



# What Is the Point of Development Ethics?

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## ABSTRACT

Research and teaching in societal development ethics face potentially four fundamental types of objection: first, that ethics is obvious already; second, that it is instead impossible, on epistemological grounds; third, that it is theoretically possible but in practice fruitless; and fourth, that it is in any case politically insignificant. The paper presents qualified rebuttals of the four objections. In the process of doing so, it builds up a picture of this field of thought and practice: its modes, methods and alternative forms of organization, and some of its pitfalls and potentials, exemplars and achievements.

## RÉSUMÉ

La recherche et l'enseignement en éthique du développement sociétal sont confrontés à quatre types d'objection fondamentales : premièrement, que l'éthique est déjà évidente ; deuxièmement que l'éthique est au contraire impossible, en raison de fondements épistémologiques ; troisièmement que c'est théoriquement possible mais pratiquement sans fruits ; et quatrièmement que c'est dans tous les cas insignifiant politiquement. Ce papier présente des réfutations de ces quatre objections. Il propose alors une image du champ de pensée et de la pratique : ses modes, ses méthodes et ses formes alternatives d'organisation, et certains de ses pièges et potentiels, de ses exemples et aboutissements.

**Key words:** development ethics; methodology of ethics; impact of ethics

**JEL classification:** O20, D63, D78

## **1. DOUBTS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT, AND DOUBTS ABOUT ETHICS**

### **1.1 Agenda**

Other than to transport the authors of papers to pleasant conferences in scenic settings, what is the point of teaching and research in development ethics as an activity? Granted, “development” has generated and continues to generate numerous ethical doubts and tensions. The spread of, and reactions to, Western ideas and systems and power; the spread of capitalism, commoditification, objectification, alienation, but also new possibilities of abolishing severe material poverty, rapidly; multiple social transformations, and the decline, abandonment or rejection of traditional ways; global exposure, interactions, comparisons and competition, and new possibilities of global disaster – all these contribute. Many people involved or interested in development work feel associated doubts and tensions. But an apparent majority in these groups also have either not conceived of the possibility of systematic ethical reflection and debate that could feed into development practice, or have dismissed it as irrelevant, a low-return activity.

Development ethics could be irrelevant if the answer to any of the following questions is yes:-

- Is ethics epistemologically futile?
- Is ethics epistemologically possible and in fact straightforward, even self-evident?
- Is ethics epistemologically possible in principle but sterile in practice?
- Is ethics epistemologically possible in principle but politically irrelevant?

In other words, besides doubts about the ethics of development, there are doubts about the value of ethics as a specific focus. The paper looks at aspects of these four questions, in response to people who consider work on ethics pointless, with particular reference to development ethics. At the same time it in effect responds to people who have not even considered systematic ethical discourse.

We look first at the claim that ethics are obvious, at any rate within whichever community one is situated. Section 2 proposes that critiques of “common-sense”, intuitionism and communitarian relativism help to establish the need in development ethics for “second mode” activity with more formal and probing examination. “First mode” work sees and reacts to problems of development and of non-development, and invokes multiple different appealing principles. “Second mode” theorizing tries to refine and relate different principles and build systematic theoretical alternatives. However, life’s richness outstrips any single system; we require a “third mode” which takes abstracted theoretical systems back to the real worlds of practice and compromise. We might summarize the three stages as: sensitization, systematization, adaptation.

We face also an opposite challenge, the claim that argument about values is a contradiction in terms. Section 3 indicates that general meta-ethical argumentation can be powerful in refuting claims of epistemic futility. However its influence may be limited if it is not complemented by presentation of particular authors, studies and practices, as exemplars, and by more concrete methodological exposition of component activities in substantive ethics.

Section 4 accepts that ethics is in principle neither epistemically futile nor superfluous; but asks whether it is sterile in practice: for example if it is often too difficult or inevitably subject to professional deformation or unable to get beyond vacuous general principles. I propose that the claim of sterility is refuted by experience in practical ethics in general and development ethics in particular; and look at some elaborations of useful questions and activities in development ethics.

Section 5 notes the view that ethics, even if not sterile, will have too little real-world influence to be worthwhile. It argues that influence, while patchy, is sometimes significant, even major, especially through indirect channels over longer-terms and via re-framing and reinterpretation of questions and categories, for example rethinking what one's "interests" are. It takes as examples the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century campaign against slavery, the 20<sup>th</sup> century campaign against colonialism, and the work since the 1940s on articulating and applying human rights norms. Beyond this, development ethics work can relevantly aspire to somewhat improve professional and academic practice, in the same way as seen in business and medical ethics. Even influence on oneself could be justification enough. Concluding remarks review issues of strategy and tactics on how to be less powerless and less sterile, and invite reflection on the approaches of influential authors.

## **1.2. The possible forms of development ethics**

It is worth keeping in mind various possible outcomes for the character of development ethics, as a field in teaching, research, writing and public utterance. I do not highlight "public action" in the definition of the field, not because public action is unintended or unwanted, but because the organisation and culture of a political movement, a policy campaign, a development NGO or a religious body are inevitably rather different from those of an area in research, writing and education. Let us consider five possible roles for such an area. Combinations of them may occur. As throughout the paper, the categories are not hard-edged but the contrasts that they provide can be useful.

*A. Development Ethics as an abstracted high-mindedness; a play religion.* Development ethics might figure as a high-minded, high-toned form of utterance, invoked in certain times and places within the worlds of public policy and national and international organisations. Uvin suggests, for example, that Sen's "Development as Freedom" (1999) is beloved in aid agencies because it permits uplifting talk with no specific operational commitments (Uvin 2004: 126). I suggest elsewhere that this picture is rather unfair (Gasper 2007a). We will also see later the legitimacy of seeking indirect and long-run paths of influence. Different charges are made against for example the Inter-American Development Bank's initiative in recent years on Ethics and Development, namely that here a high-minded discourse combines with a narrow operational focus on a conservative social agenda. Here the high-minded discourse is not a cover for inaction but, critics allege, proposed as backing for a conservative action agenda. This leads us to the second type of role.

*B. Development Ethics as defining and promulgating specific ways of life.* The role here of development ethics is as a set of serious secular religions; such as, for example, Gandhianism in the public arena. Some other commentators fear that the higher-minded that a generalised discourse is the worse often is the associated behaviour, for powerful agencies come to feel themselves vindicated in pursuing their great ends by whatever means they consider necessary. We see this in the histories of various political movements and supposedly other-worldly religions. The quasi-religious discourse can become deadly “play”; its specific injunctions may not be followed but they set the stage for legitimising rather different actions, through the depiction of its leaders as righteous and well-intentioned.

*C. Development Ethics as an academic sub-discipline.* Development ethics could aspire to be an academic discipline or sub-discipline. Denis Goulet regularly used the term “discipline” (e.g. Goulet, 1997), as I discuss in the introductory paper in this special issue (Gasper 2006a). There have been attempts to build a sub-discipline in academic philosophy, within ethics and political philosophy. This was mainly a North American concern, reflecting the greater scale of professional philosophy there. However the difficulty to draw any clear boundaries for development ethics, a greater difficulty than for medical or business ethics, contributed amongst several other factors to the non-emergence of a distinctive field. Gasper (2006a) notes further the paradox that Goulet was himself strongly trans-disciplinary. By a “discipline” he may then have meant the reservation of an intellectual space, in the form of specific courses, journals, conferences and so on, within which development ethics issues would receive concentrated and rigorous attention. While relatively little of this emerged during most of his career, there has been an acceleration within the past five to ten years. At the same time, various of the issues of development ethics have received increased attention in many more established and organised fields: in human rights, international relations, international law, public health, and even in parts of welfare economics, public administration, public policy and business management.

*D. Development Ethics as a field of professional ethics,* comparable to business ethics, medical ethics, and so on. This asks: What should we—those working in “development theory, planning and practice”, in Goulet’s oft-used phrase—do with and to clients/advisees, students, research subjects...? What should we work on, whom should we work for, what criteria should we use in assessing and evaluating situations and policies...?

*E. Development Ethics as a forum for serious look-see-ing and if-then-ing,* on a broader scale than implied in the model of professional ethics, but still with a relatively specific primary audience in mind: development studies academics and students, development planners, practitioners and activists, and their major clients.

Neither in role D nor role E (formal professional ethics, and broader ethicizing by and for professionals and activists) need one be as worried as in role C (an academic subdiscipline) about defining boundaries or distinctiveness. Instead both roles D and E imply areas of activity that draw eclectically on many disciplines. These last two possibilities are those more in my mind in this paper. However, there is a role for various roles.

## **2. ETHICS AS EASY ?**

### **2.1. The limits of intuition**

The first line of attack on ethics as an activity is to claim that ethics as a set of value principles is quite obvious, at any rate for knowing or finding out what is good/ right, even if not for putting that into practice; and therefore that ethics as analysis is superfluous. This line is common in everyday life—“all clear thinking and good hearted people [i.e. me and my party] will agree that...”—and especially so amongst populists and fundamentalists. It is found too in academe, for example in the unthought through mix of utilitarianism, liberalism, logical positivism, and relativism that was implicitly adopted by many economists. (This is discussed in for example Hook ed. 1967; Wilber ed. 1998; Hausman & McPherson, 2006.) In reality, value intuitions are often vague, changeable, and in conflict – within people, between community members, and between communities.

Similarly, the assertion that each particular community has its own sufficient moral foundation, about which there can be no further argument, encounters basic problems. (I draw here on Gasper, 1997). ‘Communities’ are not consensual, locally or nationally, especially in our present globalized world; and they overlap and lack clear boundaries. Community cultures, even for earlier eras, always contain ambiguities and are not fixed—two factors which reinforce each other. Cultures have internal tensions and inconsistencies. Not only would it be dysfunctional for cultures to be so fully defined as to leave little room for manoeuvre, adaptation and growth, no set of social rules can be complete, totally clear and able to handle all new situations. The need for new interpretations arises, and these are debatable. Thus cultures are fluid not fixed; they always evolve, especially in the modern era. This contributes to heterogeneity. The idea of monolithic, given, cultures, fixed beyond the reach of reason, is partly a legacy of colonialism, which downplayed the role of reasoned debate in Southern /‘other’ cultures. In sum, ethics are not straightforwardly given, from intuitions or community codes.

### **2.2. A three mode model of development ethics**

A multi-mode model of work in substantive ethics (Gasper, 1993a, 1996a) shows both the role and the limits of “common-sense”, intuition, and emotions.<sup>1</sup> First-mode work in development ethics reacts to and reflects on problems and horrors of development and of non-development, past and present, capitalist or socialist, and puts forward views of human interests, rights, duties, and dilemmas. First-mode work has reconsidered meanings of “development” and advocated or examined concepts like “equity”, “basic needs”, “participation”, “autonomy”, “dignity” and

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<sup>1</sup> The following presentation of the model draws on Gasper (1996a), where the term “stage” was used. “Stage” can be read too chronologically, to suggest a one-way sequence rather than an eternal cycle.

“empowerment”. *Ad hoc* reference to multiple different appealing principles is however not enough.<sup>2</sup>

“Second mode” theorizing tries to theorize, to refine and relate different principles and build systems of interconnected ideas. It essays justification of first-stage positions, by probing foundational issues of value and the methodology of ethical theorizing and practice. This too is not enough, as life’s richness outstrips any single system. Theory building is slow, abstracted, and leaves things out; and becomes in danger of losing touch with the variety and intensity of experience and concerns from the first mode.

“Third mode” work takes abstracted theoretical systems back to the real worlds of practice and compromise. It attends to how to achieve more influence in the world without omitting important things: the world of power, ideology and conflict. This work includes attention to possible alliances between different ethical views, such as rights and needs, religious and non-religious, or modernist, pre- and post-modernist. And it considers practical tools, policy proposals, and decision procedures.

The three ‘modes’ may be summarized as: sensitization, systematization, and adaptation. Each mode has a permanent role: first-mode reaction to new issues and experience; second-mode systematization and deepening of those responses; and third-mode application and adaptation of the systems when facing real choices. The modes represent more an intellectual than a historical sequence, since each will always be necessary. There is some chronological association, as the proportion of second and then of third mode work grows over time. But in addition there are feed-backs as well as feed-forwards; for example, ‘third mode’ application-cum-adaptation of selected, systematized and revised ethical intuitions may in turn lead to new ‘first mode’ experiences, reactions and insights.

Denis Goulet’s work remains perhaps unsurpassed as a sensitizing introduction to general issues and relevant cases, as in his *The Cruel Choice*. Goulet had intensive involvement in the other modes too, especially the third in his work on methods of participation and action research, and on incentives and indicators. One can overlook this since in his handling the modes interact so intensively as to almost fuse. He espoused a process-oriented, practice-centred, locality-specific approach rather than an elaborate generalized theoretical model.<sup>3</sup>

Raff Carmen (1994, 1996) takes over the three-part schema but seen as chronological generations, with a presumption of intellectual maturation over time. I refer rather to the phases as an argumentative sequence: all can be found at the same time and place, and all should be. For Carmen the second mode is a stage of mistaken movement into formalism and detachment;

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<sup>2</sup> E.g.: “there is development where people and their communities—whatever the space and timespan—act as subjects and are not acted upon as objects: assert their autonomy, self-reliance and self-confidence: when they set and carry out projects” (Nerfin, 1981, cited by Carmen, 1994:21). Regardless of the content of the action and assertion?

<sup>3</sup> Selections of his lifetime’s work are in Goulet (2006) and at <http://www.nd.edu/~dgoulet>.

I suggest in contrast that a mode of more rigorous clarification is often essential.<sup>4</sup> For Carmen the third mode contains current reaffirmation of humanistic development (e.g. Manfred Max-Neef's work, including his theory of universal need-types) and yet also a post-modernistic rejection of universalistic philosophizing. For me it is more a stage of practice, guided by theories but recognizing and adapting to limits and fundamental conflicts. I classify much recent work as instead first mode; including Carmen's own, where ethics is a matter of appeal to potent, supposedly clear and consistent, humanist-populist intuitions that appear to him self-evident.

First mode work alone leaves us with concerns that can be vague, inconsistent, impractical, and uninformed by systematized past reflections. Second mode work alone leaves us with theories that can be implicitly based on narrow experience and particular (generally Eurocentric) backgrounds and presumptions. Not surprisingly some of the best second mode work seems now to be done by Southerners working in the North.<sup>5</sup> Philosophical ethics will, however, rarely itself be the main emotional source for action; instead its role is to order, sift, broaden and upgrade ethical passions, intuitions and reactions, into consistent, widely aware, more sophisticated (and more reformable) positions. Similarly, third mode work in isolation could leave us with a street-wise practice prone to all the above weaknesses and to cynicism. Work in any mode that lacks intelligent connection to work in the other modes is likely to be ineffective.

### **3. ETHICS AS EPISTEMOLOGICALLY FUTILE?**

Let us look next at the opposite attack on ethics as an activity, that rather than being extremely easy ("Refer to community values") it is impossibly difficult, and that in the absence of pre-existing consensus nothing can be done. Three possible types or aspects of refutation of a claim that work on ethics is epistemologically futile could be:

- 1 - general meta-ethical argumentation, about the status of ethical argumentation;
- 2 - counter-examples: reference to particular authors, studies and practice;
- 3 - more concrete exposition of relevant component activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Carmen finds Sen unacceptable as a leader of development ethics, because he uses "the artificially separationist, detached, non-holistic, negative, objectivist and intentionally politically neutralized vocabularies" of economics, and "In view of the purposely disembodied nature of such language, flagging a purposely neutralistic mode of thought..." (Carmen, 1994:20). In commenting on second stage work Carmen is preoccupied with and resistant to the work of Sen, whom he mis-identifies as a macro-economist and as limited to an assumption of self-interested individuals. In reality Sen deconstructs and critiques some of the language of economics, but in a way that will be (and is) listened to by economists and, more generally, in a way that opens up and helps deepen debate, by being precise, undogmatic and explicit, rather than by distant denunciation.

<sup>5</sup> Much of the best first mode work has, similarly, been by Northerners working in the South, e.g. Goulet and Illich. Note too the case of Gandhi, who spent his first twenty five years of adulthood outside his home country.

While general meta-ethics has great importance, it has limited capacity to communicate to and influence wider audiences. Probably the best basis for discussing the possibilities of making better rather than worse value judgements is by having seen it done. That will prevent people being diverted by formulations in terms of “right versus wrong” values, away from the practically relevant issue of better-justified versus worse-justified valuations. In social and development studies education I suggest we should introduce meta-ethics (type 1 above) after some exposure to systematic substantive ethics cases and activities (types 2 and 3 above); thus in the sequence 2-3-1. For expositional purposes here however, addressing an audience that is probably familiar with (counter-)examples, I will proceed in the reverse sequence, 1-3-2. The discussion of type 2 (counter-examples) follows in later sections. As we proceed we will identify a set of arguments that dispute the epistemic futility of ethical discourse. They will be labelled (in brackets) with reference to the three aspects just mentioned: general meta-ethical considerations; counter-examples; and indication of relevant concrete activities.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1. Meta-ethics: the positivist and relativist traps**

In what sense(s) if any can there be said to be better or worse grounded values? Or are all ethical values arbitrary? In development studies two types of arbitrariness claim have special salience: first, forms of subjectivism associated with positivism, as represented in some mainstream economics and political science; and second, extreme forms of relativism found in some anthropology and cultural studies and in some cultural nationalism. Development ethics has to arm itself on these two fronts.

Much of the mainstream mixture in economics, and in much political science and policy analysis, goes back at least as far as David Hume and the 18th century: a strong fact-value distinction associated with a radical subjectivism concerning values, yet also the idea that whatever subjective values individuals happen to hold are the obvious basis for social decision and happen to have a universal form and content compatible with utilitarian theory.

Hume’s fact-value distinction does not necessitate value subjectivism or relativism, but it leads that way if combined with thin theories of the person; for example that people are the same only in being creatures of arbitrary taste, or completely plastic and conformist members of particular groups. One may then arrive at views that normative discourse has not only no distinctive characteristics but no content at all and requires no particular attention. If one rejects these thin premises concerning people one may then reject the subjectivist or relativist conclusions drawn (Gasper: 2004, Ch.8; 2007b). [*Argument 1a - The claim that subjectivism and relativism typically use fallacious psychology.*] A variant of this argument holds that inter-communitarian relativism relies on weak sociology (Benhabib, 1995).

To try to distinguish facts and values is helpful advice; but to proceed as if the materials we face are already, or easily, or always attainably, partitioned into the two is an error. If values really were such a separate realm, beyond reference to facts, then ethics as a subject would have

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<sup>6</sup> The exposition in 3.1 draws on Gasper 1993b, 1996a, 2004.



proved superfluous, in the face of clear and completely irreversible agreements or disagreements on “basic values”. Milton Friedman, some other positivists, and some Marxists proposed just this: on value differences all we can do is fight. We often can do more, and we do. *[Type 2a argument, demonstration of cases of non-superfluosity of ethics, and Type 3a argument, demonstration of relevant component activities.]*

Just as the best basis for discussing the possibilities of making better rather than worse value judgements is by having seen it done, so too exposure to some positive study of human valuation helps in avoiding the pitfalls of cruder positivism. *[Type 2b argument: lessons from examining valuation in various contexts.]* It is no coincidence that the positivism which pronounces all valuations as arbitrary decisions or mere emotions is often associated with crude and *a priori* descriptive analyses. We can note some examples.

When Lionel Robbins and others who were influenced by logical positivism redirected mainstream economics in the 1930s and 40s, they hijacked the term “utility”, to simply mean Pareto’s “ophelimity” (subjective preference and its fulfilment). They further claimed that interpersonal descriptive comparisons of this preference fulfilment or satisfaction were impossible. In reality there are a multitude of reasonable methods of descriptive comparison, especially across wide gaps in levels of living (Sen, 1982, Ch.12). To the positivist economists, all such comparisons were normative, which they usually further took - incorrectly - to mean purely arbitrary. *[Argument 1b - positivists’ circular reasoning which presumes their conclusion.]* In reality there are again many reasonable (though non-identical) normative approaches to inter-personal comparison (ibid.). *[Argument 3b - reference to specific systematic forms of normative analysis.]* Often they will lead to similar conclusions.

Robbins’ method was to discredit comparison of utilities, by, firstly, taking the difficult case of pairs of named individuals not far apart in income (see Cooter & Rappoport, 1984); and secondly, presenting an image of broadminded awareness of other cultures’ drastic otherness, and of our supposed inability to refute a Brahmin who assures us “that members of his caste (or his race) were capable of experiencing ten times as much satisfaction from a given income as members of an inferior caste (or an ‘inferior’ race)” (Robbins, 1932: 140). In making comparisons though, the Brahmin adopts comparability conventions, and so cannot rule them out *per se*. One can then assess different conventions, as better or worse grounded. *[Argument 1c - the ubiquity of value comparisons/rankings/arguments.]* Ernest Gellner (1974) commented on the “scandalously selective use of ethnographic material” by conservative theorists in this case. *[Argument 2c - the mis-use and proper use of evidence on valuation in everyday life; a subset of argument 2b.]*

The idea that there can be no reasoning about values sometimes uses the ancient tag “de gustibus non est disputandum” - there is no arguing about tastes. But even for tastes which are non-moral preferences, to which no inter-personal oughtness attaches, we spend much time arguing about them, for they are formed and reformable. One can distinguish choices that reflect simply habit or whimsy, from others that reflect consideration and experience, for example through comparison of the implications of various desires. *[Argument 2d - the reality of principled argumentation about preferences and values.]*

For values in general, there are many lines for criticism and testing. The claim that expertise is irrelevant in making value judgements (e.g. Simon, 1947) trades on an assumption that all of an agent's feelings and ideas are already clearcut, ranked, and consistent. Observation shows that they instead usually require ordering. Brandt (1979), Körner (1976) and Richardson (1997) indicate ways in which value judgements can be wrong – for example by dependence on false beliefs, by overlooking options or outcomes or other preferences, or by being based on false inferences or on obsessions produced by deprivation. [*Argument 3c - multiple relevant lines of argument in assessing value judgements.*]

We need a refined view of the types of normative analysis and their relations to and uses of positive analysis. Normative argumentation includes logical and empirical claims; and has both consequentialist reference to effects, and partly non-consequentialist argumentation on the scope, categories, and procedure to adopt. It is neither completely the same as nor completely different from positive argumentation; and involves various activities and styles which can be studied and differentiated. Appendix 1 outlines Frank Fischer's influential breakdown of the case of policy discourse.

So, normative arguments can be wrong, and often are, as are many claims about their methodology. [*1d, 2e - presence of demonstrably false arguments in some first- and second-order ethical discourses*] We repeatedly find, for example, presumptions that “real” values must be absolute, overriding or unconditional. Also common are beliefs that values must be beyond all doubt, otherwise “nothing” has “really” been established. These are part of a questionable foundationalist view of validity, which contributes to the misleading dichotomy of supposedly absolute fact versus emotional value. There are psychological reasons why such beliefs cluster around values. These and other features underline the need to treat values distinctively, and the importance of (up to a point) attempting value clarification. It is neither possible nor essential to overcome all resistances, but we can usefully mobilise questioning and alertness in these areas.

The attempt to avoid normative issues leads instead typically to their confusion. Descriptive relativism, i.e. noting the variation of ethical beliefs with time and place, often led on to a tacit prescriptive relativism, which somehow thought it could draw *prescriptions* from a premise that all normative positions are equally *arbitrary* - for example prescriptions that one *should therefore* stick with the values one has inherited, or adopt the values holding sway in each situation one enters. Similarly, types of communitarian relativism appealed to some anthropologists and colonial administrators (Williams, 1972); but they are logically incoherent if put forward on grounds of the *absence of normative grounds*.<sup>7</sup> [*Argument 1e - the internal contradictions seen in attempts to avoid value judgements.*] Similarly, while proponents of relativism allege non-comparability between cultures—‘diverse and non-comparable ways of existence’ (Sachs et al., 1992:3)—these same proponents typically go on to compare and criticize (ibid.; see Gasper 1996a, 2004).

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<sup>7</sup> More plausible grounds for accepting local practices might be the presumptive functionality of any existing code, the special value of each society's unique experience, or the pitfalls in attempting engineered change.

For relativism is inconsistent not only internally but also with other beliefs [*Argument 1f - the external contradictions of relativism*]. Ideas of common humanity, basic human rights, and so on legitimate the possibility of external assessments and comparisons, and not just in one direction (North preaching to South). In contrast, communitarian relativism would allow no criticism against the pre-1990s apartheid culture of a large majority of white South Africans (and an overwhelming majority of Afrikaners), which would be viewed as one more richly unique, non-comparable way of existence. Rejection of the possibility of external assessments and comparisons suits the convenience of elites in all countries.

Even if communities had consensual, consistent and so on cultures—which we queried in Section 2—they would remain open to external (and minority) moral evaluation. Suppose that a community favours some persons vastly more than others, but not on basis of their contribution and without making the worst-off better-off than they would otherwise be, or that it treats in different ways people who are in the same position.<sup>8</sup> Even insofar as there is local acceptance of this, but due to indoctrination, habituation or lack of awareness, then it may not be morally convincing or sufficient. [*Once more 1f - the argument from other strong moral intuitions.*] More generally, what makes the cultures convincing and appealing to members? Only indoctrination, brainwashing or habituation? No: there is (also) reference to reasons, evidence, (views about) human requirements, and so on – and all of these are open to review and assessment. [*1g - The argument of rational corrigibility.*]

In the course of inventorying some arguments against subjectivism and relativism, we have laid a basis for the third line of response to ethical scepticism: concrete exposition of component activities in substantive ethics.

### **3.2. What one can do in substantive ethics**

For the sake of argument, I will suggest five component phases in substantive ethics:

1. *look-feel phase*
2. *describe/identify phase*
3. *analyze/systematize phase*
4. *synthesize-evaluate phase*
5. *apply-compromise-interrelate phase.*

My main reference will be to ethical assessments of individual cases and situations, but most comments apply also to assessment of broader ethical positions.

The five phases represent of course an elaboration of our earlier model, of three modes in substantive ethics: sensitization, systematization, and adaptation. We stressed that each mode is permanently required and that they interact in all permutations. In the five phases model we describe one major series of interactions leading through from experience to theory to practical choice to more experience (hence the use of the sequential label ‘phases’). The sensitization mode largely matches the look-feel and describe-identify phases, though the latter phase can

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Chen (1995), on rulings about purdah in Bangladesh that are flexible for those who make them and rigid and restricting for other people.

overlap with the systematization mode. The systematization mode largely matches the analyze-systematize and synthesize-evaluate phases, although the formal evaluation phase may overlap with third mode work. And the adaptation mode largely corresponds to the apply-compromise-interrelate phase.

*1) Look-feel phase*

In this first phase one invites discursive partners or is invited by them to “Look at this particular experience, and think and feel about it”, and to “Look at these claimed ethical principles/categories (for example, autonomy or vulnerability) and at current categorial schemata and formats (for example, the veil of ignorance); and consider how you could handle existing and new experiences with them”. The phase captures attention, broadens experience, and enriches and sharpens attention to concepts. Nussbaum and Glover (1995)’s *Women, Culture and Development* project opens in this way with Martha Chen (1995)’s case studies on obstacles to women taking formal employment in parts of South Asia. The case studies are cross-referred to later in a number of the subsequent explorations of theory.

*2) Describe/identify phase*

This phase proceeds to clarify the values and value-choices encountered in a situation. Denis Goulet called here for “phenomenological analysis: i.e. the methodical ‘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” (Goulet, 1995: p.x; also p.25). It leads on to description of formalized systems of values, and of societal systems for making choices and articulating values. This in turn leads into the third phase.

*3) Theorization phase*

*3A) Analyze-systematize phase* (for that which can be analysed and systematized)

Description of systems of belief and practice can be hard to separate from their systematization and rationalization. There are choices to make in description, which we typically resolve by seeking pattern and consistency; thus we build and not simply describe the system of ideas. Activities in systematization include the following (amongst others):

- Clarification of concepts
  - Logic checks
  - Mutual consistency checks, for various (stated/experienced) values
  - Checks on consistency with proposed methodological norms (e.g.: “Can your stated values be universalized?”; Jamieson 1993 on role-reversal tests)
  - Looking at implications: “What do you think your stated values will bring if fulfilled?” This is one way of testing values: by comparison with actual or expected experience.
  - Asking: “How can your higher values be furthered? What are their requisites?”
- Fischer’s schema given in the Appendix further categorizes such questions.

*3B) Innovate & system-build phase*, if necessary.

The more that specification leads into construction, to fill gaps, resolve inconsistencies and ambiguities and deal with additional questions, the more it will involve activities of:

- Establishing new or modified concepts and conceptual schemata
- Drawing new analogies, connections and comparisons
- Adjusting new (and old) ideas in light of their applications.

*4) Synthesize-evaluate phase*

Describing, systematizing and elaborating can be followed by a phase of conscious assessment, to draw overall conclusions about the adequacy of certain valuations / values / practices / systems of values / systems of value-choice. Assessment may well be comparative.

*5) Apply-compromise-interrelate phase*

The previous phase of theoretical assessment is unlikely to suffice for practical choice, in which a series of further challenges must be faced, such as these:

- “How will you deal with uncertainty, and with the certainty of the insufficiency of your own conceptual schema?”
- “How will you deal with factors outside your schema?”
- “How will you deal with conflicting ethical viewpoints?”
- “How will you acquire sufficient support across partly conflicting views in order to influence decisions?”

This picture of component activities is suggestive rather than rigorous, and requires contextualization. It can be refined further. (For a complementary treatment, see Jamieson, 1993; for a classic book-length exposition with reference to economics, see Johnson & Zerby, 1973.) But it is already a third relevant type of response to the charge of futility of ethics. It bolsters the epistemological defence of ethical deliberation, seen as the preparation and/or selection of better argued valuative choices in situations where choice is unavoidable. It gives a frame for viewing the work of different authors and for showing the limits of any one type of work in isolation, and it serves too against the charge of sterility. Let us elaborate the picture, with more direct reference to development ethics.

## **4. ETHICS AS INTELLECTUALLY STERILE IN PRACTICE?**

### **4.1. Useful questions and activities in development ethics**

On the basis of an ethically aware examination of the debt crisis, Stuart Corbridge (1993) made proposals on what development ethics can and cannot do intellectually. His agenda for development ethics fits the analysis and synthesis phases that we have just seen. He adds a third-mode observation: the goal is to promote amelioration, not seek for perfection. The activities he notes as worthwhile include:

- to highlight the question of costs; as was classically done in, for example, Goulet’s *The Cruel Choice* and Peter Berger’s *Pyramids of Sacrifice*
- to point out the likelihood / significant possibility of effects unintended by advocates if their measures are adopted
- to raise the questions of conflicting values, and of distribution of benefits and costs
- to make us look at both the local and the global
- to put the burden of proof on those who advocate courses that put suffering on real

- people now
- to float alternatives, make us think of alternatives, raise the possibility of choice.

Development ethics here serves as a mental discipline and democratic discipline: throwing up as many questions as answers, but keeping us flexible, open and honest; identifying complexity, trade-offs, and some ordering of our choices.

Corbridge replies to the charge of emptiness by identifying useful questions and activities, within an acceptance of inability to provide “the” answers. His questions and activities exemplify the general sorts we noted in Section 3. In effect he sees development ethics’s role as to support an ideal of democratic politics. This line matches the stress on “illuminating choice in development” that was posited by David Booth in the early 1990s as the new agenda in development research (1993:52).

The questions and activities are not an *ad hoc* heap, but can be ordered into a logical system. They can be readily fitted into Hambrick’s model of policy argumentation (Hambrick, 1974; Gasper, 1996b) and its more elaborate successor, the Fischer-Taylor model, which relates ethical and policy choices to underlying theories. Untheorized views, especially in professional life, contain implicit and unexamined theories (see Appendix).

Cees Hamelink (1997) goes further. His agenda for development ethics includes besides (a) practicing and teaching critical thinking and (b) helping to ‘rid ourselves of obscurantist language’, making language honest (pp. 22-3), also (c) designing morally adequate processes of decision-making, and (d) challenge to personal life-styles.

#### **4.2. The non-sterility of practical ethics and of development ethics in particular – exemplary work**

We may be able to point to, and practice, all manner of intriguing component activities in substantive ethics, trying to order and upgrade reactions and intuitions -- but does such work generate anything other than more questions and more paper? Are not these tools used to polish almost any sort of preexisting conclusion and in addition to elaborate many different conclusions not previously conceived? While they may provide fascinating careers for academic philosophers, do they reduce the areas of reasonable disagreement significantly, or at all, or do they instead extend them?

Ethics could be largely sterile if it were one or more of the following:

- a. too difficult to be pursued by others than professional philosophers, and if the philosophers’ work is marked by professional deformations and in-breeding and is thus of very limited value;
- b. when it is undertaken, unable to advance beyond a level of somewhat vacuous general principles;
- c. if it does get beyond enunciation of general principles, too purist: over-perfectionist or over-critical;
- d. if not too purist, then yet too indecisive in practice, so that innumerable positions can be

defended and almost none rejected.

The Corbridge-Booth type of response argues that ethics supports and enriches democratic politics by informing and illuminating choices, even if it typically cannot provide “the” answers. Agreement on some things, some bounds, can be established; beyond those issues, frameworks are provided for proper deliberation. This matches the experiences with practical ethics since the 1970s, which in their various fields refute the charge of sterility (see e.g. DeMarco & Fox, 1986). As for development ethics, it has provided significant contributions to ethics more widely, on issues of needs, quality of life, entitlements, capabilities-functionings, cross-cultural relations, participation, and roles of rights thinking. A refutation of sterility is simultaneously again a refutation of the accusation of intellectual futility.

Which are the works that we do, or would, bring to the attention of potentially interested but sceptical colleagues and students? The task here is significantly easier than in the 1980s. Besides work by perhaps Denis Goulet, Louis Lebret, Onora O’Neill, Amartya Sen, or Peter Singer, one could now readily include, for example, Alkire, Boltvinik, Carmen, Crocker, Dasgupta, Deneulin, Dower, Giri, and (fast-forwarding through the alphabet) Nussbaum, Parekh, Pogge, and others; and much recent work on human development, human security, and human-rights based approaches. Good general anthologies of work on development ethics are still needed, especially if, as proposed earlier, reference to specific development ethics writings or practice can be more influential than generalised meta-ethicizing will ever be.<sup>9</sup> A good anthology would include a range of types of work: meta-ethics, methodology, substantive theory and, especially, case studies at various levels (global through to personal) and on varied topics; plus a range of types of approach in terms of disciplinary background and the personal background of the author.<sup>10</sup> One could use the frameworks discussed earlier, for example that of three modes in substantive development ethics (Section 2), to build a systematic coverage and go beyond existing collections.

## **5. ETHICS AS POWERLESS IN POLITICAL REALITY?**

*The first law of history: things change more slowly than one expected.  
The second law of history: things change more quickly than one expected.*

The final charge I will consider against ethics is that the practice and discourse of politics differ fundamentally, and necessarily, from Corbridge’s ideal of open and intellectual interchange; that ethics as used in politics is instead a charade, a cosmetic surface used by doers, and a farce or fraud as seen by victims. Corbridge and Booth would reply that research highlighting the presence of numerous different development paths still contributes “in some small way to the

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<sup>9</sup> There are good collections on special aspects, e.g. Aiken & La Follette (eds.) on hunger, or Engel & Engel (eds.) on environment. Koggel (ed) 2006 covers a great variety of ethical questions, with a global range of attention but not a sustained focus on development ethics.

<sup>10</sup> Gasper (1994) illustrates this sort of coverage, in a structured set of abstracts around the ethics of development aid.

demise of political cultures based on appeals to spurious necessity and the denial of choice by leaders and political movements” (Booth, 1993:54). In fact the historical record suggests that it can contribute sometimes in larger ways too. Let us first identify some of the issues; next consider the contemporary example of the spread of human rights norms; and third, look more precisely at how far ethical argumentation, as opposed to convenience and self-interested pressure by powerful agents, has had influence in changing policy and practice.

### 5.1. The limits of ‘realism’

From early in his writing career, Denis Goulet was concerned equally and simultaneously with “The Ethics of Power and the Power of Ethics” (Goulet 1971, Appendix 2). His *The Cruel Choice* observed at the outset that development ethics as an endeavour exists within the room for maneuver left between constraints and determinisms (1971: 19). For him the dictum of “politics as the art of the possible” covered also “politics as the art of redefining the possible” (1971: 336). Innovation is possible, and remakes the range of the possible. Ethics has evaluative and critical roles in judging practices and experiences; a normative role in guiding the use of power; and a pedagogical role, including “as a pedagogy of the oppressed in case it is rejected as pedagogy by the oppressors” (1971: 338).

“...given contemporary levels of awareness, consciousness and sophistication, victims can be pushed (or manipulated) only so far before they will seek to destroy the oppressor, even if their act is suicidal. To disregard norms, *on the pretext that these are incompatible with the present concerns of those who exercise power*, is [itself] unrealistic. ... My contention is simply that the *responsible* use of power leads to consequences which are more controllable and beneficial than its irresponsible use. ... [for] power without legitimacy must ultimately perish... Therefore, responsible power accepts the obligation to be normative, whereas irresponsible power arms its enemies by refusing to be normative.” (Goulet 1971: 339-40, 340, 341; italics in the original).

Goulet thus had a theory why development ethics could have efficacy, especially given intelligent decisionmakers. But what is the evidence? And what are reasonable expectations, yardsticks and timescales by which to assess the influence of ethically informed work? The issue of influence must not be seen as: Can we change everything tomorrow? One needs to think further about the meaning(s), channels, targets and measures of influence. Influential in what ways and on whom?

Here are some possible *audiences* for development ethics work. Specifying possible indirect *beneficiaries* is a separate exercise.

1. Development studies academics and intellectuals (in a broad sense). This includes all those studying societal, human and global development, not just those under the banner of “development studies”. Different approaches fit for addressing one’s ideological and mood mates and when addressing other audiences.
2. Within the first category, one case deserves separate mention: where the audience is oneself, and the work helps to clarify and deepen one’s own position, prioritize one’s



- own activities, influence one's teaching and writing. Influence on this audience alone justifies the activity of development ethics – if it is really achieved.
3. For development studies students – including to help them see issues, choices, dilemmas, and questions, and see beyond dominant ideologies. The formulations of Booth and Corbridge mentioned earlier are germane.
  4. For a development practitioner audience - including individuals, agencies, NGOs.
  5. For policy makers - although this will probably largely be only indirect, contingent and over the longer-term.
  6. For 'civil society', the sea in which policy makers, practitioners, students and academics swim, and whose currents move them.

I argue that development ethics can aspire at least, like business and medical ethics, to somewhat improve professional and academic practice. If development ethics is seen as professional ethics, aiming to reduce professional malpractice, one assesses it differently than if it is seen as a secular religion. One will ask for example about the usefulness and design of explicit codes of conduct. Let us look also though at the hardest and perhaps most significant target: impact on policy.

Lessons from the literature on impacts or non-impacts of policy-related research in the 1960s through 1980s were synthesised by Shadish et al. (1991) and Wagner et al. (1991), and apply beyond the North American and European settings of that literature:

- Influence is generally far less and slower than hoped for;
- but it can be significant in certain circumstances and in various ways; and very significant in special cases. A major, enlightening, example concerns the decades of research, lobbying and preparation, from the 1940s to 1970s, that laid the basis for the 1980s triumph of “free”-market individualism and the partial delegitimation of the State, especially in Britain and the USA.
- Influence occurs in important part through indirect channels over longer-terms and via re-framing and re-interpretation of questions and categories (White, 1994), including rethinking what one's “interests” are and even rethinking one's identity.

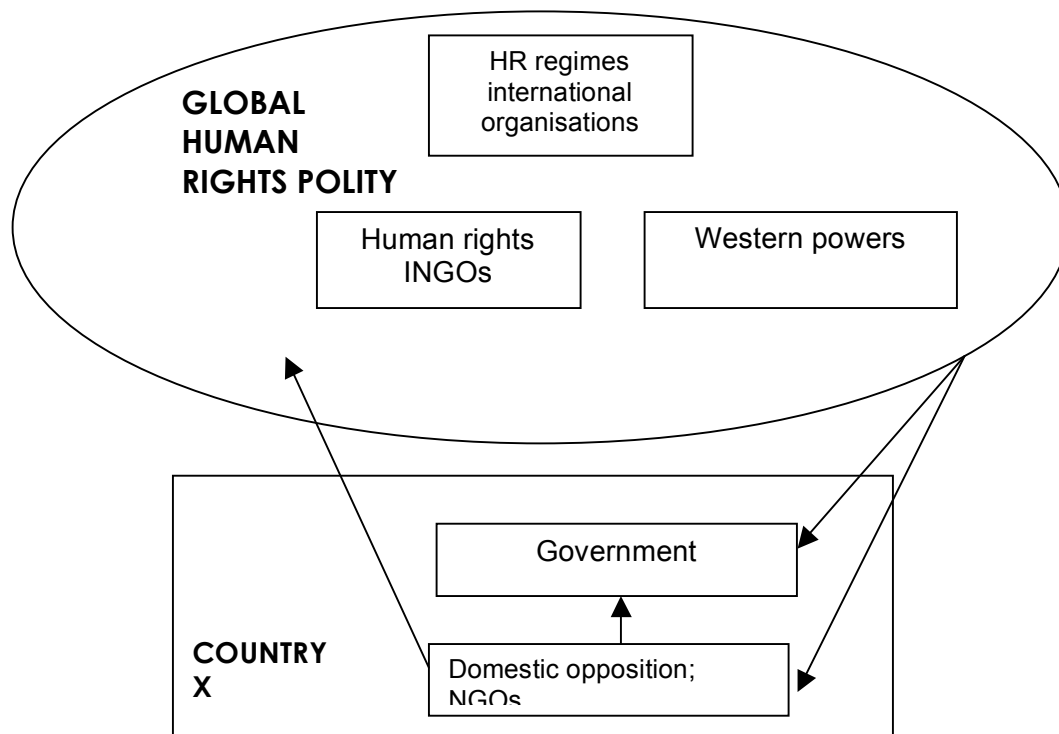
Similar themes apply to cases of major policy changes in history. They reveal the long time-frames and, given the numerous other influences, the contestability of any impacts of ideas and of ethical advocacy and persuasion in particular. The campaigns against slavery, colonialism or the Vietnam war provide food for thought and debate on the modalities and impacts of deliberation, advocacy and campaigning. The 45 year campaign against apartheid in South Africa involved both support to internal and external opposition forces, and directly and indirectly influencing the readiness of parts of ruling elites inside South Africa, and their backers outside, to compromise and evolve. A further theme suggests itself from such cases: that the differing approaches adopted by groups who have been each other's bitter critics have often proved complementary – part of the cunning of history. The spread of human rights norms in the past generation provides a major example.

## **5.2. The example of human rights**

How can we explain the growing strength of the global movement for human rights norms, which in the words of Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) has brought in recent years a human rights “norms cascade”? Risse and Sikkink (1999) offer a summary of the entry and absorption of international human rights norms (for civil and political rights) into the domestic practices of many countries which originally criticised the norms as Northern interference into their realm of sovereign self-determination. The model is presented in two diagrams. The first shows how pressure from the “global human rights polity” impinges on national governments and strengthens their domestic oppositions, which in turn increases the flow of information and appeals to the global human rights polity, which further increases the pressure: “the boomerang effect”.

Risse and Sikkink believe that these interactions typically generate a “spiral model” of change, proceeding through five stages (though with possible loop-backs, leaps, standstills, etc.). First comes repression of domestic human rights and their advocates; second, denial in the face of international criticism, but with the implied concession that repression requires explanation; third, substantive concessions made for tactical reasons, to reduce pressure, but again thereby tacitly increasing the local legitimacy of the norms; fourth, after further internal struggles, fuller acceptance of the norms; and fifthly, absorption of the norms into routine practices and behaviour. Figure 2 presents the spiral. At several of the stages the “boomerang effect” is at work, building pressure to move to the next stage. Accompanying this movement in the content of interaction comes movement in the style of interaction, from 1) purely instrumental bargaining, tactical interaction, and conflict, through 2) argumentative interaction, seeking to persuade by reference to some mutually accepted principles, to 3) internalisation, institutionalisation, and habitualisation.

Figure 1: The “boomerang effect” (Risse & Sikink 1999: 19)



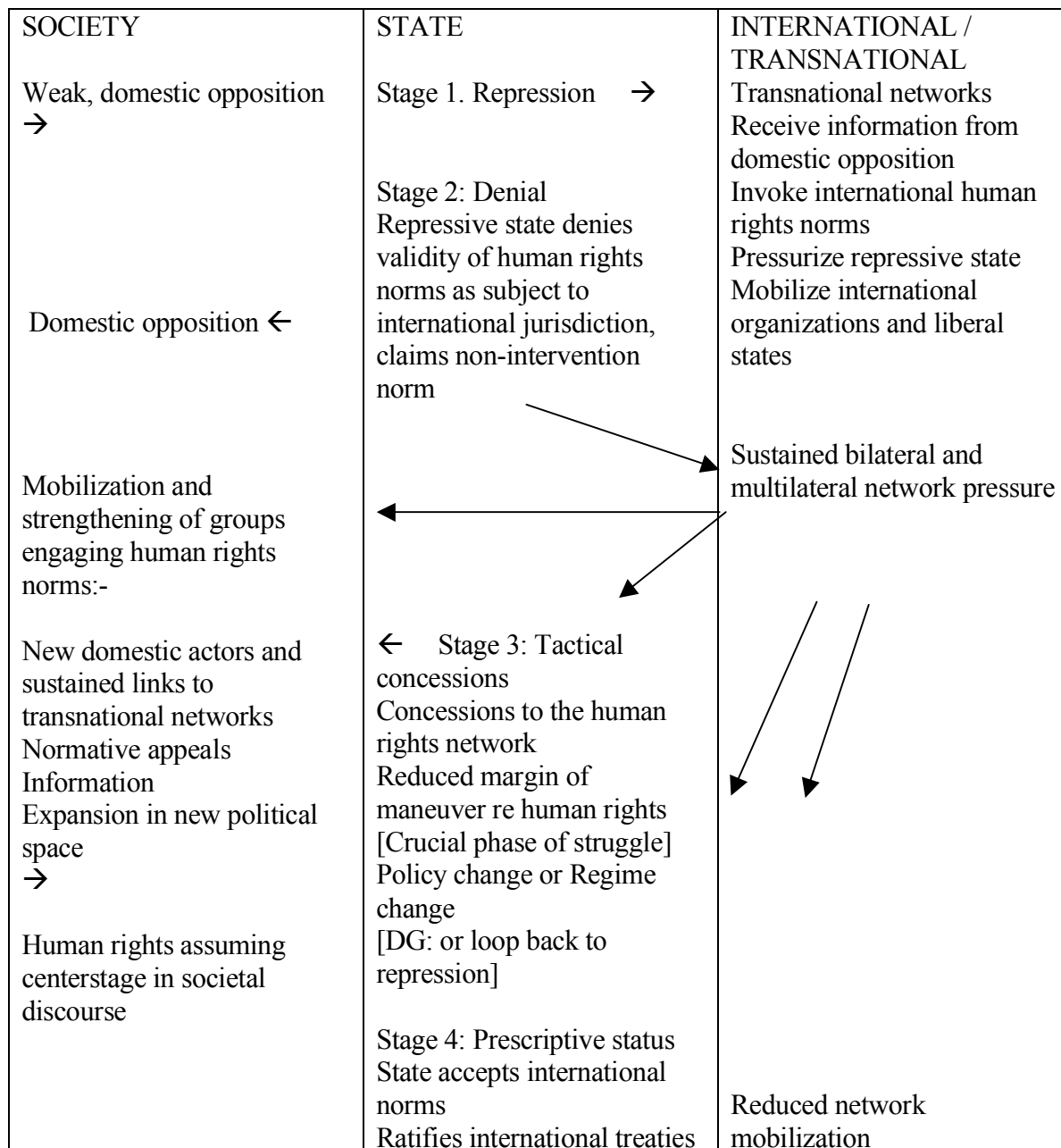
A condition for the model to be strongly relevant is that the national government should care about its international image (Risse & Sikink, p.38) and correspondingly be prone to ‘socialization’ (p.11). Wood & Newton (2005) suggest that international institutions’ normative discourses have had little impact in some types of LDC: (i) the ‘insecurity regimes’ of Sub-Saharan Africa, (ii) and clientelist regimes of South Asia where the local rich can opt-out of local problems by sourcing their required services globally. Similarly, Fleay (2006) notes that China’s case partly fits the model, but that China has such countervailing power that it can influence the global human rights polity through offering economic inducements and affecting the working of human rights regimes in international organisations.

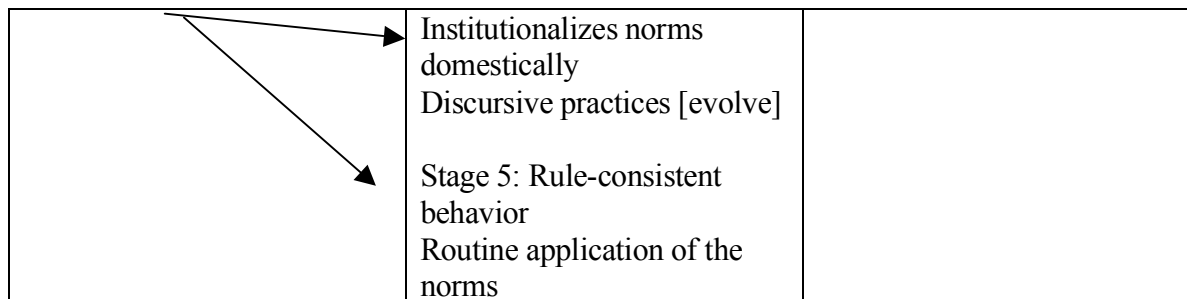
The model was designed to describe the spread of civil and political rights norms. How much does it need to be modified in order to analyse attempts to extend economic, social and cultural international human rights norms (and sister values), matters close to the heart of development ethics? <sup>11</sup> Such norms are probably less consensual and also more difficult to fulfil, and especially involve changes by and in national and international power systems. Work such as

<sup>11</sup> The term ‘extension’ may be less loaded than ‘spread’. ‘Spread’ would imply that the West/North is a haven of (economic, social and cultural) human rights fulfilment busy with promoting human rights fulfilment worldwide, rather than (also) spider in a web of domination and exploitation or marginalisation.

the multi-volume UN Intellectual History Project gives reason to think that the work of ideas has been essential in the significant extension of economic, social and cultural human rights norms too. (See e.g. Emmerij et al., 2001; Jolly et al., 2005.) Gasper (2007b) looks at a sister example, the rise of the Human Development movement in development policy analysis and statistics, led by Mahbub ul Haq.

Figure 2: The ‘spiral model’ of human rights change (Risse & Sikkink 1999: 20)





### 5.3. Crawford on the ending of slavery, empire, and apartheid

How far the is spread of new behaviours due to the spread of new norms, and how much, if anything, do either new norms or new behaviours owe to value argumentation? These issues have been examined with care for several major historical cases. Neta Crawford synthesises the materials to provide a detailed “account of the end of colonialism that stresses factors other than profit, capabilities, and the rational calculation of costs and benefits. It is certain that those factors were important.... But what mattered more in the long run was the making of persuasive ethical arguments containing normative beliefs about what was good and right to do to others.” (Crawford 2002: 4).

Crawford notes that: “Ethical arguments that succeed in changing beliefs and practices must be extremely persuasive in order to overcome the inertia of habit, the obstacles of institutionalization, the possible confusion and loss of efficiency associated with change, the personal identification and stakes individuals may have in the practice, and the belief that the old practice is good” (p.111). Correspondingly: “Ethical arguments that match or complement the content of religious, social, or scientific belief systems that are part of the dominant culture are more likely to be successful than arguments that clash with existing webs of belief” (p.113). Analogies are particularly effective, to show a parallelism to other existing beliefs. However, some lesser or greater part of an existing belief system has to be detached, denormalised (removed from a status of normalness, naturalness, common-sense) and delegitimised. The first step in that process is its deconstruction. Crawford presents successful ethical argumentation as involving three strands: firstly, this displacement of the old; a stage that continues to run in parallel and interact with, secondly, the construction of an alternative, which should “offer and change conceptions of possibility and interests” (p.108), and, thirdly, the institutionalization of the alternative view, which requires changes in both capabilities and institutions.

To test whether ethical arguments had real influence in cases of behaviour change, she devises several criteria, including the following (pp.123-4):

- The ethical discourse must precede the behaviour change.
- It must continue to be used after the behaviour change and “not ignored or mocked” (p.123); instead, it may start to be used as part of the grounding for other propounded normative beliefs.
- When its prescriptions are diverged from then we see arguments presented that try to

justify the divergence.

- Sanctions were perhaps used to try to enforce the discourse's prescriptions.
- We see cases of actors following the prescriptions contrary to conventional interpretations of what are their "interests", and/or re-interpreting their interests, after adopting the new normative beliefs.

That policymakers often make adjustments on pragmatic grounds—in order to hold power while taking into account multiple constraints, including what their actual and potential supporters believe—does not show that ethical arguments are unimportant. Ethical arguments can be amongst the beliefs of the supporters.

Crawford reviews and extends the work of many others, to apply these criteria explicitly to a set of cases: from the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spanish determination of their policies towards indigenes in the Americas; from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British rejection of first the slave trade and then slavery; the subsequent movement to regulate, delimit and eventually ban forced labour; the 20<sup>th</sup> century movements of colonial reform and then of decolonization, including the processes of monitoring and norm-setting established by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations and extended under the UN Trusteeship system; and the international campaign against South African occupation of Namibia (South West Africa). Other authors have done parallel studies of the trajectory and causes of the international opposition to apartheid in South Africa and the resulting introduction of sanctions and boycotts against the apartheid state.<sup>12</sup>

Let us look briefly, in the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, at the 1807 British (and American) decision to ban the slave trade. These events are particularly relevant for our purpose, since of an era for which no counterarguments in terms of a supposed wish to obtain or retain support from other parties can even be posed, let alone sustained, concerning motivation of the decisions.

“...when its policy towards the slave trade changed ... Not only were slave economies doing better than non-slave economies, the British government paid for suppression of the trade. ... by the 1840s, when the Africa Squadron was at its peak [up to thirty-six ships], Britain often devoted over 10 percent of its naval manpower [to suppressing slave traffic, at a cost far in excess of its annual trade with Africa.] ... The slave trade did not end because it was no longer profitable.” (Crawford 2002: 166-7).

On the contrary, the trade long continued profitable. Correspondingly, the proposition to stop it had been fiercely opposed and blocked for over twenty years, and the trade continued in the face of the risks of capture and dispossession by Britain's Africa Squadron. Opposition to the trade was explicitly and predominantly voiced on ethical grounds, often religiously backed.

Following the 1824 decision to make slave trading a capital offense, Britain abolished slavery in its territories in 1833. This step faced equally fierce opposition and brought further costs. Crawford's summary of other studies runs: “Productivity in British West Indian economies immediately declined following abolition, while Cuba and Brazil, which still practiced slavery, had robust economies and their demand for slaves grew. ... Spending on compensation [of slave owners] in 1836, at 25.6 percent of total [British] government expenditures, exceeded total spending for the army, ordnance and the navy combined” (pp. 169-70). British loans and foreign

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<sup>12</sup> An important sister study and source for Crawford on the struggle against apartheid is Klotz (1995).

agreements were conditional upon the other parties agreeing to cooperate in the anti-slave trade operation (p.185).

Crawford concludes that in each of these epochal cases, ethical argumentation had demonstrable impact. She shows how: “The content of argument, belief and culture enables, shapes, and limits, providing a discursive structure to world politics that is as real as the military force of states or the balance of power among them” (p.343). Her chapter 8 tests her explanation using the set of criteria mentioned earlier, and reviews alternative explanations in depth: namely, claims that military, economic or other non-ethics explanations suffice. There is no evidence that colonies which formerly used “to pay” then became “non-paying” after 1945 or in the 1950s, causing decolonization in the 1960s. And “anti-colonial movements were not necessarily better armed in relation to the colonizer. Rather, what became increasingly evident was the declining willingness of colonizers to fight for colonies in the same brutal ways they had in the past.” (p.350). This decline was not a disappearance of all willingness, but shifted the balance. “Britain and France were much stronger militarily at mid-century *vis-à-vis* their colonies than they were before and they could likely have kept their colonies if they had chosen to do so” (p.356). Extermination of opponents was within their technical capacity, which far exceeded that of the German practitioners of the art in South West Africa earlier in the century; but extermination was now morally excluded (*loc. cit.*). And the moral structuring of political discourse had moved further than that, in for example the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The belief in fundamental inequality of different peoples which underlay slavery and imperialism had withered, not least from the two World Wars.<sup>13</sup> The changes were not automatic: “Rather, it was the arguments that were framed, extended, or sparked by these events, and the contradictions these arguments exposed (between the rhetoric of self-determination that was so widely proclaimed during the world wars and the actual conditions of the people in the colonies) that led to a growing recognition and influence of ideas about the equality of the ‘other’ that formed the core of the decolonization regime. ... Anti-colonial arguments had been made for centuries before the twentieth-century process of decolonization began; what made those arguments persuasive to more people were changes in the culture of the metropole...” (pp.393-4).

## **CONCLUSION - ON BEING LESS POWERLESS, LESS STERILE**

I have considered four sets of objections that development ethics, like other areas of practical ethics, must handle in order to be widely taken seriously; and have argued that it can do so. This leads us to a further agenda. If development ethics work is not necessarily epistemically futile, substantively superfluous or sterile and politically irrelevant, then we should think in more detail about by what strategies and tactics it can achieve more, and how it can be fruitfully organised. I offer two concluding suggestions.

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<sup>13</sup> Similar arguments apply to why white South Africa eventually faced international sanctions, restricting its military capability to the point where it could not simply enforce its will on neighbours or its black population.

First, we can learn from examination of those development ethics authors whose work can be deemed far from futile.<sup>14</sup> Looking for example at Amartya Sen, we see an ability to communicate to and influence a wide range of audiences. Relying not only on the content of his insights, he adopts a range of media and of levels of exposition, including non-academic journalism. He writes periodically for 'The New York Review of Books', 'Scientific American', and the literary periodical 'Granta', increasing his audience ten-fold. He publishes multiple versions of his work, seeking persistently to convey and update his arguments as well as to interact with others; and he writes in a calm, rigorous style, with reference to striking cases. Vitally, his work covers concepts, and explanatory and normative theory, and policy analyses and proposals. Each of the areas strengthens the others. Following a consistent format in comparative review of each author should deepen our insight.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the question of where should development ethics work be communicated and published links to how far development ethics should be seen as a separate realm in development studies and practice, or instead in a constitutive role as a component or dimension of (all) other work. I suggest primarily the latter response but from a base that sustains the ongoing mission. We need to balance publication where we seek intellectual 'critical mass' through speaking to and interacting with fellow enthusiasts, against the risk of 'preaching only to the converted'. Does the relative fruitfulness compared to earlier academic ethics of the last generation in practical ethics imply that more of development ethics is and should be embedded in discussions on democracy, participation, women, environment, civil society and governance, and so on? Or does the relative fruitfulness too of recent general theorizing in development ethics, including on human rights, indicate a different model? Again I suggest we instead see a complementarity of theorizing and more embedded work, with services provided by each to the other. Theory is stimulated, tested and adjusted or rejected, while "case work" too is in turn stimulated and guided. Development ethics should be a multi-mode activity, with close interaction between its different modes.

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<sup>14</sup> An illuminating authors-centred review of a field of work that does this is Shadish et al. (1991).

<sup>15</sup> I have tried to extend this line of reflection on the work of specific authors, in a series of papers including Gasper (2000) on Sen, (2003) on Nussbaum, (2006) on Goulet, and (2007b) on Haq.



## **APPENDIX - FISCHER'S MODEL OF THE LEVELS OF POLICY EVALUATION**

The model illustrates the scope for ordering and systematizing normative policy arguments. He has adapted work by some philosophers on normative argument in general (notably Taylor, 1961) to fit policy analysis interests. I have paraphrased Fischer (1980: 206-12); comments in brackets are his, on how to tackle the various questions.

Level 1 (Technical verification of program objectives):-

- 1) Program Objectives - Is the program objective logically derived from the relevant policy goals? (Refer to logical rules.)
- 2) Empirical Consequences - Does the program empirically fulfil its stated objectives? (Refer to empirical knowledge of consequences.)
- 3) Unanticipated Effects - Does the empirical analysis uncover secondary effects that offset the program objectives? (Refer to knowledge of consequences.)
- 4) Alternative Means - Does the program fulfill the objectives more efficiently than alternative means available? (Refer to knowledge of alternative means.)

Level 2 (Situational validation of policy goals):-

- 5) Relevance - Are the policy goals relevant? Can they be justified by appeal to higher principles or established causal knowledge? (Refer to knowledge of established norms and goal-systems, and to causal conditions and laws.)
- 6) Situational Context - Are there any circumstances in the situation which require that an exception be made to the policy goal or criterion? (Refer to particular facts of the situation.)
- 7) Multiple goals - Are two or more goals equally relevant to the situation? (Refer to normative logic.)
- 8) Precedence - Does the decision-maker's value system place higher precedence on one of the conflicting criteria? Or does it lead to some contradictory prescriptions? (Refer to normative logic.)

Level 3 (Vindication of political choice):-

- 9) System Consequences - comparison of goal-system's consequences with accepted social ideals in the situation. (Refer to causal conditions and laws.)
  - 10) Equity. (Refer to normative logic and accepted social ideals.)
  - 11) Ideological conflict. (Ditto.)
- For questions 10 & 11, there should be discussion of how far the policy's goals and the supporting social ideals are compatible with equitable resolution of conflicts.

Level 4 (Choice of social order):-

- 12) Alternative Social Orders - comparison with alternative social orders, if 10 & 11 so imply. (Refer to knowledge of fundamental needs and to normative logic.)

Some details of the model and of how it is being used are open to criticism (see e.g. Gasper, 1989); but those are matters for another discussion, after the critique of positivism has been established.

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