
Summary:

Introduction.

1. Precursors.

2. Development Ethics: Two Pathways.

Conclusion.

Introduction.

As the 20th century opened, the world's political stage was peopled by a small number of colonizing nations, a larger number of colonized lands, and a few countries engrossed in their own affairs. Within fifty years two world wars, two grandiose social revolutions and a worldwide economic depression had totally transformed this global stage, the cast of nation-state actors, and relationships among them. Beginning with India in 1947, former colonies in Asia and Africa emerged as independent nations politically committed to rapid improvement of their citizens' standard of life, but lacking the capital, technical skills, and institutions to achieve it.

Thus did development, as a vision of a better life and a process of deliberate change to attain it, emerge after World War II as a universal national goal. Europe's reconstruction with Marshall Plan aid made it seem that rapid development could also be gained in the Third World through a massive infusion of financial and technological resources, and the transfer of institutional models and dynamic ideas from rich to poor

* Denis Goulet é Professor da University of Notre Dame (USA).

countries. Experience soon revealed, however, that success in development depends most critically on a society's own efforts to change its policies, social structure, institutions, and values.

The multiple meanings assigned to the term "development" mirror the diverse political, economic, and social conditions found in varied urban and rural settings around the world. To people whose physical circumstances are vastly more comfortable than those experienced by their families one or two generations ago, development stands for access to ever more diversified consumer goods. To the billion people who continue to live in extreme poverty much like what their forebears knew at the turn of the century, development is the modest hope of gaining a secure supply of food and drinking water, adequate shelter, and access to rudimentary health services.

Not everyone views development in material terms, however. For Brazil's revolutionary educator Paulo Freire, development is the ability of powerless masses to begin to shape their own destiny as subjects, not merely as objects, of history. Many Latin American theorists of social change speak not of development but of liberation and argue that, before meaningful change can take place, political power must be transferred from traditional land-owning and modernizing technological elites to poor masses.

Many practical-minded problem-solvers, in poor as in rich countries, see development as the "modern" way of doing things. Modern patterns of settlement concentrate people, jobs, services, and amenities in cities — thereby linking development to urbanization in the perception of countless millions. And because the modern mode of creating wealth rests on the systematic of technology to boost productivity, industrialization has become synonymous with development.

Moreover, since the west industrialized first, industrialization is often assumed to involve the Westernization of attitudes and values.

Yet many in developing countries now find such notions insulting to their civilizations. With Paul Streeten they consider that "[I]t" is development itself that interferes with human development.¹ Today's development countries in growing numbers value the preservation of national cultural identity in the face of imported values and practices, and the pursuit of development in a self-reliant endogenous manner. Self-reliance is neither autarchy nor self-sufficiency. Self-reliance means that basic decisions about the speed and direction of change must come from within poor nations and in accord with their traditions -- not in blind imitation of practices and policies in Western industrial nations.

"Development" evokes cultural as well as economic, social, and political fulfillment. It is "the great ascent" toward new civilizations in which all human beings have enough goods to be fully human.² If genuine development is found where a society provides essential goods to all in which enhance self-esteem and expand their freedom to create, then no society is yet satisfactorily "developed." It may well be that high-income nations have as much need to find a wisdom to match their sciences as poor countries have to test their ancient wisdoms in encounters with modern technology and dynamic social change.³

In its early years after World War II development was viewed as a straightforward economic problem. It was simply a matter of identifying and quantifying the composition of economic growth packages: of raising agricultural output,

¹ Paul Streeten, *Strategies for Human Development*, Copenhagen: Handelshojskolens Forlag, 1994, p. 13.

² Robert Heilbroner, *The Great Ascent, The Struggle for Economic Development in Our Time*, NY: Harper & Row, 1963.

³ Denis Goulet, "The Quest for Wisdom in a Technological Age," *Philosophical Studies in Education, Proceedings - Annual (1985) Meeting of the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society*, edited by Robert J. Skovira, Coropolis, PA: Versatile Printing Co., 1987, pp. 123-154.

diversifying manufactured products, building infrastructure, increasing the provision of services. Growth objectives would be planned, resources mobilized to reach them, and the complex institutional apparatus for investing, managing, financing, and producing activated. This array of organized activities would yield "development," measured as higher national income, increased product, greater output. Eventually it came to be recognized that numerous social, cultural, institutional, and psychological determinants affect a nation's prospects for successful development. Its work force has to be trained, its people have to be motivated to desire the fruits of modern production and to accept its discipline, and cultural beliefs have to change: cows must now be defined as nutritional resources, not as sacred beings to be shielded from human consumption. To development's early practitioners certain values seemed self-evident and beyond dispute: that economic well-being is, everywhere and for everyone, a good thing; that technology should be harnessed to all human activities because it enhances their productivity; that modern institutions, characterized by specialization and the division of labor, are desirable because they foster economic growth. The study of development was not a value-laden philosophical pursuit, but a technical examination of how to be most efficient in using resources, in mobilizing people to desire more goods and to labor to get them, and in fashioning institutional arrangements best suited to growth. In a word, development was the proper object of study for economics. And within economic discipline, it was the value-free "engineering" stream of theory, methodology, and analysis which prevailed. As Amartya Sen explains:

economics has had two rather different origins, both related to politics, but related in rather different ways, concerned respectively with 'ethics' on the other... The 'engineering' approach is characterized by being concerned with ultimate ends and such questions as what may foster 'the good of man' or 'how should

one live.' The ends are taken as fairly straightforwardly given, and the object of the exercise is to find the appropriate means to serve them. Human behavior is typically seen as being on simple and easily characterizable motives...⁴

The ethics-related tradition is traceable to Aristotle, according to whom, Sen notes, "[T]he study of economics, though related immediately to the pursuit of wealth, is at a deeper level linked up with other studies, involving the assessment and enhancement of more basic goals... Economics relates ultimately to the study of ethics."⁵ Sen laments that "[T]he methodology of so-called 'positive economics' it has also had the effect of ignoring a variety of complex ethical considerations which affect actual human behavior and which, from the point of view of the economists studying such behavior, are primarily matters of fact rather than of normative judgement."⁶

Above all else development is a question of values, human attitudes and preferences, self-defined goals, and criteria for determining what are tolerable costs to be borne in the course of change.⁷ These are far more important than optimal resource allocations, upgraded skills, or the rationalization of administrative procedures. Moreover, developmental processes themselves are dialectical, fraught with contradictions, conflicts, and unpredictable reversals. Development is an ambiguous historical adventure born of tensions between what is sought and how it is obtained. As technological innovations or new

⁴ Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987, pp. 2 - 3.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷ A "value" is defined here as any object or representation which can be perceived by a subject as habitually worthy of desire. Cf. Denis Goulet, "An Ethical Model for the Study of a Values," *Harvard Educational Review*, 41:2, May 1971, pp. 205-227.

behavioral norms impinge on societies living in relative equilibrium, their values are deeply troubled. Innovations create new strains between demands and the effective ability to meet them. Expanded demands bear on information, material goods, services, freedom, or other presumed benefits. Yet all such changes, usually proposed under the banner of "development", can threaten the very survival of a society's deepest values.

Educators, researchers, and planners are engaged in the transfer of technologies, not the least of which are research techniques. And inasmuch as value crises in under-developed societies are closely linked to those faced by industrialized nations, it is essential to engage in critical inquiry into the value assumptions underlying research on development. Ethical judgements regarding the good life, the good society, and the quality of relations among people always serve, directly or indirectly, as operational criteria for development planners and as guidelines for researchers. Development ethics is that new discipline which deals ex professo with these normative dimensions of development. Only recently has this specialization within philosophy become formalized.⁸ Nevertheless, the new discipline had noteworthy precursors who undertook to study development in value in value terms.

1. Precursors.

Gandhi

Although he is neither economist nor ethicist, Gandhi formulated a vision and practice of development centered on values of non-violent cooperation among social agents, responsible trusteeship in the ownership and administration of

wealth, production by the masses over mass production, village development, the provision of basic needs over the multiplication of wants. As one student of Gandhian economics, Amritananda Das, observes:

the target of poverty elimination set by Gandhi in fact demands very rapid rates of growth. Remember that, in 1930, Gandhi set what he regarded as a 'decent minimum' standard of living at Rel per person per day. This works out to Rs.365 per year at 1930 prices, which would come to something like five times the amount or about Rs.1825 per year per person at current prices. This, too, is a 'minimum' and not a per capita average level. India in 1977 (after three decades of post-Independence development) is not even half-way to the mark. Thus, there is nothing 'anti-growth' about Gandhi. His only interest in need limitation stems from the justified conviction that the per head consumption of the poor cannot be raised to the needed extent unless other classes, to some extent, cease and desist from conspicuous consumption. There is nothing 'metaphysical' about this conclusion. It is an arithmetical truism that an employment-based growth leads to rapid increase in consumption of basic necessities and a slow growth in the luxury elements of consumption. In this sense it calls for the giving up of luxury consumption as the summum bonum of life.⁹

Das has schematized Gandhis's implicit model of development as follows:

1. It is based on the ideal of the development of a collaborative economic system and of its pattern of institutions.

⁹ Amritananda Das, Foundations of Gandhian Economics, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 58.

⁸ On this see David A. Crocker, "Toward Development Ethics," World Development, Vol. 19, No. 5, 1991, pp. 457-483.

2. These institutions comprise (a) cooperative groups of small farmers and artisans, (b) the cooperative institutions of credit and marketing, (c) large-scale private-owned and state-owned industries organized on the trusteeship principle, and (d) large-area infrastructure systems run by the state.
3. The coordination of the economic system is in terms of three types of planning processes: (a) the area development plans of local communities and clusters, (b) the marketing and reinvestment planning of the cooperative structure, and (c) centralized planning of large industries, the three processes being made to interact in a hierarchical indicative planning system of cluster/district/zone levels.
4. The objective of planning is visualized as the attainment of a zero structural unemployment state in the shortest possible time.
5. the acceleration of the growth rate of employment is seen as being achieved primarily by investment reallocation and the encouragement of appropriate technical innovations, rather than by the raising of the rate of investment.
6. The resource mobilization for the small-scale sector is visualized as taking place through the reinvestment planning of the cooperative agencies, local infrastructure needs being met by local resource-raising at the cluster level and public resource mobilization relating only to large-scale industry and infrastructure.
7. Investment in large-scale industry and infrastructure is to be kept to the lowest level

possible consistent with the small-scale sector growth plan.

8. The growth is visualized as taking place in a semiautarchic context, at least till such time as the international trade and exchange system becomes free of its present exploitative character.¹⁰

Gandhi denounced "immiserising modernization" and advocated instead an investment strategy which maximized employment and fostered a collaborative economic order, demanding of central planning that it create conditions favorable to economic decentralization. By centering his analysis and policy prescriptions on the values affected, Gandhi was operating, in effect, as a development ethicist before his time.¹¹

Lebret

A second influential precursor of development ethics is L.J. Lebret, founder in 1941 of the Economy and Humanism movement created to study economic problems as human problems.¹² Underdevelopment, in his view, is not primarily an economic problem, nor simply the inability of social structures to meet new demands issuing from hitherto passive populations. Above all else, underdevelopment is a symptom of a worldwide crisis in human values; accordingly, development's task is to create, in a world of chronic inequality and disequilibrium, new civilizations of solidarity. Lebret designates such creation the "human ascent,"¹³ ascent in all spheres of life – economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual. It requires new patterns

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹ Das, *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

¹² Cf. Joseph Lebret and René Moreux, Manifeste D'Economie et Humanisme, Marseille: Economie et Humanisme, Février-Mars, 1942.

¹³ L.-J. Lebret, Montée Humaine, Paris: Les Editions ouvrières, 1951.

of solidarity which respect differences and do not posit easy shortcuts to the elimination of privilege and domination. If a human economy is to be implanted in small localities as well as in more extensive regions, national societies, and the world at large, monumental human interventions must occur, aimed at optimizing the use of all resources – natural, financial, technical, and human.

“The problem of the distribution of goods,” Lebret wrote in 1959, “is secondary compared to the problems of preparing men to receive them.”¹⁴ Underdevelopment bears witness to the bankruptcy of the world’s economic, social, political, and educational systems. Not only have these systems created mass misery coexisting with alienating abundance; they have also reified human beings and subordinated them to the myths of growth and social control. Therefore, although rational resource planning, judicious investment, new institutions, and the mobilization of the populace are necessary to achieve development, such measures can never be sufficient. More necessary is overall cultural revolution in the values human beings hold. To Lebret, it seemed evident that underdevelopment is a byproduct of the distorted achievements of those societies which incorrectly label themselves developed. He argued that satisfying an abundance of false needs at the expense of keeping multitudes in misery can never constitute authentic development. Rather, a sound hierarchy of needs must be established for every society. These needs must harmonize with the society’s spiritual and cultural values, with the exigencies of solidarity with others, with the demands of wise resource use, with the aspiration of all individuals and groups to be treated by others as beings of worth independent of their utility to those others.¹⁵

¹⁴ L.J. Lebret, *Manifest pour une Civilisation Solidaire*, Calurie: Editions Economie et Humanisme, 1959, p. 49.

¹⁵ Lebret presents his theory of scaled needs in numerous works, notably in “pour une Economie de Besoins,” *Economie et Humanisme*, no. 84, March-

Lebret distinguished three categories of needs:

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

The policy implications which flow from this vision are obvious:

- Basic development efforts must place priority on assuring all persons sufficient goods of the first category. This priority ought to dictate investment decisions, the kinds of social institutions adopted, the mechanisms of world resource exchange, and the allotment of scarce goods to competing groups.
- Sufficiency at the first level must not be pursued to the detriment of goods related to human fulfillment. Lebret insists, however, that the satisfaction of basic subsistence needs is the prerequisite or infrastructure upon which human creativity and expression normally depend if they are to flourish.
- The second category of goods, ranging from goods which are relatively useful to those which are

luxuriously wasteful, is not totally useless but should be clearly subordinated to the others.

Myrdal

A third precursor of development ethics is a Swedish economist who agonized over the clash between the requirements of objectivity in social science and the imperative need for valuebased interventions in the pursuit of development. Gunnar Myrdal pondered how development interventions could avoid being arbitrary and biased, but rather "objectively" or scientifically valid and based on a positive economic analysis of facts and conditions. As he wrote:

[T]he ethos of social science is the search for 'objective' truth. The faith of the student is his conviction that truth is wholesome and that illusions are damaging, especially opportunistic ones. He seeks 'realism,' a term which in one of its meanings denotes an 'objective' view of reality.

The most fundamental methodological problems facing the social scientist are therefore, what is objectivity, and how can the student attain objectivity in trying to find out the facts and the causal relationships between facts? How can a biased view be avoided? More specifically, how can the student of social problems liberate himself from (1) the powerful heritage of earlier writings in his field of inquiry, ordinarily containing normative and teleological notions inherited from past generations and founded upon the metaphysical moral philosophies of natural law and utilitarianism from which all our social and economic theories have branched off; (2) the influences of the entire cultural, social, economic, and political milieu of the society

where he lives, works, and earns his living and his status; and (3) the influence stemming from his own personality, as molded not only by traditions and environment but also by his individual history, constitution, and inclinations?

The social scientist faces the further problem: how can he be in this sense objective and, at the same time, practical? What is the relation between wanting to understand and wanting to change society? How can the search for true knowledge be combined with moral and political valuations? How can truth be related to ideals?

In our profession there is a lack of awareness even today that, in searching for truth, the student, like influenced by tradition, by his environment, and by his personality. Further, there is an irrational taboo against discussing this lack of awareness. It is astonishing that this taboo is commonly respected, leaving the social scientist in naïveté about what he is doing. To destroy this naïveté should be the object of the sociology of science and scientists, the least developed branch of social science. This is important, as these influences, if they are not controlled, are apt to cause systematic biases in research and thus lead to faulty knowledge.

Even if the influences conditioning research had already been exposed, so that the social scientist was more sophisticated about himself and his attitudes in searching for truth, there would still remain a problem of the philosophy of social science: are there logical means by which he can better assure objectivity in his research? This is the problem I shall lead up to in this essay.

We shall find, the logical means available for protecting ourselves from biases are broadly these: to raise the valuations actually determining our theoretical as well as our practical research to full awareness, to scrutinize them from the point of view of relevance, significance, and feasibility in the society under study, to transform them into specific value premises for research, and to determine approach and define concepts in terms of a set of value premises which have been explicitly stated.¹⁶

Because Myrdal was a development policy planner as well as an economic theorist, his epistemological anxieties changed his way of "doing economics."¹⁷ "We will have to master the complex problems that exist in reality by whatever tools are available," he writes. "This should not be taken as an excuse for dilettantism: it is our duty to develop our skills to the highest possible degree in order to solve the scientific problems before us. The student must try to improve and adapt his skills to suit the particular problem he is tackling; he must not be content to limit them narrowly to one of the traditional disciplines. In my own professional life I have sometimes wandered far from what is usually considered economic theory, my original playground"¹⁸.

Myrdal saw economics as radically flawed: in the name of value-free objectivity it abstracted from reality, and it uncritically extrapolated concepts from Western to non-Western societies. He understood that "the use of Western theories, models, and concepts in the study of economic development in

the South Asian countries is a cause of bias seriously distorting that study"¹⁹ Among concepts central to economic analysis which are especially inapplicable to developing societies he numbered: employment and unemployment, savings and consumption, the supposed spread effects of investment, and the notion of output. The aggregation of magnitudes which is central to economic analysis, he argued, is meaningless in South Asian developing countries. As he assesses Western economic procedures for utilizing data, Myrdal concludes "that their categories are unrealistic... while in the Western world an analysis in 'economic' terms -- markets and prices, employment and unemployment, consumption and savings, investment and output -- that abstracts from modes and levels of living and from attitudes, institutions, and culture may make sense and lead to valid inferences, an analogous procedure plainly does not in underdeveloped countries"²⁰.

Other precursors of development ethics have likewise shifted the development problematique away from technical economic analysis to value-centered investigation, among them the economists François Perroux and Jacques Austruy and the sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda.²¹

¹⁹ Asian Drama, Vol. I, p. 19.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²¹ François Perroux, L'Économie du XX^e Siècle, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964; Perroux, Economie et Société, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2^e éd., 1963; Jacques Austruy, Le Scandale du Développement, Paris: Éditions Marcel Rivière et C^x 1965; Austruy, L' Islam Face au Développement Économique, Paris: Economie et Humanisme, Les Editions Ouvrières, 1961; Orlando Fals-Borda, Conocimiento y Poder Popular, Bogotá: Punta de Lanza, 1985; Fals-Borda, Subversion and Social Change in Colombia, New York: Colombia University Press, 1969.

¹⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, Objectivity in-Social Research, New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, pp. 3-5.

¹⁷ His 3-volume inquiry into the poverty of nations remains a classic monument of practical economic analysis and policy prescription. Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama, An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, New York: Pantheon, 1968.

¹⁸ Myrdal, Objectivity in Social Research, p. 11

2. Development Ethics: Two Pathways.

In new and ever-changing settings development poses ancient philosophical questions: What is the good life (the relation between having goods and being good), what are the foundations of life in society, and what stance should human groups adapt toward nature? "Development" provides one particular answer to these questions. Merely to engage in applied ethics, however, is tantamount to harnessing ethics in instrumental fashion to the uncritical pursuit of development. Yet it is the very goals of modern development, and the peculiar answer it offers to the ancient philosophical questions which are themselves at issue. Accordingly, development ethics is summoned to a task beyond mere instrumental norm-setting in processes of change. What is needed is a critical questioning of the very nature of development and of its declared goals: a better human life and societal arrangements which provide a widening range of people to pursue their common and individual good.

In formulating the new discipline of development ethics, its pioneers have travelled two separate roads. The first road runs from engagement as planners or change agents in development practice to the formal articulation of ethical strategies. The second originates in an internal philosophical critique of conventional ethical theory and moves outward to the elaboration of a distinctive ethics of development as normative praxis. Both modes of "doing" development ethics go beyond instrumental application to a reformulation of ethical theory itself, this in accord with the inner exigencies of the development problématique. That new problématique leads, not only to new applications, but to new theoretical formulations as well.

Along the first road, ethical strategies are derived from the varied development practice of national societies, of opposition social movements experimenting with alternative counter-strategies, and of ethicists' own activities as a

development practitioners.²² The basic mode of study employed is phenomenological analysis, i.e., the methodical reduction or "peeling away" of values and counter-values contained, usually implicitly and in latent form, in the policies, programs, and projects proposed and carried out by development agents.²³

This first stream delineates, illustrates, and presents a justification of development ethics:

- as a new discipline with its proper nature, distinctive methods, and research rules;
- as the constitutive source of general principles which serve as criteria guiding the formulation of ethical strategies;
- as operational guides or ethical strategies in specific sectors of development decision-making and action; and
- as the source of normative standards for evaluating development performance.

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

This second stream of development ethics has begun the task of conducting a formal analysis of:

- the foundational justification of rights, needs, and entitlements;
- the ethical assessment of policies as these affect special categories of persons victimized or marginalized by current development practices

²² Cf., e.g., Denis Goulet, "Doing Ethics in Development Arenas," *Journal of Regional Policy*, Naples, Italy, Vol. 11, July/December, (3-4/1991), pp. 601-608; "Ethics and Development: A Development Ethicist at Work," *National Geographic Research & Exploration*, Vol. 8, N° 2, 1002, pp. 138-147.

²³ On the phenomenological method applied to social issues, see Helmut R. Wagner, ed., *Alfred Shutz, On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 1-79.