Development Ethics and Human Development

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Development Ethics and Human Development

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What is 'development ethics'?

'Development ethics' can be seen as comparable to business ethics, medical ethics, environmental ethics and similar areas of practical ethics. Each area of practice generates ethical questions about priorities and procedures, rights and responsibilities. So, first of all, 'development ethics' can be seen as a field of attention, an agenda of questions about major value choices involved in processes of social and economic development. What is good or 'real' development? 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 behaviour of people who have too little real choice ? Besides such issues of policy ethics, come the many ethical issues, stresses and choices in daily professional life and interaction. (Glover 1995, Goulet 1988, and Hamelink 1997 are fuller statements of agendas)

Second, development ethics is the body of work that has tried to address such questions, and the sets of answers that are offered. This includes work from long before the label 'development ethics' existed; for example, we find positions on some of the questions above from 19th century writers like John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. It also includes current work that may not use the name 'development ethics' but addresses various of the questions, for example Joe Stiglitz's *Making Globalization Work*.

Third, more narrowly, we have work which uses the name 'development ethics'. Its founder, if anyone should have that title, was the economist Louis Lebret (1897-1966) who led a group called *Économie et Humanisme*, which worked first in France and then in many other countries. Similar work emerged in Spanish, Portuguese and elsewhere. Notable in connecting these traditions and spreading them into English language work was the polyglot American social planner Denis Goulet (1931-2006), for example in his book *The Cruel Choice* (1971). Others, such as David Crocker, have linked Goulet's thinking to the research traditions of human development, human rights and deliberative democracy. Work on development ethics includes much by authors who, like Crocker, have been active in the human development approach.

Fourth, more narrowly still, development ethics is the stream of work that has in addition highlighted a development ethics agenda and tried to institutionalise the field, in publications,

scholarly associations, networks and courses. The International Development Ethics Association was formed in 1987 (http://www.development-ethics.org/).

What is the role for 'development ethics'?

The main role for development ethics is as an interdisciplinary meeting ground where diverse disciplines, concerns and approaches interact, rather than primarily as an academic sub-discipline 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 been found 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. The required types of immersion, 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).

Why should one bother with 'development ethics' if one works within the human development approach and/or capability approach?

Human development thinking, as formulated by Mahbub ul Haq, Paul Streeten and others, 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 linkages that are not mediated and measured through economic means are often centrally important: for example, the linkages from lopsided income distribution to malnutrition to reduced learning capacity and lifetime earning capacity, or the linkages from skewed international trading systems to societal stresses and conflict in low-income countries. 'Side-effects' and 'collateral damage' are widespread; they are marginal only in terms of the attention often given to them, not marginal in their occurrence and human significance. 'Some get the gains, others get the pains', remarks Michael Cernea. The principle of interconnection strengthens the ethics agenda as well as implying wider scope in explanation—it brings a focus on the 'side-effects' damage to 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. The explicit ethical perspective, the capability approach, holds that the ethical principles embodied in market-based economics do not suffice for public policy; market values are important primarily insofar as they support valuable 'beings' and 'doings'. 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 'beings and doings'. To think about the ethical meaning(s) of 'human', and about trade and sweated labour, forced displacement or professional ethics, human development thinking can usefully draw on longer standing discussions in development ethics. (See e.g.: Esquith ed. 2009; *Ethics and Economics*, 4(2); Hamelink ed. 1997; Quarles van Ufford & Giri eds. 2003; Schwenke 2007, 2008)

Why bother with 'development ethics' when we have the human rights tradition?

Thinking in terms of rights is invaluable but insufficient: rights conflict, not all relevant values can be thought of in terms of rights, and rights language in isolation is at risk of becoming rigid and legalistic, set in forms and institutions which are often not accessible for poor people. The World Commission on Dams illustrated how processes of equitable and respectful negotiation are needed, besides declarations of rights. We require a richer value basis than only rights or only capabilities or the two together, which includes attention to roots, processes and formats of ethical reasoning, and to attitudes of caring and commitment. One reason why human security thinking has gathered momentum is because it draws on a deeper picture of human personality, emotion, sociability and lived experience than has been used in some thinking on human rights and human development. It 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 feed Goulet's thinking and related work in development ethics. Similarly, in thinking about responsible lifestyles or responsible and respectful (and therefore more effective) forms of advice and influence, or in trying to interpret and counteract corruption, we can draft and use codes of rights and duties but also need much more.

Discussion of ethical questions and principles is sometimes felt as embarrassing, but it is far from a luxury. As human beings we undertake our lives with notions about what are appropriate ends and rights and due respect, and those ideas require attention, for better understanding, for negotiation, and for our orientation and motivation.

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