries in terms of the instrumental significance of ethical concerns. If we wish to understand and influence human behaviour, then we need to think about ethics, among other matters; for people are in part motivated and guided by ethical ideas, among other types of idea. If people feel that they are treated unfairly, in terms of the ethical principles they subscribe to, this affects their motivation and cooperation, and can lead to conflict. As Amartya Sen reminded economists in ‘On Ethics and Economics’ (1987), since people engage seriously in ethical debate, looking closely at ethics is an essential part of good explanatory work too. Similarly, attention to and respect for people’s ethical beliefs has instrumental importance, for designing effective styles of intervention and interaction.

Methods of interaction that do not respect what participants consider to be their rights, including their rightful degree of autonomy, are likely to undermine their commitment and involvement. David Ellerman’s book *Helping People to Help Themselves* (2005) looks at how processes employed in development cooperation affect the growth of recipient autonomy. He concludes that autonomy-promoting assistance turns out to be very close to rights-respecting assistance. Unhelpfully intrusive ‘help’, whether it is ‘help’ that replaces beneficiaries’ own activity or ‘help’ that dictates their pattern of activity and hence replaces their decision-making, simultaneously offends their felt rights to be active makers of their own lives and leaves underutilised their capacities, knowledge and will. These two lines of counter-productive interaction then reinforce each other in scenarios of apathy and resistance, leading to wasteful use of resources and more frequent failure to fulfil objectives.

Discussion of ethical questions and principles is sometimes felt as embarrassing — precisely because rather than being a luxury it touches on fundamentals of identity and
motive. As human beings we undertake our lives using notions about what are appropriate ends and rights and due respect, and those ideas demand attention: for understanding behaviour, for negotiations, and for motivation. As recognised by Berger in his emphasis on the calculus of meaning, and by Tawney from his review of history, according people dignity is not a luxury, nor very expensive. People feel it as a basic need, and to neglect it is liable to be far more expensive, since neglect triggers conflict. This principle underlies the United Nations Charter: ‘the explicit linkage of human rights protections to an international order of peace and security. … Collective security now [is] seen to require the defense of human rights norms and principles’ (Quataert 2009: 40).

Articulating the principle has become part of the ‘human security’ approach, as sister to conventional human rights advocacy.

3.3. Objection 3: why bother, if we already have the human development and capability approach and/or the human rights tradition?

Human development thinking, as formulated by Mahbub ul Haq, Paul Streeten and others and incorporated in the work for the global, national and regional Human Development Reports, contains both an ethical perspective and a theory of interconnections. Both arose in reaction to the traditional perspective in economics. The principle of interconnection holds that many linkages that are not mediated and measured through economic means are very important, including for economic life: for example, the linkages from lopsided income distribution to malnutrition to reduced learning capacity and lower lifetime earning capacity, or the linkages from skewed international trading systems to societal stresses and conflict in low-income countries. As we saw, this principle of interconnection widens the ethics agenda and requires wider scope in explanation. It brings a focus on the ‘side-effects’ that damage some people, for example, when greater purchasing power and greater political power for some groups makes food unaffordable for weaker groups or leads to their displacement from lands that more powerful people now desire (see e.g. Blaser et al., 2004).

The explicit ethical perspective, the capability approach, holds that the ethical principles embodied in market-based economics do not suffice for public policy; instead market values are important primarily insofar as they support humanly valuable ‘be-ings’ and ‘do-ings’. This component in human development theory is vital, but is far from giving a full ethical basis; for example, for how to handle conflicts between and within different people’s valued ‘be-ings and do-ings’. Capability theory explicitly declares that it is not a full ethical system. Human development theory formulated in terms of a capability space emphasises that space, but tells us nothing about what within such a space is valuable; though it rightly rejects the idea that everything whatsoever in that space is valuable.

To think about the ethical meaning(s) of ‘human’, and about trade and sweated labour, forced displacement or professional ethics, human development thinking needs to draw on longstanding discussions. The ethical traditions that should be consulted lie not only in mainstream Anglo-American academic philosophy; they include not least the human rights tradition, the tradition of humanistic economics, and the related development ethics traditions of Lebret, Goulet, Crocker, Penz, et al. (See e.g.: Wilber & Dutt eds. 2010;
Esquith & Gifford eds. 2010; Ethics and Economics, vol. 4(2); Hamelink ed. 1997; Quarles van Ufford & Giri eds. 2003; Schwenke 2008.) Capability is only one aspect of humanity; vulnerability is another, as emphasised in human security analysis and in Goulet’s The Cruel Choice (1971) whose second chapter was entitled: “Vulnerability: the key to understanding and promoting development”.

Tawney defined the humanistic tradition in terms of its treatment of material inputs and wealth ‘as means to an end, and that this end is the growth towards perfection of individual human beings’ (cited by Lutz 1992a: 98). Lutz called this ‘a welfare standard explicitly expressed in terms of human welfare rather than “economic” or “social welfare”’ (1992a: 103). He highlighted the additional “a priori ethical assumption of human equality” (p.103) and an insistence on assuring the welfare of all. This ‘human welfare’ notion uses a picture of a scale of human values, from basic material needs through a range of higher aspirations for expression, self-realization and dignity. Lutz summarized the welfare standard as ‘material sufficiency and human dignity for all’ (1992b: 166), further summarized as respect for basic human rights, as recognised in the Charter of the United Nations.

What exactly is the relationship of development ethics to human rights, an older and larger tradition than the work that has explicitly called itself development ethics? Human rights ideas have become a language with which nearly everyone is able and willing to communicate and around which nearly everyone can unite. It generates powerful work such as Paul Farmer’s account of global health challenges (2004) and Thomas Pogge’s analysis of current world poverty as a matter of human rights violation (2008). However, reflecting the growth of separate bureaucracies for development and for human rights from the mid 20th century, work on these two concerns had taken separate paths for several decades (Murphy 2006; Quataert 2009). From the 1990s the gap has considerably reduced, in part through the leadership provided in the late 1990s by the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. Also the work on ‘human development’ and ‘human security’ led by Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, Richard Jolly, Martha Nussbaum and others, has helped to link development thought to the project of universal human rights (Jolly et al., 2009).

At the same time, while thinking in terms of rights is invaluable it is insufficient. Human rights theory has a largely individualistic orientation. Different human rights can conflict and require prioritization, yet the rights tradition generally insists on inviolability. Too many claims can become asserted as inviolable human rights, including even property rights, not least ‘intellectual property rights’. Defining definite duties that correspond to asserted rights is often problematic. Prioritization, duty-specification and enforcement have conventionally relied on a cumbersome legal system which is far more accessible to the rich and powerful (Gasper, 2007). Rights language in isolation is thus at risk of becoming rigid and legalistic, set in forms and institutions which in practice often exclude poor people.
We require a richer value basis than only rights or only capabilities or the two together. Not all relevant values can be thought of in terms of rights and duties; we need attention also to virtues, and to processes of equitable and respectful negotiation (World Commission on Dams, 2000; Forester, 2009; Penz et al., 2011). The value basis must include attention to the grounds, processes and formats of ethical reasoning, and also attitudes of caring and commitment.

One reason why human security thinking has gathered momentum is that, as we saw, it elaborates the foundational principle of the United Nations, that without respect for basic human rights there will be no sustained security. The human security approach integrates the languages of capability, rights and security. Underlying that principle is a deeper picture of human personality, emotion, sociability and lived experience than has been used in some thinking on human rights and human development. The approach makes us ask: What is the ‘human’ minimum that each person has a right to secure, beyond possession of a set of reasoned preferences and capacities for choice? An exploited garment worker and the seller of a kidney may have made informed and reasoned choices. Human security thinking connects to the roots in humanistic psychology, humanistic philosophy and daily moral life that also fed Goulet’s thinking and related work in development ethics. Similarly, in thinking about responsible lifestyles, or respectful (and therefore more effective) forms of advice and influence, or in trying to understand and counteract corruption, we can draft and use codes of rights and duties but we also need much more.

Human rights thought forms a central strand in development ethics. But the human rights model does not fit or suffice for all of the issues, contexts and tasks that we face in development policy and practice. We need other resources too and a broader umbrella.

3.4. Objection 3: ethics never has any impact?

Moral arguments typically have little force to change policy and action, if they remain ‘external critiques’ not within the scope of currently accepted ‘expert’ knowledge for development, and if the ethical critiques come from many diverse sources often with little recognition of or knowledge about each other. But by using a more appropriate strategy for influence, some improvements in the design, assessment and evaluation of development interventions have occurred. For example, the now widely accepted definition of development as centering on how people can live as judged by a range of human values (the human development conception) was clear in the work of Lebret in the 1950s or Goulet in the 1960s and 70s, but it became much more visible and influential only in the 1990s when taken up by a network led by a well situated and charismatic policy entrepreneur (Mahbub ul Haq) who seized and made good use of a favourable combination of circumstances (Gasper 2011; Haq and Ponzio 2008).

Other grander examples offer lessons too, from the campaign against slavery that was eventually successful despite the continuing economic profitability of slave-traders and slave-owners (Crawford 2002), through to the debt-relief campaigns of the 1990s and recent years. Joe Hanlon (2000) shows the application of ideas of basic needs, fair
process and human rights to the debt crises in the poorest countries, in work that played an important role in the Jubilee 2000 campaign that led to lightening of their debt burdens. Hanlon outlines the history of credit, debt, default, and debt relief or forgiveness or repudiation, through the 19th and 20th centuries. Periodic default or relief can be seen as a normal, occasional hazard inherent in the overall richly profitable history of lending. However, the same countries in the North that had defaulted or repudiated debts at various times in the 19th and early 20th centuries were to the fore in the late 20th century in enforcing repayment of external debts by low-income countries that were in economic crisis, driving them to cut their already low expenditures on basic services for water, health and education. The debtor and creditor countries are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The main victims of the cuts were poorer people and children who bore no responsibility for the debts, which had sometimes been corruptly arranged. But financial power brings influence, both directly and indirectly; rich country governments have feared to let the biggest irresponsible lenders collapse, because of envisaged knock-on effects, and have given priority to supporting them. Stiglitz (2005) shows how the IMF and its lead member, the US government, have repeatedly given priority to bailing out rich lenders while cutting or diverting resources from the poor. The Jubilee 2000 campaign’s historically-informed critical analyses in terms of basic needs and the associated human rights achieved significant impacts in countering this bias. Various subsequent campaigns for economic, social and health rights have also made progress.

Moving from— though not leaving behind—the levels of global ideas and global policy, down to the levels of development projects and local resource-allocation, experiences in Brazil and elsewhere in popular participation in decision-making around dam construction and in participatory municipal budgeting show how ethically inspired and informed social movements can and do make a difference (see e.g. Goulet 2005). Fora of globally and locally networked activism, such as the World Social Forum, have shown that ‘another globalization is possible’, at least to some useful degree.

4. From What and Why to How: some suggestions

4.1. A ‘means of the means’

Ethically informed analysis and action can make a difference. How and when? The following sections look at how ethics might be incorporated in codes, in training, policy and planning routines, in public debate, academic organization, and communication strategies.

Professional codes have a role. For example, economists work on issues marked by major uncertainty and it is fair to hold them responsible, like members of other professions, to make clear the degrees of uncertainty in their understanding, and to take into account the vulnerability of poor people to unwanted effects resulting from their advice and decisions (Stiglitz 2005). George DeMartino has further specified elements of such a code (2005, 2010). However, if not partnered by a readiness and willingness of spirit, codes remain dead letters (Gasper 1999, Inter-American Initiative 2007).
Denis Goulet argued that to make a real difference ethical thinking must become ‘the means of the means’, ‘a moral beacon illuminating the value questions buried inside instrumental means appealed to by decision-makers and problem-solvers of all kinds’ (1988: 157). Since the fate of general intentions depends upon the character of the concrete means which are available and assigned to fulfil them—the institutions, rules, persons and procedures—so ethical ideals must be well embodied in those concrete means, and must pervade and guide their detailed operation. The agenda for development ethics includes not just ethical theorising but close attention to its linkages to attitudes, public action and policy making, to the work of national and global institutions and civil society, and to practice-related ethical thinking in these settings.6

McNeill and St.Clair (2009) argue that much ‘development’ activity has become a sort of business: a specialised arena dominated by professional development experts and by ‘agencies’ dealing with ‘recipients’. These experts have shared an arcane language in which fundamental ethical issues and reflection on the costs and risks of their planning were absent or, when present, stripped of any direct and painful human content. The role of economic experts in defining and framing development issues is particularly important, for they hold central roles within development bureaucracies, present their frameworks as value-free, and often reject ethical thinking as being outside the scope of their science and planning (McNeill and St.Clair 2009). In particular, market prices have been widely accorded a status as like meteorological data that must simply be observed and respected. The task for development ethics is to make questions like the following, asked by a student perturbed by market-derived prices for water that are unaffordable by the poorest groups, seem as normal as the question of what is the market price or the direct cost recovery-price: ‘What is the human rights price for water?’. Whereas ‘embedded ethicists’ are now not uncommon in medical organizations, the field of economic and social development remains riddled with resistance to ethical thinking and queries as to its legitimacy and value-added.7 Development ethics touches on fundamental features of intra- and inter-national systems of power and is thus not just one more area of applied ethics. St. Clair (2007) calls for investigation of the processes of authoritative knowledge production. Ethical thinking needs to be complemented with epistemological reflection, on how different cognitive and social values can guide attention and research choices, and how the choices of these values, implicit or explicit, are constrained by power relations. Grasping this theme is fundamental for bringing in insights from social sciences other than economics, and from local knowledge, and thus for advancing global justice. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that ‘cognitive justice’—the democratization of expert knowledge and openness to alternative non-

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6 The next three paragraphs draw on material drafted by Asuncion Lera St. Clair.
7 McNeill and St.Clair (2009) discuss further obstacles encountered by work to embed ethical and human rights perspectives in the work of development aid bureaucracies: it can challenge their autonomous power as institutions, it would force government representatives in their boards to rethink their countries’ position in the global scene, and it challenges the established power balances within organizations by making explicit that economic analysis of poverty and development is seriously insufficient for understanding and decision making on these issues.
Western and non expert-based knowledge—is fundamental for construction of alternative futures (De Sousa Santos 2005, 2007).

The most fundamental ‘means’ that should be imbued by a development ethic may well be professionals, at various levels. Chambers (1997, 2005) discusses elements of an informal professional ethic, an ethos of ethical development:- sensitivity to the power of language and to who controls it, and a search for effective generative concepts; an openness to listening, which is found to be the most important element in the use of techniques of participatory research and planning, far more important than the technical details; and an openness to self-criticism, including about one’s own lifestyle, and to learning how to be more while having less. These themes are taken further by, amongst others, Hamelink (1997), Giri (2002), Sharma (2006), and Crocker (2008).

Some authors consider that such perceptions can be dramatically promoted by short ‘immersion visits’ in which development professionals spend some days or weeks living with poor people. Whether most already moulded professionals can be influenced in this way is open to question. At least such visits must be complemented by attention to the methods that they have available in their subsequent operations, and to their prior education. Teaching in schools and general citizen education are by far the largest arenas, but academics unfortunately typically have little to contribute here. Within university teaching, some development ethics textbooks are now available, designed for teaching separate optional courses. While such courses may attract keen minority audiences, and provide an opportunity to work with future potential key resource persons and to develop ideas, ultimately more important is to exert influence within mainstream and compulsory courses in development economics, public policy, research methodology, and the like.

4.2. Incorporation in methodologies of policy analysis and planning

Crocker (1995, 2008) calls for a shift in primary emphasis in development ethics work ‘From Moral Foundations to Interpretative and Strategic Concepts’. Many urgently needed changes can be justified from several types of moral foundation. More important then than further ethical theorizing is conversion of ethical insights into practical and flexible working methodologies for value-conscious investigation, evaluation and design, to help to guide policy and action.

Hoksbergen (1986) demonstrates methods for drawing out and assessing the world views and assumptions within given methods of development policy analysis, and for proceeding in the opposite direction: beginning with a specified world view and/or ethical perspective and then working out its possible implications for methods and procedures of policy analysis. Human rights-based approaches now provide a key example, having moved beyond lists of human rights norms that are somehow to be legally defended, to using human rights ideas to influence all stages and phases of practice. Crocker’s own example is Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze’s use of capabilities analysis to strategically redirect development policy analysis, illustrated at book length in Drèze and Sen (1989) on hunger, Drèze and Sen’s (2002) book on development challenges and options in India, and some of UNDP’s work on human development. I have tried to formalize the implied
methodology (Gasper 2008b). Jolly and Basu Ray (2007) show how the related theme of human security has been applied by a series of national Human Development Reports: by a case-specific focussing on the particular threats to the particular priority aspects of life that are felt to be at risk in the place and time concerned; and wide ranging analysis then of those factors’ causes and effects. The reports demonstrate how such a value-led transdisciplinary approach, that shows for example how certain types of economic policy may generate major morbidity and mortality impacts amongst poorer groups, can still retain a manageable scope of attention.

Evident in both the Sen-Drèze approach and the human security work is scope for case-specific deliberation about what will be the priorities adopted to focus and guide investigation, design and evaluation. This is seen too in the basic needs theory created by the Chilean Green economist and politician, Manfred Max-Neef, that is influential in community development practice worldwide (Max-Neef et al., 1989, 1991). It provides a rich format for discussing life-situations and priorities in particular communities. In contrast to needs theories which involve only an expert specification of priorities, it aims ‘to promote the transformation of an object-person into a subject-person’ (Max-Neef, 1992, p.198). More widely, work on deliberative methodologies and multi-level societal deliberation about development choices (see e.g., Cameron and Ojha, 2007; Chambers, 1997, 2005, 2008; Crocker, 2008; Forester, 2009) and on promotion of personal and group agency and autonomy (e.g., Ellerman 2004, 2005; Pick & Sirkin, 2010) provides suggestions for how to counter inequalities in voice between local and international elites, technical specialists, and ordinary people. Important partners for these forms of analysis are social movements that represent and/or support the claims of the weakest groups in national and global society.

4.3. Development ethics in the public arena

How one defines ‘development ethics’ is not so important, provided one does development ethics: looks at interfaces of development practice and ethical theory; looks at interactions of national, global and local systems; and looks at costs and risks and at who bears them. Development ethics needs to be a strongly inter-national field, in which the voices of not only English speakers are heard. It must acknowledge, relate to, and strengthen or revive dialogue with non-Western and non-English language sources of ethical thinking.

The main format for development ethics should be as an interdisciplinary meeting ground where diverse disciplines, concerns and approaches interact, rather than primarily as an academic subdiscipline in philosophy. Only in this way can it have substantial impacts on methods, movements and education. Since ethics is a branch within philosophy, development ethics work has occurred partly as one niche of practical ethics within university worlds. However, just as environmental ethics is certainly not only engaged in by disciplinary philosophers, work on development ethics involves people from a wide range of backgrounds, including practitioners of many types and scientists of many types. The required types of interaction and immersion (see Figure 1), in particular contexts each with their own reality, and in trying to understand and influence the methods and
systems that structure routine practice, must be undertaken by people who come from and remain well connected to specific disciplinary and/or professional background(s).

So while Goulet’s vision of the scope of development ethics remains sound, his ideas about organisational format require reconsideration (Gasper 2008). Ethics as the ‘means of the means’ is effected situation by situation, in particular professional, physical and social niches, rather than by a cadre of super-generalists. At the same time, a widely influential development ethics requires also robust general theories—such as of needs, human rights, capability and deliberative democracy, and of how such frameworks connect—in order to motivate and guide action and to communicate across wide spans of professional and physical territory.

Human rights work already illustrates the required combination and articulation of activities. Besides the traditional locations in political philosophy and academic and applied jurisprudence, human rights-based approaches have a broader field of operation: seeking to influence public policy and action by businesses, civil society and community groups, and individuals. For example, in trying to promote basic rights like the right to sufficient food or the right to sufficient clean water, in situations with no single clear-cut and capable duty-holder, attention now centres less on continued refinement of an ethical case, and rather on building a human rights culture marked by principles of universality, accountability, non-discrimination, and empowerment, that helps to ensure that the ethical case is not marginalised by ‘narrow economistic and political’ concerns (Hansen & Sano 2006: 54). Human rights campaigning seeks to gradually affect public consciousness and conscience, to directly and indirectly influence the actions of governments (for example, to encourage provision and subsidy of school lunches) and businesses and all manner of organizations, and of their voters, consumers and associates.

Agencies like Oxfam which engage in human rights-based campaigning have become highly aware of the issues of ‘marketing’ and public communication that are involved: how to cooperate with policy agencies and (other) social movements, and choices of keywords, memorable labels and other attempted attention-grabbers such as statistical indicators and evocative and instructive examples (Gasper 2000; Krznaric 2007). Academics working on development ethics face similar issues: Where to publish? How to maintain ‘nursery journals’ and in-depth work, while avoiding the trap of ‘ghetto journals’ which speak only to the converted? How to be heard in mainstream journals, popular media and social movements?

4.4. Being ready for crises

As the world rethinks ‘development’ in light of multiple challenges of sustainability, not least from climate change, the past and ongoing work on development ethics will be an important resource of imaginative and rigorous thinking for needed transformations. In one type of scenario, thoughtful and effectively communicated development ethics work could have gradual influence that contributes to steer humanity’s ships away from iceberg(s) of pain, misery and possible societal collapse. In another type of scenario, only when absolute crisis strikes will there be sufficient institutional and intellectual
momentum for major change. We cannot tell in advance what mixture of these scenarios will eventuate. The Great Transition Initiative’s work models various scenarios, that vary according to the combination of (a) intensity of crisis and (b) degree of coping capacity. Global coping capacity can only be greatly increased if a powerful global citizens movement emerges. Such a movement is not sufficient though; required also will be sufficient shared vision, a shared identity of global citizen, and a realistic change strategy. Only given a powerful and well-oriented global citizens movement will, for example, even a modest policy reform scenario make much progress, concludes Raskin (2006).

Disturbingly, the degree of progress made in instituting a global human rights regime in and since 1945 fits the second scenario at least as much as the first. Conferences and publications on perpetual peace and ‘the rights of man’ did not avert the disasters of the First and Second World Wars and other holocausts of the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. They did however prepare an intellectual and organizational infrastructure that was then available when global leaders sought plans in the 1940s for a new order that could avoid such disasters (Quataert 2009). This is an example, on the grand scale, of a standard pattern in institutional reform: change may come only after an old system enters into severe crisis that hurts also its rulers and supporters; and at that stage the proponents of change must be ready with viable alternatives that have not only an ethical rationale but have been elaborated and convincingly presented in terms of language, methods and actionable plans. ‘Turbo-capitalism’ (Luttwak 1999), driven by unlimited desire for financial profit, ever increasing concentrations of money capital, ever growing spread of the commodity form, and and the alienation of the powerful from responsibility for ‘collateral effects’, may not readily self-reform. Via monetizing everything we may fetishize levels of monetized activity and give decisive power to the super-wealthy, who can avoid bad effects at least for very long. New problems also generate new cycles of monetized activity which are highly profitable for some groups.

Work on development ethics should prepare for both types of scenario. Social change happens in many ways. It typically comes either slower than we expect or faster than we expect. Unfortunately this can apply both for undesirable as well as desirable change. The required preparations include strengthening of exchange and deliberation with various ethical traditions around the globe; engaging more with the worlds of activism and practice that seek global justice; and essaying further influence in policy and action through strategies and methodological tools that consciously incorporate ethical thinking.


Hicks, D. 2000. Inequality and Christian Ethics. Cambridge Univ. Press.


Great Transition Initiative, Paper 16.


annex:

development ethics

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