

## **‘Contemporary Issues in Development Ethics’**

Talk for DDA Scotland Meeting

Friday 10 January 2020

Dr Nigel Dower, Senior Lecturer Emeritus,

University of Aberdeen

n.dower@abdn.ac.uk

### **1. Historical Note and Introduction to development ethics**

#### ***International Development Ethics Association (IDEA)***

Formally started in 1987 in Costa Rica with Dave Crocker as First President (he had been leader of the IDEG before)

The website says:

What is Development Ethics?

International development ethics is ethical reflection on the ends and means of local, national and global development. IDEA is forging a consensus on the tasks and methods of this relatively new discipline. The following is how one IDEA member sees our interrelated concerns:

#### **LEVELS OF VALUE ISSUES**

---

- 1) The recognition of value issues as an important part of development discourse. These issues are not peripheral, mere extras after the technical and economic analyses have been done. They ought to be at the very heart of all development thinking.
- 2) The careful defense of basic normative theories, whether secular or religious, that justify a model of local, national, or global development. For example, such theories appeal to social justice, human rights, basic needs, and theological understandings of the human condition.
- 3) The application of values to concrete decision making, whether at the level of donor organization or grassroots communities. There is a vast agenda on the “ethics of the means” – both how to realize goals and what ethical limits must be observed in pursuing goals.

#### **TYPES OF VALUE INQUIRY**

---

The above value issues can be taken up in a number of different but complementary ways.

- 1) Reflection: Philosophical thinking can clarify what development is; it can defend normative positions by critical and rational thinking about ethical alternatives; it can identify the complexities involved in the rational choice of means. Philosophical and theological reflection can provide a basic understanding of the human condition and of morally relevant facts.

2) Application: the social scientist, technologist, economist, medial expert, or agriculturalist can integrate their expertise with properly articulated values to make their prescriptions and policies more ethically authoritative.

3) Practice: the committed development worker or policy maker engaged with concrete problems can gain from more abstract thinking and at the same time keep such reflection firmly rooted in and informed by development practice.

In 1990s the DSA itself had a DESG which I co-convened with Des Gasper.

The **Human Development and Capability Association** (HDCA) was launched in September 2004 at the Fourth Capability Conference in [Pavia, Italy](#). It was founded to promote research from many disciplines on key problems including poverty, justice, well-being, and economics.

## 2. New Themes / Trends

These can be illustrated by looking at the contents of two recent books:

*The Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics* (2018)

Edited by *Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher*

And

*Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics* (Cambridge 2019)

Edited by [Lori Keleher](#) & [Stacy J. Kosko](#)

The latter in honour of David Crocker

*Ethics of Global Development* (Cambridge 2008)

*The Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics* provides readers with insight into the central questions of development ethics, the main approaches to answering them, and areas for future research. Over the past seventy years, it has been argued and increasingly accepted that worthwhile development cannot be reduced to economic growth. Rather, a number of other goals must be realised:

- Enhancement of people's well-being
- Equitable sharing in benefits of development
- Empowerment to participate freely in development
- Environmental sustainability
- Promotion of human rights
- Promotion of cultural freedom, consistent with human rights
- Responsible conduct, including integrity over corruption

These seven dimensions cover a large range of issues relevant ethically to development in its fullest form (see appendix 1 for full list): e.g. happiness, social justice, gender, indigenous peoples, empowerment, agency, displacement(by dams), sustainability and climate, security, cultural freedom, religion, corruption.

Further illustration of the diversity of contemporary issues:

Table of Contents of: *Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics* (see Appendix 2 for more detail)

The titles are as follows:

*Why Development Needs Philosophy*

*What Is Development?*

*Public Goods and Public Spirit* - Reflections On And Beyond Nussbaum S Political Emotions

*The Choice of a Moral Lens* - LGBTI Persons Human Rights And The Capabilities Approach

*Peacebuilding, Development, Agency and Ethics*

*Expanding Agency* - Conceptual Explanatory And Normative Implications

*"Reason to Value"* - Process Opportunity And Perfectionism In The Capability Approach

*The Multidimensionality of Empowerment* - Conceptual And Empirical Considerations

*Agency, Income Inequality, and Subjective Well-Being* -The Case Of Uruguay

*The Legal Status of Whales and Dolphins* - From Bentham To The Capabilities Approach

*On Some Limits and Conflicts in Deliberative and Participatory Democracy*

*An Agency-Focused Version of Capability Ethics and the Ethics of Cordial Reason* - The Search For A Philosophical Foundation For Deliberative Democracy

*The Double Democratic Deficit* - Global Governance And Future Generations

*Deliberative Democracy and Agency* - Linking Transitional Justice And Development

*Consensus-Building and Its Impact on Policy* - The National Agreement Forum In Peru

*From Agency to Perfectionist Liberalism*

*Perfectionist Liberalism*

### **3. Reflection:**

It is not surprising that development ethics has come to recognise the diversity of ethical concerns illustrated above. If these concerns are widely shared and are such as to affect how well we see a society (or the world) is doing, then they impinge on development.

Development is a highly normative concept and hence deeply contested.

Formally: development is a process of socio-economic change that to the extent that it is under public control ought to happen (vs. strictly descriptive concept: change that actually happens)

The question is: what ought to happen? What should we pursue (shorter- and longer- term goals) and how should we pursue them (dimensions of justice; procedural values of democracy and participation; limitations by other factors by other factors such as sustainability)?

if someone says (as a neo-liberal or economic libertarian) that development is really only economic growth, even this is implicitly normative.

It assumes that economic growth from the point of view of public policy is *all that matters* and either (a) that all the other goods that people value will be enhanced by this (trickle

down) or (b) that it is a matter of indifference how the growth is generated (treatment of workers, animals or the environment) and how it is distributed (equally/unequally) or how other goods such as health, liberties, rights, well-being are affected.

In fact not all ways of pursuing growth are equally good at promoting all these goods; these goods are important from the point of view of public policy and for many of them other measures are far more important than economic growth itself.

Appendix 1:

Table of Contents of *Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics*

1. Introduction *Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher* **PART I Contexts** 2. Global ethics *Nigel Dower* 3. Integral human development *Lori Keleher* 4. Post-development *Mitu Sengupta* 5. Epistemology *Anna Malavisi* **PART II Well-being** 6. Well-being *Rebecca Gutwald* 7. Capabilities *Oscar Garza and Severine Deneulin* 8. Happiness *Melina Nikolova* 9. Adaptive preferences *Serene Khader* **PART III Social and global justice** 10. Social and global justice *Julian Culp* 11. Gender *Christine Koggel* 12. Indigenous peoples *Krushil Watene and Roger Merino Acuña* 13. 'Horizontal' inequalities *Frances Stewart* 14. Children *Flavio Comim* 15. Health *Sridhar Venkatapuram* **PART IV Empowerment and agency** 16. Empowerment *Karie Cross* 17. Agency *Matt Regan* 18. Education *Sandra Boni and Merridy Strydom-Wilson* 19. Displacement *Asmita Kabra and Jay Drydyk* **PART V Environmental Sustainability** 20. Sustainability and Climate Change *Andrew Crabtree* 21. Food Production *Paul Thompson*

22. Buen Vivir and the Rights of Nature *Laura Rodriguez and Johannes Waldmueller* **PART VI Human rights** 23. Human Rights *Polly Vizard* 24. The Right to Development *Stephen Marks* 25. Security *Stephen Esquith* **PART VII Cultural freedom** 26. Cultural Freedom *Stacy Kosko* 27. LGBTI People *Yuvraj Joshi* 28. Religion *Katherine Marshall* **PART VIII Responsibility** 29. International Responsibilities *Julian Culp* 30. Development practitioners *Chloe Schwenke* 31. Corruption *Sirkku Hellsten* **PART IX Regional perspectives** 32. Latin America *Mario Solís* 33. South Asia *Shashi Motilal and Prakriti Prajapati* 34. East Asia *Benedict Chan* 35. Middle East and Northern Africa *Alain Piveteau and Eric Rougier* 36. French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa *Jérôme Ballet, Kouamékan J.M. Koffi, and Alice Kouadio* 37. Sub-Saharan Africa *A.B. Rukooko* 38. Europe *Louise Haagh* 39. USA and Canada *Eric Palmer*

Appendix 2: Table of Contents of: *Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics*

**Introduction** pp 1-15

By Lori Keleher, Stacy J. Kosko

**A Note from David A. Crocker** pp 16-22

Part I - Development Ethics pp 23-152

**1 - Why Development Needs Philosophy**

Lori Keleher

**2 - What Is Development?**

By Eric Palmer

**3 - Public Goods and Public Spirit** Reflections On And Beyond Nussbaum S Political Emotions

By Des Gasper, Flavio Comim

**4 - The Choice of a Moral Lens** LGBTI Persons Human Rights And The Capabilities Approach

By Chloe Schwenke

**5 - Peacebuilding, Development, Agency and Ethics**

By Nigel Dower

Part II - Agency pp 153-288

**6 - Expanding Agency** Conceptual Explanatory And Normative Implications

By Christine M. Koggel

**7 - "Reason to Value"** Process Opportunity And Perfectionism In The Capability Approach

By Serene J. Khader, Stacy J. Kosko

**8 - The Multidimensionality of Empowerment** Conceptual And Empirical Considerations

By Jay Drydyk, Alejandra Boni, Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Melanie Walker, Aurora López-Fogués

**9 - Agency, Income Inequality, and Subjective Well-Being** The Case Of Uruguay

By Gonzalo Salas, Andrea Vigorito

**10 - The Legal Status of Whales and Dolphins** From Bentham To The Capabilities Approach

By Rachel Nussbaum Wichert, Martha C. Nussbaum

Part III - Democracy pp 289-382

**11 - On Some Limits and Conflicts in Deliberative and Participatory Democracy**

By Luis Camacho

**12 - An Agency-Focused Version of Capability Ethics and the Ethics of Cordial Reason** The Search For A Philosophical Foundation For Deliberative Democracy

By Adela Cortina

**13 - The Double Democratic Deficit** Global Governance And Future Generations

By Frances Stewart

**14 - Deliberative Democracy and Agency** Linking Transitional Justice And Development

By Colleen Murphy

**15 - Consensus-Building and Its Impact on Policy** The National Agreement Forum In Peru

By Javier M. Iguíñiz Echeverría

Part IV - Development Ethics, Agency, and Democracy pp 383-454

New Challenges And New Directions

**From Agency to Perfectionist Liberalism**

David Crocker

**Perfectionist Liberalism**

David Crocker