

## ETHICS OF DEVELOPMENT

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### Learning objectives

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

*Avatar*, the 2009 film by Canadian director James Cameron that is sometimes listed as the highest-grosser of all time, is set in the 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 it considers necessary—their extermination. RDA ethnographers have been living 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 favored, 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 favored, neglected or sacrificed. The key role of development ethics is to reveal, reflect on and assess these choices, and 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. which had emerged during the previous two centuries in Europe and North America and had become consolidated as separate disciplines that 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 people and countries, in a world dominated now by rich groups and countries, and after having been subordinated and transformed by the power of those groups and countries. Existing disciplines reflected in various ways the perspectives and interests of established richer groups and richer countries. Correspondingly 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 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 of development and of the benefits is often unbalanced and unfair, including through infliction of undeserved, unconsulted and uncompensated harm. Second, what should be assessed as truly costs and benefits of development, what is the significance of culture and how far are values justifiably culturally relative? Third, what is appropriate distribution over time, laying burdens on present people or on future people? 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? 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 from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards as images of children and babies from around the world—often suffering children or babies—became more widely distributed. Small children and babies bear no responsibility for their own situation and have little unaided 'response-ability' (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 29.1 Important Concepts: 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 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, 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, not be at the expense of existing occupants or of the work-force 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, 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 19<sup>th</sup> century, as shown in detail by for example 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) and indeed since earlier and in all parts of the world.

In particular, international development studies returns to the issues and formats in the social studies and humanities of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that were aiming to make sense of a world in transformation, before these areas of thought became artificially separated, formalized and abstracted in imitation of the natural sciences. The 'great issues' that Kitching refers to were prominent in the writings of amongst others John Locke (1632-1704), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Karl Marx (1818-1883). The contemporary Indian-British philosopher Bhikhu Parekh (1935-) warns though that all four of those great thinkers were in fundamental ways Eurocentric (Parekh 1997). 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 unfortunately frequently included processes of Other-ing, exploitation and extermination, but sometimes, in contrast, processes of growth of mutual respect, sympathy and cooperation.

*Avatar's* themes match many contemporary '**resource-grab**' situations on Earth. They echo too the seizure of the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 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 indigenes 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 reportedly engaged in human sacrifice and cannibalism. The Catholic priest Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) was the most famous defender of native Americans' human status and corresponding rights, and recorder of their subjugation (see las Casas 1552 for a readable and chilling account). [*Picture of las Casas: e.g. memorial in Sevilla.*]

Development ethics considers comparable present-day situations where there are opportunities for enormous gain through application of modern technology to resources worldwide and yet there is drastic exclusion or exploitation of many of the people affected. This occurs no longer through formal systems of slavery but often in successor arrangements in which for example workers may have no contracts, may never get paid, or are otherwise deceived and trafficked and/or work at high risk of injury (as reportedly do many of the over one hundred million internal migrants in China; Pai 2013), and in which local people are often brusquely displaced to make room for new projects from which they themselves do not benefit.

Various systems of thought in the 16<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries put forward justifications not only for European expansion but for the subjugation and **dispossession** of non-European populations. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), known as the father of international law, crafted arguments why the expansionist Dutch Republic had the right to sail and trade in whichever seas it could reach—for 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, using the argument that a theater seat once taken can be temporarily left vacant and rightfully not available for others (Arneil 1992). What supposed right had the colonizing European power to take such lands? – First, ‘for the reason that uncultivated land ought not to be considered occupied’ (Grotius, *The Law of War and Peace*; cited by Arneil 1992, p.592); and second, because ‘men who are like beasts’ and especially ‘those who feed on human flesh’ can rightfully be punished by dispossession (cited by Arneil, p.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 amongst these authors was John Locke (1632-1704), philosophical father of the English Revolution of 1688 and long-term 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 that were not cultivated could be deemed unoccupied; hunter-gatherers 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 by Arneil 1992, p.601]

Locke and similar thinkers and the European governments whom they advised 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 also instead be done for the Europeans by slaves brought from Africa. The history of the subsequent centuries-long struggles against legally-established slavery and various 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 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**

Nussbaum asked: 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 for 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 become combined. Such ideas have been applied both to the intra-country case and nowadays increasingly to inter-national relations.

### 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. Human rights thinking comes from this tradition, in the line of Las Casas: humans are seen as a single species, with a common worth and common necessities, who are both deserving and 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 which 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; 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 businessmen's time can be used to justify ever more air travel that through climate change may cost lives of (typically infants amongst) some of the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world (Noll 2011; WHO 2014).

A third tradition is **social contract theory**, which asks: what do or would participants freely agree? It treats the participants as in important respects free, equal and intelligent; each seeks their own advantage and they negotiate a contract that supposedly gives advantage to all. This bargaining may be specified as being between all households within a nation-state, as for example in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*; or only between full citizens, namely in John Locke's context white male property holders; or between states, as in Rawls's *The Law of Peoples*; 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 in free and equal inter-country negotiation; and even when written for the immigrant nation of the USA, it can ignore migration (as Rawls did in *A Theory of Justice*) or rule it out as irregular (as in *The Law of Peoples*). To return to the case of human babies, why, considers 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.

Nussbaum (2004, 2006) asks further how far any contract model, about relations between basically equal bargainers, is in fact relevant as the primary construct for talking about justice. Why not adopt a start-point that more adequately reflects our humanity, including our unequal strength plus 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 argues (Nussbaum 2004, p.12; see also Etzioni 1988). Hence Nussbaum (2006, 2011) presents instead a particular type of human rights ethic.

### **'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, including those above and others. It discusses different possible degrees of ethical responsibility: to ensure equal treatment or equal outcomes or fulfilment of minimum basic rights? Other work though has concentrated on a restricted set of issues concerning the infliction, avoidance of and remedies for harm. For these issues are especially pressing and important in development studies; and it may be easier to make progress with

application of the principles of avoiding doing harm to others (Pogge 2008) and of taking responsibility for the effects of one's actions and therefore compensating others for harm done to them whichever country they live in (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 on to other people rather than to pay the full costs of what one initiated and benefited from. (*Photo from WDR 2010 of villagers in flood.*)

An important example of proceeding in this way is provided by Penz, Drydyk and Bose (2011), who discuss the rights of persons potentially or actually displaced by development projects (Box 29.2). Rather than follow one specific theory of appropriate distribution they use a more general principle of '**minimizing harm and neglect**' (2011: 118).

### **Box 29.2 Critical Issues:**

#### ***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, utilization of useful minerals, and so on – often bring physical displacement of 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 are relatively or absolutely poor, for the sake of bringing benefits mainly to people who are 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 balancing the potential benefits from development investments with the rights and interests 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 absolutized rights: no one 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 for victimized persons) and to share equitably in benefits. 'Good reasons' means that the physical development which 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 which 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. Determination of what is a responsible project plan and what is adequate compensation must be 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.

Penz et al.'s work grew out of experience with large dam projects. Similar lessons emerged from study of conflicts over mines: lack of respect for human rights conduces to conflict (and so less profitability), whereas respect for human rights helps resolve conflict. Centrally important are **human rights principles** of accountability, transparency and participation. They are more important than any **human rights norms** about what people should rightly receive, for 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 on transparency and participation.

To initiate and sustain these processes of negotiation and adjudication and to hold governments and corporations accountable typically relies on the energies of networks of social movements at local, national and global levels. Only thus can local struggles be connected to actors—national and international media, consumers, rating agencies, etc.—who are able to make large corporations and governments think again. This is **‘the boomerang model’** of how human rights ideas exercise influence (Risse, Ropp, Sikkink, 1999); the boomerang of global pressure substitutes for the military ‘big stick’ that an interventionist U.S. president, Teddy Roosevelt, combined with ‘talking softly’. Human rights has 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 essential for cooperation to create superior ways forward. (This box draws especially on Gasper, 2015.)

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

The world’s governments have endorsed a series of major conventions on human rights, since the 1940s onwards. 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 sometimes 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 they ‘do good by doing well’, i.e. by making profits; so that ‘the only business of business is business’, i.e. they should be left to at most self-regulate and voluntarily follow self-defined codes. Organized business has had the power and backing to block anything more. 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 aim for a perfectionist solution that would in reality lead to no agreement and hence 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; the two 1966 human rights Covenants; and the 1998 ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work). The principle of non-violation is hard for businesses and their backers to object to. Third, he indicated practical implications of that principle, and 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 Ruggie 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 lies in contrast on all agents, including corporations; and citizens have a right to have access to systems for remedy of human rights violations. Corporations’ duty to not violate human rights must be complemented by showing respect for the people one interacts with and affects. Ruggie underlined that if one does not show this respect then small conflicts are likely to escalate into bigger ones.

The 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, and well-designed agreements with investors. Citizens' rights for remedy require the provision of adequate courts systems, plus relevant national administrative mechanisms and company-level grievance mechanisms since those are often more economical and readily attainable. Corporations' duties require 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 on how far they respect human rights and repair 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 is perhaps the biggest stream of development ethics. It overlaps with most others, both secular and religious, for 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. The commitments can be supported on the basis of different ethical traditions, religious or secular. We will not go further into human rights approaches, for which there is a huge literature (see e.g. Uvin 2004, Gasper 2007). 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. This rigidity is its strength, helping to make the claims enforceable, but is also its limitation. 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. Sister languages for thinking about values and threats to values are necessary.

'**Human development**' language, often based on the capability approaches of Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011), is a popular partner. These approaches talk about facilitating access by people to values that they have reason to value. **Human security** language is an important sibling or subset, about threats to fulfilment of people's priority needs (see e.g. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 of 2012). It is more flexible than rights language because it does not consider threats only to values which are treated as ethically inviolable; and it focuses on the systems of interconnecting and intersecting factors that generate threats for particular people (Gasper 2012). Extended rights-based approaches may do similar work even if under a different name. Such a rights-based approach should "look at underlying causes of poverty (and not symptoms) and therefore necessarily [build] partnerships between a large range of stakeholders; including the linkage between citizen and state, thus creating systems and mechanisms that ensure that all actors are accountable for the development process" (A. Burden of CARE USA; cited in a United Nations Development Group report; at [hrbaportal.org/wp-content/files/1238763225summary.doc](http://hrbaportal.org/wp-content/files/1238763225summary.doc)).

## 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 prioritise and pursue, development discourse typically includes 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 can in very favourable circumstances live 100 years but never 1000 years like some trees. 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.
- ❑ There is in broad terms 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 not sensitivity to alternative paths and alternative destinations and to how development paths differently affect different groups and values.

The more that the path and meaning of progress are 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’, says a famous slogan that reportedly originated with British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914).

A second idea has contributed to hiding the choices of priorities and between alternative paths: the idea of national economic product as the measure of progress. National economic product measures volume of monetized activity. So, first, it is a measure of activity rather than of valuable achievement; it measures for example the costs of medical bills, not the length and healthiness of people’s lives. Second, besides measuring costs and not only benefits, 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 cost 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 under Gross National Product, and that other values should be sacrificed for the sake of GNP growth. Development became equated to GNP. What other important values should be considered? Indeed, how far is GNP itself 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 with ill-being. As we saw, to identify harm or what is wrong may be easier than agreeing on what is good. The one thing that every theory of well-being agrees on is that suffering is undesirable (Phillips 2006). Various dimensions of ill-being require separate attention however; one cannot simply compare and sum different types. Narayan summarizes 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 have often 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. We noted how especially inapplicable these sorts of argument 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 fulfil basic needs around the world, notably children's health and education needs. Yet for example, 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. Eight days of global military spending would cover the annual cost of good-quality universal pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, according to UNESCO (2015).

These are cases of non-inclusion in the benefits of economic development. We saw earlier cases of deliberate exclusion, by forcible displacement. Other cases concern 'collateral damage' through negative externalities of economic expansion, like climate deterioration. Others still, such as frequent farmer suicides in India, involve 'disadvantageous inclusion'; farmers become involved in taking large loans for high-input agriculture which can bankrupt them in climatically adverse years.

### **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, with that reflection and choice as themselves central features in 'the good life'. Sen recognises yet the priority for a good life of fulfilment of basic needs, such as in nutrition, education and health. This needs-fulfilment can be seen as the removal of fundamental elements of ill-being: notably not living a full healthy life-span.

Beyond those elements, well-being research (summarized in e.g. Phillips 2006) does suggest some shared fundamentals of well-being. Etzioni (2012) highlights three elements: 1. personal relationships and friendship, 2. intellectual/spiritual life, 3. social participation and contribution. Much other well-being research underlines the prime importance of: health, physical and mental; 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 all areas of need it considers not only a dimension of Having but also Being, Doing, and Interacting.

Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar documents do not leave elements of the good life purely to be discussed afresh in each situation, without any constitutional prioritization, for that would leave too much power to the powerful. Market capitalism for example has built-in biases towards supplying 'information' which says that having more commodities will bring all good things for everyone (who is deserving) and urges us that economic growth should never end and is essential for social order; plus under-supplying information which 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 sometimes takes undesirable forms such as nationalist aggression, environmental destruction or religious zealotry. Denis Goulet (1971) analysed '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 encyclical of Pope Francis 'On Care for our Common Home' (2015) is one recent exploration, as are the Latin American schools of thought and practice on *buen vivir* (living well; Gudynas 2011).

Box 29.3 looks at the thought-provoking case of Japan, which illustrates choices faced and made in national development and their ethical significance: such as its orientation by nationalist values, which made it a colonial power that itself 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 29.3 Critical Issues:  
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 being the first non-Western industrialised 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 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1853-54 the militarily and economically vastly stronger United States of America dictated to Japan that it must re-open to foreign trade or would be forced open. The ruling Japanese elites acquiesced, in order to not become a subject country like India. In 1871-73, more than half the leadership of the 'Meiji Revolution' spent almost two years travelling across the USA 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 by Pyle 2008, 61). It saw that different 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 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 success in imitating selected Western patterns and models left cultural self-doubt: we have copied the West, what are we now? Japan continued for generations to seek strength and status through imitating the West, plus trying to compensate for feelings of loss of own-identity. By the 1930s Japan sought to impose itself further across East Asia, in pursuit of natural resources and Great Power status. Faced by 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 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 now not only of national solidarity and ambition but also a strong strand of declared universalist ethics. (This box is based on Pyle, 2007: *Japan Rising*.)

## ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS IN DEVELOPMENT ETHICS

Development ethics thinking and action can be seen as having three aspects: first, observation, experience, 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 pitfalls.

### Observation, exposure, sensitization

This first stage includes a 'look-and-feel' phase. Writers and speakers and those 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 brings also 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 29.4 explains the method of 'immersion visits', nowadays used sometimes for senior development bureaucrats.

#### ***Box 29.4 Important Concepts: 'Immersion visits' – Putting yourself in other people's shoes***

During the past twenty years, 'immersion visits' have become talked about and sometimes practiced 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., p.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., p.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, not merely two day, visit would not be enough to adequately understand other people's life-worlds. But brief exposures under the right circumstances can help visitors to realise 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 that are on display during brief official visits
- ❑ To have time to listen and watch, not only to talk, and to learn from also children and the old
- ❑ To counteract the centralizing 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.

Most of our exposure to other people's lives must though be second-hand, through research literature, novels, newspapers, television, films, and hearing other people's accounts. These sources give us access to far wider ranges of experience than we could have directly, and come in forms which 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, Rogers, Woolcock 2008). We need however 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.

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 takes us richly and vividly into the lives, thoughts and emotions of a wide range of protagonists. Her book *Poetic Justice* shows how effectively Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* refuted the narrow money-tarian perspectives that underlay the inhumane industrialization in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain which Japan's Meiji Revolution leaders rejected too. 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 can have major consequences; and they involve and educate (for good or ill) our emotions, because they help us to think—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 literally know 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. [*Avatar picture of paired half-faces*]

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, trying to further analyse and assess these ideas. Activities here include to clarify concepts and check logic, including the mutual consistency of different values; partly through examining implications, 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 like a theory of justice which 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): identifying existing intellectual frames and what they include and exclude, by using tools such as indicated in the first half of Box 29.5 (see e.g. Gasper 2004); then comparing and assessing the frames, and trying where necessary to craft more adequate alternatives, using tools indicated in the second half of the box (see e.g. Gasper 2006).

**Box 29.5 Important Concepts: Basic questions and tools in value-sensitive discourse analysis and philosophical ethics**

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS / FRAME ANALYSIS**

*Preliminary.* Ask who wrote the text, for which audience and purpose, and how this should affect 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., 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: the choice of examples, the use of images and proverbs.

*Values.* Identify the praise and criticism language; this provides clues about the unstated along with the stated conclusions and proposals.

*Frameworks of inclusion/exclusion.* From the above steps and other indicators such as the recurrent vocabulary used, identify which are the issues, identities and interests that 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 amongst the poor; the language of human rights?).

**ETHICS**

*Preliminary.* Do not assume that nouns in language are necessarily definite things in reality. (E.g. do not assume ‘development’ is an entity/phenomenon like 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? (E.g., the Jubilee 2000 debt-relief campaign found that all the countries that had insisted on full repayment of LDC debts had themselves had major instances of receiving debt relief or forgiveness or where they themselves had repudiated debts.)

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; but also, as continuous relative blind-spots, lack of attention to sanitation facilities for ordinary and poor people and to the enormous numbers of informal sector migrant workers and their families.

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 29.1 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 more vividly and confidently identify the different guiding values of the two reports.

Table 29.1: Vocabularies of the Overview chapters in **HDR 2007/8** and **WDR 2010**  
(based on Gasper et al. 2013)

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
climate smart	0	9
consumption	7	19
threshold/s	7	1
manage/(mis)management/mismanaging	6	26

### 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 the limitations of any system of ideas when applied, and the need usually to negotiate and compromise with other idea-systems. (Hence the fulfilment of basic needs has a special importance, because these are necessary conditions for people to follow any more elaborate ethic, whether of satisfaction or freedom or virtue or spiritual growth or whatever.) 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 exercises 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 deal with how the associated risks are distributed across different groups and persons. For example, much discussion of risks arising from the climate change generated by fossil-fuel based economic development is in reality about the risk, given our uncertainty about exact future impacts, of unnecessarily reducing economic growth due to excessive precautionary responses. That sort of discussion reflects the concerns of people who feel they benefit from the existing and future production. Also requiring attention though are the risks of damage to the health, lives and livelihoods of marginal people, usually in poor countries. Those risks may rank higher in importance than the first set when we bring almost any ethical theory into the discussion (Gasper 2012).

Another fundamental challenge concerns how to get ethically based concerns onto organizational and public agendas, and get attention in a sustained way to 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 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, social networks and so on—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 one debated current example, regarding children’s rights, see [http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/.](http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/))

Transferring ethical criteria and critiques into influence and action requires creative thinking. Box 29.6 presents the example of the very broad range of policy instruments that are relevant for promoting human rights.

**Box 29.6 Important Concepts: Policy instruments for promoting human rights**

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

**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 its 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: rethinking the nature of well-being and ill-being and what should be meant by 'development'; ideas about equitable distribution of the costs and benefits from change; debates around what are ethically legitimate rights and the responsibilities in relation to infringement of those rights; and underlying all these, 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 5 minute film on farmer suicides: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av6dx9yNiCA>. Which ethical principles do different speakers appeal to? Are there other ethical principles which you consider relevant here? What would you like to know more about the case, in order to answer these questions better?
2. Watch a 12 minute film on deforestation and displacement of people in Latin America to make way for soya farms: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzdnCmLHvNQ&feature=related>. 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 there other ethical principles which you consider relevant in this case? Do the principles conflict with each other? How can one try to analyse and resolve such conflicts? What would you like to know more about the case? And: Why does this type of harm, conflict and exclusion arise?
3. *Life in a Day* is a crowd-sourced documentary of extracts from the lives of hundreds of people around the world on July 24, 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 value criteria that are used in the report, how different groups are characterised, and which issues and groups are downgraded or omitted.

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## Related websites

International Development Ethics Association, IDEA: <http://www.development-ethics.org/>  
Human Development and Capability Association, HDCA: <http://www.capabilityapproach.com>

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## Relevant multimedia

- A talk by UNICEF professional Paula Claycomb on Ethics in International Development, with discussion cases: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdcjxMV1RN0> (38 mins.)
- Three talks on 'Development Ethics: Past Reflections, Current Happenings, Future Directions', and the following discussion, at the 2014 International Development Ethics Association 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference (2 hours); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBsHqPftqjQ>
- Discussion of the Ethics of Global Development, 2011, between Bill Drayton (founder of ASHOKA Foundation) and Duke University's president and business school dean [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9h3Gv\\_xoraE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9h3Gv_xoraE) (65 mins.).
- The Ethics of Mining and Development, 2015. Canadian International Council discussion (30 mins.), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS\\_eduPM03E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS_eduPM03E)
- Interview of the Nobel Prize winner Indian economist-philosopher Amartya Sen, by Ingrid Robeyns: [http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOP\\_87KDRS](http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOP_87KDRS)
- *Green*, a 2010 film about the final days of an orangutan displaced from her habitat by logging and separated from her children, [http://greenplanetstream.org/all\\_films/green/](http://greenplanetstream.org/all_films/green/)

## Photographs

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2. Page xxii, World Development Report 2010
3. From *Avatar* – the twinned faces