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**DEVELOPMENT ETHICS -- AN EMERGENT FIELD?**

**A look at scope and structure with  
special reference to the ethics of aid**

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## 1. AN EMERGENT INTER-DISCIPLINARY FIELD ?

'Development ethics' is attracting increasing attention. An association has existed from 1984, and now uses the acronym IDEA (International Development Ethics Association). Already fairly well established in the Americas, it is now extending more widely. IDEA's president recently published a survey article in 'World Development' (Crocker, 1991a), citing a notable amount of relevant publication.

Crocker's valuable survey reflects how interest in development ethics has arisen from many streams of work. Moral and social philosophers, like Crocker himself, have been prominent. They are the largest group in IDEA, whose flyer even defines the association as 'a cross-cultural group of philosophers and practitioners'. Perhaps it uses the terms 'philosophers' and 'practitioners' broadly. Equally or more important than the extension by professional philosophers is the interest that has emerged from work on human rights, international relations and law, culture, environment, gender, and other fields, not least development economics; and from practice in governmental, international and non-government development organizations and groups. Adoption of the title WIDER for the U.N.'s World Institute for Development Economics Research has to date been matched by its work. Some of the most interesting research on ethics now comes from development economists (like Amartya Sen and Partha Dasgupta) and others who combine formal analytical skills with a relatively wide cultural and practical experience and basis for comparison.

The first meeting of a U.K. Development Studies Association study group on development ethics, in 1991, gave an indication of the range of starting points and interests. A philosopher presented some basic conceptual issues in development ethics; an economist outlined alternative approaches to assessing (primarily material) well-being, drawing on work for the UNDP Human Development Report; and an international relations specialist spoke on national sovereignty and the debt issue. Finally an educational administrator looked at distinctive issues of administrative ethics which arise in many cases in poor countries: official rules may be impossible to follow; and salaries are often wretchedly low and/or not paid or paid very late, so that civil servants survive only through networks of kin and clan which impose their own demands and ethics. What norms and sanctions should be imposed in such cases?

These concerns from experience on the ground need to be accommodated in development ethics, at the same time as academics extend the range of their theories. A study like Shawcross' 'The Quality of Mercy' (1984), on the emergency food supply operation to Cambodia in 1979-83, illustrates how fraught and complex experience can be. He records the quandaries in which humanitarian organizations were placed and the paradoxes with which they had to deal, when facing high stakes but severely limited information in situations of intra- and inter-national conflict. Development ethics requires more than philosophers and economists enriching each others' models.

I want to present some ideas on the scope and contours of this growing field. We need to consider: is the development ethics field underdefined, and overbroad? and what are its relations to other areas of work, including ethical theory, applied ethics and development practice? One issue that Crocker raises is whether development

ethics should be seen as a unified discipline of 'normative development science (or studies)' (1991a:468), or rather as an inter-disciplinary forum for mutually enriching exchange between a number of streams of work. In my view, development ethics is an inter-disciplinary field, not even a subdiscipline. I doubt if it will become a subdiscipline, except possibly for some philosophers; nor is that to be seriously regretted. We are unlikely to have more agreement on scope, let alone priorities, in this field than we have in defining 'development' or 'development studies'. Section 2 introduces these questions of the coverage of development ethics, and some of the different streams of work which make an entry.

Not surprisingly, the shape of an inter-disciplinary field may appear differently according to people's academic discipline and experience. The approach in Sections 3 and 4 grows out of development economics in Britain, but with influences from the revival of political philosophy, especially in America, and from other lines of thought and practice. Section 3 sketches the necessary structure of a response to the criticisms by writers like Bauer, Lal, and Seers of giving development aid or promoting redistribution in LDCs. I will emphasize the range of considerations that arise beyond conventional economics, both by those authors and in trying to respond to them; and comment in particular on the contributions and some limits of the responses by Riddell and Mosley. Section 4 extends this picture of structure, and sketches the variety and styles of literature on the ethics of development aid; further areas come in.

Development ethics as now surveyed by writers like Crocker and essayed within IDEA is wider yet. Section 5 returns to how we might define and order this variegated field. One option is to distinguish core, background, and specialization areas. Another is to seek unifying themes. I will note a few reasons why it may yet be wise for the field to remain consciously plural and resist trying for disciplinarity.

## 2. WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT ETHICS ?

Denis Goulet, whom Crocker and others identify as the pioneer of a self-conscious development ethics (DE), defined it as work on 'the ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning, and practice', by the method of 'an explicit phenomenological study of values which lays bare the value costs of various courses of action' (1977, cited by Crocker, 1991a:458). [1] Goulet apparently saw this activity as a 'new discipline'. His own work is compatible with seeing it as an inter-disciplinary field of exchange, that draws on and influences various areas, rather than as a separate formalized discipline or sub-discipline, let alone a master-discipline prescribing development principles and practice.

Pioneers need not be very precise in drawing boundaries. Nor need an inter-disciplinary field, for it aims to influence, energize, and cross-fertilize, rather than to distinguish itself from others. But more might be asked of a 'new discipline'. What precisely would it cover? The implications of Goulet's definition depend on how one sees the scope of 'development' and of 'development studies'. Goulet's own work

has been on economically poor countries and societies, including their relations with the rich. Others see 'development' as global.

We should speak of 'development studies' (DS) in the plural. Many modes of study are involved, shading into and cross-cutting other fields. Firstly, there are positive analyses of development processes. The scope of this area of work depends on the definition of 'development'. Thus secondly, we have analyses of the meaning of 'development'. Some are positive interpretations: such as economic growth, or its proposed institutional and social accompaniments ('modernization': Berger, 1977), like urbanization, or extension of the world market or of certain relations of production. Other definitions are normative. The broadest of these takes 'development' to mean all desirable change. Somewhat more narrowly one can refer to desirable growth and modernization.

'Development' also connotes maturation to fulfil a potential. Segal (1986) speaks of development normatively as the fulfilment of desirable human potentials. Since death and decline are also maturation, one could add another descriptive sense - i.e. all societal maturation. These maturational definitions are very broad. With more historical specificity, 'development' in a normative sense can refer to fulfilment to some degree of the potential to greatly reduce human suffering and increase material welfare in 'the South'. This potential became increasingly apparent over the past century but dramatically visible in the last 45 years with decolonization and accelerated Northern growth; and hence the appearance of the new fields of DS, centering on economically poor countries and their relations with the rich, while drawing on many background fields.

Thirdly, DS can include work on normative theories of value. For as Gavin Kitching notes: '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' (1982: viii). This third area is an extension of that on normative interpretations of 'development'. It covers the principles behind any particular normative interpretation, and the further considerations needed to assess changes. It includes for example views on basic human 'needs' and appropriate (or 'human') mouldings of human nature; and the relative claims of needs, rights, and capabilities (the topic of IDEA's 1991 Montclair workshop; Aman, ed., 1991).

And fourthly, we have attempts to assess particular activities, approaches, or options, drawing on both positive and normative analyses. The activities can range from a project to a programme (like relief to Cambodia) to an organization (like an aid agency).

Now let us look again at Goulet's definition of DE: work on 'the ethical and value questions posed by [first] development theory, [and second, development] planning, and practice'. If one uses only a positive definition of 'development', the first part in DE so defined will be small -- for development theory is seen as only

positive -- including just issues in research ethics, avoidance of ethnocentrism, and so on. And the second part, the ethical issues in planning and practice, might be seen as outside the discipline of DS, a matter for (mere) planners, consultants and practitioners. If one uses, instead or in addition, a normative definition of 'development', then the first part in DE will include work on normative theories of value and the debate on how to refine our interpretations and understanding of good development. The second part of DE will not be marginal, and will also include issues in the assessment of particular activities and behaviour.

Note the danger, if one uses the normative definition which sees development as simply meaning desirable change, that DE expands to become social ethics in toto. More helpful, even if still very broad, is to say that DE tries to understand and assess what are desirable growth, modernization and structural change, and their implications. A more modest coverage within that range can be set by emphasising the options and dilemmas for economically poor countries.

Interestingly, DE's boundaries seem to be widening rather than narrowing. Crocker's own recent definitions are, firstly, 'the normative or ethical assessment of the ends and means of Third World and global development' (Crocker, 1991a:457). In an earlier version he spoke only of 'the ends and means of 'developing' societies' (1988:1). Secondly, wider still: 'International development ethics is moral reflection on the ends and means of societal and global change' (Crocker, 1991b:149). This extends beyond the Third World to view all societies as 'developing'. And finally the IDEA flyer drops all societal or national reference: 'International development ethics is ethical reflection on the ends and means of global development'. Should one perhaps instead call that global ethics?

We return to these issues in Section 5. Before more theorizing on what DE is or should be, we need to refer to some of its work. Section 3 now offers an extended illustration of how new concerns arose out of experience and discussions in development aid and development economics. Sections 4 and 5 then provide some possible steps towards ordering the considerable variety of current materials.

### **3. WIDENING ECONOMISTS' APPROACHES TO ASSESSING DEVELOPMENT AID**

#### **3.1. The challenge from critics of redistribution and foreign aid**

Distribution and redistribution have always been important motifs in development studies, as in its concerns with land reform or international aid. This is no accident: the questions are unavoidable political issues in poor countries, and part of the moral charge and attraction of development studies in rich ones. But criticism emerged that these concerns have often been not merely politically naive, but worse: ignorant, muddled and even hypocritical in their supposed ethical thrust. In reviewing three presentations of the 1970s concern with distribution -- Chenery et al. (1974); ILO (1976); Adelman & Morris (1973) -- Deepak Lal argued that they 'show no



evidence of having thought through the implicit ethical premises of their recommendations' (1976:731), and that the 'ethical preconceptions underlying [the first two] are particularly shallow' (p.737).

Two features which Lal claimed to find in this literature deserve note (whether or not they apply to the books he was reviewing; see Gasper, 1986). Firstly, use of a primitive normative theory of distribution: notably a stress on remedying inequality, not only poverty, including through redistributive policies of all types, subject only to feasibility constraints, with no awareness of ethical constraints. Bauer argued similarly that: 'Many writers on development... express concern with income differences, and regard as self-evident the case for their substantial reduction or even elimination... without examining the reasons behind the differences and the process by which they are reduced' (1975:393).

Secondly, Lal objected to the spectacle of authors situated in rich countries or international organizations ruling that poor country governments should give priority to effecting major internal shifts in the distribution of income and wealth. He made explicit the charges of double standards and hypocrisy that are often only silently voiced by recipients of such advice. Why not focus equally on international redistribution? Why presume the ethical and feasibility constraints on intra-national redistribution are less than inter-nationally? Why don't advisers distribute their individual incomes in line with their theories? If the foreign rich claim the right to preach redistribution to the LDC rich, have they not an implied duty to make transfers to the LDC poor?

Issues of international redistribution were indeed debated in other fora, including those on the proposed New International Economic Order (NIEO). In an attack on NIEO, Lal (1978) raised the same issues: firstly, querying certain influential 'Western' conceptions of distributive justice, here as applied internationally; and secondly, highlighting people's appeals to national rights, in this case not for proscribing poor countries' claims on rich countries but for rejecting as 'illegitimate intervention' the redistribution prescriptions given by the rich to the poor.

Debate within the West on foreign assistance intensified in the 1970s due to dissatisfaction with the impact of assistance of the previous scale and types. Some groups pressed for greater concessional transfers, even for schemes of automatic transfer through international taxation. But on the other hand, and in the USA and UK with more influence, right wing criticism of aid's ethical and instrumental justification became prominent. (In contrast left-wing critics attacked aid's specific effects rather than its stated intentions.) Sumberg (1973:60) 'looked for... without finding... [any] duty laid upon us. There is no such duty... [Aid] is purely discretionary.' Given such discretion, proponents of 'lifeboat ethics' advocated jettisoning 'basket case' countries (say Bangladesh) on the grounds that assisting them is hopeless and merely jeopardizes the prospects of others on 'Spaceship Earth' (Hardin, 1974). Peter Bauer elaborated in a stream of papers and newspaper articles a series of claims against concessional dealings with LDCs:- present DC holdings are

just, many LDCs do not deserve help, welfare goals are misconceived since there are no common needs, and official aid is justified only in so far as it serves donor interests (e.g. Bauer, 1981: 117-121).

Two subsequent defences of official aid accepted that rationales had never been sufficiently defined (Lewis, 1980; Healey & Clift, 1980). These studies therefore outlined a rationale in two parts: market imperfections justify official involvement, and ethical grounds imply a concessional element. However, both provided little in the latter field. Lewis, chairman of the OECD aid committee, offered only a traditional call to human fraternity and the diminishing marginal utility of income. Streeten (1976) gave a similar but deeper argument including three sorts of moral claim: (a) again, the brotherhood of man; (b) that the poor are not fully responsible for their poverty; (c) that the rich are partly responsible for this poverty. Claims (a) plus (b), or (a) plus (c), might constitute a reasonable moral case. Whether (a), (b) or (c) alone do so is more dubious. This step towards formalization already goes beyond Streeten but is not enough.

The critics needed a fuller response, for they precisely disputed the content, sufficiency and even relevance of traditional notions like fraternity, responsibility, and welfare. Lewis had proposed that people are satisfied with a simple criterion of increasing long-run net welfare; but when we probe arguments and actions, both everyday and academic, we find many important and influential objections current. Even operationalizing his criterion runs into major difficulties at some point. Further, when the late Dudley Seers, a pillar of development studies, came out against aid increases and existing aid budgets (e.g. Seers, 1983), he did so not only from doubts as to how recipients use aid, but with nationalist arguments of priority to domestic interests and of avoiding 'meddling' in ex-colonies for which the West no longer has responsibility. (Gasper, 1986, comments on Seers's views.) Had Western developmentalists previously worked themselves into a lather of concern on the basis of unexamined and unfounded habits of thought?

An important philosophical literature has emerged on some of these issues, especially in the revival of ethics and political philosophy from the 1970s. From abstract and/or domestic concerns, as in John Rawls's work, interest extended to international issues. Peter Singer (1977) and others developed a utilitarian case for 'radical sacrifice' by the rich in a world of famines and malnutrition; while the lifeboat moralists advocated a different type of sacrifice (dropping the poor from the boat). Lal's own inspiration -- '[allegedly showing] up the relative superficiality of the ethical underpinnings of RWG, AM and ILO' (1976: 731) -- was Robert Nozick's libertarian treatise 'Anarchy, State and Utopia' (1974). 'Nozick's book... [raised] some economists out of certain unreflective habits into which they had fallen. Indeed it has been said, however fairly, that it roused them from dogmatic slumbers' (Honderich, 1979:91). But to another economist: 'his case... [lacks] any systematic argument' (Arrow, 1978:265); and a different philosopher calls Nozick the leading representative of conducting political philosophy as 'an expression of unjust American ideologies, which legitimates crass failures of humanity and elementary justice in the interest of

class and national selfishness' (Richards, 1982:924).

These last two judgements on Nozick have been echoed in much professional philosophy (Paul, ed., 1982). He gained such attention, though, only because several of his points struck home. The attacks of Lal, Bauer and similar writers equally demanded examination. As Berger observed (1977:233): the relationship between rich and poor countries needs to be thought through -- not considered on the basis of some psychological needs of the rich, whether for righteous sacrifice or righteous rugged isolation. There are matters of appropriate degree in aid, beyond Singer's radical sacrifice and Nozick's radical rejection.

Any such assessment of aid requires attention to a set of issues beyond the traditional pastures of development economists. Until lately there has been a strange contrast: while positive theories of distribution and other matters were elaborated and competed, many supposed policy analysts barely considered normative theories. They were presumed self evident, or arbitrary, or exogenous. As Lal implied, this was an intellectual scandal, perhaps even an ethical one. The critics have forced considerable enlargement of the debate.

In an earlier work (Gaspar, 1986) I examined the claims that much of development studies has been normatively primitive, and looked at the range of conceptions of distributive justice available, including the New Right arguments against egalitarianism. [2] Here I will not essay further substantive argument, but look instead at the range of the recent literature on aid ethics, and the structure and organization of the wider emerging field of development ethics.

### 3.2. The structure of the argument on justifying aid

Riddell (1986, 1987) has concisely presented requirements of a moral case for inter-governmental foreign aid. [3] He argued that a complete case must establish all the following propositions:-

1. the affluent have a (potential) moral obligation to help the poor (i.e. if they can, and subject to their other obligations);
2. this obligation affects governments, not just affluent individuals;
3. governments' obligations to help the poor extend across national boundaries;
4. such trans-national obligations are not completely outweighed by governments' other obligations;
5. direct assistance is a good way to help, and indeed is
6. the best (feasible) way to help; and, lastly,
7. making such transfers via LDC governments is effective.

We can group these propositions under three headings: (a) no. 1 comes under the general normative theory of distribution; (b) nos. 2-4 concern the more concrete issue of whether governments in rich countries have any moral duty to help the (very) poor in other countries; and (c), nos. 5-7 look at the actual effects of direct government aid, especially if done via other governments, which it almost inevitably largely is.

Area (c), on the effects of aid, is well-trodden. We noted too that area (a), the general normative theory of distribution, has been intensively debated again in the past generation, with extensions to international relations and aid, and contributions by development economists such as Sen (e.g. Sen, 1981). In addition, development ethics must face the issues in area (b): why should governments try to help those in other countries? Very many people hold that even if every person has human rights, corresponding obligations lie only on his or her own government (Nelson, 1981).

Riddell's approach is more satisfactory here than are two other major contemporaneous studies by British economists: 'Does Aid Work?' by Robert Cassen *et al* (1986), and 'Overseas Aid: Its Defence and Reform' (1987) by Paul Mosley. Both follow the tradition of little or no reference to the ethical issues under headings (a) and (b). Cassen *et al* were constrained as consultants to the OECD, an inter-governmental organization which might inhibit embarrassing and controversial probing of moral claims on governments. Let us look at Mosley, originally one of the consultants, but who wrote his book independently.

Mosley gives a helpful analysis of current aid practice and of evidence on its more economic impacts. The opening chapter though seeks to establish the potential justification of aid, and does not advance beyond the positions of Lewis or Healey & Clift. Following the categories of domestic public finance theory, which he transplants to the international arena, Mosley identifies three cases for official aid: (i) a redistributive case; (ii) an allocative case; and (iii) a stabilisation case. The last two concern possible defects of LDC, international, and global market mechanisms, such that aid can support valuable investments in LDCs and help increase economic activity and employment worldwide, including in DCs (Mosley, 1987:12).

The stabilisation case is an appeal to mutual interests and enlightened self-interest, since donor countries benefit too. For the redistributive case, Mosley speaks simply of a widespread value judgement that 'the conditions of life available to the poorer people of the Third World today are not acceptable, and should be relieved by transfers of income from those who have more' (p.12). There are in fact two judgements here, of which the second must face the challenge of Bauer's tax-payers who object to compulsorily-raised taxes going to non-citizens for whose conditions they deny responsibility. One needs to supplement the judgements.

Similarly, for the allocative case, even if aid-funded investments do produce enormous benefits in LDCs, why should DC governments bother? And have they a right to use taxation for this when there are unmet demands or needs at home? So before the allocative case for aid can have force, we must tackle some of the other issues Riddell listed. The allocative case relies partly on the redistributive case. In domestic public finance, economists often treat the two as independent, because of utilitarian or other assumptions about domestic political community, so that it is enough to identify only potential Pareto improvements; i.e. reallocations which increase total output (or welfare) are acceptable, regardless of whether some individuals lose

(and whether they are compensated). A global utilitarian, or an analyst who transplants domestic public finance presumptions to the world level, may assume that if resources can yield far greater benefits abroad, they should be allocated there. But the implied belief in some degree of global community is rejected by many nationalists and right-wingers, sometimes even for disaster aid. A thorough evaluation of aid must respond to those positions.

When he comes to sum up the arguments against aid that need to be assessed, Mosley gives only two (1987:14):

To summarise, the right argue that the allocative case for aid is undone by side-effects on the supply of effort and on private investment in recipient countries, whereas the left argue that the redistributive case is undone by an improper focus by analysts on the distribution of income rather than on the distribution of power. The second of these propositions is a matter of differing priorities or value judgements, and as such not susceptible to empirical analysis. The first, however, is eminently a testable proposition....

So in Mosley's view, the right criticizes the effects of aid, and the left argues that aid helps to sustain anti-people regimes (1987:13). We saw though that many on the right strongly criticize the distributive rationale of aid, far more than the left have done. Secondly, some on the left do argue that aid that, in the short-run, palliates the position of the poor in LDCs, in the longer-run only helps maintain them in misery. But this is an argument about effects, not purely a value judgement (though values are involved in comparing short-term with long-term, and income with other goods). The left in general hold that if aid could have good effects, when appropriately judged over both short and long terms, then rich countries should give it. Many on the right reject this. Finally, we can note the sharp contrast between Mosley's degrees of faith in the power of empirical analysis for identifying effects as opposed to for informing value judgements. This positivism helps explain weaknesses in identifying the structure of the valuative arguments on aid. [4]

Riddell too is sometimes hampered by economistic presumptions and can confuse different theories of distributive justice. [5] He has difficulty for example in distinguishing the principles of entitlement and of desert (1987:24). Nozick, and most legal systems, hold that people can be entitled to holdings, quite independently of their past actions and efforts, and hence of what they deserve; e.g. they may legitimately inherit property. Economists' preoccupations with identifying the effects of actions, and with welfare as the criterion of relevant effects, make it harder for them to perceive Nozick's disinterest in both of these. His ethic refers to the past and to procedures of just acquisition. When economists do turn to look at past actions, they often assume these must be weighed according to their contributions to social welfare, i.e. by a type of desert criterion -- which is far from the Nozickian position. [6]

Since Riddell lays out the aid debate more adequately than many others, he enters wider areas and may sometimes run into problems. But we can appreciate and applaud his overview of the terrain.



#### 4. SURVEYING THE LITERATURE ON ETHICS OF INTERNATIONAL AID

##### 4.1. Method of approach

This section supplements Riddell's schema with a framework for review of the literature on ethics of international aid that has grown from the 1970s. The framework is quite simple, and distinguishes core, background, and specialist topics. A similar approach should be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to development ethics as a whole; but here I concentrate on the aid literature.

While the ethics of aid and of development are growing, they are not as prolific as the ethics of medicine or business or research. DE in general lacks a long self-conscious history or its own journals. [7] Standard computerized data bases have not yet captured a vast body of material; and the range of sources cited in major surveys (e.g.: Dower, 1983; Gasper, 1986; O'Neill, 1986; Riddell, 1987; Crocker, 1988, 1991), while substantial, is not too dauntingly wide. Aid literature in particular has been dominated by economists, but most economics was traditionally cut-off from ethics. We should add a proviso: the survey-writers may have been slightly biased to sources from conventional philosophy, and not fully in touch with the working worlds of aid.

Writing as an economist, I will still propose that the work on aid ethics has a relatively small 'umbra' or core of literature. Having largely emerged since the mid-70s, it lacks established boundaries defining it or some larger area as a sub-discipline (unlike in the cases of medical and business ethics). A very large 'penumbral' zone also exists, containing topics which are undoubtedly relevant, but not unique to the ethics of aid or development; such as human rights, the history of colonialism, the effects of particular types of aid, or the ethical issues associated with population policies, research, planning and consultancy. If one accepts the relevance of the penumbral areas, writing a survey would require significant time and judgement to define the field and justify one's selections. (Some work on DE does give space to general background on ethics, aid, and so on; this reflects the variegated audience, including from donor and counterpart organizations, development studies, philosophy, and elsewhere.)

From literature on ethics, one needs to look at the current work that seeks to apply abstract theories of distributive justice onto the world stage. Besides the generalized debate on ethically appropriate volumes of international aid, several more concrete topics are important, including: (i) ethical issues in the actual operation of aid programmes, including the inter-personal and cross-cultural relations involved; (ii) issues in emergency aid (including famine relief, refugees, responses to wars and other disasters); (iii) the ethics of debt and repayment; (iv) the ethics of aid and environment. To take just the last of these, ethical analysis of environment and development has flourished from the mid-80s (see Engel & Engel, eds., 1990), and was the theme of the 1992 IDEA conference in Honduras.

Crocker too emphasises the limits to abstracted ethicizing, and calls for 'theory-

practice', involving practical people and their concerns and knowledge (Crocker, 1991a). Related selection criteria in any survey of DE should include ensuring representation of Third World voices, and work from disciplines other than philosophy and economics, including, when appropriate, literature and journalism.

The rise of practical or applied ethics is well summarized in De Marco & Fox (eds., 1986), a set of essays directed not only to philosophers but to professionals in areas where ethical issues have become a pressing concern. It describes the recent emergence (or revival) of applied ethics as an active and self-conscious field, including intensive work on biomedical ethics, business ethics, reverse discrimination and equal opportunity, and the ethics of nuclear strategy. This work arose partly as a result of the revival in general ethics that we mentioned, but mostly in response to practical challenges.

With such points in mind, literature on (and for) aid ethics can be categorized as follows.

#### A - Background

1. (A1) Introductory:- including discussion of 'what is the ethics of development aid?'
2. (A2) Background on development aid:- history, types, volumes, distribution, organization; reasons and motives for aid; conflicting perspectives on aid.
3. (A3) Background on ethics:- the nature of ethical theory and of applied ethics; distributive ethics.

#### B - Core

4. (B1) The distributive ethics of international aid:- especially applications of general normative theories of distribution to the case of international aid.
5. (B2) Nations and states, groups and individuals:- locating responsibilities; 5a - the status of national boundaries; 5b - the respective roles (including obligations and rights) of governments, NGOs, and individuals.
6. (B3) Reference to preceding events - the historical record: arguments for or against aid by reference to the past history of relations between countries now rich and those presently poor.
7. (B4) Reference to subsequent outcomes - assessing the effects of aid: including case studies (e.g. of food aid).
8. (B5) Applying conditions on future actions - leverage in aid: tying aid, e.g. to specific uses (project aid), or to satisfaction of more general conditions (as in much programme aid); including case studies (e.g. from population policies).

#### C - Special Topics

9. (C1) Ethics of 'technical assistance/co-operation', including of:- international aid organizations and 'experts'; aid-funded research, training and advice; cross-cultural and inter-national interaction. (This topic might be in the core, for aid is always administered; but it includes special forms of aid, and can also subdivide into a series of special topics.)
10. (C2) Emergency aid
11. (C3) Ethics of debt
12. (C4) Ethics of aid and environment. ... And so on.



Of course some literature, such as surveys, can span the categories.

We look next at this contents list in use, in a sketch of a cross-section of literature covering most of the headings. The aim is not a literature review, but to bring alive the great range, in both topic and approach, of current DE work. We start with two British economists whom we introduced earlier, and then spread our net wider.

#### **4.2. The range of aid ethics: some books and articles from the 1980s**

(A1) - Introductory. We saw why Riddell (1986) is a helpful introduction to the scope of current discussions. Most people in Britain cite an ethical justification for aid when asked to comment; so did donor governments but none had rigorously spelled out their arguments. Riddell noted that a complete moral case for official aid requires several components, and looked at current criticisms of each. He then outlined a more systematic, as well as more qualified, justification of official aid than those made in the 1950s to 70s.

(A2) - Background on aid. Mosley (1986) gave a readable survey of many major aspects of overseas aid (in the British terminology). We commented earlier on his general economic case for official foreign aid. His history of aid and its distribution between recipient countries argued that while poorer LDCs tended to receive more aid as a % of their GNP than richer ones, there were two immense, hard to pressure, exceptions: India and China; yet even so, aid has been ineffective as an instrument of political leverage by governments. From an overview of the groups involved in each aid donor community, their differing perspectives and conflicts, the processes in allocating aid budgets, and the comparable groups and processes on the recipient side, Mosley suggested a set of likely biases in aid allocation: towards projects which are large, risk-avoiding, and import- and capital-intensive; but also a rural bias.

(B1) - The distributive ethics of international aid. What are the obligations to give, or rights to receive, aid? Two studies by British philosophers, Dower (1983) and O'Neill (1986), illustrate different theoretical approaches (out of the many in circulation) as well as different intended audiences. Dower's book was 'for the general reader who wants to explore the issues raised by our responses in the West to world poverty. It... deals with general moral principles and values, not their detailed application [and] in this sense it bears the stamp of a philosopher's mind' (p.vi.) 'The book is concerned with ends, rather than with means, with [establishing] the central proposition that we ought to help, rather than with the wide variety of ways in which one [might be able to] help' (p.11). It further discussed responsibilities, attitudes, and possibilities at the level of the affluent individual in a rich country.

O'Neill's 'Faces of Hunger' gave a denser and more academic treatment of similar questions. She argued that while substantive ethical theory had definitively revived since the early 1970s, it remained disturbingly abstract and individualistic in

method. She proposed steps towards a more adequate method, and advocated a modified Kantianism, to take into account decisionmakers' human limitations and constraints, and to systematically consider the steps between general theory and practical application.

(B2) - Nations and states, groups and individuals. Upon whom specifically lie any obligations to give aid? Some of the literature, probably too little, tries to clarify what could be the respective roles (and rights) of international agencies, rich country governments, and individuals or private groups in rich countries, with respect to governments, groups or individuals in other countries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such analysis is quite often by those seeking to restrict their obligations.

At the level of nation-states, an American philosopher, Nelson (1981), defended 'the standard assumption' that while each person has some general human rights, the corresponding obligations lie only on his or her own government. He argued that obligations must be attached to units which have adequate resources, internal sympathy and operational cohesion to act upon them; that the nation-state meets these conditions but wider units do not; and that the nation-state therefore has a self-enclosed moral status comparable to that often attached to the family. [8]

Much work looks at the public/private/NGO division of labour. Ethics enter Douglas' (1983) analysis of the rationale for the 'Third Sector', non-profit non-governmental organizations, in interesting ways. The economic literature on market failure suggests necessary areas for activity by agents who are not private profit-seekers; but Douglas argued that the literature has a number of holes, reflecting inability to recognize and handle altruistic and idealistic behaviour. His parallel analysis of the limits on what can be achieved by governmental authority, given the constraints set by democratic norms, thus suggested necessary areas for the 'Third Sector'.

(B3) - The historical record. Critics of aid coolly claimed corroboration from Communist Eastern Europe, which rejected any duty to make the transfers to LDCs called for in the NIEO, on the grounds of having no colonial past (Lal, 1976:732). Such claims about past events, as supposedly establishing either obligations for rich countries or their absence, cannot be avoided in debate on the ethics of aid. Literature on the balance sheet of colonialism is longstanding and immense, but for various reasons little of it makes systematic links to argumentation on aid. One factor is that what would have happened in the absence of particular past actions is inevitably hypothetical and open to dispute, especially the longer ago those actions occurred. But more recent, and equally germane, is the balance sheet of previous financial and technical assistance itself. Donors undeniably share responsibility for past mistakes.

(B4) - Assessing the effects of aid. Most of the large aid impact literature is not distinctively ethical; but there are key value issues involved which demand attention (Hoksbergen, 1986).

Mainstream literature focuses on the impact of official aid on growth and investment. Mosley (1987) for example found no general statistical connection between aid flows and aggregate growth in recipient countries. Given the high average reported project returns, he argued that aid often allows diversion of domestic public resources away from investment into consumption, and bids-up the price to the private sector of scarce local resources. (However he later noted that average aid impacts appear considerably more favourable in Asia than in Africa, which requires a modification of his general argument.) Several questions arise: how far should we generalize? how should we interpret imperfect data? which effects should we consider? who benefits? and whose views and perspectives should we include?

Concerning the types of effects to consider, one might for example agree that aid often does not increase LDC investment and growth, yet defend it as increasing current LDC welfare. But whose welfare? Mosley argued that the politics of aid processes have militated against investigation of whether poorer people benefit. From the few serious studies he identified, he suggested that 'aid projects can help the poor, but not the poorest' (p.165); and that 'trickle-down' effects to the poor are 'virtually inoperative' (p.178) in most countries. Reasons include the power of local elites, inappropriate technologies, and leakage of benefits to richer areas; though these could, he argued, be reduced. (As to who benefits in donor countries, he found that aid given as export subsidies produced very few additional exports or jobs, but cushioned inefficient firms.)

Despite the limits of information, especially timely information, Riddell like Mosley believed not just in the pertinence of evidence on impacts, but that the aid debate 'is ultimately a controversy resolved by assessing the evidence' (Riddell, 1987:58). How frequently do the forms of evidence and assessment in the social sciences resolve controversies? Often many actual and prospective effects remain far from clear, indeed open to profound debate. Riddell himself earlier noted: 'The total moral case for governments to provide development aid would seem to be dependent upon a blend of three interrelated factors: [i] narrow ethical beliefs (the basis for action), [ii] theories of development (constructs of how the world works) and [iii] an assessment of the performance of aid in practice' (1987:16). These assessments are imperfect and theory-dependent; we would not otherwise need to mention factor [ii]. Faced with the limits to consequentialist assessment (i.e. in terms of effects), we look for defensible principles of judgement, including reference to non-consequentialist criteria. Choice of these principles can be informed, but may not be fully resolved, by assessing the evidence.

For all the above reasons, it is important to obtain accounts of aid from a variety of viewpoints. As one example, Kurien's 'Life and Death through Foreign Aid', by a Southern writer, has a significantly different scope and flavour from conventional Northern economic analyses. It illustrates recipient country intellectuals' unease and dissatisfactions. Kurien discussed positive and negative impacts of the foreign aid channelled into India via churches, with special reference to Kerala.

Suggested positive features of aid included provision of foreign exchange, jobs, training centres, and hospitals (most of Kerala's 900-plus private hospitals in 1980 were run by churches, and mainly set up with help from abroad); and in addition (in Kurien's view) the creation and expansion of churches. Negative features claimed included creation of attitudes of dependence and imitation; concentration on elites; proliferation of denomination-specific facilities (sometimes luxurious); promotion of corruption, demand for imports, and scope for leverage; and pacification of the oppressed. He drew a contrast with the case of a self-reliant mine-workers' group in Madhya Pradesh.

(B5) - Conditions attached to aid. What conditions can or should be attached to aid to increase the chance of achieving desirable effects, despite possible interference with recipients' sovereignty and self-reliance? What of the other conditions that donors attach? Faaland (ed., 1981) exemplifies the mainstream literature here, in a set of accounts of experience from aid operations in Bangladesh. We find supplementary, rather richer, insights from an anthropologist, even in a topic like conditionality.

Harrell-Bond (1986) studied the programmes for Ugandan refugees in Southern Sudan in 1980-85 undertaken by the UN High Commission for Refugees and foreign NGOs. Thousands of refugees were interviewed, inside and outside the official settlements, as well as members of the indigenous population. Refugees helped determine the data to be collected and discussed its implications. Harrell-Bond argued that official assistance programmes, which placed refugees in controlled rural settlements, largely failed in Sudan as in most other countries to integrate them into the host country or make them self-reliant. Comparative evidence was drawn from those refugees (in fact the majority) who stayed outside official settlements, and from countries where refugees were allowed to manage the use of aid themselves. She argued that refugee needs have been outweighed in mainstream programmes by the preoccupations of donors and host governments with control and security, and by misplaced presumptions of the incompetence and untrustworthiness of refugees and local officials. The study found that refugees often had valuable skills and represented a pool of potential creativity, capable of responding to the stresses and opportunities in their new situation. This potential was stifled or inhibited by aid officials who considered themselves too busy, too knowledgeable and too worthy to need research on refugees' situations and activities, or even to consult with the people they were supposed to be assisting. Harrell-Bond concluded that attempts to control, made from a position of ignorance and mistrust, produce severe negative effects for the refugees, in both frustration and dependency.

(C1) - Ethics of technical assistance and co-operation. The refugees study has led us onto issues in the actual operation of aid programmes, including the behaviour and life-style of aid agents, aid bureaucracies, and their LDC counterparts. Aid personnel bid up the local price of housing; and they introduce external consumption norms and the funds for some locals to acquire and practice them. Others make careers of per-diem-ed luxury in the name of the poor. The enraged whistleblowing

on UN agencies in Hancock's 'The Lords of Poverty' and Linear's 'Zapping the Third World' are rare examples, for literature here is limited by access problems, and practitioners tend to be too busy, cautious and implicated.

A short story by Leonard Frank (perhaps an apt pseudonym, like Linear?) gives a glimpse. A UN project identification team visits the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan. The team includes professionals from six countries; none have previously met. None of them has been there before – but many previous missions have, leaving reports. The team has four weeks to identify a project for around \$30 million. Some team members are under extreme stress, caught between the demands of their actual job and their formal profession; others are committed to just one or the other – to 'the official world' or to 'the real world' (but perhaps with disagreements over which is which). A project is duly designed, on time, and with an eye to meeting the desires of donor and recipient agencies, and to providing defences against critics.

(C2): Emergency aid. Whether on grounds of importance or interest or interconnections, we cannot exclude emergency aid just because it is sometimes defined as not 'development' aid. Much of the literature from cases like Ethiopia and Cambodia has, from the urgency of the events it describes, been pointed and holistic; not formal examinations of dense but narrow data, but thought-provoking accounts of decision-making done with poor information and under pressure.

We earlier mentioned Shawcross's study of the US\$ 1 billion-plus international relief efforts for Cambodians in 1979–83 and the ethical dilemmas in emergency aid. It records for example how the Cambodian government, still fighting a civil war against the Khmer Rouge and others, resisted and obstructed technical assistance to improve the inflow of food, ignored monitoring and reporting requirements, and gave most of the food to government officials, soldiers, and others not in greatest need – yet how this reduced pressure to extract supplies from rural areas. Many lines of international food supply emerged: including to border camps controlled by the Thai Army, Khmer Rouge or other Cambodian opposition groups, who diverted many of the supplies; and to Cambodians arriving at the border, to distribute back inside the country, free of any conventional aid monitoring, and probably subject to significant diversion. Shawcross concluded that, amidst the diversions, obstructions and confusions, food and relief still reached huge numbers of people in severe need; and that conditionality to ensure no supplies reached unintended destinations would have meant that far less reached desired destinations.



## 5. HOW CAN WE ORDER THE DEVELOPMENT ETHICS FIELD ?

The issues and literature on the ethics of aid are certainly extensive. The coverage in development ethics as a whole, as in Crocker's survey article or at IDEA conferences, is wider still. I have said little for example of the critiques and defences of utilitarianism, and the rethinking of concepts of poverty, welfare, and other ideas central in development discourse.

Crocker concludes his survey with unanswered questions on how to conceptualize, organize, and engage in DE as a field of 'theory-practice', including on its relations to other intellectual and practical fields. Such questions are themselves partly practical and political matters, not to be settled by purely theoretical analysis. The following reflections are simply suggestions, to help debate.

Section 4 illustrated an approach that distinguishes between core, background, and specialization areas (C-B-S). We could extend this to cover more than the ethics of aid. DE as a whole draws on a number of standard fields, and adds distinctive concerns in terms of topics (e.g. rich-poor international relations in aid, trade, tourism, and other areas) and of substance (because of distinctive conditions in poor countries). To refine use of the C-B-S model, one could look at how it applies in more mature fields of applied or practical ethics.

However, the model will not provide a definitive picture. There will be demarcation options and disputes in trying to use it, and different views on what is the core. Let us identify some of the important disagreements, while remembering that there is unlikely to be one correct answer: why should core, background, and specialization areas be the same for everyone working on development ethics? To presume they must be the same begs the question of whether this is a discipline or an inter-disciplinary field.

One area of disagreement reflects different opinions on the nature of ethics, and hence whether DE is just 'applied ethics', or instead, using Crocker's term, 'theory-practice'. Another area concerns the scope of 'development', including whether DE's focus should be Third World, inter-national, or global.

The more one believes in universal principles of ethical theory, that are universally applicable and still offer a lot of substantive guidance in particular cases, the more one will see those general principles as at the core of development ethics too. In effect DE will be one of the applied specialization zones of a rather tightly unified and centralized ethics. For example one might seek to establish 'first principles' through an abstracted thought-experiment on the lines Rawls conducts, and then apply the principles on various stages, including to distant countries and international relations. (Rawls himself apparently held that his approach is specific to a 'Northern' context of relative affluence and diminished inter-individual bonds; and denied that it can be applied globally. [9])

The alternative conception takes ethical theory as a necessary source of suggestions, principles and criteria, but not of hard and sufficient guidance. We find this pattern of work in the newly active areas like medical and business ethics. For any theory is inevitably simplified, and has implicit assumptions and limits to its relevance. Experience tests the conceptions' adequacy and helps reveal what they omit. Similarly, general concepts, including general values, have limited specification and power. The practical issues prove richer than the concepts. (Work on gender and environmental ethics, for example, may modify various previous general assumptions and categories. And some readers may well feel, at least on first examination, that the most rewarding pieces outlined earlier were those -- such as the books by Shawcross and Harrell-Bond -- not written by philosophers or economists!) Codes of practice -- if and when feasible and relevant -- must be prepared by concerned practitioners, in contact with those they affect, not alone by philosophers.

Some writers accordingly prefer the term 'practical ethics' to 'applied ethics', for the latter suggests one only needs to apply already conceived principles. The more one thinks instead in terms of somewhat context-specific 'theory-practices', the more one sees general ethical theory as key background material, but not something to conclusively apply in every field of concern.

I suggest that DE is a swathe of 'theory-practice(s)' that is likely to be loosely articulated, internally and externally. My approach in Sections 3 and 4 has reflected a traditional DS focus on poor countries, which tries to ensure emphasis on issues relevant to them. Some recent work, calling for a globally-focused rather than a Third-World focused development ethics, is likely to see core, background and specialization areas in another way. (Believers in strong universal ethical principles will also tend to see a single global field.) This recent work proposes that in today's 'one world' we must look at the issues of international justice, growth, environment, and security as an interconnected set, where sustainable solutions may require worldwide changes in ethics, culture, and perceptions of identity. It attractively highlights responsibilities in rich countries, common intellectual and practical challenges, and our interdependencies and shared humanity.

These discussions about coverage in development ethics parallel earlier ones in development studies. DS has traditionally looked at the South and North-South relations; and presented to the South some aspects of the North's experience (especially the strengths). The questions it tackles have led it towards seeing countries in their global context, while trying to respect the specific conditions of each; and, for many practitioners, to going beyond Eurocentrism. Overall, it has moved towards a more integrated and relevant social science. So we find DS also in the South, in many institutes, journals and training programmes; it is therefore not just the North looking at the South. (We find work called development ethics in the South too, and, one judges, not merely due to Northern trends.)

Some examples suggest a (re-)emergent DS of the North. Seers and others found it fruitful to apply DS ideas to Europe, given a concern with poorer areas that live



in the shadow of richer ones, and DS's broader approach and longer-term perspective than much other social science. DS will contribute to understanding the new Eastern Europe as it struggles to structurally adjust to the West and cope with Western assistance and incursions. And DS concerns with structural change are relevant to Europe as a whole, in the face of structural unemployment and reorganization (Hettne, 1990). Some development journals have begun to publish not only on the South. However, a big gap remains between having some more integrated social science, and having a unified social science. Of the latter there is no sign.

Besides the experience of DS, the sociology and philosophy of science suggest the likelihood of specialization and differentiation. This applies to development ethics too, internally and with respect to general or global ethics. We could then have both global and development ethics, as related enterprises, and distinguish, as Crocker sometimes does, between 'development ethicists... [and] those involved in other forms of... global ethics' (1991b: 170). The latter term functions here as an umbrella, under which we can move around, without having to say that the areas spanned are all one. [10]

Within such inter-disciplinary fields, some shared frameworks and areas of theory, cross-fertilization, and cooperative areas of work are both feasible and desirable. To take one example: 'An important task of the emerging field of development ethics will be to grasp and assess Sen's proposals' (Crocker, 1991a:466). This focus will appeal to a variety of people in DS, philosophy, economics, social administration, and aid, given the range and force of Sen's writings, from famine to fundamental critique of utilitarianism. It can strengthen the theoretical basis for later work, in a more focused way than by reviewing tomes of philosophy; and it requires no close agreement on definitions of DE.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

- (1) DE may be seen as work on 'the ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning, and practice'. It has boundary-definition problems, both internally and externally, which partly reflect problems in defining what are 'development' and development studies. If one sees 'development' only as all desirable change, there is a danger of endless diffusion of DE. Even with a more delimited view of 'development', as fulfilment of some of the modern era's potential for major improvements in welfare in poor countries, the scope of DE is very great. (Section 2 above.)
- (2) Amongst other stimuli, right-wing and free-market challenges to development aid and its associated conventional wisdoms have forced a salutary probing of ethical assumptions, and led to a considerable extension and deepening of analysis. (Section 3.)
- (3) DE work has proceeded on a variety of levels, topics, and theoretical tracks.

On aid, analyses of past events affect present stances, but clear implications are hard to draw. Other ethical studies on aid have drawn out the value issues in: allocation of responsibilities (domestic/foreign and private/ public/NGO); analysis of effects (who benefits? which effects to consider? how to interpret weak data? whose views are heard?); and conditionality (the balance of accountability against fostering independence). Special topics in aid ethics include technical cooperation, though this has rather little literature, and more thriving areas like environment and emergency aid (whose interest and importance demand its inclusion). (Section 4.2.)

- (4) While the upsurge of work is encouraging, the literature remains limited, sometimes in depth or quantity on key issues, and in its organization and availability. We need in addition to close the gap between abstracted philosophical work and the worlds of development practice (a stated aim of IDEA). (Section 4.)
- (5) Distinguishing between core, background and specialization areas can be useful, but will be done differently according to the interests and perspectives of participants, in what is likely to be a multi-disciplinary field more than an actually or potentially unified (sub-) discipline. Trying to subsume DE in a wider field, such as global ethics or a unified ethics, has attractions but also significant problems. The parallel experience in development studies suggests there is valuable scope for globalization of approach, but a continuing role for differentiation and narrower foci. Cross-fertilization and co-operation between related streams of work can still proceed. (Section 5.)

Overall, boundary-definition problems in DE probably neither can be, nor need to be, resolved presently. More important now is simply to promote interchange between relevant lines of work, and to inject more good philosophy into development studies and more practical experience and awareness into ethics. I hope that an unusual form of literature survey will help in this, for an unusual area.

## NOTES

- [1] Another pioneer, Peter Berger, defined DE as political ethics applied to social change in the Third World (Berger, 1977).
- [2] I argue there that recurrent features in much New Right anti-egalitarian argument are absolutized values, and, as an offshoot of individualistic psychology, a preoccupation with blaming: being to blame, or not being to blame. I consider too the constraints and consequent scale and types of obligation of the individual within his/her society, e.g. the developmentalist dispensing advice, and also official funds, but perhaps not his or her own.
- [3] Riddell sometimes uses 'moral' to mean 'not implied by self-interest'. In this paper I generally take 'moral' and 'ethical' as synonyms.
- [4] Blaug notes that, having 'deliberately eschewed [discussions on values, economists] have largely denied themselves the analysis of value judgements as a fruitful area of research, [and are accordingly] rather poor at assessing other people's values' (1980:149).
- [5] E.g. he describes utilitarianism as if it calculates in terms of need fulfilment, rather than utility maximization (1987:21); and describes Rawls' theory too as if it weighs basic needs rather than basic rights (loc.cit.). Thus he then introduces theories about the rights of the poorest, as if something further to the Rawlsian view (p.23). See e.g. Sen (1981).
- [6] Similarly, Riddell identifies these two views: (a) 'National interest considerations are fundamental in foreign policy decisions' (1987:65); and (b) a Nozickian position that 'there are no obligations for citizens or for governments to meet the needs of other citizens or to alleviate suffering either within national boundaries or abroad' (p.66) because everything is instead to be left to mutually agreed contracts. But view (a) can be held by many non-Nozickians and be rejected by Nozick-style libertarians who stress only individual interests.
- [7] 'Ethics and International Affairs' appeared from 1987, with a much wider scope than aid and a different emphasis than development. 'Alternatives' often contains DE-type articles.
- [8] See Gasper (1986) for further comments; and Frankena (1977) and Hare & Joynt (1982) on the moral status of national boundaries.
- [9] Some writers disagree with Rawls on this; but his deliberate ignoring of most of the specifics of persons' situations might be less appropriate, or less widely acceptable, when applied in other contexts or across wider social and cultural ranges. Indeed it has been rejected by women commentators for his own 'Northern' context.
- [10] We can expect some correlation between answers to the three questions: (i) universal or contextual ethics?, (ii) global or development ethics? and (iii) unified discipline or inter-disciplinary field? But the questions are not reducible to one, and various patterns of response are permissible.



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