Third Stage Development Ethics: Global Institutions, Scientific Uncertainty and the Politicization of Moral Worth

DRAFT ONLY
15 May 2005

Asunción Lera St. Clair

Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Bergen
and
Senior Research Fellow
Centre for Development and the Environment
University of Oslo
Norway

Asun.st.clair@sos.uib.no

International Conference & Workshop on Ethics and Development: The Capability Approach in Practice
Michigan State University, East Lansing
11-13 April 2005
Third Stage Development Ethics: Global Institutions, Scientific Uncertainty and the Politicization of Moral Worth

Asuncion L. St.Clair

Abstract

The paper argues that development ethics requires new research, a deepening of focus and a wider disciplinary scope. Its task must include engaging directly with practices and knowledge for development produced by global institutions, and to join forces with global justice research and social justice activism. The paper argues for a third stage development ethics, enriched with a methodological pragmatism, which centers on the interplay between facts, values, concepts and practices. It views development ethics as a hybrid between a public moral-political philosophy and a public conception of social science. Within global institutions development ethics may become moralizing or the artificial superimposing of ethical analysis to pre-decided values entangled with mainstream economic science. Thus, development ethicists must consider the interplay between values, science and politics, including the ways in which ideas are used and distorted by powerful development agencies.
For the time being, the implementation and realization of human rights remain just a residual of another paradigm: i.e., the present paradigm of economic development. ……If countries adopt a ‘human rights based approach to development’, human rights values must permeate each and every aspect of a development strategy, so human rights issues do not come as a residual of economic transactions or other possible leading activities…What many human rights activists would like to see is that human rights values must cut at the centre of economic values.

Alfredo Sfeir-Younis (2003)

[The] sorts of science and technology assessments used to address climate change and related sustainability issues are necessarily shaped by value-laden choices regarding which questions to ask, who to treat as an expert, and how to deal with disagreements. Democratic societies must therefore find means of assuring appropriate participation of affected citizens in the process of negotiating such value judgments.

(William Clark 2003)

**Introduction**

There is no doubt that there is an increasing awareness of the ethical aspects of development policy and practice among scholars, practitioners, and development agencies. Development ethics today is slowly evolving into a wider field of knowledge studied in universities and research centers and there is an increasing amount of development ethics courses and seminars. Reflection on the ethical aspects of development is slowly making a breakthrough amongst practitioners, donors, multilateral development agencies and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the focus on this paper. For example, the Initiative on Social Capital, Ethics and Development of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been successful in calling attention to some ethical aspects of development processes, and the World Bank has created a small department addressing value-related matters, in particular faith-based principles but including also the role of values in development (World Bank, 2004). In addition, recent Bank
development policy documents such as the World Development Reports (WDRs), are addressing, even if tangentially, some value-related aspects and concepts. Clearly, the most representative ethically and philosophically explicit conception of development within a multilateral agency is formed by the twin notions of human development and capability (HD-CA) espoused by the Office of Human Development and to a wide extent by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The work of Amartya Sen is at the center of all the initiatives just named, and it is perhaps the single most important source of inspiration amongst most development ethicists today. In addition, the revamping of human rights by many UN agencies and donors has led to important research on the role that rights may have in redefining development and poverty and in leading towards more fair development policies based on the possibility of global justice.¹

In turn this has led both to important academic contributions addressing the relations between the capability approach and rights and to constructive criticisms including reports such as the work of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights.

Yet even though there are more researchers interested in development ethics than there were in the 1970s or 1990s, and even though powerful development agents are starting to acknowledge some of the roles that values may have in increasing the effectiveness of development processes, development ethics, as a field of knowledge, remains a marginal discipline and has little impact on both dominant knowledge for development and mainstream development policy. The influence of the capabilities approach is increasing, no doubt, but among global institutions it is too often adopted at a superficial level and at the expense of engaged critique on the value conflicts and challenges to neo-liberal policies that the actual implementation of such an

alternative development view may lead to. Human rights are also being adapted and often
distorted and instrumentalized to suit the conceptual frameworks of global institutions
responsible for development policy (for example through connecting rights to more widely
acknowledged ideas such as ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’). And given academic work is
still minimal, development ethics (and thin versions of capability and human rights) risk being
capsized by a handful of powerful global institutions, instrumentalized and narrowed down to
justify their own development policies, and often to justify appeals for charity towards the very
poor. Ethical analysis then looses its role as providing analytical tools and ethical clarification to
formulate alternative knowledge for development centered on the equal moral worth of all human
beings, and shifting development from a charity issue to a matter related to questions of global
justice. Development ethics may miss the opportunity to contribute to the increasingly obvious
ethical flaws of neo-liberal ideology and to join forces with an increasing body of theories and
praxis on global justice.

The paper argues that development ethics in the 21st century requires new research, new
reflections, a deepening of focus and a wider disciplinary scope in order to engage directly with
practices and the knowledge for development produced and espoused by global institutions. The
paper elaborates some themes for a revised notion of Des Gasper’s (2004) characterization of
third stage development ethics that centers on the interplay between facts, values, concepts and
practices. The first section situates the meaning of development as part of globalization processes
which increasingly leads to integrate development aid with relief or even humanitarianism while
eventual progress and societal improvement is left to neo-liberal policies and actors. It argues that
development ethics must engage with global institutions and with activists and civil society
organizations as these are them main drivers of conceptual and practical changes in development.
The second section takes as its point of departure the ways in which knowledge for
development among global institutions is entangled with normative and political issues and views global institutions as co-producing both knowledge and social orders. The third section revisits third stage development ethics and argues for the relevance of a pragmatist methodology that focuses attention on practices and policies and on a notion of development ethics as a hybrid between a public moral and political philosophy and a public conception of social science. This leads development ethicists to beware of moralization and artificial superimposing of ethical analysis to previously decided knowledge and policy. It leads development ethicists to consider the value content and entanglement of values with political and epistemological themes; to consider the interplay between values, science and politics, including the ways in which ideas are used and distorted by powerful development agencies; to draw from critical globalization studies assessments of the new shapes of and challenges for development aid and cooperation; to draw insights and analytical tools from new disciplinary sources such as an increasing body of literature under the rubric of political economy or new political economy, social studies of science and technology (S&TS) and sociology of knowledge in addition to philosophy and economics; and to bridge more explicitly with research and activism on global justice as a single knowledge area.

1. Development entanglement with Globalization: Development Ethics Beyond Humanitarian Aid and Relief

The characteristics and scope of development has changed substantially in the past 20 years. One of the important consequences of the increasing dominance of economic neo-liberal globalization and the globalization of unfettered capitalism is that development is increasingly becoming, conceptually and practically, more and more a matter of relief, and perhaps too close to the goals of humanitarian intervention; a tendency that reinforces the already common charity aspect of
development aid (Gasper 1999). While progress and social improvement is increasingly left to the forces of free markets lead by neo-liberal ideology and by a global elite. Global institutions, like the World Bank or even the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are viewed by critics as tools for such globalization processes. Rather than a possible channel for challenging current power structures, critics dismiss the role of development aid, except in providing immediate relief to those so-called ‘bypassed by globalization processes,’ or the victims of bad governance practices (primarily identified with the South). Development research remains rooted on methodological territorialism, the idea that the overarching category shaping socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of societies and peoples is the geopolitical boundaries of the nation state. This keeps local problems ‘local’ and blind to questions of socio-economic justice.

Development funds and their attached conditionalities and discourses are forms of disciplining developing countries into joining in the ranks of the globalized, critics argue, and as such they must be rejected as tools for alternative globalizations (Appelbaum and Robinson 2005, Robinson 2002, Sklair 2002). And as global institutions themselves interact increasingly with the private sector, they themselves may be in the process of becoming privatized (Bull, Boas and McNeill, 2004). There is a tendency to target development aid money as a tool for providing social safety nets, while the core matter of increasing economic growth is left to privatization of social services and private funds, through either foreign direct investment and transnational corporations, regional transnational elites, or public-private partnerships, matters regulated and permitted by states. While many defenders of alternative globalizations (both activists and academics) refuse, wrongly in my view, to engage with the dominant views of global institutions, it is also a mistake to ignore their critique. Although this paper focuses on global institutions, the task remains to build bridges on that direction.
Aid proposals from these global institutions have shifted attention since the 1990s towards poverty, local solutions and the strengthening of the poor’s entrepreneurship. As welcome as a focus on poverty and the provision of social services, through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the newest conceptual frameworks of most global institutions, this has also been an opportunity to narrow down conceptions of development too close to relief, as a form of collective charity. At same time as these strategies tend to put the burden of responsibility on individuals and local groups to cope with the negative effects of global socio-economic change. As I have argued in detail elsewhere, many of those new frameworks and certainly the MDGs are thin and ‘commodified’ versions of what in the 1970s were called ‘basic needs’, an idea or theoretical approach to development that became distorted and narrowed down to something altogether completely different altogether when used by global institutions, specially the World Bank under the leadership of Robert McNamara. The basic needs of poor people in the South were never fulfilled, nor was poverty reduced, and the framework eventually was abandoned by the pressures of the third wave of globalization (St. Clair 2004a).

It is important that development ethics reengages with the new and emerging meanings of development, that it addresses development as part and parcel of complex global processes and transnational practices of social transformation; which are entangled with various and often competing meanings of globalization. And that in particular it recaptures the language of global justice. The poor and vulnerable may serve no purpose after all. Economic globalization may in the end have no need for those bypassed neither in the South nor in the North. Those global losers may best be characterized as Zygmunt Bauman argues as ‘outcasts’, the poor and the very poor, the refugees, the illegal migrants, those ill with HIV aids. These human beings may be but the waste of economic progress, of modernity and globalization; their ‘wasted lives’ serve no global purpose (Bauman 2004); (except perhaps as targets for our charity and to appease our
consciousness). Development ethics cannot avoid engaging with such critical perspectives which lead to focus, primarily, on questions of socio-economic justice in the North as well as in the South.

Looking at the literature (and perhaps through personal knowledge) it seems that proponents of global justice within academia tend to disassociate themselves from development ethics, which remains too identified with a single approach, the capabilities approach. At the same time, it is not that clear that the emerging body of research around capabilities identifies itself as a ‘development ethic.’ And in the hands of many donors and global institutions—besides UNDP where capability lies at the core of its flag notion of human development—capabilities and ‘ethics and development’ in general lends itself to be reduced to provide moral grounds for relief and thus blind to questions of socio-economic justice, to the immense value conflicts and moral flaws posed by the contradictory values and goals of global justice and neo-liberal economic globalization.

Clearly, arguments for increasing aid to alleviate poverty, ill health, lack of education and other basic needs in the South are lacking. As the recently released Report of the Millennium Task Force clearly argues, it will cost only about 189 billion US Dollars to meet the millennium Development Goals (MDGs); yet rich countries are not keeping their promises to raise their aid budgets. Certainly, one of the substantial tasks of development ethics is to produce arguments for a renewed effort of the global community to bridge the gap between the North and the South, but this, I argue, is only a partial task of development ethics; an urgent, immediate, matter.

Although development ethics does have much to say about the need and how to build immediate moral awareness among the public for the suffering and pain of those living under conditions of severe deprivation in the South, the task must be explicitly broader, medium and long term looking. For example, in his recent address at the Inter-American Development Bank,
Amartya Sen argued that the recent Tsunami disaster has shown the easiness in which human beings are able to ‘understand the predicament of others (Sen, 2005).’ He argued that the same ability to connect with others shall lead us towards preventing pain and suffering of other kinds such as easily preventable ill health, lack of food or shelter. People’s moral capacities require that agents see their connectedness with one another, Sen reminds us, but there are many epistemic constraints for the exercise of our moral capacities that prevent us from grasping what is happening around us and how can it be different. Sen pointed, rightly, towards the lack of communication and understanding of Western media and politicians as root causes for an evasive moral awareness for people’s poverty and destitution, but there are other epistemic constraints, much more decisive in the ways development and poverty are conceptualized and realized by powerful agents, that development ethics must attend to. As much as I appreciate Sen’s speech for its capacity to draw attention to clear examples of contemporary interest, I see some risks in addressing public audiences in those terms, as many international bureaucrats and agencies’ staff may only read ‘ethics as justification of relief and charity’ in Sen’s words. Epistemic constraints for the understanding of deprivations are deeply entangled with the sources of legitimacy and authority of mainstream knowledge for development and tend to be a pervasive component of defenders of globalization. A recent example is the work of Jagdish Bhagwati (2004), In defense of Globalization, an analysis of current socio-economic relations that presumes the world is already on the right track to reduce poverty and suffering, and that development agents would do best to keep themselves busy with questions of relief. There is one single scientific view in regards economic development, Bhagwati argues, “that trade enhanced growth, and that growth reduces poverty (2004: 53).”
In the rest of the paper, I argue that the task of development ethics is also to address those epistemic constraints and to challenge the value assumptions and hidden values of the knowledge and policies for development of global institutions. These are simultaneously building a system of global governance. My aim is not to in the end dismiss the knowledge claims of global institutions, like the World Bank. On the contrary, a well-functioning global order requires well-functioning global institutions, perhaps the most important sites to challenge the current order of things. Otherwise, development and poverty would be left to the workings of amoral and ahistorical, blind, transnational practices and a global elite who can care less about the distant poor or those next door. Such critical engagements may address, among other themes, how cognitive, political and value issues in knowledge for development are leading not towards moral connectedness but towards the deepening of moral distance and the denial of moral responsibility between the poor and the non-poor, not only between the North and the South, but within all countries. Even if the field of development ethics succeeds in transforming aid philosophically or conceptually into a matter of justice by overcoming the pervasive methodological territorialism of moral and political philosophy and social theory, such an undertaking is not sufficient. Appalling poverty and suffering amidst plenty is a moral outrage for most cultures, value systems and political parties. The task of development ethics, I argue, is not only to remind the rich of their duties to help those in need or a matter of involving the press to cover “‘silent tsunamis’” so they understand better people’s pleas. Development ethics needs to tackle head on the ways in which the presumed accuracy and legitimacy of mainstream economics knowledge judgments co-opts or overshadows the space for ‘real’ ethical reflection and prevents alternative values and envisioned social orders to be part of the systems of knowledge, political mechanisms, and institutional dynamics responsible for dominant development policy. That is, an important task is to engage with knowledge and practices produced and espoused by global institutions, with their
definitions of evidence and development effectiveness so they can provide more salient, credible and legitimate knowledge. Not only are people surrounded with messages and practices that presume the current global distribution of wealth and power are optimal and the only channel for the eventual elimination of poverty and destitution, but such assumptions pervade what it is considered legitimate and authoritative knowledge for development and globalization. The problem is then, not only a lack of ethical arguments for helping the poor, but an abundance of arguments for keeping power structures the way they are, for continuing business as usual, issues entangled with scientific knowledge that manipulate and politicize the moral worth of human beings.

The world has changed dramatically in the past years and development ethics needs to respond to such changes. It is not only engagement with the negative consequences of global socio-economic change what is lacking, engagement with the Faustian value conflicts posed by global capitalism, its failures to deliver widely acknowledge values such as freedom and democracy, and the ways in which new forms of transnational practices have changed the landscape of development, are also issues to be addressed by development ethicists. It is amidst these new transnational practices where the moral worth of certain issues and people gets decided, where moral connectedness and disconnectedness is generated and sustained. The so called ‘end of history,’ the triumph of liberalism and western values as the victorious ideology lacks a serious engagement with the different meanings of freedom and democracy or with possible negative consequences of promoting free markets and democracy. As Amy Chua claims, the twin results of increasing wealth for elites which often belong to minority ethic groups and empowering masses through democratic ideas, may lead to ethnic hatred and violence (Chua 2003). A basic example is how the primordial value of the market defended by such ideology fails to inquire “into the extent to which market relations are themselves power relations which
can constrain and limit the democratic process (Held 1996).” If there is something we have also learned from the Tsunami disaster, is that it is far easier to acknowledge the moral weight of a problem if it does not challenge established patterns of power, if it allows agents (whether individuals, collectives or institutions) to be charitable, to do their share, and continue business as usual.

It is at this macro-level where development ethics needs to look when assessing ethical aspects of development ideas and approaches. And it is because of the risks of becoming justification for charity that development ethics needs to unite forces among perhaps philosophically competing views or approaches and to reconnect theory with practices, including the praxis of social justice activism. Capability has been very successful among certain donors and global institutions in changing the ways in which knowledge is constructed, the counterfactuals taken, and the envisioned futures in such alternatives. As Fukuda-Parr has argued, the philosophical underpinnings of human development and capability do make a difference (2002). But there is a risk that development ethics becomes too identified with capability, which perhaps still lacks self-reflection. Attention to human rights is equally important as it tends to tackle head on matters of justice, both in their legal and in their moral sense. The view that severe poverty is a violation of human rights, for example, has an immense power for the very poor and leads to new analyses of current power structures as they operate in practice and as they affect people’s lives (Follesdal & Pogge 2005, Gargarella 2005,, 2004; Pogge, 2002, 2005, OHCHR 2004, UNESCO 2003). The question is not how philosophically tenable it may be to argue for viewing poverty as a violation of human rights, but what it may do in practice to peoples’ lives, to their capacity to resist oppression and marginalization and how it may challenge current global
distributions of power and resources. In the next section I propose a reformulation of Des Gasper’s notion of third stage development ethics that can tackle the particularities of knowledge produced and defended by global institutions and the contributions.

2. Third Stage Development Ethics: Addressing the co-production of knowledge and Politics

Des Gasper elaborates a series of three stages in development ethics. The first stage refers to the realization or experiencing resulting from moral awareness, an opening and realization that some issues in development may indeed carry ethical consequences, ethical meanings. Second stage development ethics is the phase where researchers or practitioners (who presumably have already experienced stage one) formulate concepts and ideas to capture, reflect upon, and theorize about ethical issues in development. The second stage can start with descriptions and clarification of values and value choices. Flowing from this conceptual and theory building phase comes the stage where there is further systematization and assessment of value choices and problems. Third stage development ethics also reveals the need to address opposing ethical views, the need to compromise and negotiate, and apply insights from stage two. This is the stage of application, compromise and negotiation; the moment of attempting to reach sufficient support as to influence policy making. Third stage development ethics is the ‘ethics of policy planning and professional

---

2 The work of Thomas Pogge and his edited work and collaborative endeavors are, in this regard, important contributions to development ethics, although such contributions are often not that clear as this work tends to be categorized as on global justice and often disassociated from development ethics. The disassociation is perhaps due to a misguided identification of development ethics with the capability approach to the detriment of complementary views.
practice, devising and negotiating and trying to execute value-sensitive action (Gasper, 2004: xii).

Gasper acknowledges, clearly, that all three stages are interconnected, that there are feedbacks and feed-forwards from experiencing to conceptualization, negotiation and policy. But I wish to push forward Gasper’s analysis and argue for the need of a third stage development ethics that explicitly addresses the intrinsic linkages with both experience and perceptions (stage one) as well as with the elaboration of concepts and theoretical approaches (stage two). This is a more accurate way to address the knowledge and policies produced by global institutions, where value clarification is established in stage one due to, primarily, the overarching importance given to the cognitive values of economics above any other value, including ethical values. The blindness towards ethical concerns that characterizes mainstream economics and the economization of all social life proper of neo-liberal ideas influences not only the choice of concepts, but the ways concepts are elaborated and the specific meanings attached to what are often complex ideas. Explicit value clarification and value choices, if they occur, often mean the seeking of justifications for already decided knowledge systems where knowledge and action overlaps. These knowledge systems may not necessarily be morally acceptable nor even have any ethical grounding at all. And by the time one reaches the third stage of policy planning and professional practice, alternatives and values have already been sorted out and it is very problematic to have a well-balanced negotiation. Value-sensitive action may end up being an artificial superimposition of explicitly stated values that may hide the actual value choices made in the early stages. Or, alternatively, ‘value-sensitive action’ may become outright moralizing, patronizing.

I have explored elsewhere some of the processes in which knowledge systems are built within global institutions, especially, institutions that have taken as their main tasks to produce not only policy but also to perform basic research on poverty and development. For example, the World
Bank (the Bank) is one of the dominant sources of knowledge for development and poverty reduction. Its research capacities, the influence that the Bank’s lending role has in developing countries, and the support it draws from the United States and global financial actors, endow approaches and ideas endorsed by the Bank with a unique power and influence. The Bank may be said to be a major global governance actor as much as a major global knowledge actor: a transnational expertised state-like institution setting the scene for both global politics and global knowledge (St. Clair forthcoming a).

As I shall argue in the last section, it is very common that the justification of, for example, refusing to accept the view that health or education may be best conceptualized as human rights instead of as commodities, is simply because Bank experts address their knowledge claims to a narrow audience of ideologically bounded elite of mainstream economists who are the same audience that then legitimizes such knowledge claims. The problem is related to a circularity between audiences and those who legitimize the Bank experts claims, but also that accepting health as a human right would challenge their authority because such a definition points towards sources of evidence well beyond mainstream economic science and to a broader audience than simply mainstream economists. The presumption that mainstream economic knowledge is a-historical, value free and objective science, together with the presumption that the relations between knowledge and action are linear, are the most substantial reasons for denying ethical analysis any role in the formation of knowledge for development. In addition, these presumptions are what permits authors like for example Bhagwati’s, to manipulate the views offered by the Bank as justification of current neo-liberal globalization, while rejecting or ignoring anything Bank experts may say that would contradict his goals (2004). But the knowledge-based economic policy dominant in many multilaterals is best seen as straddling an uneven territory between
science in the making and politics in the making and not as objective science, or truth speaking to
power.

According to literature on social science studies, one of the most fundamental ways in which
knowledge about social facts is formulated is by making a constant negotiation between what is
knowledge and what is not knowledge. What demarcates science from non-science is not a
particular set of cognitive specific characteristics but rather a combination of contingencies and
strategic behavior. Social studies of science refers to this as ‘boundary work’ (Jasanoff, 1990,
2004; Gieryn, 1995, 1999). Boundary work views science as partly constructed; a social and
value-laden highly complex enterprise that involves many actors besides scientists. But the
boundary perspective is constructive, as it aims to explain what and how different social worlds
are linked, and the negotiations that are part of what appears objective and value free codified
knowledge. This notion is helpful as it clarifies the understanding of the complicated aspects of
knowledge-based policy making processes, as Jasanoff has shown in her analysis of the roles of
some US advisory committees and the interactions these have between politicians and scientists.
Given the boundaries between science and non-science are provisional and ambiguous, Jasanoff
argues, the more we blur them the more transparent science policy becomes. Policy is an issue
made among different social worlds and demands the possibility of responding to different
interests and diverse goals and ends (St. Clair, forthcoming b).

Such a theoretical outlook is important for understanding the formulations of knowledge for
development, especially economic knowledge. It helps also understanding the tensions and
distortions that ideas and concepts are subjected to as they become part of the knowledge systems
of global institutions. Two of the main characteristics of ideas in the multilaterals are their
bridging capacity between policy and research as well as their need to become operationalized.
Ideas arise and are developed in the interplay between the two domains of academia and policy
making, often deriving their credibility from the former (Bøas and McNeill, 2003). Yet once within the multilateral system, ideas are subject to a process of consensus building among many partners and interests within the UN System; to adaptations and competition with other more established ideas and goals of these institutions; and they are increasingly tested and reframed to include concerns and interests from non-state actors (NGOs, civil society groups, and the private sector). In addition, as development and poverty have become widely accepted as multidimensional problems, ideas have had to adapt to interdisciplinary assessments, and thus be able to share meanings with common disciplinary understandings and terms of the dominant discipline of economics, and in particular, neo-liberal economics.

In many multilateral agencies, these processes involve a depolitization of ideas and a tendency of economics to become the main cognitive channel to construct definitions, methodologies and policy proposals in addressing development and poverty reduction (Bøas and McNeill, 2003). In addition, given institutions like the UNDP offer knowledge-based policy making, ideas must be policy-oriented and are often subsumed to pre-established policy goals. Like scientific theories and disciplines, policies have not only moral or ethical but also non-moral normative constraints. Policies must fulfill certain normative criteria in order to be considered successful, such as testability, quantification, efficiency or simplicity, norms that are best seen as ‘cognitive values’. The fact that the dominant cognitive values of policy making fit particularly well with the cognitive values of neo-liberal economics are a particularly important source of power for such ideas. For example, whether a concept is suitable to quantification and thereby easily measurable has been an important reason for the differing pace of institutionalization of such idea within the UN System (St. Clair 2004a, 2003).

Knowledge produced or supported by the Bank cannot be said to be objective science elaborated independently from politics and disembodied from wider social worlds. Not only is
the Bank’s knowledge limited by its diverse principals who often pose conflictive demands on
the Bank’s researchers, but also the legitimacy of such knowledge is drawn through - circular
processes between the knowledge the Bank produces and the audiences that legitimize that
knowledge. Bank researchers tend to address their claims to a particular set of audiences. On the
one hand their principals, and on the other, their most powerful peers, mainstream economists. It
is within this messy interface between knowledge and action, knowledge and politics,
institutional cultures, and the wider social worlds where we must see the role of ethical values,
starting in stage one as defined by Gasper (2004).

Rather than simple social facts waiting to be discovered poverty and development are complex
and ill-structured issues which cannot be fully captured by the cognitive tools of a single
discipline. Rather than formed by objective truths or scientific consensus, knowledge for
development tends to be formed by what I have called ‘fact-surrogates’, partial accounts of a
complex social problem; or as Turner puts it, well-structured parts of an ill-structured and
complex whole (Turner, 2003). The particular shape of these fact-surrogates is decided by the
hierarchies of cognitive and moral values entailed by the audiences that legitimize the knowledge
claims of these global institutions. And these are often the result of a consensus among certain
scientists rather than a scientific consensus (St. Clair forthcoming a). Awareness of the partially
constructed character of knowledge is very important, as it is during this messy construction
process where values get chosen and decided, some at the expense of others. It is at the very early
stages when for example, as Sfeir-Younis claims, concerns for human rights become residual to
the values of consumerism and individualism proper of mainstream economics.

Ideas that challenge mainstream ideology are distorted as a result of the pressures to
depoliticize and economize them. And ideas that have ethical content are not excluded from such
distorting processes. Value conflicts and trade-offs are commonplace in the battlefield of
development agencies, and ethical values that challenge hegemonic ideas and pre-established policy goals tend to be distorted or supplanted by cognitive values. In particular, cognitive values such as measurability, simplicity and efficiency tend to prevail over concerns for global justice or any other ethical principle that challenges the dominance of a market ethic. And as politicians also want simple, measurable and quantifiable data, the cognitive values of neo-liberal economics tend to coincide with the cognitive values of policy making and draw still more power from such overlapping of goals. The widely shared assumption that dominant ideas are value-free entails that ‘hidden norms’ move freely and shape knowledge and policy for development and poverty in particular ways. The role of these hidden values is of enormous importance, as they not only assume certain hierarchies of ethical values (for example consumerism and accumulation above equity and solidarity) but they also define the scope of what are considered relevant facts (St. Clair 2005).

In order to capture the particular need for ideas in the UN System to respond to, adapt to, negotiate between and act as interfaces and trading zones between a whole variety of users with their own values, interests, social, economic and political goals, I have suggested that these ideas are conceptualized, following insights from social studies of science (Star & Griesemer, 1989), as intellectual boundary objects: ideas in action within global institutions co-producing knowledge and social orders. Ideas that travel the boundary successfully are adopted easily, often in a short time (a case at hand of a boundary object is the idea of social capital). Ideas that challenge the dominant players, especially their cognitive and ethical values, become distorted or rejected (as was the case of basic needs as it became adopted by the World Bank in the 1970s (St.Clair 2004a). Thus what makes ideas successful and quickly adopted are not necessarily their analytical qualities, but their capacity to either adapt to the boundary (even if distorted) or to travel the boundary while maintaining their basic shape (St.Clair 2005).
Thus I emphasize the need for academic formulations of third stage development ethics interlinked with the other two stages to convey that development and global poverty are highly complex social facts, and constructing knowledge about them entails sorting out values—accepting some and rejecting others—from the very early stages of moral awareness and formulating ideas and concepts. As knowledge for development is in the hands, primarily, of transnational knowledge elites and institutions there is a risk that ethical reflection is captured to justify the values of these elites and their cognitive biases. The ethical aspects of development, like any other knowledge provided by these elites is undeniably restricted and distorted by these institutions’ commitments and compromises with particular political ideologies and with particular disciplinary audiences, which are the ones that legitimate the expertise of such bodies in a circular process between expert judgments, audiences, and the legitimacy of such expertise.

Development ethicists may need to be strategic and aware that the value content of the ideas they use—as ideas become intellectual boundary objects—may be simply emptied out or transformed. If development ethics aims to address value conflicts entailed by development and not only be a mere extension of abstract ethical theory to development policy and planning, it cannot avoid addressing the co-production of both knowledge and politics, the delegatory nature of all knowledge, especially knowledge of highly complex and ill-structured problems like global poverty and development, that occurs among global institutions. As such, it is difficult to disentangle the practice aspect of development ethics—the level of negotiation and compromise pointed out by Gasper—with the ways stages one and two are perceived, experienced and formulated. Development policy and practice, like policies about the carcinogenic effects of food additives or climate change policy, is knowledge-based policy making where it is difficult to disentangle and separate the inputs from science from the inputs from politics. Knowledge and action are intrinsically interconnected. And moral values compete with cognitive values, often to
the detriment of the first. As Jasanoff argues (1990), the more transparent these relations are made, the better knowledge and the better policy one may achieve.

From this perspective, the role of a self-conscious third stage development ethics is not only as an interdisciplinary reflection on a public issue, development, but must evolve into a hybrid between philosophical analysis and social science addressing the role that not only moral, but also non-moral values have in the formation of knowledge for development and global poverty. Such a truly interdisciplinary endeavor requires not only to address the value conflicts between cognitive and moral values, but also to unveil the fairness or unfairness of certain ethical views, for example the dominant global ethic of the market presupposed by mainstream development economics (McNeill 1999); and the ways in which the economization of all social life displaces or prevents actual ethical reflection (Bauman 2000, 2003; Gasper, 2004). Furthermore, this perspective leads to acknowledge the limitations of each discipline’s cognitive values, to analyze the role these play as sources for evidence, whereas such evidence is about a particular notion of the good, a moral category, or the cognitive value of quantification proper of economic science.

Several economists challenging mainstream economics have elaborated cases that show the ways in which cognitive values play a fundamental role in defining questions of development and poverty. Ravi Kanbur explains disagreements among groups as to how best to conceptualize and address poverty as cognitive and moral disagreements (Kanbur, 2002). An important analysis is provided by political economist Robert Wade (2004), “who argues that the reasons why economists have not taken seriously what now starts being undeniably clear, that wealth polarizes towards those who are already wealthy leading to deepening levels of poverty and to increases in inequalities—what may be called the law of decreasing returns—is because of economists’ need to submit to established cognitive values of quantification.’ As Summer (2004) argues,
econometrics has become the most important source for ‘evidence’ in knowledge about global 
poverty (St. Clair, forthcoming b).”

Thus, I argue that a fruitful point of departure is to address common artificial distinctions 
between knowledge and action, and to be wary of epistemic extensionism: the presumption that 
behind all practices lays a well-formed theory, or vice-versa, the presumption that a good theory 
leads to a good practice, whether the theory here refers to economic or moral theory. Such 
aspects are crucial because, as stated earlier, rather than objective knowledge, capturing poverty 
and development is always tentative. The acknowledgment of the partially constructed character 
of the subject matter of development ethics points towards an expanded research agenda and 
democratization, rather than to relativism. As Bruno Latour argues, acknowledging the partially 
constructed character of knowledge is the best protection against all sorts of fundamentalisms, 
including market and postmodern relativist fundamentalisms (Latour, 2003). In the same way that 
development ethics is not about applying the right ethical theory to practices, nor is knowledge 
for development a true account of the facts. The factual, the political, and the normative are 
entangled, and as such require to be addressed in parallel. Ethical reflection does not come after 
empirical studies on development, nor does it come after policy making has already been 
decided. Development ethics, thus, has to aim to influence the early stages of knowledge 
formation processes, to address the nexus science-policy, the interface between knowledge and 
action, rather than attempting to influence already decided knowledge, already decided policies. 
If the latter, development ethics may end up becoming moralization, and worst still, patronizing 
or even moral imperialism.3

3 Such concerns are being raised from several sectors in Latin America in regards to the IDB Initiative on social 
capital, ethics and development. (AS) As the Initiative works today, it is very unclear the degree to which it is, in 
fact, a moralizing scheme rather than a challenge to the systems of power that permit severe poverty and 
marginalization amidst riches. The Initiative describes it role as follows: “The Initiative aims to be a catalyst in
Last, I adopt the notion of third stage development ethics to call attention to the need for a new phase in the field, where the boundaries between academic work, practices and activism are addressed more explicitly, more so as global institutions co-produce both knowledge and social orders. As Gasper clearly states, development ethics needs to have a global scope (covering advanced as well as developing and less developed societies). But I also propose a globalized development ethics in the sense of taking as its macro-level of analysis current globalization processes and theories as well as joining in current debates about the globalization of social justice. Even if now perhaps lagging behind, development ethicists have been pioneers in addressing global justice and global ethics, including formulations of global citizenship (Dower 1998, 2002, Dower & Williams, 2003, Goulet 1976, 2004). Not only does development ethics have much to contribute to current debates about alternative globalizations, it also cannot avoid engagement with the manifold aspects of globalization as these are processes that are very rapidly changing the scope, character and even the substance of development itself. And it certainly must join forces with social justice activism. This is needed not only in its own right but because often activists refuse to engage with global institutions. Development ethicists may act as bridges among various groups and interests (see for example the proposals of David Held (2004) or

awakening an interest to propel the themes of ethics, development, and social capital in government, political parties, business entities, trade unions, universities, religious communities, non-governmental organizations and all the organizations that work for the collective (wellbeing) well-being of the continent’s societies. A mobilization on a wide front of joint action in these crucial areas, allows the Initiative to improve the quality of the debate on development, enrich the framework for the adoption of such policies, increase the possibility for actionable agreements, and contribute to the rise of codes and conduct based on desirable ethical criteria by those who are principally responsible for development. In short, the Initiative is collectively contributing to the strengthening and deepening of democracy, economic and social growth, and the forging of a participatory, just, and booming Latin America to which all the communities of the region aspire (IDB website).” Yet, there is no real engagement with the ways in which mainstream development policy may be itself part of a system of domination and power that permits pervasive poverty and deprivations in the first place. And, so far, the Initiative’s leadership has little engagement with serious work in development ethics, besides drawing on the public figure of Amartya Sen. Nor is it reaching out to many Latin American scholars and philosophers, for example, Julio Bolvinik, Atilio Boron, or Enrique Dussel to name just some of Latin America’s well-known scholars addressing questions of development and social justice. Nor does it (engages) engage with important insights from liberation theology, one of the original sources of inspirations of Denis Goulet.
Leslie Sklair (2002) for the globalization of social democracy and the globalization of human rights, respectively). I view development ethics not only as an ethical reflection of development processes, but as an alternative vision of development, and today this entails an alternative vision of globalization. Ethics and development and ethics and globalization need to be addressed in parallel. Whether one agrees or not with its basic tenets, Peter Singer’s *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, does just that. But perhaps we need to think about ethics along different lines than the traditional form it has taken in Anglo-American moral philosophy. Here I address only a methodological aspect.

The characterization I propose for a modified version of Gasper’s third stage development ethics flows not only from an application of insights from the fields of social studies of science and technology, but also from espousing a philosophically pragmatist methodology that points towards viewing values entangled with empirical accounts of reality, that points towards the feedbacks and feed-forwards between experiences, perceptions, theories and practices, between knowledge and action. I take such a methodological outlook from the field of environmental ethics, which I argue, offers us not only important connections between the tasks ahead for addressing jointly environmental sustainability and global justice, but also important methodological lessons for the formulation of a truly interdisciplinary practical ethics. I propose to enrich our understanding of a third stage development ethics with an explicit ‘pragmatist methodology.’
3. *A Pragmatist Methodology for Development Ethics*  

Many of us within the field of philosophy have become aware of the need to avoid the mistakes of other applied ethics fields, where ethical reflection has run parallel and often totally dissociated from the world of action, from the world of policy. That development ethics has always been an interdisciplinary field of knowledge has helped to avoid some of the failures that, for example, led environmental ethics to become what Andrew Light calls a haven of extensionism (Light, 1996). This means that ethical and meta-ethical frameworks from the history of ethics have been extended by environmental ethicists to environmental problems. While there is certainly nothing wrong *per se* with extensionism in any applied field—it has after all produced some very interesting work in a variety of subfields—a strong argument can be made that there is something wrong with extensionism if it hinders progress in an applied field, especially where that progress can be measured by the influence of the field in question on the critical problems of the day central to the interests of the field. Environmental issues, like development, must be understood as a cluster of problems in the world - effecting actual humans which demands an ethical response.

The field of environmental ethics is focused, especially in the United States, on whether nature has value independent from human consideration of that value (often considered as a form of intrinsic value) and then a determination of the duties, obligations, or rights that follow from that description of the value of nature. Light argues that the resulting philosophical disagreements

---

4 This section draws from a paper written with Andrew Light called “A Pragmatist Methodology for Development Ethics,” presented at the American Philosophical Association meeting in New York, December 1999. I have updated, transformed and used some parts and insights developed with Light in a way he may not recognize, as I have elaborated the application of the boundary perspective to development studies after that paper was written. But the value of the work we did is still there (as well as some of the wording). Of course, any mistakes remain my own.
between nonanthropocentrists (those supporting such a broadly described view) and weak anthropocentrists (those challenging that view on the basis of claims that nonanthropocentric foundations for natural value are incoherent) fail to take into account the moral intuitions of most people with regard to the value of nature. For example, the nonanthropocentric emphasis on determining a value to nature outside human considerations of that value impedes our ability to discuss ways in which anthropogenic impacts on nature can be understood and meliorated through human intuitions about the value of nature. By focusing on whether nature has or does not have intrinsic value, environmental ethics has produced two unfortunate results: first, it excludes from its discussions the many beneficial ways in which environmental protection can be based on human interests, such as founding policies for environmental protection in the common intuitions of obligations to future generations; and second, the focus on abstract concepts of value theory distracts the field from seeking agreement on all those arguments that could morally motivate people to support environmental policies no matter where those arguments are grounded. Weak anthropocentrists end up spending more of their time debating the value theories of nonanthropocentrists than trying to forge a consensus on the different reasons which can motivate people to protect nature (Light 2002). In short, environmental ethics is not reaching the public nor helping policy makers in their task to articulate policies that make sense for a variety of people and institutions. Environmental ethics today is arguably of interest mainly to other philosophers concerned with abstract debates in value theory.

The pragmatist alternative argues that environmental ethics should break free from these debates and make room for a more public task, at least as part of its mandate. Light’s version of this form of pragmatism (which he calls ‘methodological environmental pragmatism’) is not based on the claim that nonanthropocentric notions of the intrinsic value of nature are necessarily wrong (as the weak anthropocentrist would argue) but instead that there is a task for
environmental philosophy beyond simply the search for a foundational theory of the nature of natural value.\textsuperscript{5} This is the task of translating the agreed upon objectives of the environmental community, which are reached for a myriad of different reasons and schemes of value, to the wider public. Environmental pragmatists of this school of thought agree that nature is valuable for many reasons and so when we have an agreed upon end we wish to translate to the public we do it for as many philosophically valid reasons as is possible to articulate. The advantage of this view is that it does not necessarily require an engagement with and rejection of nonanthropocentrism. Nonanthropocentrists can certainly embrace such a methodologically pragmatic task without giving up their search for the non-instrumental value to nature. They simply need to agree to sometimes set aside their more purely philosophical concerns for this public task in the service of the broader ends of the environmental community.

In the rest of the paper I shall argue that there are important analogies between Light’s analysis and debates within development ethics among diverse moral categories but also between competing cognitive values. What is important is to address the concerns of the development community, including all stakeholders and to help build awareness and consensus as to what are the best ways to address the value conflicts posed by development. I wish to push forward a pragmatist methodology for development ethics that addresses not only the risks of extensionism proper of philosophical analysis, but also more clearly and explicitly the risks of extending economic theories to a complex and messy world of practices presuming that knowledge and actions are separate.

\textsuperscript{5} Light distinguishes ‘methodological environmental pragmatism’ from ‘historical environmental pragmatism,” the latter usually indicating a process of extending the work of the traditional pragmatist figures such as Dewey, James, Pierce, etc., to environmental problems (see Light 2004).
Development ethics is usually defined as concerned with the ‘normative or ethical assessment of the ends and means of Third World and global development (Crocker 1991).’ Development ethicists are interested in the goals of development as relative to particular conceptions of the good life. But they are also concerned with whether the term development ought to be prescriptive, descriptive or both. Development ethicists ask, among other questions, what ethical values are embedded in development economics, policies, and aid; which policies are morally better and why some policies are morally objectionable; what moral responsibilities do countries and people have towards the poor; and who decides what is or ought to be development? According to Gasper,

development ethics looks at meanings given to societal development in the broad sense of progress or desirable change, at the types, distribution and significance of the costs and gains from major socio-economic change, and at value conscious ways of thinking about and choosing alternative paths and destinations (Gasper, 2004: xi).

Philosophers, however, must also respond to the concerns of non-philosophers working in the field of development ethics—economists, sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists and to be able to enter in dialogue. If development ethics is anything it must be attuned to its ability to interact with development professionals since problems of development are inherently interdisciplinary and with practitioners who are closer to both people’s lives and the institutional frameworks and social structures where they take part. This is related to the meanings giving to development by ethicists. As Gasper as argued there may be a danger in using only general normative definitions of development, i.e., as simply meaning desirable change, because it will encourage development ethics to become too broad a form of ‘social ethics,’ and therefore push it too far afield from the concerns of other professionals and academics working on development.
Gasper may be worrying here that the specific policy recommendations which could be contributed by development ethicists to the problems of development would be set aside in a quest for an overarching normative theory of human wellbeing. The pioneer of this field of knowledge, Denis Goulet, still favors focusing on the costs of development, and sees the role of ethical inquiry as one rendering ‘development actions more humane to assure that the painful changes launched under the banners of development do not produce anti-development, which destroys cultures and exacts undue sacrifices in individual suffering and societal well-being, all in the name of profit and absolutized ideology, or some alleged efficiency imperative (Goulet 1995: 27).” This points to look at praxis as much as to theories. As David Crocker is now elaborating more fully, thinkers like John Dewey can make important contributions to our understanding of the hybridity of a field of knowledge such as development ethics as well as to offer ways in which opposing and diverse values and interests may best be sorted out through democratic channels (Crocker forthcoming, 2004).

A focus on third stage development ethics as outlined above is a reflection of such concerns. But a pragmatist methodology may help to keep the work of development ethicists focused on the relations between ethics, knowledge and politics. Normative concerns need to be addressed by looking at the interface between theory and practice, knowledge and action. If development ethics is, in the end, about value conscious ways of thinking about and choosing alternative paths and destinations, as Gasper rightly argues, then it is the role of the development ethicist to address the processes that decide which paths are taken and which ones are not, and why, from the very early stages of knowledge formation. The same argument applies to environmental problems, from where I have actually drawn analogies and insights in my analysis of knowledge formation in development issues.
But development ethics still displays a tendency to center debates about the differences between universalist and particularist views of the essential qualities of a good human life, or on the degree to which it is important to situate views on rights or capabilities within philosophical traditions or whether needs, rights or capabilities are the best fundamental concept for development ethics. This tendency may lead to an unfruitful philosophical gridlock with little practical consequences. For example, debates as to whether Thomas Pogge’s (2004, 2005) proposal for viewing severe global poverty as a violation of human rights understood primarily as a violation of liberty rights is philosophically tenable is distracting the attention of many important thinkers into discussing the nature of rights and the extent to which poverty is best qualified as part of the concerns for second generation rights rather than liberty rights. What is missed is the absolute need to influence policy makers in addressing global poverty as a question of justice rather than charity and to pay attention to the value conflicts such views may pose with mainstream knowledge for development and the increasing dominance of neo-liberal globalization. Pogge’s argument is explicitly strategic; strategic because his liberty rights argument falls best among those who do not view poverty at all as an entitlement issue yet understand the basic language of liberty. As such, it is more prepared to play along the boundary described in the former section. And Pogge has never rejected the role that beneficence may play in addition to such liberty rights focus. At the same time, Pogge’s analysis of global poverty draws attention to the unfairness of the institutions that regulate the global economy and situates debates on global poverty and the global institutions responsible for knowledge for development within the macro-framework of globalization. The work of Pogge is also important because he is increasingly centering his work on the unreliability of empirical knowledge about poverty, on the relations between moral and political philosophy and mainstream methodological tendencies in both poverty research and development research. And although he does not explicitly
acknowledge it, his analysis shows the intrinsic relations between the empirical, the political and the normative. For example, Pogge rightly points our attention towards the consequences of the methodological territorialism dominant in poverty research not only on people’s moral awareness of poverty but also in leading towards underestimating the actual number of poor people. The assumption that poverty and development are issues bounded by the geographical and political boundaries of the state is one of the leading causes for the blindness people and politicians have towards some of the most fundamental forces producing and perpetuating poverty. In turn, methodological territorialism blinds the citizens of advanced economies from viewing their own entanglement with those forces by leading them to believe that poverty occurs somewhere else and it is those other countries’ problems, not their own.

From a methodological pragmatism perspective, third stage development ethics needs a secure understanding of what is or ought to be its subject matter—development conceived from a worldwide perspective. And as such it is impossible today to understand development without looking into globalization processes, new transnational practices, and the emerging consensus on human rights as the leading normative framework for global relations. It leads, for example, to generate what William Robinson calls a ‘social cartography of development’, looking into social groups and uneven development across social classes rather than looking at countries or regions (Robinson 2002, 2004). It leads towards addressing, to put it broadly, the conflicts raised by the contradictory values of neo-liberal economic globalization and the globalization of human rights and/or capabilities. And certainly, it leads towards addressing the conflicts among various rights and capabilities, and various groups. In turn, this leads towards focusing on the conflictive role that global institutions play in both areas. For example, the UNDP is, according to many critics of globalization, both an institution defending economic globalization and normative understandings of development as social processes that will improve ‘all’ people’s quality of life.
A methodologically pragmatist third stage development ethics must seek to offer answers to ethical dilemmas that respond to and are coherent to all interested parties, while at the same time respecting the particular political and social histories of the parties involved, but this refers not only to values or ethical beliefs, but also to interests and disciplinary cognitive norms. It must aim at responding to the demands of building a worldwide moral framework on development that is able to respect the plurality of ways of life of different cultures and peoples over the planet, a good attempt is the work of Nigel Dower on a cosmopolitan ethic (1998). Yet such attempts need to be conceptualized as part of already ongoing transnational practices. Many globalization studies scholars as well as new social movements are engaged in formulating similar frameworks often arguing for either the globalization of human rights, or the globalization of social democracy (Appelbaum & Held, 2004; Robinson, 2005, Held 2004, ; Sklair, 2002); yet they fail to draw from an already important body of work in development ethics while these alternative views of globalization presuppose a substantial re-definition of the meaning of human development along the lines of some of the work done by development ethics. More engagement on the side of development ethicists may lead to fruitful cooperation for both groups.

In short, the difficult task for a methodologically pragmatist third stage development ethics seems to be identifying and attempting to address substantial and complex value conflicts between development knowledge and policy, their relations to globalization and alter-globalization scholarship and activism, and an awareness of the roles of global institutions without loosing its focus. As Crocker and Gasper had often warned, development ethics cannot overextend its reach without risking too far afield. Yet these authors referred to overreach in regards an all encompassing social ethics. Yet, today development ethicists cannot avoid engaging in the ways in which concerns for global justice are coming up from other areas of
philosophy and the social sciences, and coming up from new social movements’ praxis and critical globalization studies.

A pragmatist methodology has relevance also for assessing mainstream economic development doctrines as well and may add methodological rigor to the analysis I drew earlier from social studies of science. (Although I do not have space to address this in this paper, I wish to point out that environmental pragmatism may gain much from engaging itself with the ways in which climatologists and environmental scientists in general interpret evidence, the social aspects of such knowledge and the role played by global institutions). Clearly, mainstream economic thinking, the main builder of knowledge for development, falls into the same types of dogmatism as the meta-ethical debates illustrated by Light (1996, 2003), especially as it works within global institutions. Development economics concentrates often on the application of insights from economic theory to the real world, and presumes a linear relation between the arena of politics and the arena of science. Ignoring the problems that such dichotomization between knowledge and action plays is perhaps one of the most fundamental reasons for the persistence of obsolete development doctrines that time has proven inadequate. An illustration of the disassociation between knowledge and action, between abstract theorizing and the real world of actions, is the pervasive view that economic growth reduces poverty almost on a 1 to 1 basis. Such ‘belief’ is more the result of extending economic theory to the real world, while ignoring a messy world of practices and social institutions. As Jan Vandemoortele reminds us, the combination of an income based definition of poverty together with the uncritical faith in the overarching value of logarithmic regressions leads to the ‘dangerous’ prediction that poverty lowers at the same pace as economic growth rises. Such thinking commits the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, Vandemoortele rightly argues, as averages are abstractions and not real observations. That is,
‘the fact that the income of the poor rises one-for-one with overall per capita income may be statistically correct, but it is not necessarily true (2002: 9).’

A pragmatist methodology for development ethics focuses our attention on the ways in which economic science’s abstract theorizing plays in practice. It is impossible to claim the same ‘certainty of outcomes’ in the messy world of practices that in academic theoretical publications. For example, in practice there are often massive difficulties in establishing the economic situation of a country. IMF or Bank missions are messy and complex fact finding exercises, often leading to uncertain and even often risky guesses experts are forced to make due to the lack of data or contradictory statistical reports of different ministries in client countries. The outcome of such missions is not objective science, but rather the result of negotiations experts make with people whose knowledge judgments they deem are most reliable and accurate and with whom they are able to establish social relations. Numbers end up often being interpreted rather than collected; such interpretations conform more to particular circumstances experts find themselves immersed in or simply those they are able to get because of their social skills that to accurate application of economic theory. As Richard Harper (2000) argues in his detailed account of an IMF mission, these processes are best seen as ‘social processes’. The results are as much the outcome of a combination of contingencies and strategic behavior as the outcome of applied expertise; that is, building expert knowledge is the result of boundary work. Similarly, the expert work consultants or Bank staff end up performing in client countries is similarly messy and ill-structured. In the words of a consultant trying to establish food security in Sierra Leone, this was more about detective work and negotiation; about sorting out what was relevant knowledge from what was not (Griffiths, 2003).6

6 Must shorten & rephrase this last paragraph which is from GSP.
A pragmatist methodology for development ethics focuses our attention on the role played by abstract theorizing in economic science, and misguided claims related to a presumed economic scientific certainty. It points towards addressing the ways in which all science, and certainly economic science, may be partially constructed, simultaneously as description and prescription, simultaneously as knowledge and action. Development and poverty, in the same way as climate change or environmental sustainability, are highly complex and ill-structured problems far from mere facts easily defined, measured and planned. And knowledge-based policy recommendations in these arenas are plagued with uncertainties and risks. As Stiglitz vividly argues, uncertainty and risk are defining characteristics of knowledge-based economic policy (2001, 2002).

Most importantly, as I hope to have illustrated earlier, it is at this level of formation of economic knowledge, where values are sorted out, some chosen, some rejected and where the politicization of moral worth occurs. The false belief that economic science provides a true account of reality is perhaps one of the most fundamental reasons for rejecting the role of ethical thinking as valid knowledge for development. Untangling the value problems related to the scientific uncertainties related to knowledge for development is, therefore, one of the important tasks for third stage development ethics, especially at it seeks to reinstate the moral worth of all human beings and to prevent intrinsic values from becoming instrumentalized.

There are further lessons to draw from a pragmatist methodology for development ethics. The focus on competing meta-ethical or meta-economic positions can be wrong-headed for other reasons as well. The connection between ethics and public policy does not consist in simply applying a correct moral theory to a specific situation. In fact, we might not want to live in a world where priorities for development policy were thought to reside only in the extension of moral theories. The assumption of an identifiable scheme of moral knowledge would lead to an intractable state of affairs where no negotiations among competing conceptions of the good or a
well-organized society were possible. This would be particularly unfortunate in the case of
development because development policy making always takes place within a political
framework, one in which the parties are always unequal. The last thing that development aid and
co-operation needs is to become part of an inflexible philosophical debate as what has happened,
for example, in the case of family planning. The history of the debate about abortion shows the
dangers in making the moral dimensions of public policies explicit while leaving untouched the
role played by cognitive values and values hidden under the veil of scientism. In this regard, Paul
Thompson argues that ‘it is at least arguable that the bitterness and inflexibility of the abortion
debate today is due to both sides not only having adopted philosophically incompatible positions,
but also having buttressed these positions with moral philosophy that demonizes the other side
(Thompson 1996 ).” A similar inflexibility is already the characteristic of globalization debates.
Development ethics must aim to cut through it.

**Capability and Methodological Pragmatism**

I wish to contribute to the debate on capability by offering now a brief analysis of the ways in
which Sen’s capability and freedom approach can be seen as an instance of a methodologically
pragmatist development ethic. In addition, in the form the approach takes within the UNDP, as
the twin notion human development-capability (HD-CA), is may also be argued that capability
represents a well-designed boundary object strategically imbued with ethical meanings that do
not lend themselves to be emptied out that easily, pushed away or instrumentalized (St. Clair,
2004b). Development as freedom can be seen as a methodologically pragmatist public
philosophy that espouses a theory of valuation but not a theory of value. That some freedoms or
capabilities are essential, for Sen, does not entail they follow from a theory of true human nature, nor from a universalist notion of values (neither a universal conception of the validity of all local values nor a general universal conception of value) (Sen 1999: 247). Certainly, Sen’s approach rests on a universalist presumption about the value of freedom. But this presumption goes hand in hand with the role that bundles of freedoms and capabilities have in leading people to reach fulfilling lives on their own terms. Sen calls these two roles of freedom (i) the evaluative reason, and the (ii) effectiveness reason. Evaluative because it allows for an assessment of how much progress development has helped in enhancing people’s freedoms. Effective because free agency—the outcome of many interconnected and interdependent freedoms—is a necessary condition for successful development (Sen 1999: 4). For example, women who have the freedom to work outside their homes enhance their social standing as well as contribute to the prosperity of their families. Working outside the home usually gives women more visibility, voice, and less dependency, as well as enhances their education. This, in turn, strengthens women’s agency and usually makes women more informed, able and empowered to influence family decisions.

The bridge Sen builds between the economic, political, social, and ethical aspects of development is a public philosophy very much in the sense of the term championed by John Dewey. This is not to say however that we favor a form of extensionism with respect to classical American pragmatism, nor do we claim that Sen is a pragmatist in the Deweyian sense, but there are nonetheless some interesting similarities between Dewey’s and Sen’s works. Dewey’s social and political philosophy is based on the avoidance of metaphysical and meta-ethical dead ends. Sen and Dewey both try to work out a conception of freedom that does not appeal to ontology or epistemology, and that eventually breaks through the distinction between theory and practice by making both of them part of experience. But how does Dewey situate this form of freedom?
First, Dewey argued that we cannot have *a priori* knowledge of our own nature. As Hilary Putnam puts it: Dewey’s view is that we don’t know what our interests and needs are or what we are capable of until we actually engage in politics. A corollary of this view is that there can be no final answer to the question of how we should live, and therefore we should always leave it open to further discussion and experimentation (Putnam 1992). Dewey also warns us about the risks of inverting the relationship between commodities and the good life, and to look for a proper understanding of the role of economics in human life. In his critique of liberalism, Dewey claimed that the new material possibilities resulting from science and technology have brought material security to many, but this abundance is taken as an end in itself and not as a means to a more fulfilling human life. As Dewey claimed:

> The habits of desire and effort that were bred in the age of scarcity do not readily subordinate themselves . . . Even now when there is a vision of an age of abundance and when the vision is supported by hard facts, it is material security as an end that appeals to most rather than the way of living which this security makes possible (11:44, in Hickman 1998).

Last, at the core of Dewey’s thinking, lies a politicized conception of individuality as a social product which emphasizes the interdependence of politics with socio-economic factors. Individuality, for Dewey, is the result of an ongoing social development process, a development that occurs because we are involved in many social interdependencies. According to Dewey, ‘Individuality, like community, is a process of growth. It is self-realization, the continuous development of one’s potentialities (11:44 in Hickman 1998).” And this social conception of individualism leads Dewey to defend a very particular conception of freedom: ‘Freedom conceived as power to act in accord to choice depends upon positive and constructive changes in social arrangements (Dewey 3:100-101).”
Sen’s conception of development as freedom is consistent with the Deweyian tradition as well as similar to Dewey’s concern with the relationship between ‘our wealth and our ability to live as we would like (Sen 1999: 13).’ Most importantly, Sen emphasizes a view of participation and public scrutiny in accord with Dewey’s spirit of meliorism. These similarities make Dewey’s and Sen’s view of freedom very close: freedom as the ability to choose our own life. Sen, like Dewey, emphasizes the role of politics as well as of ethics in the assessment of the good life, and the need to bring to light the empirical connections among the social, the economic, the political, and the ethical. Sen offers a view of development based on both the intrinsic and the consequential value of different freedoms, as well as on the constructive role these freedoms play on the genesis of values and priorities in development decisions. Although Sen accepts that freedom is an end in itself, he cannot defend moral absolutes. Sen would probably agree with Dewey that people cannot really know all their capabilities—least of all how they want to live their lives—before they have full political liberties. But achieving those political liberties, according to Sen, depends on a wide variety of conditions and opportunities. Development as freedom has to leave conceptions of the good life open-ended and exposed to a continuous process of democratic inquiry. After all, Sen, like Dewey and John Rawls, would accept the claim that moral theory may sometimes require revision on the basis of empirically received facts which help us understand the demands of morality. In order to be consistent, the capabilities approach needs to see lists of capabilities as drafts in progress and place most of its normative emphasis, as Crocker rightly identifies, on participatory deliberation (Crocker, 2004).

The pragmatist stance of the notion capability has helped in its acceptance and eventual co-production for alternative development in its boundary object form, as part of the twin boundary object human development-capability (HD-CA) as operating within the UNDP. What seems to have made the difference is the ways in which certain values are imbued in HD-CA. Intellectual
boundary objects that have their philosophical underpinnings explicitly elaborated, with embodied ethical principles and which take ethical views as their point of departure have shown to be, at least partly, driving forces towards alternative policy making. This boundary object has demonstrated that an ‘idea’ is able to force the institution to develop and use it towards more democratic knowledge production. This represents the substitution of cognitive values by moral values. Indeed, boundary objects with embodied ethical concerns survive trade-offs better with cognitive values and power pressures. They are also more able to lead institutions towards a learning process and to raise support from different stakeholders (thereby affecting the thresholds of legitimacy and credibility), as well as to represent the concerns and needs of non-experts and vulnerable groups who may not be at the boundary table at all (St.Clair 2004, 2005). But the intellectual boundary object HD-CA still lacks a serious assessment of the ways in which development agencies themselves support poverty producing forces, and are themselves institutional mechanisms preventing the eradication of poverty. As it operates within UNDP, the idea still hides inequalities, compares itself with past policies, in particular it compares itself to mainstream economics but leaves unanswered perhaps less politically correct questions such as the ways in which over-accumulation (of goods but also perhaps capabilities) may lead to other people’s dispossession, to paraphrase David Harvey (2003).

A better intellectual boundary object would compare itself with counterfactuals based on global justice and not only to pass or dominant knowledge and policy. Foreseeing the future use of ideas by global institutions, I have proposed, that a well-designed boundary object ought to have embodied three main ethical principles: equity, accountability, and deliberative participation (St.Clair 2005). The embodiment of these three principles may act as a conveying device, or as obligatory passing points, to place discussions about global justice on the boundary table. In other words, boundary objects embodied with these three ethical principles can act as
incentives for better and more stable boundary management and for more salient, legitimate, and credible knowledge. Capability already has some of these norms imbued, clearly the norm of participatory deliberation (Alkire 2002, Crocker 2003), perhaps less clearly the equity and accountability norms. But its methodological pragmatism is more clear. Sen’s capability and freedom approach reminds us all of something very basic neo-liberals seem to have forgotten: that theoretical freedom is not the same as actual freedom for all. By paying attention at practices as much as theories such artificiality may best be captured. Yet capability needs more engaging with the consequences of such view as well as with the ways in which it is being used and abused by global institutions. Not only the World Bank misuses the notion of capability, but it may be important to investigate the degree to which its boundary form, the HD-CA is leading the whole theory towards too much political correctness, as not to challenge too frontally with established norms and goals of the UNDP. Although I cannot address this issue here, it will be important to follow up on the ways in which there is an increasing tendency to relegate Martha Nussbaum’s version of capability to a second place in debates about human development, simply because of it lacks that element of correctness that Sen’s version captures so well. As much as I favor the deliberation aspect imbued in Sen’s version of capabilities, some issues may not be dealt properly by deliberation, as Nussbaum rightly argues. As Alkire has illustrated very well, some notion of basic needs is still imbued within capability. Perhaps good boundary predisposing leads to a ‘lack of teeth’, or too softened version of ideas, or as Gasper names it, they tend to display a ‘cautious’ boldness.

The capabilities approach, in all its versions, could be improved by making much more explicit the ways in which it differs from neo-liberal economics or other mainstream economic theories. It will be strengthened by clarifying the degree of acceptance of current capitalist globalization; and they ways in which it may be weakened by needing to be ‘economics,’ albeit
with its philosophical underpinnings explicit. And last, capability may be improved by more self-reflection in regards its position to other disciplines besides philosophical ethics and mainstream economics. Neither are markets the best ways to allocate equity, they may be the cause of massive inequalities that prevent people’s exercise of their political freedoms⁷, to powerlessness of the many and too much power in the hands of a global elite. These and other basic insights have had extensive treatment in sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and today are being addressed by critical globalization studies (Applebaum and Robinson 2005). To conclude, an enriched third stage development ethics may offer philosophers and non-philosophers much value-added to ground each other’s views, to enrich analysis and critiques of development, and to reach forward not only envisioning better futures, but also engaging in formulating institutional and practical changes that may make a difference in practice.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, as development ethics is already multidisciplinary and approaches are formulated not only by academics but also by staff from multilateral agencies, the warning against moralism and against leading the debates about the goodness or badness of development and globalization towards unfruitful meta-ethical and meta-theoretical discussions is even more relevant. If disciplines are to contribute to an already politicized, ideologized and polarized debate about complex and ill-structured social facts such as development, global poverty or globalization, a third stage development ethic driven by a pragmatist methodology may be fruitful in shaping the tasks ahead as to avoid the risks outlined above. If disembodied from policies and practices, there

⁷ If I understand it correctly, this is exactly the main argument of Thomas Pogge in arguing that severe poverty is, de facto, a violation of the liberty rights that be traced to an unfair system of global economic relations (past and present).
is a risk that ethics leads to confusing rather than to clarifying policy debates, whether debates center on competing conceptions of the good, on competing moral categories (capabilities or rights), or competing economic theories (social choice, or behavioral economics). And given the empirical, political and normative elements of development debates are entangled, clarifying their moral dimensions may lead disputants to insist on an interpretation of the problems that conforms to their philosophical positions (Thompson, 1996). To avoid falling into moralizing an already polarized debate and thus to preclude rather than help political action, development ethics must be necessarily explicitly both a moral and political philosophy, and a hybrid of philosophy and social science. Yet a pragmatic form of this dual strategy would remain agnostic with regard to the possibility of absolute moral and scientific knowledge. A pragmatist methodology would focus attention not only on a plurality of values but also on a plurality of possible epistemologies. It leads our attention towards coping with scientific uncertainty and value conflicts and towards unveiling and avoiding the politization of the moral worth of people, actions and institutions. It is here were the overarching normative value of deep democracy is justified (Crocker forthcoming) yet many issues cannot be left to deliberation. It leads our attention towards disentangling false dichotomies, such as for example the distinction between altruistic and self-interested behavior, or the distinction between knowledge and action, between poverty and development research by global institutions as separate realms of global politics. To the questions of what are first: facts, values or practices, third stage development ethics answers, ‘all of the above’. In short, a third stage development ethics needs to engage with processes of knowledge formation and to aim at democratizing those by unveiling, pointing and clarifying value choices and value laden concepts.

Scholars in the fields of climate change and sustainability science have engaged with such questions and drawn insights from social studies of science to elaborate ways to reach more
salient, legitimate and credible knowledge. As the opening quote by William Clark says, value laden choices regarding which questions to ask, who to treat as an expert and how to deal with disagreements should be part of an explicit attempt to democratize knowledge and to assure the participation of all affected parties in the inevitable negotiation of values entailed by progress and changes in social structures.

[The] sorts of science and technology assessments used to address climate change and related sustainability issues are necessarily shaped by value-laden choices regarding which questions to ask, who to treat as an expert, and how to deal with disagreements. Democratic societies must therefore find means of assuring appropriate participation of affected citizens in the process of negotiating such value judgments (William Clark, 2003).

Development ethics may play a contribution as well as learn from such insights, as opposing sides in both development and environmental debates define evidence and policy effectiveness according to diverse standards. And each definition of evidence entails established hierarchies of values (often cognitive values taking priority over ethical ones). Everyone has heard about the presumed lack of scientific consensus about the issue of human-caused global climate change. Yet science about climate change is elaborated by the most sophisticated system of science advice in the United Nations System, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). And there are far more areas of uncertainty around economic science than around environmental matters. These twin global problems, perhaps the most important challenges to worldwide peace and stability, are equally politicized. Emphasis on scientific certainty or uncertainty is simply a manipulation to promote what in the end are political or ideological views to keep power relations untouched. An epistemic trick leading to what sociologists call social closure: eliminating one's opponent by monopolizing the source of one's advantages. Perhaps because the scientific uncertainty surrounding climate change is so obviously politically manipulated, there
are far more truly interdisciplinary research teams in this field as in any others. Yet their work leads them straight to ethical evaluation. In fact many environmental activists today argue that it is a renewed conception of the ethical and a new political philosophy what can make the difference. Such view is coming from such diverse places as the latest work by Bruno Latour (2004), or the Ethics and climate change group, under the leadership of Donald Brown (Brown 2002, Buenos Aires Declaration 2004). These authors, like Clark, are pointing towards the ways in which the economization of all social life and the transformation of public issues into expert matters to be resolved by certain experts, prevents ethical issues to be debated as such, as value conflicts that deserve ‘public’ attention.

References


Beeson, M. “Globalisation, the state and economic justice, Paper for Ethics and Australian Foreign Policy, Symposium at the University of Queensland, 3-4 July 2003, Brisbane.


Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Goulet, D (1976), *The Cruel Choice*


-------- (ed.) (2005), Freedom from poverty as a human right, Oxford: Oxford University Press.


