Development Ethics and Gender Justice

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I would like to begin by thanking Christine Koggel for the marvellous work she has done in organizing this conference. It was her knowledge and influence within development ethics and within feminist philosophy that we can thank for bringing so many of you here today. And you really have come from far and wide. The program lists participants from twenty countries. So I would also like to thank you for making what for some was a considerable effort to join us for these next three days to discuss Gender Justice and Development: Local and Global – along with other topics in development ethics.

Now, speaking of development ethics, I would guess that most of you have not attended a development ethics conference before. In a way, that is not surprising. There are many people who contribute to development ethics without saying so and without describing themselves as development ethicists. Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and Thomas Pogge are three examples. Whenever I reflect on this, I am reminded of Moliere's character Monsieur Jourdain, the bourgeois gentleman, who remarks, 'Good heavens! For more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing it.' And so I could ask many of you in this audience, 'How long have you been speaking development ethics, without knowing it?'

In light of this, I thought it would be useful to begin this conference with some remarks on what development ethics is. I will not try to do this in any comprehensive way. Instead, I will draw your attention to seven broad ethical values that have become central to the theory and practice of development ethics. I will say something about how these seven values have acquired such prominence. And this will set the stage for asking what development ethics and gender justice have to do with each other. My goal here will be a very modest one: only to open this question for the further discussions that will follow in these next three days.

What, then, is development ethics? I want to begin with a thought from our late colleague Denis Goulet, who inspired so many of us take up development ethics. Denis observed there are two directions in which development can go. Some development is worthwhile because it leads to improvements in people's lives. In other cases, development leads in the opposite direction, making people's lives worse. This can be called 'maldevelopment'. I suppose, this distinction between worthwhile development and maldevelopment could be regarded by some as a technical distinction between more effective and less effective means for achieving development. But Goulet's inspiration was to propose that this distinction is not merely technical, it is a normative distinction, based on *values* that worthwhile development is expected to serve and advance. Goulet's idea was that development is worthwhile when it serves certain values, whereas maldevelopment does a disservice to them (Goulet 1995; Goulet 1997; Goulet 2006).

Well, what might these values be? How on earth can we reliably find out what they are? One approach might be to apply some of the great ethical theories. Implicitly, that is what Peter Singer does when he applies his version of consequentialism to issues of global poverty and climate change. Similarly, Onora O'Neill and Adela Cortina have taken Kantian perspectives on development (O'Neill 1986; Crocker 2008, 218-254).

I prefer a vantage point that is a little closer to the ground. In fact, people who engage closely with the practice of development have been debating these questions about good development versus maldevelopment for at least six decades. I have in mind people who work for development banks, people who set development policy, and people who manage development projects, but also the people who are affected by development projects and the advocacy groups and networks that support them. And, of course, academics, like most of us here, have also engaged in these debates. What is at issue has often been misdescribed as 'What is development?' But what these debates were really about, I think, is what development *ought* to be – and what it should not.

So let me give you a brief history of these debates. You can find a more extensive and careful presentation of them in Chapter 6 of my co-authored book, *Displacement by Development: Ethics, Rights, and Responsibilities* (Penz, Drydyk and Bose 2011).

After the Second World War, 'development' meant post-war reconstruction. Starting some fifteen years later, the idea of development was applied to the formerly colonized countries that had just won their independence. Then began a dialectical pattern that repeated itself many times over. This dialectic begins with ideas of development that guide national and international policies and projects. Many of these turn out to cause unexpected harm to the people who were meant to be helped by them. Where people are capable of resisting, they often do resist. Their challenges to these ideas and practices of development sometimes reverberate upwards through local organizations, political parties, civil society organizations, transnational social movements, and in some cases these reverberations create cracks and divisions within and among national governments, international development institutions, and donor governments. At some stage, academics join in. But here is the key point: typically, in this contestation, certain values are implicitly called upon, as everyone struggles to say exactly what went wrong.

If we study this repeated dialectic, to look for the values that have been used to distinguish maldevelopment from worthwhile development, what do we find? So far, seven key ethical values have been most prominent.

First, worthwhile development must enhance people's ***well-being***. This is the first principle of the human development approach founded by the late Mahbub ul Haq (Haq 1995). It is here that development ethicists disagree with some development economists, who identify development not with enhanced well-being but with simple economic growth. We point out that you can have periods of growth in which living standards remain stagnant or even fall, and for this reason, development – worthwhile development, that is – should not be identified with simple economic growth. There may be much debate about how we should understand 'well-being', but nevertheless I think there is now widespread agreement that good development must enhance human well-being.

Second, the development that is worth having must be ***equitable***, both locally and globally. This may mean giving priority to the worst off; it may mean bringing more people to a threshold of decent living standards; it may mean reducing inequalities of what Sen has called 'well-being freedom'; it may mean reducing long-term social inequalities along lines of sex, race, ethnicity, disability, and so on. Notwithstanding these differences of interpretation, there is widespread agreement that good development contributes to reducing these inequalities, while maldevelopment either reproduces them or worsens them.

Third, good development is not something that is done to people; rather, people must be the agents of their own development. At one time this was conceived as participatory development; more recently, 'agency' or 'empowerment' have become the leading concepts. In my view, the principal value here is ***empowerment***. Good development connects people with power in such ways that, through their own agency and decision-making, they can improve their lives, and, on the contrary, development that disempowers people is maldevelopment.

Fourth, development is not worthwhile unless it is ***environmentally sustainable***. Once again, there is wide agreement on the broad principle, accompanied by wide discussion of what 'sustainability' should mean.

While these four values may have been invoked most often in discussions of how development can go wrong, three others are no less important. The fifth is that worthwhile development does not weaken but strengthens human rights. Sixth, worthwhile development reduces social exclusion and enhances cultural freedom – the freedom to be who we are and who we want to be. Seventh, worthwhile development is not carried out by corrupt means or for corrupt purposes; rather it is carried out with integrity.

This value framework is not meant to be purely theoretical. On the contrary, it is meant to be action-guiding and political. Among people working with development in practice, these values can be invoked as bases for criticism of development projects and policies, and for uniting opposition against them; on the other hand, these values can also be used as grounds for change from within development institutions, or for making graceful concessions, or for seeking common ground.

I am not saying that, either in theory or practice, development ethics is reducible to such a framework. Only that the framework is important. But should it have any importance for

gender justice? And, conversely, what importance does gender justice have for development ethics?

I would like to take up the second question first. The development ethics values framework owes a considerable debt to struggles against the gender injustices of development. Most of you are no doubt aware of the pioneering research of Ester Boserup in the 1970s, which showed that the modernization of agriculture could make the lives of women worse off in numerous ways. In effect, Boserup's research planted a flag, marking gender inequity as a feature of maldevelopment, while at the same time beginning a new paradigm for understanding the gendered dimensions of development (Boserup 1970). Before that time, it had been held quite commonly that development consists simply in modernization, or economic growth, and equity had nothing to do with it. As awareness of the gender inequity of economic development became stronger, the view that equity is irrelevant became ever more untenable.

Feminist critique of development strategies and practices has supported other values in the framework, too. Ecofeminism has supported the value of sustainability by linking gender inequity with environmental abuse and degradation. More recently, the importance of empowerment in development was underlined by researchers and advocates stressing the value of empowerment for women.

In these various ways, and more, the framework of values for development ethics has been shaped by struggles against gender injustice in development.

Concern for gender justice is also beneficial to development ethics in a second way, and that is by warning us not to assume that any of these values can be pursued in a gender-free way. Yes, worthwhile development must enhance human well-being, but we should not assume that the risks to well-being are the same for men and women, any more than we would assume that risks to their health are the same. Similarly for equity and empowerment, and human rights. The international community has for several decades affirmed that risks to women's human rights are distinctive, which is recognized in the Convention to Eliminate All Discrimination Against Women.

One might wonder whether this is true of every value in the development ethics framework. What about integrity against corruption? Does corruption pose differential risks for men and women? Unfortunately this question has not received much attention in recent research, which is more interested in the question of whether women are less corruptible than men. I scarcely know what to say about this, except to express my suspicion that placing women on moral pedestals has never achieved real equality.

Despite these uncertainties, I think it is clear that development ethics has a great deal to learn from feminist cautioning that the values of worthwhile development cannot be achieved by policies that are oblivious to gender. One size simply does not fit all.

So these are two ways in which development ethics has learned and has much more to learn from feminist advocates of gender justice. But now let's turn the table, to ask what the latter may have to gain or learn from the former. I am going to approach this somewhat negatively, by first considering some arguments that feminist advocates of gender justice have ***nothing*** to learn from development ethics. My response to these arguments will lead to some broader and more positive remarks on how the 'ruling ideas' of any time (including ideas of

development) are best approached by any of us who oppose justice in any of its forms, including gender injustice.

One argument against engaging in development ethics stems from an interpretation – which I believe is a misinterpretation – of Vandana Shiva. Harm that is done to women by maldevelopment is Shiva's central theme. The sources of this harm are political and economic forces that push relentlessly for inappopriate application of technology to the land, led by a masculinist ideology. (Shiva 1989, 1-37). Arturo Escobar cites approvingly Shiva's call for an alternative, which, in her words, involves 'a redefinition of growth and productivity as categories linked to the production, not the destruction, of life.... an ecological and feminist political project that legitimizes the ways of knowing and being that create wealth by enhancing life and diversity, and which delegitimizes the knowledge and practice of a culture of death as the basis for capital accumulation' (Shiva 1989, cited in Escobar 1992). The question arises, is Shiva here calling for alternative forms *of* development, or is she calling for alternatives *to* development. Anti-development theorists like Escobar, Gustavo Estevez, and Wolfgang Sachs insist that only the latter makes sense (Sachs 1992). In their view, development is a single comprehensive paradigm which, in Escobar's words 'articulates the state with profits, patriarchy, and objectivizing science and technology' (Escobar 1992). Hopes for worthwhile development, ethical development, equitable development, or gender justice in development are illusory. Development is a beast of just one species, and this kind of animal cannot change its spots. Development is necessarily maldevelopment.

As I read Vandana Shiva, that is not her approach. She is generally very careful to identify specific forms and features of development that lead to maldevelopment; she does not hold that all development is maldevelopment, and what she calls for are alternative forms *of* development.[1]

I support her on this point. We need a non-normative concept of 'development' that is neither too broad nor too narrow. It should not be true by definition that all development is worthwhile development, nor that development is maldevelopment. So how are we to define 'development' in a way that is normatively non-committal?

At one time some leading members of this Association believed that the term 'development' should refer to all positive social change. I disagreed, for two reasons. First, there are positive social changes that should not be considered 'development' – for instance, the defeat of fascism in the Second World War. The war itself was surely not a development project. More broadly, conceiving of development as positive social change excludes maldevelopment. If, as development ethicists, we want others to recognize some instances of development as maldevelopment, then we must recognize maldevelopment as development.

Moreover, and this is the key point, we must ask ourselves: with whom do we want to speak about the ethics of development? If the community with whom we want to speak includes those who affect or are affected by development, then we need a concept of development

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[1] Her use of the term 'development' is generally (and increasingly) contextualized, as for instance specifying 'economic development', 'development and growth' (Shiva 2006, 15ff), 'water development', and 'land development' (Shiva 2002, 63,110). Her consistent practice of indicating spurious forms of 'development' with scare-quotes suggests that there is at least conceptual space for development that is not maldevelopment.

that includes all projects or processes that might be brought up in those conversations. For that purpose, I think of development as the enhanced production or distribution of perceived public or private goods. To keep this a non-normative concept, we can interpet 'enhanced' as what people *consider* to be enhanced, and 'goods' as *perceived* goods. In that way, we can recognize development without necessarily endorsing it or condemning it, and that is just the kind of concept we need in order to talk with people about whether particular development projects and strategies are worthwhile.

If we adopt this or something like it as our non-normative concept of development, then it is clear that there are many means that can be tried for enhancing production and distribution of perceived public or private goods, so that development is not just one single and comprehensive paradigm. This is a concept of development that does not favour any particular conception of development. Economistic conceptions of development as growth are not ruled out, but neither are green conceptions that call for reducing or slowing economic growth (To 'enhance' production may not always be to increase it.) Similarly, the modernization of agriculture was one way in which development could be attempted, but not the only way – and here is Vandana Shiva's starting point. Growth and modernization may be means of development, but 'development' should not *simply mean* growth, nor should it *simply mean* modernization.

In short, it is crucial that we do not allow the *concept* of development to be reduced and restricted to any particular *conception* of development. There is also a political reason for taking this approach. The idea of development is arguably one of the ruling ideas of our time, or, as Antonio Gramsci would have said, it is a hegemonic idea. There are two approaches to these hegemonic ideas that advocates of social change can take. One approach would be to reject them categorically. Alternatively, they can be appropriated and progressively altered by and for people who are disadvantaged within the current relationships of power. According to the second, Gramscian approach, struggles over power, advantage, and disadvantage should also involve struggles over the meanings of the hegemonic ideas (Mouffe 1979).

How does this apply to us? I believe that advocates of development ethics and advocates of gender justice can, if they wish, combine in numerous ways, in both struggles. In order to contest the effects of development, including the damaging effects of maldevelopment on women, it is necessary to challenge dominant conceptions of development. While I have singled out Vandana Shiva as an example, it would be difficult for anyone to engage in development ethics very deeply, without coming to reflect critically on dominant conceptions of development. More than that, creating and maintaining an intellectual space for such challenges is an essential function of development ethics. This, I think, is a further reason why those who are drawn to gender justice should also be drawn to development ethics.

I look forward to discussing these ideas with you, and I wish you a rewarding and enjoyable conference.

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