

Ethics of Development

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Learning Objectives

- *To understand development ethics as an essential dimension of international development studies, for explanatory work and self-awareness as well as in evaluation and policy design.*
- *To recognize issues in values-sensitive thinking about development: in conceptualizing costs and benefits, assessing who bears them, and asking which types of change process are legitimate.*
- *To become alert to which issues, identities, and interests get considered and which get downgraded or ignored.*
- *To identify relevant tools in development ethics for description, analysis/evaluation, and action.*

Introduction

Avatar, the 2009 film by Canadian director James Cameron that is one of the highest-grossing movies ever, is set in the twenty-second century. Humans have found in a remote star system the moon Pandora, which contains sites rich in the technically vital mineral unobtainium. The Resources Development Administration (RDA) commences displacement of the indigenous humanoid people and destruction of their forest environment and sacred sites in order to extract the mineral by open-pit mining. When the humanoids refuse to move, the RDA embarks on their removal by force and—when that is considered necessary—their extermination. RDA ethnographers have been spending long periods with the indigenes, through periodic transference to bodies that can live in the alien environment. They are under instructions to learn about the indigenes and persuade them to move, but become sympathetic to their situation and decide to defend and ultimately to side with them.

Development in human societies involves value-laden choices. Different choices and ways of thinking about development bring greatly different outcomes for different people. We should try to think openly, carefully, and fairly about the priorities and principles that guide these choices, about which groups are favoured, neglected, or even sacrificed, and about the choices involved also in the related ways of thinking. Besides its importance for guiding action, attention to values is important for trying to understand people. Humans hold and use and are partly driven by values, including ethical ideas; and the types of ethical ideas they hold affect their motivation for thinking empathetically about other people and for engaging in action. Powerful groups often keep values concealed and deny choices, to hide who is favoured, neglected, or sacrificed. The key role of development ethics is to reveal, reflect on, and assess these choices, and to add a voice for those who otherwise are unreasonably neglected or sacrificed.

International development studies arose in the post–World War II era because of the inadequacy of simply adopting and applying the forms of economics, sociology, political science, etc. that had emerged during the previous two centuries in Europe and North America and had become consolidated as separate disciplines to describe industrialized commodity-oriented nation-states. To try to understand and promote prospective transitions in the rest of the world from low-income agriculture-based rural societies to affluent, industrialized, predominantly urban societies, more integrative and dynamic perspectives were needed. Attention was required to the constraints and opportunities for low-income countries and people, who now lived in a world dominated and transformed by the power of rich groups and countries. Existing disciplines reflected in various ways the perspectives and interests of established richer groups and richer countries. Consequently, they neglected some issues, including the explication and debate of values used in thinking about and promoting “development.”

From the 1950s, a field of thought called “development ethics” gradually emerged as a strand within, or partner of, international development studies. It was a response to many issues concerning how a society (and our global society) is moving into the future. First, there are perceptions that much poverty is both undeserved and removable, including much sickness and insecurity and unhappiness; that many processes of further impoverishment are also undeserved and avoidable; and that distribution of the costs and benefits of development is often unbalanced and unfair, including through infliction of undeserved, unconsulted, and uncompensated harm. Second, what should be assessed as the true costs and benefits of development? What for example

is the significance of culture? And to what justifiable extent are values culturally relative? Third, what is appropriate distribution over time in regard to laying burdens on people in the present or on future generations? Fourth, who bears which responsibilities, including to refrain from harming, to compensate for harm, to prevent harm occurring, and/or to help more extensively if one can do so? Fifth, who should be involved in consultation and decision-making on all this and how?

It is no coincidence that, reflecting the modern world's combination of economic interconnection and potential for technology-based improvements, attention to development ethics has grown since the mid-twentieth century as images of children and babies from around the world—often suffering children or babies—have become more widely distributed. Small children and babies bear no responsibility for their own situation and have little unaided ability to respond. The following question arose, as articulated, for example, by Martha Nussbaum (2004: 3): to what extent, if any, should “the chance of being born in one nation rather than another pervasively [determine] the life chances of every child who is born”?

Box 30.1 | Questions in Development Ethics

- *What meaning is given to “development” in the sense of progress, well-being, or improvement?*
- *Which values underlie this meaning of “development,” and which values in practice determine the allocation of attention and the prioritizations made in development processes? Are values of human well-being, justice and human dignity adequately reflected in practice? How can attention to those values be supported?*
- *Who is gaining and who is losing in social change? Who bears the costs of “development”? Is it fair?*
- *Why do unfair arrangements arise? How can they be prevented or mitigated?*
- *How should we respond to the painful—sometimes “cruel”—choices between different values and groups that can arise in development policy/programs/projects?*
- *How can one construct well-reasoned alternatives to prevailing practices that violate values of justice, well-being, and dignity—alternatives in ways of thinking and in strategy, policy, and practice?*
- *Who has responsibilities (and “response-abilities”)—to act, to desist, to compensate—in regard to violations of values of justice, human well-being, and dignity?*

Historical Context

In principle, the gains from more productive use of a location's resources and opportunities should bring benefits for all parties and not be at the expense of existing occupants or of the workforce used to bring these resources into more productive use. In practice, this has very often not happened, in the past and presently. Although development studies and development ethics under those names arose in the post-1945 era, the broad ideas of development, underdevelopment, and development ethics do not date from 1945 or 1949, the year of President Truman's oft-cited inaugural speech. "Development" language in regard to issues of socio-economic change and improvement had already been long-established around the world since at least the early nineteenth century (see Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Further, behind the particular words used, "the issues with which 'development studies' deals are some of the great issues (of justice, of equality and inequality, of the nature of the 'good' life) with which human beings have been preoccupied since the days of Plato and Aristotle" (Kitching, 1982: viii). Indeed, these concerns go back in time even earlier, and in all parts of the world.

The social studies and humanities of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries were aiming to make sense of a world in transformation. The "great issues" that Kitching refers to were prominent in the writings of John Locke (1632–1704), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), John Stuart Mill (1806–73), and Karl Marx (1818–83), among others. The contemporary Indian-British philosopher Bhikhu Parekh (1935–) warns, though, that all four of those great thinkers were in fundamental ways Eurocentric (Parekh, 1997, 2019). They wrote emphatically of the necessity of European rule over other countries, but had never visited, let alone lived, outside Europe. In this respect, present-day development ethics should and mostly does adopt a more informed and inclusive perspective. Many of its themes concern relations between actors who have great relative power and others who are marked by extreme relative weakness, and the responses to these disparities. The responses, historically, have frequently included processes of Othering, exploitation, and extermination, but sometimes, in contrast, responses have involved growth of mutual respect, sympathy, and co-operation.

Avatar's themes match many contemporary "resource-grab" situations on Earth. They echo, too, the seizure of the Americas in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and the subjugation and decimation of Native Americans by European invaders driven by desire for precious resources while confident in their technological advantage over the indigenous peoples and believing in their

own radical biological and cultural superiority. Many colonizers held that the Native Americans were subhuman or damned creatures of the devil; not only were they non-Christian but they allegedly engaged in human sacrifice and cannibalism. The Catholic priest Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), who wrote a chilling record of their subjugation (*A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* [1552]), was the most famous defender of Native Americans' human status and corresponding rights. Las Casas was a forerunner of universal human rights thinking and of the liberation theology movement.

Development ethics considers comparable present-day situations where there are opportunities for enormous gain through application of modern technology to resources worldwide and yet many of the people affected are harshly excluded or exploited. This no longer occurs through systems of formal slavery but often in successor arrangements in which, for example, workers may have no contracts, may not get paid, or are otherwise deceived and trafficked and/or work at high risk of injury (as have reportedly done many of the over 100 million recent internal migrants in China; see Pai, 2013). In many instances, local people have been brusquely displaced to make room for new projects from which they do not benefit.

Various systems of thought in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries put forward justifications not only for European expansion but for this subjugation and **dispossession** of non-European populations. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), known as the father of international law, crafted arguments for why the expansionist Dutch Republic had the right to sail and trade in whichever seas it could reach—because the sea is not enclosable and is open to all—and at the same time to occupy and enclose lands around the world and continue to own them even when its personnel were not present. He invoked the analogy that a theatre seat, once taken, can be temporarily left vacant and rightfully not be available for others (Arneil, 1992). What supposed right had the colonizing European power to take such lands in the first place? First, “for the reason that uncultivated land ought not to be considered occupied” (Grotius, *The Law of War and Peace*; cited in Arneil, 1992: 592); and second, because “men who are like beasts” and especially “those who feed on human flesh” can rightfully be punished by dispossession (cited in Arneil, 1992: 594). Other authors declared that many of the non-European populations lived in a savage and disorderly “state of nature,” a war of all against all, and that their absence of private landholding implied that the resources concerned had no owner and so could be rightfully taken by the Europeans.

Most famous among these authors was John Locke, philosophical father of the English Revolution of 1688 and previously (1668-75) secretary to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina, the English colony that later became the American states of North Carolina and South Carolina. Like Grotius, he held that lands not cultivated could be deemed unoccupied; hunter-gatherers and herders could be rightfully displaced or subordinated by new, more intensive users, without compensation.

Land that is left wholly to Nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage or Planting, is called, as indeed it is, *wast[e]* . . . *As much Land* as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates, and can use the Product of, so much is his *Property*. (Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II, para. 26, cited in Arneil, 1992: 601)

Locke and similar thinkers, and the European governments they advised, thus declared that communally held Native American lands were “wastelands”, with no owner, and were open for rightful acquisition and enclosure by Europeans who would, at least in theory, fell trees and/or establish crops or livestock. Other arguments became added, though, to supposedly justify why the felling and cultivation could instead be done for the Europeans by slaves brought from Africa. The history of the subsequent centuries-long struggles against legally established slavery and forms of quasi-slavery is both depressing and uplifting. The slow rise of ethically based resistance (Crawford, 2002; Gasper, 2006) provides many lessons for practically oriented development ethics.

Current development ethics work similarly assesses our present-day systems of thought and practice, to see whose interests they give attention to and respect and whose they downplay or ignore. Development ethics brings to the fore who has gained and who has lost, and explores principles and practical procedures and **alternatives** for ethically better outcomes.

Justice and Harm; Rights and Responsibilities

We saw that Nussbaum asked how far should “the chance of being born in one nation rather than another pervasively [determine] the life chances of every child who is born”? A sister question applies to the chance of being born in one family rather than another within a country, and here most countries take some steps to ensure access by all resident children to certain basic goods.

How have people reasoned about these questions? Nussbaum (2004) comments on some major traditions, elements of which may be combined in various ways.

Three Relevant Philosophical Traditions

One tradition is **natural law ethics**, in which ethical implications are proposed based on the nature of human beings and their environment. There are various such ethics, according to how human nature and “the human condition” are interpreted, as we saw above. Las Casas, Grotius, and Locke all reasoned partly in this way, but making different interpretations. Human rights thinking too comes from this tradition, in the line of Las Casas: humans are seen as a single species, with a common worth and common necessities, and they deserve and are capable of mutual respect and sympathy.

A second great tradition is **utilitarianism**, which grew out of the type of rational calculation fostered by business and markets: costs and benefits should be calculated, summed, and compared. Predominant now in business-dominated societies is an economic variant of utilitarianism that we can call “money-tarianism” (Gasper, 2004): costs and benefits are assessed in terms of monetized market values. This tends to lead to the following: only monetized effects are included; a rich person’s well-being becomes considered more important, because greater purchasing power brings greater monetary impact; and interpersonal distribution is sometimes treated as unimportant so that gains for the rich can outweigh costs for the poor, even the deaths of the poor because those have little or no monetary weight. Saving some minutes of business people’s time can be used to justify ever more air travel that, through its impact on greenhouse gases and climate change, may cost lives of some of the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world, especially infants (Nolt, 2011; WHO, 2014).

A third tradition is **social contract theory**, which asks: what do or would participants freely agree? It treats the participants, in important respects, as free, equal, and intelligent; everyone pursues his/her own advantage (or own values) and together they negotiate a contract that supposedly is agreed by all. This bargaining may be specified as being between all households within a nation-state, as outlined in John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971); or only between full citizens (so, in John Locke’s context, white male property holders); or between states, as in Rawls’s *The Law of Peoples* (1999); or, instead, between all human beings seen as members of a global society. Social contract theory sometimes ignores the record of history, by assuming that countries

are self-enclosed and have engaged only in free and equal inter-country negotiation; and even when formulated in the context of such an immigrant nation as the United States, it can ignore migration (as Rawls did in *A Theory of Justice*) or rule it out as irregular (as he did in *The Law of Peoples*).

To return to the case of human babies, why, asked Nussbaum, should their life chances be determined by their good or bad luck of nation of birth? No baby is responsible for its parents, and arguably the idea of a fair “social contract” should be at the level of the whole world. In addition, she asked how far a contract model, about relations between basically equal bargainers, is relevant as the primary construct for talking about justice (Nussbaum, 2004, 2006). Why not adopt a start-point that more adequately reflects our humanity, including our unequal strength but also our social nature? Humans are “people who want to live with others. A central part of our own good . . . is to produce, and live in, a world that is morally decent, a world in which all human beings have what they need to live a life with human dignity,” she argued (Nussbaum, 2004: 12; see also Etzioni, 1988). Hence, she presented instead a particular type of human rights ethic (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011).

Minimizing Harm and Neglect in Displacement and in Business Operations

Much work in development ethics has involved application of and debate between different broad theories about appropriate distribution, such as those just mentioned. Some work considers different possible degrees of ethical responsibility: to ensure equal treatment or equal outcomes or fulfillment of minimum basic rights. Other work has concentrated on a more restricted set of issues concerning the infliction, avoidance of, and remedies for harm. These issues are especially pressing and important in development studies. It may be easier to make progress by applying the principles of avoiding doing harm to others and of taking responsibility for the effects of one’s actions and therefore compensating others for harm done to them, wherever they live (O’Neill, 1996). These issues may offer more scope for reaching agreements, such as that it is unacceptable to inflict basic harm on babies, as through climate change, and that it is unacceptable to externalize costs onto other people rather than to pay the full costs of what one initiated and benefited from. An important example of such an approach is Penz, Drydyk, and Bose’s book (2011) on the rights of persons potentially or actually displaced by development projects (Box 30.2). Rather than

espouse one specific theory of appropriate distribution, they use the more general principle of “minimizing harm and neglect” (2011: 118).

Box 30.2 | Adjudicating Development-Forced Displacement: “Talk Softly and Carry a Big Boomerang”

*Core development processes—expansion of cities, construction of irrigation and transport systems, generation and distribution of energy, mining projects, and so on—often physically displace many people. An estimated 10–15 million people each year are directly displaced. For centuries, displacement has frequently occurred with little or no consultation with, compensation to, or benefit for the displaced people, and in many contemporary cases this continues. Such displacement often mainly involves people who were already relatively or absolutely poor, for the sake of bringing benefits mainly to people who were already better off. It removes livelihoods and can bring massive cultural and psychological disruption. In their book *Displacement by Development*, Canadian scholars Peter Penz, Jay Drydyk, and Pablo Bose propose a detailed ethical approach for appropriately taking into consideration both the potential benefits from development investments and the interests and rights of people liable to suffer through displacement. It deepens ideas in the report of the World Commission on Dams (2000).*

Penz et al. elaborate a rights-based approach, but without absolute rights: no one, they argue, has an absolute right not to be displaced. More fundamental are the rights to participate in open and fair processes of decision-making, to be moved only for good reasons, to have equitable sharing of costs (not disproportionate costs to victimized persons), and to share equitably in benefits. “Good reasons” means that the physical development that would cause the displacement satisfies values of “responsible development” (Penz et al., 2011: 13): the promotion of human well-being and security, and respect for equity, participation and empowerment, cultural freedom, environmental sustainability, and (other) human rights and fair procedures. These are the values governments worldwide have repeatedly endorsed in international declarations and conventions.

A justified project should produce enough benefits that any people to be displaced can be treated decently, gaining rather than being broken through the project. What is a responsible project plan and what is adequate compensation must be determined through a fair procedure for adjudication of claims and resolution of disputes, with participation of those affected. Displacement by Development applies these principles in detail to propose rights and responsibilities of governments, investors, local residents, and international agencies.

*The work of Penz et al. grew out of experience with large dam projects. Similar lessons emerged from study of conflicts over mines: lack of respect for human rights leads to conflict (and, thus, less profitability), whereas respect for human rights helps resolve conflict. Centrally important are **human rights principles** of accountability, transparency, and participation (UNDP, 2012). They are perhaps even more important than **human rights standards** about what people should rightly receive (e.g., basic education), because norms can become ignored when the principles are absent. People care most about being treated with respect and wish to feel involved in the processes of balancing between competing values. They may agree to some sacrifices if they feel fairly and respectfully treated overall; such feelings depend upon transparency and participation.*

*Initiating and sustaining these processes of negotiation and adjudication, and holding governments and corporations accountable, typically relies on the energies of networks of NGOs and social movements at local, national, and global levels. Only in this way can local struggles be connected to actors—national and international media, consumers, rating agencies, etc.—who are able to make large corporations and governments listen and think again. This is the **boomerang model** of how human rights ideas exercise influence (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 1999); the boomerang of global pressure substitutes for the military “big stick” that an interventionist US President in the early twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt, boasted of combining with “speaking softly.” Human rights have served as a forceful, universally understandable language that can link and energize these networks worldwide, to gain a place at the negotiation table and to increase the mutual respect and acceptance that are essential for co-operation to create superior ways forward.*

Source: Adapted from Gasper (2016).

The Ruggie Framework and Principles for business corporations’ public responsibilities, discussed next, provide a second important example. They have achieved broad endorsement and contributed to significant progress after decades, indeed centuries, of near-deadlock in this area.

Beginning from the 1940s the world’s governments have endorsed a series of major conventions on human rights. Over those same decades the activities and power of global business corporations grew enormously, but their human rights responsibilities remained disputed and ambiguous. Corporations have often transgressed human rights and continue to often to do so: in land acquisition and displacement of local populations; in inflicting environmental damage; and by participating in extreme exploitation of workers at the bottom of global supply chains. Major conflicts and campaigns have resulted. Human rights advocates demanded that corporations adopt

all the human rights obligations in international human rights law. Businesses replied that they are not governments and that instead they “do good by doing well,” i.e., by making profits; so that “the only business of business is business” and they should be left alone, except perhaps to self-regulate and voluntarily follow self-defined codes. Organized business has had the power and the government backing to block anything more extensive. In the late 1990s United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan took a first step beyond this deadlock by bringing forward a more ambitious voluntary code, the Global Compact. In 2005 he mandated his chief adviser in that exercise, Harvard professor John Ruggie, to lead a second stage. Ruggie’s book, *Just Business* (2013), describes his approach and the results achieved.

Ruggie decided not to put forward a perfectionist proposal that would lead to no agreement and no progress. Instead, he proposed, first, to draw out the implications of existing human rights agreements, not try for a special new convention for businesses. Second, rather than treating corporations as if they have the same responsibilities as states—to promote, advance, and protect all the human rights specified in all the conventions—his approach focuses on the obligation of businesses to not violate the rights indicated in the four foremost existing agreements (the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the two 1966 human rights covenants—on **civil and political rights** and on **economic, social, and cultural rights**; and the 1998 ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work). The principle of non-violation is much harder for businesses and their backers to object to.

Third, Ruggie indicated practical implications of that principle of non-violation, plus procedures for getting case-by-case negotiated compromises between conflicting objectives rather than falsely assuming that covenants and laws can foresee all details and resolve all cases in advance. In 2008 he presented the Protect, Respect, and Remedy Framework, followed in 2011 by Guiding Principles that provide suggestions about operationalization. The duties to protect and promote human rights lie primarily on states; the duty to not infringe human rights, in contrast, rests on all agents, including corporations; and citizens have a right to have access to systems for remedy of human rights violations. In addition, corporations’ duty to not violate human rights must be complemented by showing respect for the people they interact with and affect. Ruggie underlined that if corporations and their agents do not show this respect, then small conflicts are likely to escalate into bigger ones.

Ruggie's Guiding Principles provide advice on how to institutionalize human rights responsibilities. States' duties to protect imply that they must, for example, establish suitable corporate laws and regulation systems, as well as well-designed agreements with investors. Citizens' rights for remedy require provision of adequate court systems, plus relevant national administrative mechanisms and company-level grievance mechanisms since those are often more economical and more readily attainable. Corporations' duties include respect for international law and human rights conventions even when those are not ratified or adopted or respected in a particular country (for example, in a "failed state"); and, of vital importance, they imply that businesses must show **due diligence** in respect to these duties. The businesses must have and use adequate systems that check how far they respect human rights and then repair identified failings, in the same way that they must have and follow systems to show due diligence in regard to, for example, financial risks.

Human Rights, Human Development, and Human Security

Human rights thinking and practice compose perhaps the biggest stream of development ethics. The human rights movement that was consolidated under the new United Nations in the 1940s chose to focus not on underlying doctrine but on consensual commitments. Such commitments can be supported on the basis of many different ethical traditions, both religious and secular. We will not go much further here into human rights approaches, for which there is a huge literature (see, e.g., Uvin, 2004; Donnelly, 2013). Note, though, that broader development ethics work exists partly because human rights approaches, while essential, are not sufficient. Human rights thinking tends to represent values in a rigid format: definite rights to which correspond definite duties of definite duty-holders. Its rigidity is its strength, helping to make the claims enforceable, but is also its limitation (Gasper, 2007). It leads, for example, to difficulties when values clash, as they inevitably do. Even the Christian theological language of "indivisibility" that is used in human rights conventions cannot resolve such clashes. Additional tools for thinking about values and about threats to values are necessary.

A **human development discourse**, often one based on the capability approaches of Amartya Sen (1999) and/or Martha Nussbaum (2011), is a popular partner (see Chapter 1). Such approaches talk about facilitating access by people to fulfilment of values that they have reason to value. **Human security discourse** focuses on threats to the fulfillment of people's priority needs (see,

e.g., United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 of 2012). It is more flexible than rights language: it does not consider only values that are treated as ethically inviolable; and it studies the systems of interconnecting and intersecting factors that generate particular threats for particular people (Gasper, 2012). Extended rights-based approaches can sometimes work in a similar fashion even if under a different name. Such a rights-based approach will “[look] at the underlying causes of poverty (and not symptoms) and therefore necessarily [build] partnerships between a large range of stakeholders; including [at] the linkage between citizen and state” (A. Burden of CARE USA, cited in United Nations Development Group [UNDG] report; summary at UNDG, n.d.).

Reflection on Meanings of Well-Being and Ill-Being

Conceptions of Development: How Much Room for Alternatives?

While development paths involve value-laden choices about which values to prioritize and pursue, development discourses have typically included strong elements of asserted necessity: claims that progress inevitably and indisputably requires some particular actions or path. The notion of “development” was strongly influenced by thinking in biology about the life path of an organism. Each organism has inherent potentials to achieve some pre-set ends; an infant animal, for example, can learn to walk but in most cases not to fly, and human beings in very favourable circumstances can live 100 years but never 1,000 years. The conception of development as the unfolding of a necessary path of progress is strong in some thinking in engineering, business, and economics. It can lead to lack of attention to alternatives and to value principles for designing and assessing alternatives.

The unilinear model contains these components:

- Progress—fundamental improvement—has a universal meaning, content, and destination, though there can be local variation in details.
- In broad terms, there is a universally necessary path to this progress—involving science, investment, economic growth, urbanization, etc.—though again there can be local variation in details.
- Given the belief in a universal path to a universal destination, there is a lack of sensitivity to alternative paths and alternative destinations and to how development paths differently affect different groups and values.

The more that the path of progress is seen as universally necessary, the less patience and attention go to securing the interests of marginal groups; instead, the entrepreneurial “developers” must stride forward and others must bear what they must bear as the necessary price of long-term progress. “We must break eggs in order to make omelettes” was a famous slogan that reportedly originated with British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914).

A second major idea—that national economic product is the central measure of progress—has contributed to hiding the choices of priorities and the choices between alternative paths. National economic product measures volume of monetized activity. So, first, it is a measure of activity rather than of valuable achievement; it includes, for example, the costs of medical bills, not the length and healthiness of people’s lives. Second, besides inappropriately including costs, it excludes many types of major value, such as friendship, justice, peace, dignity, identity, and so on. Third, national economic product ignores how costs and benefits are distributed across different people and across generations; for example, much monetized activity can occur at the expense of exhausting resources and bequeathing problems to future generations. Unfortunately, business leaders and political leaders have frequently acted as if all important values are subsumed within gross national product (GNP), and as if any other values should be sacrificed for the sake of GNP growth. Development became equated to GNP. But what other important values should be considered? Further, to what extent is GNP truly important, or at best just one possible means towards well-being—and not always a good one?

Ethics of Ill-Being

It makes sense to start the discussion with ill-being. As we saw, to identify harm or what is wrong may be easier than to agree extensively on what is good. The one thing that every theory of well-being agrees on is that suffering is undesirable in itself (Phillips, 2006). Various dimensions of ill-being require separate attention, however; one cannot simply compare and sum different types. Narayan highlights **voicelessness** and powerlessness, for example, in her summary of the *Voices of the Poor* study, which reviewed over 60,000 interviews with poor people:

The study establishes, first, that poverty is multidimensional and has important noneconomic dimensions; second, that poverty is always specific to a location and a social group, and awareness of these specifics is essential . . . ; and third, that despite [these] differences in the way poverty is experienced by different groups and in different places,

there are striking commonalities. . . . Poor people's lives are characterized by powerlessness and voicelessness (Narayan, 2000: 18)

Worse than suffering is undeserved suffering. Historically, and still currently, ruling groups nationally and internationally often have argued that most of the suffering poor deserve their situation, because of misdeeds in a previous life or alleged indolence or incompetence. "The deserving poor" were a minority. We saw that European invaders of the New World mostly considered the indigenous peoples incompetent wasters of resources who did not even deserve their own lands (see Chapter 2). We noted how especially inapplicable these sorts of arguments are in relation to babies and children.

Of critical ethical significance is undeserved avoidable suffering. Modern technology and riches make it relatively easily possible to fulfill basic needs around the world, notably children's health and education needs. Yet, health research funding has been and remains overwhelmingly focused not on the diseases of the people who live short, vulnerable lives, but on further extension of the lives and comfort of the rich. Transferring just eight days of global military budgets would cover the additional annual costs required for achieving good-quality universal pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education, according to UNESCO (2015: 8).

These are cases of non-inclusion in the benefits of economic development. We saw earlier cases of deliberate exclusion through forcible displacement. Other cases concern "collateral damage" through negative externalities of economic expansion, like climate deterioration. Others still, such as the frequent farmer suicides in India, involve "disadvantageous inclusion"; farmers are seduced into taking large loans for high-input agriculture, and these loans can bankrupt them in climatically adverse years. (See Question 1 at the end of this chapter.)

Ethics of Well-Being

A strong liberal strand in development ethics, as in the work of Amartya Sen, proposes leaving the choice of priorities to personal and societal reflection, case by case, with such reflection and choice seen as themselves central features in "the good life." Nonetheless, Sen recognizes the priority for a good life of fulfillment of some universal basic needs, such as in nutrition, education, and health. This needs-fulfillment can be seen as the removal of fundamental elements of ill-being, including most notably not living a full, healthy lifespan.

Beyond those elements, well-being research (summarized in Phillips, 2006) does suggest some shared fundamentals of well-being. Etzioni (2012) similarly highlights three elements: (1) good personal relationships and friendship; (2) intellectual/spiritual life; (3) social participation and contribution. Much other well-being research underlines the prime importance of physical and mental health; balanced time budgets, not only monetary budgets, including having enough time for recreation, reflection, and participation; quality of work-time; and feeling treated with respect and dignity, including eventually in the process of dying. Chilean development theorist Manfred Max-Neef's model of human needs reflects much of this: for each area of need it considers not only a dimension of Having but also dimensions of Being, Doing, and Interacting.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar documents do not leave the elements of the good life purely to be discussed afresh in each situation, without any constitutional-level prioritization; for that would leave too much power to the powerful. Market capitalism, for example, has built-in biases towards supplying "information" that says that having more commodities will bring all good things for everyone (if they are deserving) and urges us that economic growth should never end and is essential for social order. At the same time, market capitalism undersupplies information that is hard to make a profit from, including information about some non-commodity aspects of life and about negative side effects of commodity-centred society.

Much work in development ethics considers the human quest for meaning and identity, a quest that unfortunately can also take undesirable forms such as nationalist aggression or religious zealotry or involve environmental destruction. Denis Goulet (1971) analyzed "The Cruel Choice" felt in many cultures regarding a perceived need to abandon types of behaviour and tradition that constituted their felt identity, as the price of "catching up" with foreign powers and hence maintaining independence and respect. Peter Berger (1974) explored the associated "calculus of meaning." Such issues remain of central importance. The 2015 encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home"), is one recent exploration. Others include the Latin American schools of thought and practice on *buen vivir* or living well (Gudynas, 2011).

Box 30.3 looks at the thought-provoking case of Japan, which illustrates choices faced and made in national development and the ethical significance of the choices. Japan's choices included intense orientation towards nationalist values, which led it to become a colonial power that dictated

to other countries, and its search for sources of status and self-respect that could apparently not be fully satisfied only by economic advance.

Box 30.3 | Japan: The “Calculus of Meaning”

Between the 1850s and 1890s Japan moved from deliberate isolation from the rest of the world during the previous 200 years to become the first non-Western industrialized country. It radically transformed itself in order to “catch up” with the West. Paradoxically, it did so in order to remain distinctive, unique, and independent from the West, the same reasons for which it had closed itself off in the seventeenth century. In 1853–4, the militarily and economically vastly stronger United States dictated to Japan that it must reopen to foreign trade or the country would be forced open. The ruling Japanese elites acquiesced, in order not to become a subject country like India. In 1871–3, more than half the leadership of the subsequent “Meiji Revolution” then spent almost two years travelling across the United States and Europe to learn about “the great principles which are to be our guide in the future.” This Iwakura Mission’s report noted that “the wealth and prosperity one sees now in Europe dates to an appreciable degree from the period after 1800. It has taken scarcely 40 years to produce” (cited in Pyle, 2007: 85). The Mission saw that alternative paths of transformation were possible and explicitly rejected the crude exploitation and squalor of Britain’s laissez-faire Industrial Revolution.

Already by 1895 Japan was strong enough to graduate to be recognized as a so-called “civilized” country and to impose itself on its weaker neighbours, China and Korea. While reinforcing Japanese pride in a supposed unique “Japanese spirit,” the extraordinary success in imitating selected Western patterns and models left cultural self-doubt: we have copied the West, but what are we now? Japan continued for decades to seek strength and status through imitating the West and at the same time trying to compensate for feelings of lost identity. By the 1930s Japan sought to impose itself further across East Asia, in pursuit of natural resources and Great Power status. Faced with American demands that it withdraw, backed by trade embargos, Japanese leaders this time refused. Proud in their felt strength and supposed uniqueness, angry at Western domination, and unwilling to “lose face,” Japan’s hyper-nationalist elites chose in 1941 to attack their far stronger antagonist, leading to years of war, destruction and death, and eventual crushing defeat. Post-war Japan has rebuilt on the basis not only of national solidarity and ambition, but also now of a strong strand of declared universalist ethics.

Source: Based on Pyle (2007).

Activities and Tools in Development Ethics

Development ethics thinking and action can be seen as having three aspects: first, observation, experience, and exposure; second, conceptualizing, analyzing, and theorizing; third, attempted application, adaptation, and new learning. The three aspects are to some extent a sequence of stages, but they occur also in parallel and in continuing interaction. Each involves particular skills and potential pitfalls.

Observation, Exposure, Sensitization

This first stage includes a “look-and-feel” phase. Writers and speakers and people whom we encounter invite us (or we ask ourselves) to “Look at this experience—think and feel about it.” They ask for our attention, widen our awareness, perhaps open our eyes and broaden our categories. Exposure also brings a risk of desensitization: we can stop noticing things that become familiar. Some exposure is direct, through fieldwork, visits, “gap years,” and so on. This direct exposure can have a special force, if it is not merely “development tourism.” Box 30.4 explains the method of “immersion visits,” nowadays used sometimes for senior development bureaucrats.

Most of our exposure to other people’s lives must be second-hand, through research literature, newspapers, novels, television, films, and other people’s accounts. These sources give us access to far wider ranges of experience than we could have directly, and they come in forms that are selected and organized to make a point. In particular, imaginative literature and films form a treasure store of influential and often insightful interpretations of human living. Sometimes “the trained sensibilities of a novelist or a poet may provide a richer source of social insight than, say, the impression of untrained informants on which so much of sociological research currently rests” (Coser, 1963: 3; see also Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock, 2014). However, we need to be cautious in regard to authors’ interpretations and our own interpretations of the authors. As discussed later, tools of discourse analysis can help us to better identify and assess these interpretations.

Box 30.4 | Immersion Visits: Putting Yourself in Other People’s Shoes

During the past 25 years, “immersion visits” have been talked about and sometimes practised in development bureaucracies. Some senior and mid-level staff may spend a few days, including at least two nights, sharing the lives of poor people. Often they report dramatic changes in their perspective. This box draws on a survey of such experiences by Irvine et al. (2004).

- *“I have asked myself what would have happened if I had spent one week per year in a village somewhere over the last decade. I am quite sure it would have made a difference to me. Ten different contexts, and a number of faces and names to have in mind when reading, thinking, writing, taking decisions and arguing in our bureaucracy.” (Respondent, cited by Irvine et al., 2004: 4)*

The reports of dramatic learning come not only from foreign staff. The following quotations are from Tanzanian staff members of an international NGO, after an immersion visit within their own country (Irvine et al., 2004: 12).

- *“I thought I knew about village life as my roots are in the village and I still visit family in my village from time to time. But I know nothing about what it is like to be poor and how hidden this kind of poverty can be.”*
- *“I’ve worked in rural villages for more than 20 years but I never had an experience like this.”*
- *“Even village leaders could not tell you what we experienced for ourselves.”*
- *“I could not believe that the family only had one broken hoe to cultivate with. It was like trying to dig with a teaspoon. I will never forget that.”*

Even a two-week or two-month, not merely two-day, visit would not be enough to understand adequately other people’s life-worlds. But brief exposures under the right circumstances can help visitors to realize that they do not understand what they thought they did, and to motivate them to try to better understand. The functions of immersion visits for development professionals, ranging from short stays to “gap years,” include:

- *To learn, about a very complex world; to see interconnections and go beyond stereotypes.*
- *To update, in a fast-changing world.*
- *To get beneath the artificial surfaces on display during brief official visits.*
- *To have time to listen and watch, not only to talk, and to learn also from children and old people.*
- *To counteract the generalizing tendencies of managerial thought in big organizations.*
- *To stimulate “double-loop learning,” i.e., rethinking of models and assumptions, not just feeding new data into existing mental programs.*
- *To gain credibility as a professional, commentator, and contributor.*
- *To become more empathetic, sympathetic, and motivated.*

(See also, e.g., Minch, 2016, and IIED, 2007.)

Why can imaginative literature and films be such influential sources (whether for good or ill)? Several of the reasons apply also to real stories, historical accounts, and biographies, but Nussbaum argues that imaginative literature has an extra power because it can take us vividly and richly into the lives, thoughts, and emotions of a wide range of protagonists. Her book *Poetic Justice* shows how effectively Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* refuted the narrow "money-tarian" perspectives that underlay the inhumane industrialization in nineteenth-century Britain, perspectives that Japan's Meiji Revolution leaders also rejected. Compared to the abstracted and often generalized talk in social science, political ideologies, and official documents, stories show case-specifics and thus deepen our understanding of local dynamics; they show people's emotions and calculations; they show important interactions of types that we are unable to model in social science; they present the multi-faceted combinations and coincidences that arise in real situations and that can have major consequences; and they involve and educate (for good or ill) our emotions, because they help us to think about—indeed, almost experience—what someone else's life is like and what our own life would be like if we were equally exposed. The ethnographers in *Avatar* come to know literally what it is like to live as the indigenes do, through the transference of their minds into bodies like those of the indigenes. Films, novels, and the best journalism and travel accounts can take us in that same direction. (See discussion question 3.)

Even much less detailed forms of case illustration, real or imaginary, can be important in ethical thinking when they help us to put ourselves in other people's shoes (Rifkin, 2010) and/or to grasp the implications of particular circumstances and combinations (Gasper, 2000, 2004). So cases of various degrees of detail are used in philosophical theorizing and in policy analysis training for the second and third stages in development ethics.

Analysis and Theorization

The stage of systematizing ideas can begin with an "identify and describe" phase. One seeks to clarify value choices encountered in situations and to describe the systems of values present, for example, in important documents, policies, theories, and institutions. That phase blends into the next, of trying to further analyze and assess these ideas. Activities here include clarifying concepts and checking logic, including the degree of mutual consistency of different values, partly through examining implications and asking: What do you think your stated values will bring if fulfilled? And how can your higher-level values in fact be furthered? If felt necessary, one can attempt some

synthesis and innovation of ideas, even system-building. This theorizing should grow out of close interfacing with a real-world context of experience and practice; otherwise, disasters arise, such as a theory of justice that ignores an essential real-world feature like migration. These phases of thinking match those in “value-critical policy analysis” (e.g., Schmidt, 2006; Schön and Rein, 1994), which involves identifying existing intellectual frames and what they include and exclude, by using tools such as indicated in the first half of Box 30.5 (see, e.g., Gasper, 2004), then comparing and assessing the frames and trying, where necessary, to craft more adequate alternatives by using tools indicated in the second half of Box 30.5 (see, e.g., Gasper, 2006).

Box 30.5 | Basic Questions and Tools in Value-Sensitive Discourse Analysis and Philosophical Ethics

I) Discourse Analysis/Frame Analysis

Preliminary. Ask who wrote the text, for what audience and purpose, and how this should inform your interpretation of it.

Categories. Identify the categories and labels used in the text; and those that were not used. Reflect on the system of categories. Look especially at the “cast of characters” and at who is ignored (e.g., perhaps migrants, non-nationals, women, children).

Figurative language. Identify the key metaphors used; they provide clues about the assumptions and way of thinking, the way of making sense of complexity. Study also the other attention-grabbers and attention-organizers like the choice of examples and use of images and proverbs.

Values. Identify the praise and criticism language; this provides clues about the unstated values, conclusions, and proposals, in addition to the stated ones.

Frameworks of inclusion/exclusion. From the above steps and other indicators such as the recurrent vocabulary used, identify which issues, identities, and interests receive consideration (e.g., economic growth?) and which do not (e.g., external effects; unintended effects; adequate access of poor people to water and sanitation; morbidity and mortality among the poor; the language of human rights?).

II) Ethics

Preliminary. Do not assume that nouns in language are necessarily definite things in reality. (For example, do not assume “development” is an entity/phenomenon like biological evolution or electricity.)

History. Who did what? Who caused the problem? Who contributed well and deserves reward?

Role reversal tests and empathetic reflection:

1. *Ask what would be my feelings if X happened to me/my family/friends/familiars.*
2. *Ask how other people feel when X happens to them/their families/friends/familiars.*

Consequences and other implications. *Ask what would be the requirements and the results of acting on the basis of a given idea/principle.*

Consistency. *For each view/principle/action ask: is it consistent with the proponent's (e.g., my) other beliefs and commitments? (For example, the Jubilee 2000 debt-relief campaign found that all the countries that had insisted on full repayment of least-developed-country debts had themselves had major instances of receiving debt relief or forgiveness or of repudiating debts (see Chapter 15.)*

Consider two examples of using such methods. First, a review of development literatures in India during its decades of independence shows continuous strong reference to visions of economic and technological transformation, at the same time as disputed and changing pictures of the public sector versus private business. This is not surprising, but the content analysis also reveals some less obvious continuous relative blind spots, such as the lack of attention to sanitation facilities for ordinary and poor people and to the enormous numbers of informal-sector migrant workers and their families (Gasper 2018).

Second, comparison of two global reports on the challenge of climate change for low-income countries—the United Nations *Human Development Report 2007/8* and the World Bank's *World Development Report 2010*—reveals two different mental worlds, reflecting different priority values (Gasper et al., 2013). Table 30.1 compares word counts in their almost identical-length executive summaries. The United Nations report refers intensively to issues of justice, human rights, and the interests of “our children and grandchildren”. The World Bank report never mentions human rights and emphasizes, instead, efficiency, consumption, and management towards “climate-smart” solutions. The different patterns of vocabulary help us to identify more vividly and confidently the different guiding values of the two reports.

Table 30.1 | Vocabularies of the Overview Chapters in the *Human Development Report 2007/8* and *World Development Report 2010* on global climate change. **Source:** Adapted from Gasper et al. (2013)

	HDR 2007/8	WDR 2010
we	56	11
children	11	3
future generations	19	0
the world's poor	17	0
human	102	8
human rights	11	0
efficiency/efficient/inefficient/inefficiency	21	48
effective	2	12
manage/(mis)management/mismanaging	6	26
threshold/s	7	1
climate smart	0	9
consumption	7	19

Application, Adaptation, Action

Applying ethical awareness and ethical analysis in practical ways calls for further types of skill. It does not happen automatically and effortlessly. Pure philosophy does not and cannot solve all problems. Practical ethics is therefore more than just “applied” ethics, more than just applying general theories. We have to use imperfect general ideas together with typically imperfect data about a range of relevant factors to look at distinctive real cases, in which the need for action often seems urgent. We need to identify good enough estimations, not play with philosophy for philosophy’s sake; and we have to deal with both the limitations of any system of ideas when applied and, usually, the need to negotiate and compromise with other idea systems. Hence the fulfillment of basic needs has a special importance, because these are the necessary conditions for people to follow any more elaborate ethic, such as of satisfaction or freedom or virtue or spiritual growth. Case studies and stories are useful here too, for learning how to better grapple with choices in real situations. The cases deepen our thinking beyond the theories. The questions at the end of this chapter include two such discussion cases.

One fundamental challenge is how to deal with uncertainty, not ignore that it exists, and to address how the possible dangers are distributed across different groups and persons. For example, much discussion of dangers arising from climate change generated by economic development

based on fossil fuels has become implicitly instead about the possibility, given our uncertainty about exact future impacts, of unnecessarily reducing economic growth due to excessive precautionary responses. That sort of focus reflects the concerns of people who feel they benefit from existing and future production and are little exposed to its costs. Also requiring attention, though, are the chances of damage to the health, lives, and livelihoods of marginal people, usually in poor countries. Those dangers may rank higher in importance than the first set when we bring almost any ethical theory into the discussion (Gasper, 2012; Gasper and Rocca, 2020).

Another fundamental challenge concerns how to get ethical concerns onto organizational and public agendas, and gain attention in a sustained way for weaker groups and uncomfortable issues such as displaced people and basic sanitation. Ideas of human rights, human development, human security, and so on should feed not only into critical evaluations of existing outcomes, but into the problem identification and problem definition done by powerful organizations and into the design of action alternatives. Indicators are one key to capturing attention. It is often argued that many social issues—such as the quality of childhood, local culture, and social networks—should not be assessed in monetary terms. However, they may still require strong non-monetary indicators if they are to influence public decision-making and be converted into enforceable responsibilities. (For instructive assessments though of the quality of the indicators set for the Sustainable Development Goals, see an open-access special issue of *Global Policy*, vol.10, supplement 1, 2019.)

Transferring ethical criteria and critiques into influence and action requires creative thinking. Box 30.6 presents the example of the very broad range of policy instruments that are relevant for promoting human rights.

Box 30.6 | Policy Instruments for Promoting Human Rights

“Carrots and sticks”	“Sermons and dialogue”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws and rules, and litigation to seek their enforcement • Monitoring—using vivid attention-grabbing indicators • “Naming and shaming” of violators • Intra-national and international sanctions and intervention • Reparations • Affirmative action policies • Victim empowerment • Capacity and skills investment in agencies for these activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: in primary and secondary schools, and via public information • Education: especially in university schools of law, business, engineering, medicine, and policy and governance—to influence systems of planning, design, and evaluation • Voluntary codes, guidelines • Museums, monuments, and other instruments of memory • Public debate; mass media • Truth and reconciliation commissions; transformative public dialogues • Capacity and skills investment for these activities, including for listening, mediation, innovative problem-solving

Conclusion

Development ethics themes and tools apply and connect to many topics besides those concentrated on in this chapter: for example, religions, migration to urban areas and other countries, transnational connections, tourism, and the global impacts of consumption patterns. You are encouraged to apply the themes and tools to areas covered by the other chapters. Further, the root concerns of development ethics—an insistence on not automatically equating societal improvement to economic growth, not ignoring costs of many types and their distribution, and looking for and comparing value- and strategy-alternatives—apply also for rich countries. By thinking qualitatively about what are costs and benefits, harm, and personal and societal priorities, what is deserved and what not, and relations between generations, development ethics as a field of thought helps development studies and development policy to treat human lives more seriously.

Summary

This chapter introduced some of the major areas in ethics of national and global development: asking what is the nature of well-being and ill-being and what should be meant by desirable “development”; considering ideas about equitable distribution of the costs and benefits from change; assessing debates around what are ethically legitimate rights and the responsibilities in relation to infringement of those rights; and underlying all these, examining how concepts of development typically contain and depend on values and on conceptions of the elements of living as a human being. It discussed examples that reflect central development themes, including appropriation of valuable natural resources, as in the colonization of the Americas; displacement of resident populations, as in major infrastructure investments and mining projects; and the global operations of huge businesses and their associated human rights obligations. It presented also some tools for value-sensitive observation and critical analysis and for connecting such concerns to practical action.

Questions for Critical Thought

1. Watch this five-minute film on farmer suicides: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av6dx9yNiCA. Which ethical principles do different speakers appeal to? Are there other ethical principles you consider relevant here? What more would you like to know about the case in order to answer these questions better?
2. Watch the following 12-minute film on deforestation and displacement of people in Latin America to make way for soya farms: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzdnCmLHVnQ&feature=related. Why does this type of harm, social conflict, and exclusion arise? Soya is exported to Europe and used for factory farming of animals. Try to identify all the groups involved. Which ethical principles do different speakers appeal to? Are other ethical principles relevant in this case? Do the principles conflict with each other? How can one try to analyze and resolve such conflicts? What would you like to know more about the case?

3. *Life in a Day* is a crowd-sourced documentary of extracts from the lives of hundreds of people around the world on 24 July 2010 (available on YouTube). Consider commonalities and differences in the values that you see among them.
4. The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth proposed that subjectively chosen definitions of development are more effective for furthering action and improvement. So, is part of development to make one's own definition of development? What is your definition?
5. Examine a recent development policy report. Identify the concepts, categories, "cast of characters," and (explicit and implicit) value criteria used in the report, how different groups are characterized, and which issues and groups are downgraded or omitted.

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