

## **A Moral Critique of Development**

*Ethics, Aesthetics and Responsibility*

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# **A Moral Critique of Development: Ethics, Aesthetics and Responsibility**

Ananta Kumar Giri & Philip Quarles Van Ufford\*

There is a fundamental criticism of the IMF / Washington consensus approach: It does not acknowledge that development requires a transformation of society. Uganda grasped this in its radical elimination all school fees, something that budget accountants focusing solely on revenues and costs simply could not understand.

(Joseph Stiglitz (2002), "Globalization and its Discontents", p. 76)

Human beings are not only the most important means of social development, they are also its profoundest end. Being a fine piece of capital is not the most exalted state that can happen to a human being.

(Amartya Sen (1998), "Human Development and Financial Conservatism",  
p. 734)

## **The Problem**

The discourse and practice of development is at a critical juncture now. The idea of development in its present interventionist mode had originated at the end of the Second World War as a new vision of hope against the backdrop of the devastating experiences of the war and the rising process of decolonisation. At this juncture, the idea of development shaped new forms of political responsibility on a global scale. It gave rise to many applications. Now, after more than fifty years development has gradually lost its appeal and vitality. We are facing a crisis, not knowing how to move on in a meaningful way. We now face a crisis in a foundational way and in terms of major transformations at the macro level as well as in our daily routines in the world of development. In our daily routines of development we face disjunctures and lack of communication between different domains of development, for example, as we shall shortly discuss this theme more elaborately, development as hope and development as politics and

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administration. We also face disjunctures and incompatibilities of perspectives among different kinds of actors engaged in the field of development--state, market and voluntary organizations and between the advocates and critics. But our prevalent approach seems to be ignoring these disjunctures in the name of an ideal model of development or in terms of a self-righteous closure that if there is incommensurability then the way to proceed is to assert one's a priori logic. For example, in the contemporary practice of development there is a disjunction between one-sided emphasis on state and market, or between an interventionist approach to development and a people's self-initiated model of development, or between an applied approach to development and critical approach. But the way of overcoming this disjunction is not to assert one's own perspective and positionality but to participate in mutual and multilateral conversation and learning which leads to transformation of initial incommensurability and emergence of a connected point of view and mode of praxis.

In this paper we describe the moral crisis we face in our daily routines of development in terms of disjunctures that different actors face in the field of development. This disjuncture we argue involves both knowledge and action—disjuncture between different knowledges of development such as development as hope, development as politics and administration, and development as critical scientific understanding; disjunction between different actors of development—donor agencies and beneficiaries, market and the tribal people; and the disjuncture between values and practices of application, of between value and norm. One major aspect of our contemporary crisis is the growing gap between action and reflection. We speak of a moral crisis because in the development enterprise the actors have lost sight of meaningful linkages between developmental action and intervention on the one hand, and of reflective understanding on the other. The dynamics of 'doing', of coping with the future of our common global responsibilities, and of 'understanding' past experiences have become separated. Both have become erratic undertakings. Therefore we need to gain a new perspective in which the understanding of our past experiences with the enterprise of 'applied development' in the last fifty years and the search for new global concerns and responsibilities come together in a meaningful way. In order to gain such a perspective we must discern some of the important transformations, which have taken place in both the domains of action and reflection.

Within the world of action we witness a transition from development interventions as expressive of specific political responsibilities towards a notion of development in which the issue of manageability has taken central stage. The focus of moral and political reasoning has shifted from goals to results. In the world of reflection we have seen a shift from modernist faith in development towards the post-modern, de-constructive critiques of it. These two processes taking place since the nineteen eighties in each of the two domains gradually widened the gap between

action and reflection. The domains of critical understanding and of developmental action became increasingly separated from each other. This disjunction, and the moral/ethical quandary it implies, underlies the present impasse. In this context, reinvigoration of development requires a sustained effort to reconnect the worlds of action and reflection, engagement in bridge building and border crossing, keeping pace with or even anticipating multiple transformations of criticism and reconstruction.

But for this task of reconstruction, we need to understand that though there has been a shift from “must do” to “can do” in the field of action, both of them reflect generalizing, universalising models of development ignoring the contingent nature of action and morality. We shall shortly show, how the managers of development who are our new priests of a “can do” mode apply models of market, efficiency and outcome universally to all situations of action and moral engagement without realizing that the contemporary emphasis on market had arisen in specific historical circumstances and while during the 1980s it had a liberative appeal in the context of ideological orthodoxy of “must do”, a universalisation of the “can do” principle now without consideration for contingencies of time, space and relationships leads to another ideological orthodoxy. In the field of ethics and morality also both the “must do” and the “can do” apply a universalising approach which annihilates disjunctures and contingencies in the world of development. In the world of reflection the shift from modernist views of development as “applied enlightenment” to post-modern views of development as domination also does not involve a foundational shift. Both these shifts are within the frames of “rights” and “justice” discourses of modernity and lack a transformational engagement with the emergent discourse and practice of responsibility.

This later issue of responsibility constitutes a foundational problem which contemporary shifts in development—either from the political masters to managers, or from development as hope-generating machine to development as dystopia—are completely unreflective about. For example when we propound a market redefinition of development or a Foucauldian critique of development as hegemony we are still operating with development as rights and justice but what needs to be understood that the rights and justice frames had emerged in specific historical circumstances and now these frames need to be radically and transformationally supplemented by a practice and perspective of responsibility. The crisis in daily routines and paradigms of development that we now face can be better illumined if we relate this to our clinging to only “rights” and “justice” frames of modernity and lack of willingness to accept the calling of responsibility. In his provocative work, *Discourse and Knowledge: The Making of Enlightenment Sociology*, Piet Strydom (2000) helps us understand this foundational problem. For Strydom the rights frame had emerged in the early modern revolutions e.g., the Revolt of the Netherlands, the English Revolution

and the French Revolution. The justice frame had arisen in the wake of industrial revolution in “late eighteenth century England and continued unabated yet in a sublimated form until the second half of the twentieth century, focused on the problem complex of exploitation, pauperisation and loss of identity.” (Strydom 2000: 20). These two discourses have inspired and influenced socio-political movements in the modern world including interventions of development but they have now their limits to come to terms with the emergent challenge and calling of responsibility. For example, to come to terms with environmental crisis and the attendant calling of responsibility discourses of rights and justice and politics and policies revolving around these have their limits.<sup>1</sup> In face of such challenges, in Strydom’s pregnant formulations, “The theory of justice is today making way for another, still newer semantics in the form of the moral theory of responsibility which is crystallizing around a number of intertwined debates about the problem of risk” (Strydom 2000: 20).

Thus the calling of responsibility constitutes a critical juncture for us, one that is heightened by the rise of a risk society, both locally and globally. In fact problems of poverty, rights, injustice and now the valorized problem of terrorism can be looked at as part of our risk condition but our approach to such risks have to be one of responsibility, a responsible engagement. But responsibility for us does not mean only political responsibility but also ethico-moral and spiritual responsibility, embodying co-responsibility.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, modes of responsible engagement do not emerge only from the public sphere, as Strydom seems to suggest in a Habermasian mode, but involves practices of self-cultivation including spiritual mobilization of self and society. In fact it is the perspective and practice of responsibility emerging from multidimensional practices of care of self, looking up to the face of the other, and being part of conversations and civil labor in the public sphere, that constitutes the moral critique of development that await us (cf. Beck 2000; Giri 2002a, 2002b).

The field of development has been subjected to a Foucauldian critique in the works of scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1995), which valorises political criticism, but this now needs to be radically supplemented by a moral critique and reconstructive responsibility. A moral critique however does not proceed with an opposition between politics and morality but contains interpenetrative critical moments and possibilities between politics and morality acknowledging the limits of an either-or-approach, and always inspired by a beyond, a transcendence that exists within these immanent domains. Moral critique and engagement here is not bound to the semantic distinction between ethics and morality that bedevils contemporary moral philosophy: it includes both Habermasian moral argumentation and Levinasian ethics of the face,<sup>3</sup> and radically supplements both of these with a Gandhian practice of spiritual critique and responsibility. A moral critique of development includes both practices of ethical responsibility and

aesthetic self-cultivation—responsibility to the other and the care of the self—but acknowledges the gaps that exist between the two and contains within it creative modes of dealing with these rather than suppressing them in the name of an ideal model of unity or for the sake of “order,” “truth,” and “certainty”. A moral critique of development also includes a foundational critique of development by posing such questions whether development means only economic development or political empowerment and whether the contemporary redefinition of development in terms of Amartya Sen’s “functioning” and “capability” is adequate to challenge of developing one’s mind and heart (cf. Sen 1999).

### **A Moral Critique of Development: Aspects of Our Contemporary Predicament**

*(a) The shift from ‘Must do’ to ‘Can do’: The changing definitions of manageability and the new cult of accountability*

The first dimension of the contemporary crisis of development concerns the macro level, the level at which the rules for development interventions are defined. Here, the primacy of global political responsibility, of planned change in the various ways and forms we have witnessed in the past, is evaporating. The very notion of development as a project of political engagement and responsibility is now seen increasingly as anachronistic, i.e. as belonging to a by-gone past. Current confidence is in the market as harbinger of development. As Michael Edwards (1999: 8-9) states: ‘The market is the only proven mechanism of economic integration since no other can respond to the constant signalling that complex systems demand.’ Primacy is now attributed to the role of free enterprise, free trade and the market in the quest for development.

This shift to market is much more encompassing than it seems. It aims at transforming society as a whole into a ‘market society’. The metaphor of the market deeply penetrates the conventions of steering, understanding and justifying the modes of operation of the non-market sector also, public and private. Government departments, NGO’s and private organisations active in the domains of development are required to operate as if they were business: there is no place for them unless they are able to show results. A new definition of legitimacy of good policy comes forward. As Max van den Berg, until recently the director of NOVIB, a major Dutch NGO, describes the changing *modus operandi* of his agency: “Who speaks of the market, must take into account ‘suppliers’ of development as well as customers, a product and a buyer” (Van den Berg 1998: 132). Though the emphasis on result and market evolved from many failures of experiments of political planning or “high modernism” earlier on (e.g. Crew & Harrison 1998; Scott 1998) soon this has become a cult into itself.



The implications of this shift to market, however, are wide. The new discourse gives rise to a new a-historical morality. New general criteria and rules for judging and steering interventions in development arise irrespective of any historical context. Issues of management come to the fore in the 'business of commitment'. A new regime steers development intervention, with the formation of a new class of management experts in all sorts of guises for whom substantive issues of political responsibility are not vitally important anymore.<sup>4</sup> Manageability now became an end onto itself, leading to a drastically new definition of good policy, with 'accountability' the corner stone of a new doctrine (cf. Strathern 2000). A new ethics emerges focussed on outcomes of interventions and the issues of manageability of results. The capacity of professionals and the agencies to actually deliver promised results now constitutes the core of the new moral universe. Notions of 'can do' increasingly dominate definitions of problems of development as well as responsibility.

The other implication of this shift relates to the deeper issues of self-understanding and representation. For many agencies and staff members these changes confronted earlier views and practices. Almost overnight their thematic and regional expertise became a liability. While for many development institutions 'corporate identity' had in the past constituted of a specific political awareness and loyalty to international networks, this suddenly changed. Experience now often became a burden for the very agencies in which it had matured. Transformation was often drastic and sometimes even virulent. In the early 1990s sometimes harsh measures were used in countries such as Netherlands to transform development agencies into 'businesses of commitment', with the sacking of all staffs, inviting most of them simultaneously to submit an application for a new job. The pained remarks made by a senior staff member of an international development organization may illustrate the intensity of this transformation:

Now that it has become clear that my agency is starting to seriously stress the 'quality' of development projects, it is better for me to go. The knowledge of the region I have gained in the last twenty years and the many friendships I have built up in the course of my work clearly have become an obstacle.

The 'information' collected in order to allow for judging interventions also reflects this new priority of agencies. The new 'audit culture' as it were creates its own specific body of 'information,' a new virtual reality of development (Baudrillard 1993; 1996; also Strathern 2000). We thus witness the constitution of a new myopia with the new regime of accountability.<sup>5</sup> This myopia is quite comparable to the distortions of knowledge gathered in an earlier phase. Though there is no reason to romanticise the past as upholding of high ideals and search for purity in the past had led to high levels of willed ignorance and

destruction in the phase of state-led project of modernization and development, the valorisation of audit and accountability in contemporary uncritical fundamentalist turn to the market constitutes a crucial moral problem in the field of development (cf. Hobart 1993; Quarles van Ufford 1988).<sup>6</sup>

*(b) The persisting smile of Icarus: The continuance of excessive optimism*

However, despite all these transformations in the discourse and practice of development interventions, much remains the same. In the current phase of neo-liberal domination and market-led development, managers are replacing politicians as confident architects of a new future. We can note a remarkable continuity of rather excessive feelings of optimism about development--our ideas about transforming society through organised interventions have not diminished at all. A rather unreflexive optimism concerning our capacity to produce desired results has remained the same.

At first sight the ideology of the market place stressing the role of subjectless social forces and the curious interventionist optimism are a very strange couple indeed. The stress on the market place as 'hidden' arbiter of progress and our high expectations concerning the management of desired results are clearly in contradiction.<sup>7</sup> But still there is continuity because some of the core assumptions have remained the same: the notion of an unproblematic black box linking political goals with outcomes. When we speak of a transformation we see that the direction of reasoning has changed. First the black box of administration was constructed "forwards," starting from the notion of the rationality of specific political goals. Now the direction has changed: starting with the mythical notion of results the black box is constructed "backwards" as it were. Results cannot be separated from the target, nor the targets from the results. Forwards or backwards: there is continuity because the notion of a black box of administration of interventions in development has remained the same.

*c) From Unbounded Optimism to Critiques of Development as Hegemony and Violence*

In the last fifteen years we have witnessed a burgeoning critique of development as hegemony and violence (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990). In the past development sociologists and anthropologists had stressed the importance of their academic research for improving development interventions. But now critical scholars tend to focus on analysing the hegemonic relations which development entailed. This is sometimes perceived as a confrontation with the apparatus of development for the sake of it. But this confrontation was then necessary to awaken the satisfied actors of development interventions out of their slumber.

At the same time, sustained scientific criticism, carried in itself and not accompanied by a passion of reconstructive responsibility, entails a process of social closure (Little 2000; Little & Painter 1995). Many a time, academic critics of development intervention reflect in mirror image the development practices they study. But what is to be noted at the same time is that pioneers of post-structuralist critiques of development reflect an awareness of limits of academic criticism and embody a passion for engagement. Therefore it is no wonder then that Ferguson titles the epilogue to his admirable ethnographic interrogation of the logic of interventionist development, "What is to be done?". In this Ferguson discusses with verve and passion what different actors in the field of development can do. What is quite striking is that one of the very first forms of engagement that Ferguson wants critical development anthropologists to take part in is political contestation in one's society. This has the potential to overcome the self-other dichotomy lying at the heart of the discourse of developmentalism. Participation in political struggles in one's society around such issues as human rights, multicultural recognition, the problem of the homeless and the refugees, can make development anthropologists realize that it is not only people of the so-called Third World that are the objects of their critical attention and participation but also the deprived fellow citizens of their home countries. But while Ferguson writes without any second thought about the need for political participation in one's country, he quite rightly proceeds with caution about prospects for such engagement in the field: "Whether such a useful and appropriate role is available to researcher in the 'field,' however must remain in every case an open question" (Ferguson 1990: 286). Ferguson here suggests that critical development anthropologists should "seek out typically non-state forces and organizations that challenge the existing dominant order and to see if links can be found between [anthropologists'] expertise and their practical needs as they determine them" (ibid). But what is to be noted that Ferguson does not rule out from the beginning the prospect for working with state and international agencies in a creative manner as he himself writes: "There are no doubt circumstances under which work for state and international agencies would meet these conditions" (ibid).

The pleas for engagement also comes out forcefully in the passionate reflections of Arturo Escobar who urges us in the very last section of his book entitled, "Ethnography, Cultural Studies and the Question of Alternatives" that one must not only resist the desire to formulate "alternatives at an abstract, macro level; one must also resist the ideas that the articulation of alternatives will take place in intellectual and academic circles, without meaning by this that academic knowledge has no role in the politics of alternative thinking" (Escobar 1995: 222). Escobar's own deconstruction of the apparatus of development has been inspired by not only post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault but also by critical movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa fighting against the

violent regimes of development. For Escobar, academic critique of development is not enough, it has to be accompanied by participation in critical political and cultural mobilizations for a new beginning as for him, “Social movements and anti-development struggles may contribute to the formation of nuclei of problematized social relations around which novel cultural productions may emerge” (ibid: 216). These social movements, among others, offers a “novel theorization of the political and its relation to both the cultural and the democratisation of social and economic life; the reformulation of the question of cultural identity in reconstructive ways; and a keen interest in relation between aesthetics and society” (ibid: 218; emphasis added).

### **From Deconstructive Critiques to Reconstructive Responsibility: Socio-Political Struggles, Self-Cultivation and Learning**

But such a mode of engagement still calls for reflective critique not only as to the anti-systemic struggles of movements of empowerment but to the very logic and telos of power, i.e., whether the movements of empowerment and their sympathetic academic participants are using the language of empowerment to create a closure and to enhance one’s ego-aggrandizement and will to power.<sup>8</sup> In his critique of power Foucault raises this issue of self-cultivation (discussed more elaborately in the later section of the essay) that both Ferguson and Escobar can build on for still deepening and broadening their project of engagement and giving the added flow of an ontological nurturance (see Dallmayr 2001a, 2001b). Ferguson and Escobar speak about all forms of engagement—political participation at home, working with and pitching one’s tent in the backyards of counter-hegemonic forces in the field, and not staying in the Hilton—but they do not realize that engagement also includes an engagement with oneself not only in terms of a demonised “self-reflexivity” but also in terms of developing oneself aesthetically and ethically, acknowledging the limits of human finitude and the calling of transcendence, and developing the capacity for self-emptying with regard to both individual and institutional will to power. In this context, Eisenstadt’s recent insightful critique of Foucault suggests the pathways of a new engaged anthropology where engagement also includes self-engagement:

While the term “parrhesia” as used by Foucault goes beyond the simple emphasis on resistance as due mainly to the inconvenience of being confined within the coercive frameworks of an order and denotes the courageous act of disrupting dominant discourses, thereby opening a new space for another truth to emerge—not a discursive truth but rather a “truth of the self,” an authentication of the courageous speaker in this “eruptive truth-speaking”—it does not systematically analyze the nature of the agency through which such

other truth may emerge, or how the emergence of such “truth of the self” may become interwoven with process of social change and transformation

(Eisenstadt 2002: 38).

Escobar writes in almost the last sentence of his book, “For what awaits both the First and the Third World, perhaps finally transcending our difference, is the possibility of learning to be human in post-humanist (post-man and postmodern) landscapes” (Escobar 1995: 226). The possibility of learning calls for self-engagement as well as participation in social movements and the public sphere. It is interesting that in his recent formulation of what he calls Third Enlightenment, which is based upon a fallibilistic conception of reason, Hilary Putnam (2001) urges us to realize that despite setbacks learning has been possible in history. For Putnam, Foucauldian critiques of institutions miss this possibility of learning in history. But Escobar starting with Foucault concludes with a calling for learning across the boundaries. This itself suggests that a more creative border-crossing is possible if we let ourselves from an either / or approach and engage ourselves with learning, learning to be.

Escobar speaks about “learning to be human in post-humanist landscapes.” But what is the meaning of posthuman here? Should Foucault’s critique of humanism be taken at face value or should we explore the link between Foucault’s critique and the humanistic strivings of savants such as Erasmus especially as Erasmus urges us to move beyond a power-model of the human condition and cultivate shraddha, reverence for life (cf. Das 1991; Dallmayr 2001b; Giri 2002). It is Foucault himself who has written: “[...] for Nietzsche, the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man and the space remains empty” (Foucault quoted in Carrette 1999: 85). This empty space has, at least, three possibilities; the humanization of divine, divinisation of the human including overcoming the limits of anthropocentrism, and existence of radical evil in between the lines. Engagement with development, in spite of our locations, has to touch this entire spectrum.

### **Rethinking Development: Towards an Alternative Genealogy and Ontology**

Escobar’s critique of interventionist development presents us the march of a continuous hegemony. But this is only part of the story. It is also possible to have an alternative history of the enterprise of development, beginning with moments of hope. Here we build on both Kant and Foucault (1984a) in creative ways and explore the pathways of an alternative genealogy of development. As is well-known, Kant had put the following questions as central to our human condition in general and the Enlightenment project in particular: what can we

know, what can we do and what can we hope for? Using the Kantian distinctions of hope, politics and critical understanding, we can distinguish three historical settings and to a certain extent phases. In our alternative genealogy of development, we look at our post-war tryst with development in terms of three phases: hope, politics and critical understanding. In each historical setting the concept of development entails priority given to one specific kind of knowledge. In the early years primacy was allotted to development as hope. In subsequent decades dominant attention was commanded by development as politics and administration. And during the past ten years or so, as we have seen, it is development as critical understanding of development practice itself which has received the key emphasis. In each of the phases the moral nature of development has been defined in a different and distinctive way.

### **Development as works of hope (1944-1947)**

Development constituted a new moral universe for international relations emerging at the end of World War II. The concept was first used in Los Angeles in 1944 in one of the subcommittees preparing for the constitution of the United Nations (Van Soest 1975). The idea of development became the carrier of an almost exclusive preoccupation with the global future. Development embodied a new beginning in hope against the cataclysmic experiences of World War II and against the backdrop of an expanding decolonisation of the globe.

Michael Ignatieff (1999) has called our attention to two specific characteristics of the context. He speaks of the political arena around 1946 and 1947. His remarks help us to see how practices of hope could assert themselves for some time. Ignatieff's observations about the constituting of The Declaration of Human Rights are pertinent to understanding the birth of the idea of development. He speaks of certain stillness, of a short period in which the arms of war and global power struggles were laid to rest. At 1946/47 the Cold War had not yet fully come to predominate the political agenda. The struggle for global hegemony had not yet asserted itself in the domains of the United Nations in 1947. Thus the shock about the terrible past still allowed for some space for articulating commonly defined hope for a better future. There was a moment of certain stillness between political ebbs and flows of war, cold and hot. This 'armistice' allowed for atonement, contemplation and a dream of common global responsibility and human rights to be articulated. Development also originated in this moment of stillness and hope and not in the hegemonic agenda of US President Truman though one was not totally separated from the other.

This reading of the birth of the idea development is corroborated by two influential commentators of our time: Ralph Dahrendorf and Jurgen Habermas.

Dahrendorf (1968) was one of the first to link the idea of development with the crisis of the past and war. Almost thirty years later Habermas (1998a) calls our attention again to the links now between deep, cataclysmic transformations and the shaping of a new moral perspective of development. He mentions specifically the year 1945 in which colonial empires were collapsing, the war had ended and the shock over the holocaust was there to stay for a considerable time. This year 'has set free energies and finally, even insights' (Habermas 1998a: 312). Cataclysmic events led to important universal moral insights.

### **Development as practices of politics and administration (1949-)**

The universal call of development as hope--the 'never again'--and the values generated in the first phase call for action. As hope had given a new sense of direction, modes of 'doing development' were now called for. This is what the second phase is all about. Development here enters the domains of politics, of application and administration and the key question becomes: Who must take the lead? The answer to the question of agency has varied over the years: while initially the thrust was on state and benevolent international donors, initiative passed to non-governmental organisations and the market. But despite the shifting trajectories of application of development: from state to market via the NGOs, each of these trajectories evinces a characteristic emphasis on doing.

In the earlier years of 'doing', political action had still some connection with dreaming and hoping. The magnum opus of Gunnar Myrdal (1968), *Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, written in the early sixties is a telling case in point. Myrdal makes explicit reference to the new values, which have been emerging as a frame of reference for action. But it is not yet clear what kind of practical political agenda emerges from these values. He asks himself the question which course of action, which practical problems of development must be given priority over and against the other options. Must priority be given to the issues of still weak states and to strengthening their capacity of national planning? Or is a more full attack on poverty more advisable? The three volumes clearly allow us to discern the intellectual and political struggle of translating new general and universal values and dreams into distinctive international political agendas.

This struggle did not last. After some time the enterprise of development became completely divorced from such encumbrances. The machinery of various political creeds each entailing its distinctive planning, policy formulation and application of development became increasingly self-contained, cut off from any meaningful relationships to other practices such as

development as hope and development as critical understanding. A process of social, moral and intellectual closure set in.<sup>9</sup>

The context of emphasising the ‘doing’ of development gave rise to ‘development ethics’ as a professional engagement. Development ethics came to be defined as a moral calling for the continued adherence to universal moral views and commitments when these narrowed down into the practices of political applications (cf. Goulet 1995). As the values evaporated these calls became more urgent. Development ethics concerned itself with the issue of linking the domains of hope and values to the many practical issues of politics and administration (Gasper 1999). But in this phase, issues of ethics also became increasingly narrowed into the technical and professional domains, which it addressed. Often issues of morality were narrowed in the domains of administration: definitions of ‘mission statements,’ defined identities of development agencies, certifications of good development practice etc. Moral issues increasingly obtained an instrumental significance. Moral choices thus become important political assets of specific agencies, constituting their ‘symbolic capital’ in the market place (cf. Hoebink 1988). The engagement of development as doing in the end came to predominate the agenda of development ethics.

### **Development as critical understanding (1990- )**

As we have seen with Ferguson and Escobar, about fifteen years ago, critical students increasingly disengaged themselves from the political and administrative concerns of development. They were rather more interested in showing that development projects are hegemonic and violent. In their engagement with development they reflected a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (cf. Bellah et al. 1991). This suspicion was not only of academic origin but was inspired by critical social movements fighting against the interventionist development projects such as the building of dams and mines which destroy people’s homes and habitats.

But following the logic of only a “hermeneutics of suspicion” constitutes a fundamental moral problem as this does not deal with the relationship between critique and reconstruction. A moral critique of development calls for accepting responsibility for establishing a meaningful relationship between critique and reconstruction. In this context, the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in contemporary critiques of development needs to be supplemented by a “hermeneutics of recovery” (cf.. Bellah et al. 1991; Giri 2002a, 2002b). Development as critical understanding is vital to reconstituting development as global responsibility especially as it makes us aware of hegemonic intentions and relationships



parading in the name of global solidarity but in itself is not enough it needs to be radically and transformationally supplemented by reconstructive activities. To put it in the words of David Harvey, critics have to be “insurgent architects” with a desire to “translate political aspirations across the incredible variety and heterogeneity of socio-ecological and political-economic conditions” (Harvey 2000: 246).

## **Towards an Alternative Ontology of Development**

Development as hope, as politics and administration, and as critical understanding does not constitute only, or primarily, historical phases, they also constitute an alternative ontology of development. The discourse and practice of development consist of domains of hope, politics and administration, and critical understanding. Autonomous as well as interconnected knowledges and actions arise in these domains. But these domains though autonomous already presuppose the other in their constitution, genealogy and dynamics. The domain of development as hope has or ought to have within itself an awareness of the issues emerging from domains of politics and application, and critical understanding. The same simultaneous logic of autonomy and interpenetration is true of domains of politics and critique. These domains exist as intersecting circles not in terms of a binary logic of either or but in terms of a multi-valued logic of autonomy, mutual presupposition and constitution, and interpenetration (Mohanty 2000; Uberoi 2002).<sup>10</sup>

While historically the post-war tryst with development seems to have proceeded in a phase-like manner--first development as hope, then development as politics and applications and then development as critical understanding--now we need not proceed in a teleological manner. In fact now historical teleology might be a problem and instead of a logic of succession we have to think of a logic of simultaneity where creative and critical action in development can start from any of the domains defying the arrogant logic of a priori privileging of either one or the other. Different concerned actors of development inhabit in a significant manner one or two of the domains of development but though they belong to a specific domain their very domain already contains, sometimes as a possibility and invitation, the spirit of the other.<sup>11</sup> The practitioners in specific domains of development have a responsibility to realize this mutually interpenetrative dimension of their specific vocation, discover their latent and possible universality and realize it in practices of labor and learning in the interactive and intersecting field of development.

But who are the actors of development as hope, politics and critical understanding? Without essentializing and exhausting the list, we can find that

at the contemporary juncture the field of development consists of four different kinds of actors--state, market, social movements and voluntary organizations, and self. But as participants in the field of development they have the same multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration. They do not exist in this field as pure categories and become reconstituted as being part of a field. Take for instance the category of the state. State has been a hegemonic actor in the interventionist models of development but because of resistant as well as creative work of social movements, states themselves are being forced to transform themselves (Kothari 1988; Mohanty et al. 1998). Movements such as Narmada Bachao Andolana and the anti-mining struggle in Kashipur, Orissa contest the working of state, and also market, as pure categories and interrogate their arrogant desire for categorical self-assertion even if they do not succeed in realizing a full-fledged humanizing transformation of state in the directions of rights, justice and responsibility. But while offering critical resistance and creative alternatives to state, social movements also face a challenge of radical self-reflection. Many of the contemporary movements have fought for empowerment of deprived and dispossessed groups and their struggle has certainly made a welcome difference to the logic of distribution of power and democratization of previous hierarchical relations. But social movements at the same time need to cultivate within themselves a self-critique of the telos of power so that a politics of empowerment does not become an end unto itself and does not degenerate into another system of exclusion and oppression (cf. Laclau 1992; Giri 2001; Tagesson forthcoming). For this there is a need for a transformative interpenetration between ethics and politics in the social dynamics as well as scholarly reflections on social movements as harbingers of new beginnings in the world of development.

Thus in the intersecting and interactive field of development there is a moral problem when categories and actors exist or are allowed to exist as pure categories. They are or have to be part of a process of interaction, dynamic interpenetration and mutual transformation leading to an emergent reconstitution of the very categories themselves such as state and social movements, and hope, politics and critique. This leads to an alternative and emergent ontology of development. Earlier ontological concerns with development have meant an essentialist and stable conception of development and applying this existing out there to different contexts. But now there seems to be an urgent need to break away from such an essentialist and fixed ontology and look at development as a heterogeneous field of action and imagination and a dynamic process of learning and transformation where ontologies emerge as much from fields of conversations and contestations as they are also initial participants in this interactive field. Thus we subject ontologies themselves to a journey of homelessness and an epistemological practice of learning (cf. Dallmayr 2001; Vattimo 1999). This calls for going beyond privileging either epistemology or

ontology and embody an ontological epistemology of participation (cf. Giri 2004a).

## **Transforming Anthropological Practice and Moral Imagination**

### *(a) Being interested in empirical as well as moral narratives of development practice*

The critique and reconstruction of development that we propose calls for a new anthropology of development going beyond the prevalent distinctions between anthropology for development (where anthropology is uncritically for development practitioners) and anthropology of development (where anthropology critically looks at hegemonic relations in development interventions) (cf. Grillo & Stirrat 1997). This new anthropology of development is simultaneously a moral and empirical engagement embodying a transdisciplinary border-crossing not only between economics and anthropology but also between moral philosophy and anthropological ethnography. In dealing with development, as anthropologists writing morally sensitive and informed ethnographies of concrete development practices are our inevitable first step. We must not only describe the moral choices these actors make, study the rules of legitimation to which they refer in the concrete practices, the modes of dealing with concrete constraints, contradictions and dilemmas they face but also try and add our own emerging judgments about these moral practices. Here we follow a two-fold engagement: an engagement where ethnographic inquiry is informed by moral issues embedded in practice as well as broader frames of moral reflection, and modes of moral reasoning which are informed by empirical study of concrete practices. Following this double task urges us to break away from anthropology as a study of bounded groups and themes and reconstitute it as an open-ended inquiry into pathways of flows, paying close attention to both roots and routes and following the trajectories of both ethnographic and moral encounter.<sup>12</sup> In such an anthropology of encounter the moral and the empirical are mutually transformed.

Such a reconstituted anthropology has an eye for disjunctures that exist at the heart of development practice. It seeks to understand development as a fabric of practices confronted with some disjunctures which must be coped with in the daily routines, the everyday forms of development practice. It realizes the limitations of an unproblematic whole or predominance of one view over all others, say state over market, or market over all others. Administrative rationality cannot be attributed centre place in the development enterprise over and against the critical understanding and the practices of hope either. There is no reason to assume that ‘more’ or better in one domain will be beneficial to the other. T.S. Eliot, anthropologist as well, helps us phrase this problem: “Where is

the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information” (Eliot 1969: 147).

Such an anthropology needs new theoretical inspirations which help us go beyond preoccupation with an unproblematic whole or the morality of the black box. Here Foucault and Ankersmit are helpful in providing us a new theoretical imagination. In his reflection on Kant, Foucault (1984a) endorses Kant’s distinction between three domains of knowledge (knowledge related to political action, knowledge related to critical reflection, and knowledge related to hope) as constitutive of Enlightenment but urges us to acknowledge the lack of fit between them. Foucault also gives importance to hope but the emphasis on hope is not based on an uncritical universalising plan rather it arises out of acknowledgement of the difficulty of putting theory into practice both in the past and present.<sup>13</sup> In his brilliant meditation on our contemporary predicament, Dutch historian and philosopher Frank R. Ankersmit also urges us to be aware of the role of contingencies in the construction and dynamics of generalising and unifying formulations about the human condition and human betterment. Both Foucault and Ankersmit problematize our assumptions of a coherent body of knowledge, urge us to attend to and describe disjunctures, and provide new directions in our search for meaningful interrelationships among bodies of knowledge. The history of the development enterprise as well as the field of development needs to be looked at as a contingent struggle between different kinds of knowledge, including the moral.

*(b) Turn to contingency: Modes of acknowledgement and modes of coping*

Foucault and Ankersmit help us to turn away from a historical and generalizing mode of thinking about ethics and development and understanding the significance of contingency. An awareness of contingency helps us to understand not only our situatedness in space and time but also the situatedness of our perspective. Contingency points to our embeddedness in many webs of relationships, which simultaneously determines and opens up spaces of possibilities.<sup>14</sup> Taking contingency seriously helps us to realize that when we are dealing with a situation the history in which it is embedded is not only one of progress and order but also is a story of “shattered expectations” (Habermas 1998b: 13). A turn to contingency frees us from alluring and false promises of progress, of creeds, which promise certainty and eternal meaning. Rather it enables us to have a much humbler view of progress and development stressing on the significance of “fallibilistic conception of knowledge” (Putnam 2001) and the need to creatively live with uncertainty, which in turn calls for us to abandon our habitual clinging to order and stability (Toulmin 2001).

Contingency is not accidental. In fact it is an integral part of an awareness of contingency that concrete and diverse practices, as well as discourse and history

could have been different. As social theorist Nancy Weiss Hanrahan tells us: “...the outcomes of social processes are always contingent in that things could turn out otherwise (Hanrahan 2000: 35; also see Hawthorn 1991; Walker 1998). An awareness of contingency while making us attentive to the historicity of our action and perspective does not make us prisoners of history, it rather enables us to discover creative and less absolutist ways of overcoming the limitations of a particular, temporal and spatial situatedness. Our awareness of contingency does not absolve us from the specific responsibilities inherent in and emerging from each of the three domains. On the contrary, an awareness of contingency of being part of specific historical contexts may free us from all kinds of unrealistic assumptions. Each of the three bodies of knowledge which are pertinent to development--hope, politics (and administration), and scientific understanding--is seen to be situated in a specific domain. We must look not only to what goes on within each of the domains. Each time we must try to be creative in searching for the appropriate relationship between them. The notion of contingency makes us aware that claims of hegemony by any of the three must be looked at with reservation.

Acknowledgement of contingency is only a first step. The second question is the following: In what ways do people and institutions cope with the contingency of the practices in which they are engaged? What is their response to this often unexpected and painful awareness? On the one end of the scale, we can discern responses of ignoring, the negation of contingency. This extreme response is often accompanied with a high degree of optimism concerning the manageability of development. In the opening paragraphs we started with a preliminary discussion of the varying and transforming ‘regimes of optimism,’ those dominated by political actors and ideological points of view, as opposed to the more recent regimes of manageable development guided and controlled by accountants and their flock. On the other end of the scale of ways of coping with the notion of contingency, we may find various ‘ironic’ responses, sometimes accompanied by notions of political and moral relativism.

### *(c) Emergent Ethics: Border Crossing Between Facts and Values*

In this article our engagement with moral issues in the routines of development as well as in their macro determinations and foundational constitution transcends preoccupation with ethics as a domain of rules and regulations and calls for a new approach to understanding ethical issues in development and its interventions. It is rarely realised however that the impasse in present-day development discourse also involves the impasse in thinking about development ethics. Development ethics as charted by Denis Goulet (1995) is concerned with the quest for certain rules and regulations, i.e. to search for ‘correct’ motivations and for certain modes of development policies. It is concerned with application of values.<sup>15</sup> But as Gasper (1999: 54) tells us, such a preoccupation hides “the

tendency still to seek security and certainty through detailed pre-set plans and conditions.” But development ethics is not primarily a domain of application of values, a search for rules and regulations; rather, in our engagement development ethics is an effort to rethink ethics and rules in a new way where they embody our contingent responsibilities and care, rather than a generalising, ‘universal’ principle.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, it is helpful to proceed with the idea of emergent ethics as a companion in our search for ways out of the present impasse in ethics and development. We submit the following elements of this emergent pathway:

First, the idea of emergent ethics suggests that a moral understanding of development and its interventions cannot rest on generalised moral points of view, laws or a priori formulations. The emphasis on contingency implies a linking of moral views into a wider historical analysis. Emergent ethics seeks to understand how ethical views emerge, as it were, from efforts to come to terms with concrete practices. Emergent ethics implies a dialogical and dialectical relationship between the actors and the situation at hand, and between practices of normative reflection and critical empirical research. The fluidity of the term is thus consciously chosen. It points to the need for a *Fingerspitzengefühl*, a kind of practical moral sensitivity.

Emergent ethics thus emerges from a confrontation with the best possible data in a concrete historical situation. Emergent ethics is based on an emergent empiricism, which also looks at data as part of an emergent situation, an emergent empiricism, which is helpful when moral reasoning becomes hegemonic. This leads to our second point that the notion of emergent ethics encompasses both the normative as well as the empirical dimensions of development and calls for a morally engaged ethnography. This in turn calls for border crossing between anthropology and moral philosophy. A plea for emergent ethics entails a willingness to engage in new kinds of dialogue with moral philosophers in order to escape from various forms of disciplinary myopia from which we suffer. Fortunately for us, we have fertile traditions to build on here both from anthropology and moral philosophy as exemplified in the works of Veena Das (1995a, 1995b; 1999), Clifford Geertz (2000), Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1992), Mark Hobart, Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) (also see Fischer 1999).

Third, the question must be asked whose narratives and whose emergent horizons are we talking about? Development not only consists of different domains of actions and imaginations—hope, politics, and critical understanding but each of these domains has various kinds of actors—state, market, social movements / voluntary organization, and self. Emergent ethics calls for

attentiveness to an ethics which emerges out of openness to stories and points of view of all these actors, rather than an apriori assertion and violent exclusion of other horizons. The interventionist world of development has particularly not been open to the suffering of the people who have been violated by imposition of monological development projects such as building of big dams and mines. Here, emergent ethics calls for an embodied sensitivity to such narrations of suffering and in the process transforming itself into an ethics of friendship and responsibility (cf. Giri 2002b).<sup>17</sup>

Fourthly, emergent ethics requires public space, an agora, where all citizens may meet.<sup>18</sup> Border crossing is an engagement for all active in the domains of development. More is needed than new forms of academic collaboration. It calls for new kinds of linkages between the domains of politics and of critical understanding. Emergent ethics implies a call for breaking the processes of social closure, which have encapsulated each of the three domains—hope, politics and critical understanding.

Fifth, the notion of emergent ethics calls for acknowledgment of tensions between two sides of development: care of self and care of other, ethics as well as aesthetics.

### **Ethics, Aesthetics and Responsibility**

Emergent ethics pleads for a simultaneous cultivation of ethics and aesthetics and attentiveness to responsibility. In our experience with development interventions we find that an ethical agenda has almost always implied an agenda of the care of the other in a hegemonic manner where what is good for the other has already been defined by the benevolent Self. In fact, the problem with the practice of development in the last 50 years has been precisely with such an ethical agenda which has been an agenda of hegemonic application of a priori formulations in which the objects of development do not have much say in defining and shaping the contours of their development (Carmen 1996). Such an agenda makes development an other-oriented activity where the actors of development do not realize that the field and the practice of development provides, and ought to provide, an opportunity for learning (cf. Maturana 1980; Melucci 1996; Nederveen Pieterse 2001), self-development and self-transformation both for the object and the subject of development. In this context, there is a need to rethink development as an initiative in self-development on the part of both the subjects and objects of development, and ethics not only as an engagement in care of the other but also as an engagement in care of the self. Such a redefinition and reconstruction of both ethics and development is a crucial starting point for a new understanding and

reconstitution of development as a shared human responsibility, and as a shared human possibility.

Rethinking development from the vantage point and practice of self-development urges a shift of perspective from us: a shift from looking at development as ameliorating the condition of the other to looking at it as an initiative in self-development. Self-development here refers to the self-development of both the agents of development as well as subjects, the so-called target groups of interventions. In contemporary rethinking of welfare and well-being in advanced industrial societies, we are told that without the development of an “autotelic self” which takes upon itself the responsibility of one's development and for taking oneself out of the trap of poverty and unfreedom, no amount of development intervention and welfare work can help alter the initial situation of poverty and helplessness (Giddens 1994, 1999). At the same time, those who are engaged in developing others and creating a more capable and functioning environment have a need to develop themselves. Though in the contemporary late-capitalistic, neo-liberal redefinition of welfare, emphasis on self-development has many a time manifested itself in a politics of irresponsibility (cf. Bauman 2001), of blaming the victim for her failure, this particular manifestation should not deter us from realizing the potential that a quest for self-development today has in transgressing the boundaries between self and other, subject and object in interventions of welfare and initiatives of development. Fortunately for us, there have taken place important movements in the development field such as Swadhyaya and Sarvodaya which reiterate that development is not only meant for the other, it is also meant for the self and in development, both the development of the other and development of self should go hand in hand (Roy 1993; Sheth 1994; Giri 2004b).

The emphasis on self-development in the field of development practice is accompanied by an aesthetic deepening of the agenda of ethics where care of the self as an artistic work par excellence becomes the heart of ethics. Traditionally, we look at ethics as concerned with the consequences of one's action for the other. But ethics as care of the self urges us to realize that our action also affects ourselves and through care of the self, we are able to become worthy helpers and servants of the other. Such a deepening of the agenda of ethics draws its most immediate inspiration from Michael Foucault who urges us to realize that “the search for an ethics of existence” must involve an “elaboration of one's own life as a personal work of art” (Foucault 1988: 49). Foucault's agenda of an aesthetic ethics is developed in the context of his discussion of ethical life and ethical ideals in Antiquity. But this is not meant only to be archaeology of the past but suggest a possible mode and ideal of ethical engagement for the present and the future. For Foucault, in Antiquity, “the search for an ethics of existence” was “an attempt to affirm one's liberty and to give to one's life a certain form in



which one could recognize oneself, be recognized by others, and which even the posterity might take as an example” (ibid). For Foucault, life as a work of art involves care of the self, a conversion to self, an intense relation with oneself. While ethics is usually conceived as care for the other, for Foucault, ethics at the same time, must help one to “take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation” (1988: 42). Furthermore, aesthetic ethics as care of the self involves cultivation of appropriate values in the conduct of life. The most important task here is not to be obsessed with exercising power over others and to be concerned with discovering and realizing “what one is in relation to oneself” (ibid: 85).

Foucault’s call for self-restraint vis-à-vis one’s work of power is particularly salutary in the field of development where agents of development have sought to impose their own will and models on the targets of development interventions. Through development of self-control the actors of development can resist the temptation to unnecessarily meddle in the lives of those with whom they are in interaction and thus facilitate their self-flourishing and self-unfoldment. For Robert Chambers, “it implies that uppers have to give up something and make themselves vulnerable” (Chambers 1997: 234). An engagement in self-control also enables actors of development to be aware of the hegemonic implications of a project of ethics, which is primarily prescriptive. It enables them to continuously seek to transcend the world of separation between the creators of development and the beneficiaries of such a creation. Recently Majid Rehenema who has applied Foucault’s insights in going beyond the impasse of contemporary development interventions has called for a “bottom up aesthetic order” in development at the heart of which lies a desire on the part of the actors to be true to themselves and develop their “inner world” and challenge the distinction between the makers of the worlds of beauty, truth and goodness and those who enjoy their benefits. In such a bottom-up aesthetic reconstruction of development, “Right action involving others starts always as a personal work on oneself. It is the fruit of an almost divine kind of exercise, which usually takes place in the solitude of thought and creation” (Rehenema 1997: 401).

An aesthetic deepening of the agenda of development can also draw inspiration from Ankersmit’s recent plea for what he calls “aesthetic politics” (Ankersmit 1996). For Ankersmit, while “ethics makes sense on the assumption of a (Stoic) continuity between our intentions, our actions and their results in the socio-political world,” aesthetics draws our attention to the gaps and discontinuities among them (1996: 44). Ankermit makes a distinction between mimetic representation, which denies this gap between representation and represented and aesthetic representation which acknowledges this gap and builds on it. For Ankersmit, mimetic representation is against representation itself as “representation always happens, so to, speak, between the represented and its

representation; it always needs the presence of their distance and the ensuring interaction.” (Ankersmit 1996: 44). The problem with modernist politics for Ankersmit has been that it has been a hostage to the politically correct ideology of mimetic representation where political representatives are required to mirror the expectations of their constituency. This creates a compulsion for politically correct mimetic representation rather than a representation, which is based on one’s autonomous self-identity and negotiation between this identity and the aspirations of the represented. For Ankersmit, acknowledgment of this gap becomes an aesthetic work par excellence where actors learn to develop an appropriate political style in the midst of fragmentation rather than with a valorised united whole, which does not exist any more. Aesthetic political representation urges us to realize that “the representative has autonomy with regard to the people represented” but autonomy then is not an excuse to abandon one’s responsibility. Aesthetic autonomy requires cultivation of “disinterestedness” on the part of actors, which is not indifference.<sup>19</sup> To have disinterestedness i.e, to have "comportment towards the beautiful that is devoid of all ulterior references to use—requires a kind of ascetic commitment; it is the 'liberation of ourselves for the release of what has proper worth only in itself'" (Osborne 1997: 135).

In aesthetic politics, the development of appropriate styles of conduct on the part of the representatives is facilitated by the choice and play of appropriate metaphors. For Ankersmit, in the development of an appropriate style of conduct for a representative the metaphor of a “maintenance man” or woman is more facilitating for self-growth than an architect. While the architect thinks that she is designing a building of which she is the creator, a maintenance person has a much more modest understanding of one's role and does not look at his effort as creating a building out of nothing, rather continuing a work to which many others have contributed. Such a metaphor of “maintenance man” can provide new self-understanding to actors both in the field of politics and development where we do not have any dearth of actors, institutions and worldviews who attribute to them the role of the original creator, the architect, the god. But such a self-understanding of ourselves as architects often leads to arrogance and dominance. In this context, there is modesty in the metaphor of the “maintenance person” which is further facilitated by the choice of the metaphor of the captain of a ship. It is not enough for a captain to have only an a priori plan; she must know how to negotiate between a priori plans and the contingent situations on the ground. Such a capacity for negotiation which is facilitated by one's choice of an appropriate metaphor such as captain and “maintenance person” is crucial for development of appropriate styles of conduct on the part of the actors in the field of politics and development. In developing his outline of aesthetic politics, an outline which has enormous significance for reconstituting the field of development as a field of artistic rather than mimetic representation

which in turn calls for the cultivation of an appropriate style of life on the part of the actors of development, Ankersmit writes: “...when asking himself or herself how best to represent the represented, the representative should ask what political style would best suit the electorate. And this question requires an essentially creative answer on the part of the representative, in the sense that there exists no style in the electorate that is quietly waiting to be copied (ibid: 54). For Ankersmit, “aesthetics will provide us with a most fruitful point of departure if we desire to improve our political self-knowledge” and in this self-knowledge autonomy of actors, units and institutions has a crucial significance. In fact, nurturing the autonomous spaces of self, institutions and society itself as spaces of creative self-fashioning and development of creative styles of action becomes an aesthetic activity par excellence. Of course, autonomy here has not to be meant in a defensive sense of preserving the established structures rather than transforming it in accordance with the transformative imagination of actors and a democratic public discursive formation of will.

Ankersmit’s application of the perspective of aesthetics in the field of politics has important lessons for us in reconstituting development as a field of shared responsibility. Aesthetic politics in Ankersmit is not geared to a will to power but inspired by a will to political self-knowledge and the will to develop oneself as a “maintenance man”. As against the tyranny of unity in certain strands of German aesthetics such as Schiller’s, Ankersmit’s aesthetics celebrates and works “within an irrevocably broken world” (Ankersmit 1996: 53) but the brokenness of the world is not an excuse to abandon one’s responsibility. This is facilitated by further creative elaborations of an aesthetic mode of engagement by Charles Taylor (1991) and Seyla Benhabib (1996) where aesthetics is characterized by both quest of authenticity as well as striving for establishing non-domineering relationships with others (also see Scarry 1999; Welsch 1997). In the words of Benhabib: “The overcoming of the compulsive logic of modernism can only be a matter of giving back to the non-identical, the suppressed, and the dominated their right to be. We can invoke the other but we cannot name it. Like the God of the Jewish tradition who must not be named but evoked, the utopian transcendence of the compulsive logic of Enlightenment and modernism cannot be named but awakened in memory. The evocation of this memory, the ‘rethinking of nature in the subject’ is the achievement of the aesthetic” (Benhabib 1996: 333).

Our engagement with various new ways of understanding the work of aesthetics has important lessons for us in thinking about and relating to the field of development. First, aesthetics as sensitivity to configurations of togetherness without reducing it to an a priori plan or teleology of order can help us to look at the field of development as a field of togetherness. But this togetherness is not a product of an ordered plan nor is it teleologically geared to production of order.

A preoccupation with order has led to dangerous consequences in the field of development where leaders have deliberately tried to put conflict, ambiguity and contradictions under carpet. It has also led to a denial of the work of contingencies in developmental dynamics. Aesthetics as openness to the contingent also helps us overcome the creed of certainty and better prepare ourselves for appreciating the work of uncertainty in the developmental world and fashion an appropriate mode of action and management, which reflects such a concern. For instance, recently Lyla Mehta, Melissa Leach and her colleagues at Institute of Development Studies, Sussex have urged us to explore new directions in natural resource management which takes uncertainty of people's lives—ecological uncertainty, livelihood uncertainty, and knowledge uncertainties—seriously and in this engagement an aesthetic awareness compared with a positivist preoccupation with regulation can help us too (Mehta et al. 1999). Finally aesthetics as artistic representation rather than mimetic representation can enable us first to understand the mimetic nature of most of development interventions and then encourage us to cultivate various alternative ways of coming out of this closed mimetic world. One aspect of the mimetic character of the contemporary world of development interventions is that the representatives of development are self-confident that they can represent the interest of the donor agencies on the one hand and beneficiaries on the other in a transparent and unproblematic manner. But such assumption condemns them to a world of self-created continuity while the field of development is characterized by lack of fit between intentions and outcome. And with aesthetic sensibility once the representatives realize the practical and moral untenability of such a mimetic world they can engage themselves with various modes of aesthetic ethics and politics, which enable them to articulate the interests of donors and beneficiaries in a more responsible manner.

But as these are some of the potential for renewing development practice with an engagement with aesthetics, unfortunately there are some fundamental limits to it too. One of these relates to a narrow valorisation of care of the self in an aesthetic engagement, a valorisation, which does not take seriously and is even blissfully oblivious of its responsibility to others (cf. Krishna 1996). In fact, this problem lies at the core of the Foucauldian care of the self. As Gardiner helps us realize: "In Foucault's ontology of the subjects, there are only scattered and essentially gratuitous references to our relations with others, little real acknowledgment of the centrality of non-repressive solidarity and dialogue for human existence. One must not have the care for others precede the care of the self, he [Foucault] bluntly declares at one point" (Gardiner 1996: 38). Critical reflections on Foucault's own scripting of life also points to a preoccupation with sadomasochism in his life which points to the limits of his aesthetic ethics (Miller 1993: 327). In this context, aesthetic ethics in itself cannot help us come

out of the impasse in which we are in the field of development and we need to engage ourselves with development as embodiment of responsibility.

### **Ethics as Responsibility and the Face of the Other**

In our recent times, Emmanuel Levinas has been foremost in redefining the agenda of ethics as responsibility to the other. For Levinas, ethical engagement involves transcendence where transcendence consists of a “passing over to being’s other, otherwise than being” (Levinas 1974: 3). As Levinas tells us, in ethics “it is no longer a question of the ego, but of me. The subject which is not an ego, but which I am, cannot be generalized, is not a subject in general [...] Here the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility” (Levinas 1974: 13-14).

Levinas’s ethics of the face has an inspiring parallel in the life and thoughts of Gandhi. Gandhi’s life embodied a multi-dimensional responsibility with multiple others—especially the suffering, violated and the marginalized—in a non-hegemonic way (Parekh 1997). As Srinivasan writes: “All his experiments, whether in the realm of caste, communal, race or gender relations sought to declassify the Untouchable--harijan, muslim, white or women through a non-violent exchange” and establish solidarity of love with them (Srinivasan 1998: 76). In his ashram at Sevagram, Gandhi had a leper-stricken old man as his fellow ashramite and his daily routine included cleaning his wounds. When Levinas writes that “the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone” we find the embodiment of such an awareness in the life of Gandhi. After the partition of India Gandhi walked in the villages of Bengal reassuring faces living in the fear of death though this partly contributed to his later falling to the bulletins of an assassin. Gandhi elevates his concrete relationships with others to a heart-touching moral principle:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him; will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him control over his own life and destiny? In other words will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and the spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and self melting away.

(Gandhi quoted in Chambers et al. 1989: 241)

But Gandhian embodiment of responsibility is different from working out an apriori plan of ameliorating the suffering of the other. Gandhi’s walks with others “was always (at the same time) an interior journey, an exploration of his

being, and not just the working out of a preestablished strategy” (Pillai 1985: 77). “It is this insistent questioning of himself which distinguishes his actions from all self-sanctifying ‘social service’ based on representation. Every decision for Gandhi was simultaneously the laying open of himself” (ibid). Thus in Gandhi an appropriate response to the face of the other requires appropriate preparation in self but such a simultaneous engagement is missing from Levinas. Levinas takes the readiness of self to look up to and die for the other granted and does not realize that self has to develop herself in appropriate way for such task of responsibility and martyrdom.

The call for responsibility in Gandhi and Levinas has an esteemed predecessor in the inspiring reflections of Soren Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard, ethics is a “mode of praxial engagement and life of commitment” (Schrag 1997: 120). Kierkegaard urges us to realize the limits of an aesthetic cultivation of self and understand the significance of ethics in providing a long-term commitment to the self. In Kierkegaard’s formulation, the life of an aesthete “falls apart into a series of disconnected moments” who “becomes sufficiently self-conscious about his socially given identity to stand back from it” (Rudd 1993: 96). However, the ethicist “consciously re-engages in the commitments and relationships of social life” (ibid). For Kierkegaard, a life of ethical commitment provides a constancy to the self which is achieved “through the bonding of self with other selves” (Schrag 1997: 19). Here it is important to realize the difference in emphases in Foucauldian ethics and Kierkegaardian ethics: “The integrity that is won through self-constancy is sustained not only through a proper relation of self to itself but also in and through self’s relations to other selves” (ibid).

### **From Development as Freedom to Development as Responsibility**

This passionate call for responsibility has important lessons for us in reimagining and reliving development as a transformative practice. It can help us reconstitute development as responsibility, which can provide a self-critical and transformative supplement to the contemporary redefinitions of development as freedom (Sen 1999). In his recent passionate reflections, Amartya Sen has urged us to reconstitute development as a “momentous engagement with freedom’s possibilities” (Sen 1999: 298). But Sen does not take his explorations of freedom’s possibilities in a self-critical direction of responsibility where one’s striving for freedom has within itself a space for criticism of the self-justificatory claims of one’s freedom. In this context, a redefinition of human well-being in terms of “functioning” and “capability” of individuals and of development as freedom needs to be supplemented by a reconceptualisation and realization of development as responsibility where

freedom is an object of both ontological and social commitment. Embodiment of responsibility requires looking up to the face of the other and the mirrors of desires within oneself and going beyond the self-justificatory world of freedom itself. This, in turn, is facilitated by appropriate self-development. Development then means not only enhancing the functioning and capacity of bonded labourers or enhancing the life expectancy of disadvantaged groups such as the Afro-Americans within an affluent society such as the US, as Sen argues,<sup>20</sup> but also self-development on the part of the free agents where they do not just assert the self-justificatory logic of their own freedom but are willing to subject it to a self and mutual criticism and “undergo the suffering that would come to [them] from non-ego” (Levinas 1974: 123). In Sen, development as freedom is an end state but without the self-development of actors and institutions from freedom to responsibility there would be very little resources left to rescue human well-being from the tyranny of freedom.

But development as responsibility for the other is facilitated by appropriate self-development. In the discourse of development as freedom there is little awareness of this. There is little awareness about this in pathway of ethical responsibility as charted by Levinas too. As we saw briefly in our dialogue with Gandhi, Levinas takes the readiness for self granted and thus in our effort to reconstitute development as a shared responsibility we have to go beyond Levinas while holding his very helpful and alchemical hands. In this context, it is helpful to keep in mind the differential inspiration of Gandhi and Levinas. While in the Gandhian path, there is a simultaneous work on self-development and attentiveness to the other, Levinas only speaks of one’s responsibility to the other and takes the task of self-preparation for granted. In this context, the significance of aesthetic ethics lies precisely in stressing the point that attentiveness to and responsibility for the other requires appropriate self-preparation. But then the task here is again to be on the guard so that our engagement with self-preparation does not degenerate into beautification of self. So, we deal with a contingent world here, and the task before us is to cope with the contingent challenge of self-development and responsibility to the other in a balanced and transformational manner.

### **Development as Responsibility: Virtues of “Acknowledged Dependence”**

Development as responsibility consists of both attentiveness to the other and work on oneself. But in theory and practice there are many gaps between them and it is difficult to achieve a final solution to this problem. A creative way of coping with this problem is to cultivate what Alasdair MacIntyre (1999) calls “acknowledged dependence” in our practices of relationships. We need a new morality which acknowledges the disjunctions between different actors and

knowledges in the field of development but at the same time does not consider these disjunctions as destiny and strives to work with these and find a way out. To come to terms with it, there is a need to go beyond consequentialist and deontological ethics. The result-oriented morality in contemporary neo-liberal development practice is a variant of utilitarianism where the moral concern is external to the process of realization of results and the actors (Mohanty 2000; Thompson 2001). In place of such an externalist morality, we now need a morality and ethics of participation where “knowledge of” can never be dissociated from the process of “knowing with” (Sunder Rajan 1998). At the same time, we have to come to acknowledge that if consequentialism and result-oriented morality cannot take us out of our moral predicament, the answer does not lie in an uncritical reiteration of a Kantian goal-oriented morality (Beck 2000). A goal-oriented morality is also an externalist morality and it also leads to a “morality of black box.” In its place we now need a morality of participation, a field of participation, which has within its very heart the brokenness of the world. MacIntyre (1999) charts such a pathway for us with what he calls “virtues of acknowledged dependence.”

For MacIntyre, to participate in any particular relationship, neither the language of self-interest nor the language of benevolence is enough. Instead, it requires a language of giving and receiving in which both the self and the other, other and the self are giver and receiver at the same time. To participate in such a relationship, there is a need to cultivate both virtues of giving and receiving, the virtues, which lie at the intersection of two other virtues, the virtue of generosity and justice. While in the conventional understanding of virtues, these two virtues, i.e. the virtue of justice and the virtue of generosity, are looked at as different from each other and approached in isolation, for MacIntyre it is important to bring these two virtues together in our art of relationship. While the virtue of justice makes us aware what we owe to both the self and the other, the virtue of generosity helps us to move from conditional care to unconditional obligation both in our relationship with ourselves and in relationship to others.

This mode of engagement of acknowledged dependence provides us a way out of the black box of being trapped either in goals or results, action or reflections in the world of development. It helps us to be attentive to dialectic between goal and result, the interaction between actors and target groups, others and self, and how interdependence is put into place in the practice of development. Such a perspective of acknowledged dependence also urges us to realize how meaningful action and evaluation in development depends on our capacity to acknowledge the relative significance and limitation of different modes of engagement such as development as hope, development as politics and application, and development as critical understanding and consisting of different actors of development such as self, voluntary organizations, market and



state. This also calls for realizing development as responsibility embodying ethics and aesthetics, self-cultivation and socio-spiritual struggles, a responsibility, which is aware of the contingent nature of our locations and the need for a transcendental and transversal opening of our vision.

[This article builds on our collaborative work on development ethics, particularly our recently co-edited book on this theme, *A Moral Critique of Development: In Search of Global Responsibilities*.]

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In fact environmental critiques have constituted an important aspect of moral critique of development. See Sachs 1999.
- <sup>2</sup> Like Strydom, we owe the idea of co-responsibility to philosopher Karl-Otto Apel. Apel (2001) argues that to come to terms with ethical and moral challenges of our times neither individual-centered micro-ethics nor society-centered macro ethics is enough. What is required is a planetary ethics of co-responsibility where all of us consider ourselves responsible to each other as member of a planetary community. Apel makes clear that this does not mean that all of us share the responsibility in the same manner. In a recent discussion, Apel also makes clear that “even if I was not the one who had ordered the war in Kosovo still I am not totally absolved of my responsibility” (personal communication).
- <sup>3</sup> There is a long debate in Western philosophical tradition as to which is one is truly emancipatory: moral or ethical. While Habermas (1990) looks at ethical consciousness as embedded in taken-for-granted assumptions of society and looks up to moral consciousness as suggesting critical edge, Levinas in his pathways of ethics as first philosophy suggests just the opposite.
- <sup>4</sup> The isolation of the political process preceding interventions in development from the domains of outcomes of intervention has been well documented in the report “evaluation and monitoring” prepared by the Policy Evaluation and Review Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hague (1993). The report concluded that evaluation had not impacted policy making in any discernable way. The conclusion was made on the basis of a relatively great number of case studies. For Dutch NGO’s a similar conclusion concerning the relative isolation of policy making from the domains of outcome had been made earlier on (Quarles 1988). It was interesting to note how helpless the agencies were in amending the situation. More was apparently at stake than a ‘technical’ administrative problem.
- <sup>5</sup> The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Netherlands recently called attention to serious flaws in the assessing of ‘result oriented development intervention’. Reliable empirical data for making a judgment were absent. While available data allowed for financial accountability “more data are needed for policy evaluations” (Yearly Report 2000: 1). The complaints may well indicate the problematic nature of the empiricist assumptions involved (cf. Hobart 1993; Gasper 2003). The ‘prices’ of transforming public organisations into business like operations have been analysed by Mintzberg (1989). See also: Jacobs (1993) and Quarles a.o. (1998).
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph Stiglitz (2002) until recently with the World Bank himself talks about “market fundamentalism” in this case.
- <sup>7</sup> It must be noted that some recent developments in the theory and practice of development such as the rise of social capital theory and institutional perspectives on market clearly calls for understanding this contradiction and making efforts at overcoming this (cf. Dasgupta & Serageldin 2000; Putnam et al. 1993).
- <sup>8</sup> According to Teresa Brennan (1995), such a desire to control constitutes the core of social evil.
- <sup>9</sup> This process of social closure has been well-documented. Quarles (1988), building on the seminal work of Mintzberg (1979) shows how in the 1980s the spending staff in some Dutch NGOs gained the upper hand over those responsible for learning through monitoring and evaluation. Another study of the learning capacity of government institutions came to a similar conclusion. A study of actual impact of evaluation on wider policy processes by the Dutch governments substantiated that norms and rules guiding the administrative machinery tend to become a world onto themselves and learning have a

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limited role to play in the policy processes. The actual implementation is also cut off from the very people on whose support it depends. So donor spaces of hope, commitment and caring become increasingly self-contained.

<sup>10</sup> Mohanty (2000) helps us understand the link between “multi-valued logic” and the idea of shared contents: “Different ‘worlds’ have shared contents” (Mohanty 2000: 24). And we can similarly say: Different worlds of development have shared content. Mohanty’s pathway of multi-valued logic finds an inspiring companion in Uberoi’s recent effort to go beyond the dualist logic of European modernity, buildings as he does on the Hermetic traditions of Europe, and his plea for a “four-valued logic of truth and method in place of the restricted two-valued logic of dualism” (Uberoi 2002: 118).

<sup>11</sup> This way of thinking of relationship of autonomy and mutual interpenetration among domains finds a parallel in creative thinkers of our times such as R. Sunder Rajan’s formulation of the historiographical field as consisting of history as power, history as reason and history as vision, Iren van Staveren’s construction of the economic field as consisting of domains of market, justice and care, and Frederick Barth’s recent formulation about knowledge (cf. Barth 2002; van Staveren 1991 & Sunder Rajan 1996 ). For an illustration, we can appreciate the spirit of such a mode of inquiry by following closely what Barth writes:

‘I am *not* inviting you to take a highly generalized and abstract unity (knowledge) and divide into three parts (substantive corpus, communicative medium, and social organization) and then progressively break each of these parts down further till we finally arrive at the level of particular human actions and events. On the contrary, my thesis is that these three faces of knowledge appear together precisely in the particulars of action in every event of the application of knowledge [...] Their mutual determination takes place at those specific moments when a particular item of substantive knowledge is cast in a particular communicative medium and applied in an actor by an action positioned in a particular social organization: their systematic interdependence arises by virtue of the constraints *in realization* that these three aspects impose on each other in the context of every particular application (Barth 2002: 3; italics in the original).’

<sup>12</sup> Our pathway of development anthropology departs from many scholars who in their ethnography of development practice confine themselves with bounded groups. For example, in their ethnography of aid, Crew & Harrison write: “Our description and analysis is ethnographic in the sense that we are presenting our interpretation of patterned social relations within a conceptually bounded group of people” (Crew & Harrison 1998: 6). The pathway we plead is for more border crossing but in this we do not sacrifice the logic of place to a logic of flows, or what Clifford Geertz warns: too quickly leaving roots “in favor of routes”.

<sup>13</sup> The allowing for hope to assume its place implies a willingness to confront the makings of crisis in the past. As Kekes (1992: 12) remarks: “True hope can follow only after we have faced evil, while false hope is fuelled by a denial of evil”.

<sup>14</sup> As David Harvey argues, “Contingency does not imply, however, that as opposed to the designer ideal, the actual architecture is secondary and constantly in danger of collapse. Rather, contingency insures that no architect is able to determine a design free from the relationship with the ‘other’—the client, staff, and other factors relevant to the design process” (Harvey 2000: 230).

<sup>15</sup> For Goulet, development ethics is the “cement that binds together multiple diagnoses of problems with their policy implications through an explicit [...] study of values” (Goulet 1995: 27). This has led many scholars in the field to be concerned with the study and care of the application of certain developmental values. In this way ethics comes to be linked to a large extent with the quest for certain rules and regulations.

<sup>16</sup> In this context it is helpful here to think further about the influential theories of justice of John Rawls. The Rawlsian framework of justice constitutes historical way of thinking

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about and relating to justice and in discovering our pathway we turn from this to a new mode of emergent ethics building on the important works of virtue ethics, virtue epistemology and care. Caring as a moral concern implies that we must confront all kinds of dilemmas and contradictions and should not be confined within ethics as a series of rules and regulations. This is missing in a justice approach to morality. As G.A. Cohen tells us: “In the case of Rawlsian doctrine, the relevant life is not mine in particular, but people’s life as such [...] egalitarian justice is only, as Rawlsian liberalism teaches, a matter of the rules that define the structure of society, but also a matter of personal attitude and choice” (Cohen 2000: 3; also see Keeke 2002).

<sup>17</sup> A question here that faces us is if the idea of emergent ethics an implicit plea for relativism? How can development be a domain of global responsibility if the practices are all seen as contingent? The pathway of an emergent ethics does not necessarily lead to relativistic consequences. It does not empty our sense of global responsibility. On the contrary, the understanding of contingency may well become a stepping-stone for shared responsibility. Acknowledging different ways of coping with the very concrete problems at hand may help us to learn and move beyond our specific contexts. There are always choices to be made, learning processes must take place, insight in concrete constraints and possibilities for transformation may be gained. Thus we may move beyond the specific constraints, which we confront. This allows for transcending the specific situation and thus for universality. And here emergent ethics not only involves border crossing between facts and values but questions any naïve and unproblematic universalization of values themselves by opening these to a trans-cultural and trans-civilizational interrogation and dialogue.

<sup>18</sup> But our conception of public space is different from Habermas. For us public space is not only a space of rational argumentation but also a space for sharing one’s fear and anxieties among each other. But participating in such a public sphere requires self-cultivation in terms of listening to and acknowledgment of fear and anxiety in one’s life and life of others, of course as a prelude to searching a way out. Such a reconstituted conception of public sphere is particularly significant now as people in Europe feel that reigning ideologies of political correctness here does not allow them to talk about their fear openly in the public sphere.

<sup>19</sup> In a recent discussion with us (Aug. 8, 2001) Ankersmit makes the connection between aesthetic autonomy and the quest for freedom and the possibility of renewal in individual and social life clear.

<sup>20</sup> Amartya Sen writes: “African Americans in the United States are relatively poor compared with American Whites, though much richer than people in the Third World. It is, however, important to recognize that African Americans have an absolutely lower chance of reaching mature ages than do people in many third world societies, such as China, or Sri Lanka, or parts of India [...] If development analysis is relevant even for richer countries the presence of such inter-group contrasts within richer countries can be seen to be an important aspect of the understanding of development and underdevelopment” (1999: 6).

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