

# Denis Goulet and the project of development ethics

## Choices in methodology, focus and organization

*Des Gasper*

*Institute of Social Studies, The Hague  
gasper@iss.nl*

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### *Abstract:*

Denis Goulet (1931-2006) was a pioneer of human development theory and a founder of work on ‘development ethics’ as a self-conscious field that treats the ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning, and practice. The paper looks at aspects of Goulet’s work in relation to four issues concerning this project of development ethics—scope, methodology, roles, and organisational format and identity. It compares his views with subsequent trends in the field and suggests lessons for work on human development. While his definition of the scope of development ethics remains serviceable, his methodology of intense immersion by a ‘development ethicist’ in each context under examination was rewarding but limited by the time and skills it requires and a relative disconnection from communicable theory. He wrote profoundly about ethics’ possible lines of influence, including through incorporation in methods, movements and education, but his own ideas wait to be sufficiently incorporated. He proposed development ethics as a new (sub)discipline, yet the immersion in particular contexts and their routine practices that is required for understanding and influence must be by people who remain close to specific disciplinary and professional backgrounds. Development ethics has to be, he eventually came to accept, not a distinct (sub)discipline but an interdisciplinary field.

Keywords: development ethics; Denis Goulet; human development; interdisciplinarity

## **The career of Denis Goulet: lessons for human development and development ethics**

“[W]hat kind of development can be considered ‘human’?” asked the American philosopher, anthropologist and social planner Denis Goulet (1971a: 236). Already in 1960 he wrote, following his mentor Louis Lebrét, that ‘development’ means “changes which allow human beings, both as individual persons and as members of groups, to move from one condition of life to one which is more human in some meaningful way” (1960: 14; 2006a: 7). His 1971 book *The Cruel Choice* declared: “The aim of this work is to thrust debates over economic and social development into the arena of ethical values. ... Is human development something more than a systemic combination of modern bureaucracy, efficient technology, and productive economy?” (1971a: vii). Development’s “ultimate goals are those of existence itself: to provide all men with the opportunity to lead full human lives” (1971a: x). He presented an ideal of “full, comprehensive human development” (1979: 556), and praised the Sri Lankan Sarvodaya movement’s “concept of human development...[based on] respect for all life and the concept of the well-being of all” (1979: 559).

It is worth looking back at Goulet’s career to identify questions and possible lessons for the work on human development and capabilities initiated by Sen, Haq and Nussbaum. Well before them, he advocated that “authentic development aims toward the realization of human capabilities in all spheres” (Goulet 1971b: 205), and stressed that economic growth and technological modernity must be treated as, at best, potential means towards considered human values, not vice versa. At the same time he insisted that principles of ethics and religion had to be confronted by and relate to the full realities and complexities of modern economies (Goulet 1960: 23).

Denis Goulet (1931-2006) brought the French language project of ‘the ethics of development’ into the Spanish, Portuguese, and English language literatures and led this work for a generation. In considering possible lessons for work on human development the paper does not attempt to cover all aspects of Goulet’s thought, for example the particular ethical principles that he advocated.<sup>1</sup> We will look at four issues concerning the project of ‘development ethics’: (1) its scope; does it, for example, cover too much, and thereby nothing in depth?; (2) the methodology for such work; (3) its roles; has it any realistic lines of influence, and on whom?; and (4) its choice of organisational format and identity—is it to be seen as a (sub)discipline or not?—which should reflect considered stances on scope, methodology and roles.

Goulet’s definition of the scope of development ethics combined a broad view of it as social change ethics, with an implied core audience consisting of those who see themselves as working in development studies or development policy. Does this allow development ethics to be a unified field on a (sub)disciplinary model? Goulet did advocate it as a new (sub)discipline, but will that format promote the required depth of understanding and influence? Goulet thought hard about when and how ethics can have influence, including through embodiment in methodologies, and envisaged a humane ethics as ‘the means of the means’. Just as the means available for ‘implementation’—the resources and organisations, persons and procedures—determine how declared purposes actually work out, so, he advised, ethics should help to structure those means so as to guide how they will operate in practice.

The term development ethics emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the work led by the French socio-economist Louis-Joseph Lebreton (1897-1966), founder in 1941 of the research centre *Économie et Humanisme*. Lebreton worked extensively on a humanistic approach to national and international development. He “never tired of quoting with approval the phrase coined by Francois Perroux”, his colleague, that development is for “every person and the whole person” (“*tous les hommes et tout l’homme*”) (Goulet 2006a: 58; 2000: 34). Economic might must not be equated to societal right (Goulet 2006a: 4).

Goulet became Lebreton’s student and protégé. After a training in philosophy and theology he spent one and a half years in religious communities that lived amongst poor and marginal groups in France, Spain, and Algeria, during 1957-58. He then studied and worked with the *Économie et Humanisme* group for three years in Paris and Lebanon. Lebreton led him to “define my life’s work to become a development ethicist operating in its several registers—theory, analysis, pedagogy, planning, and field practice” (Goulet 2006a: xxxi).

In 1960 Goulet published “Pour une éthique moderne du développement”, a manifesto for “a practical ethics of development” (Goulet 1960: 12) that would transcend the rupture between utopian normative political theory that was not grounded in real life and predictive theory that had no interest in ethics. It should attend to the full development of persons (1960: 23) and not conflate the concepts of ‘goods’ and ‘good’, or ‘having’ and ‘being’ (a contrast stressed by Lebreton among others); and should give balanced attention to the responsibilities of each of “governments, private investors, owners and labour unions” in relation to the development of all of a country and of all countries (1960: 12).

Goulet spent four years in Brazil in the early 1960s, undertaking doctoral research followed by technical cooperation work. His first book, *Ética Del Desarrollo*, appeared in 1965 in Spanish and in 1966 in Portuguese (*Ética Do Desenvolvimento*). Subsequently he did field research also in southern Spain, Guinea-Bissau, Sri Lanka, Mexico, and again Brazil, and worked too in Poland (Goulet 1992a). From 1979 to 2006 he was Professor of Education for Justice in the Department of Economics at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, a charismatic voice who bridged disciplinary and theory-practice gaps. His most influential work, *The Cruel Choice* (1971a), prefigured much later development thinking, including current themes of human security. Its core concepts were ‘existence rationality’ and vulnerability (1971a: viii); chapter two was entitled “Vulnerability: the key to understanding and promoting development”. Goulet concluded that: “Every person and society wants to be treated by others as a being of worth, for its own sake and on its own terms, regardless of its utility or attractiveness to others” (Goulet 1975: 232). He proffered a “general lesson”: “every society must feel that its values are worthy of respect if it is to embark on an uncertain future with confidence in its own ability to control that future” (1971a: 49).

In a publishing career of half a century, Goulet did perhaps more than anyone to promote a notion of development ethics as a distinctive and required area in thought and practice: including in eleven books, such as *The Uncertain Promise* (1977), and *Development Ethics* (1995), and over 160 papers, including work on methods of participation and action research, technology transfer, and incentives and indicators. A selection of his lifetime’s writings has appeared as *Development Ethics at Work*:

*Explorations 1960-2002* (Goulet, 2006a). Many papers are available on-line at <http://www.nd.edu/~dgoulet>.

### **The scope and character of development ethics**

Development ethics as a body of work arose in the historical context of the gradual emergence of capacities to ensure, for example, clean water and essential drugs for everyone but the absence as yet of a working system of rights and responsibilities that will fulfil those possibilities. Two aspects deserve underlining: its global frame of reference and its focus on specific local realities, with thus an expectation of difference as well as an interest in commonality. Together these features make definition of a distinct field more difficult.

Development ethics starts from the inequalities and relationships within our world and within its parts. It deals explicitly with contexts in which markedly, even dramatically, different ethics coexist, and examines that coexistence. Mwanahewa, for example, proposes from a study of the concepts and causes of corruption in Uganda that, while much of the analysis internationally of corruption has had a generalised, universalist character, “it remains evident that the aspect of context, namely the meeting of the modern conventional and traditional, needs to be tackled”; “We can no longer afford to look at aspects of corruption and bribery as if the human race was one homogeneous lot.” (Mwanahewa 2006: 17). Goulet applied a similar principle, in an anthropological style that looks at real cultural and historical settings not some supposedly timeless ‘everywhere’. This context-specificity and the resultant comparative dimension are characteristic features in development ethics, even if not universal in nor unique to it.

In outlining an aspirant or emergent field or sub-field, one seeks to specify a scope which has a good theoretical rationale and at the same time finds a sufficient, interested audience. A field must be sufficiently distinctive and rewarding that enough people will listen and engage with it and continue to engage despite their limited time and the many competitors for their attention. The rationale of development studies in general is that social, political, economic, medical and environmental change are fundamentally interconnected; and that the interconnections demand close attention for they bring enormous threats and opportunities for humankind. Correspondingly, development is intensely ethically-laden - who benefits or loses, with respect to whose values; who decides, who is consulted, who is not? Development ethics is an untidily bounded subject about untidy and often unpleasant realities.

Goulet suggested therefore simply that development ethics considers the “ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning and practice” (1977: 5). Its mission, he proposed, is “to diagnose value conflicts, to assess policies (actual and possible), and to validate or refute valuations placed on development performance” (1997b: 1168). These specifications had a number of implications.

First, as a field of practical ethics, development ethics should be grounded in intense observation of varied experience, not only the world-views of the powerful. Its normative discourses should be well related to empirical ones.

Second, the definition depends in turn on one’s definition of development. This can be an advantage: it means the definition can accomodate different views. Alternative bounds

for development ethics include (each to be qualified by the Goulet definition): (i) ‘the South’; (ii) the South plus North-South relations; (iii) all nations (we then have ‘social progress ethics’); (iv) global relations and global issues, not only inter-national ones; etc. Over time the case for broader bounds has steadily strengthened. Goulet always accepted it, as does current work on human development and capabilities. In a densely interconnected globe, where the quality and sustainability of the North’s ‘development’ are also profoundly in question, there is a strong case for taking the scope of development ethics to be social progress ethics in all nations and their interrelations, yet also some danger of losing a focus and an audience, and of losing a priority to the poorest.

However, thirdly, development ethics so conceived can at the same time still speak especially to relatively definite audiences that self-identify as development academics, funders, planners and practitioners, and their major clients, including students, rather than attempt to speak to everybody and as a result perhaps reach nobody. If development ethics tries to cover most of social ethics that could result in duplication, lack of focus, and over-abstraction. Nigel Dower presents development ethics instead as the field that asks “How ought a society to exist and move into the future?”, as partner to the traditional field of personal ethics that asks “How ought one to live as an individual?”, and the emergent field of global ethics that asks the first question in terms of world society (Dower 1988).

In sum, Goulet’s flexible and pragmatic definition remains serviceable and allows us to combine a view of development ethics as social change ethics (and global change ethics) with yet a relatively specific primary audience—those who recognize themselves as within development studies or development policy—and an acceptance that within that audience there are multiple definitions of the bounds of “development theory, planning and practice”. One can then have an audience, and a global orientation, and not lose a priority to poor people. This has been shown, and momentum achieved, in the stream within development ethics that centres on ‘human development’, as well as in some of the great river of human rights work. Goulet’s own stream in development ethics remained small in comparison, for other reasons which we will come to.

### **On methodology: stages of observation, theory, advice, practice**

Goulet came to his ideas through an ethnographic approach rather than centrally through reflection on welfare economics or Western moral philosophy. He called for ethical investigation and debate that are driven by experience, not primarily based in academic philosophy and pre-set academic frameworks; and thus for field-based identification and reflection on values and value conflicts and on societal, corporate and global responsibilities. He espoused a process-oriented, practice-centered, locality-specific approach not an elaborate generalized theoretical model.

Writing in 1971 just before Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* appeared, he declared that philosophical ethics had become sterile, but also predicted the field’s revival. Much however of the revival has failed his test that ethics must start from experience, from “the marketplace...the factory...the planning board and the irrigation project” (1971a: 11). Contrary to Rawls and the mainstream of philosophical ethics he held that “Today’s ethicists are forced by reality to renounce pretensions towards ‘grand theory’” (1971a: 11). Life is too complex. Goulet emphatically advocated what others call ‘practical ethics’ rather than a theoretical ethics that would supposedly then be ‘applied’. His vision

of development ethics was as part of this other stream in the revival of ethics: a practical ethics that includes medical ethics, business ethics, bio-ethics and care ethics. Only a practice-based development ethics could have adequate “regard for constraints, for human desires and limitations, and for the unpredictable vagaries of local conditions” (2006a: 105) and avoid becoming entrapped in oversimple conceptual schemata (2006a: Ch.10).

Goulet’s conception of development ethics, like that of Lebret or Peter Berger (1974), included strong attention to descriptive and explanatory ethics, to be done with more attention to dynamics than colonial ethnography had given. I will not attempt to summarise his views in descriptive ethics, but instead present and illustrate why he deemed such work central. Development ethics must start, he said, from study of how people in a given setting think and seek to make sense of the world and their lives and the forces and choices that face them. To grasp this “existence rationality” is essential if one is to offer relevant advice and not merely enunciate grand ideals. “Any ethic—of development, of social practice, or of cultural reconstruction—is simultaneously an ethic of goals and a ‘means of the means.’ No extrinsic grafting of norms can truly work: norms must be drawn from the inner dynamisms of each arena in which they operate. At stake is the difference between hollow moralism and genuine ethical strategies.” (Goulet 1976: 40).

This descriptive and explanatory ethics, essential for serious ethically based strategy, requires a particular sort of research methodology, argued Goulet (1971a). He developed an approach from the French researcher Georges Allo for “integrating the living experience of ordinary people with philosophical investigation and empirical social science research” (Goulet 1992b: 19).<sup>ii</sup> For “in the case of values, the ‘object’ studied has no intelligibility apart from its ‘subjective’ resonances. .... [Further,] Values belong to realms of synthesis, not analysis: their proper domains are philosophy, poetry, meta-analytical symbolism. Only under stringent conditions... is the study of values appropriate to social science. To reduce this synthesis of totality to that mere portion of reality which is measurable is to deprive life of its specificity and to falsify reality itself.” (Goulet 1971b: 208).

Ethnographic attention shows up the unrealism of narrowly defined forms of ‘realism’ found in some analyses in development economics, international relations and related policy studies. Let us take two examples, corruption in the South and consumption worldwide.

An ethnographically grounded descriptive development ethics takes us further than theories that look only at a grasping ‘economic man’ facing a set of opportunities for personal gain. Those have been applied with limited success in much contemporary analysis of corruption (e.g., Klitgaard 1988). Goulet held that exposure to the modernising powers of Europe and North America had disrupted an ‘equilibrium of desire’ in pre-modern societies, of not wanting and craving what is not widely attainable. Demonstration effects “remove[d] curbs on desire before providing individuals with the means to expand resources” (Goulet 1997a: 493). Aware of the malleability of effective desires, he stressed the explosive danger of boosting desire in advance of productive capacity (1971a, Ch.11), a trap avoided in East Asia but perhaps not elsewhere.

This unleashing of desires would not by itself explain corruption. What must also have been removed are the constraints set by proscriptions concerning acceptable means

and other inhibitions to the pursuit of maximum desire fulfilment. A second line of explanation therefore posits the felt strangeness of the public sphere in a new larger-scale society marked still by strong family and small-scale communal loyalties; the weakness as yet of new identities of professional and citizen; and weakly evolved corresponding peer groups, organisations and belief systems. Goulet argued that more complex societies operate a division between social spheres, a meta-principle that different principles apply in different spheres—for example, that ‘something for something’ is an exchange principle that must not be applied within the State. He suggested this division might not be easily adopted by simpler societies.

Men learn to conduct their business life as though money were the supreme value, while continuing to abide by other values in their private lives. Such normative schizophrenia creates great personal stress, it is true. But it has at least protected modern societies from bearing the full consequences of the values to which they subscribe in the realm of productive activity. *Non-modern societies, on the other hand, are not psychologically prepared to dissociate economic values from more intimate value spheres.* If economic achievement is portrayed to them as important enough to warrant casting off all other concerns—including their most treasured family and religious practices—then why should their quest for more goods be moderated by considerations of the rights of others, prior claims of needier men, or the need for austerity in consumption so as to build up a solid production base in the nation? (Goulet, 1971a: 223-4; italics in the original).

Societies not steeped in such dissociation could move to a value unitarism in which acquisitive and consumerist values become applied comprehensively, not only in restricted spheres.

Goulet’s readiness to look at the empirics, not only formal analytics, of consumption led him on towards its normative assessment, and to issues central to the meaning of development. Like Sen, Goulet observed that people in general rank orders of desire, not merely intensities of desire – there are different orders of goods, and preferences about desires, not merely preferences about goods. He referred to ideas from Aristotle onwards about such ranking of types of good; for example Aristotle’s category of ‘honorable goods’. People make these rankings for practical purposes, not only from love of distinction. Like Nussbaum later, Goulet stressed the need for a normative theory of consumption (e.g., 2006a, Chs. 3 & 4). “The plenitude of good is *not* proliferation of [economic] goods. ... The defense of freedom, in the face of the seductive flattery of the myth of happiness [through consumption], is the fundamental task of any development ethics which is realistic and effective” (2006a: 34; emphasis in the original, first published in 1976). He was impressed by the attitude of pity that the nomadic groups he had lived with in the 1950s and 60s held toward people who are encumbered and dominated by things, by ‘stuff’.

Goulet employed the same language of freedom as Sen, and likewise posited freedom as a universally held value, but he had more substantive theories of desire and of freedom. He distinguished “freedom from wants”, obtained via the fulfilment of fundamental needs, and “freedom for wants”, where one is autonomous, in charge of and not slave to the determinants of want generation (1971a, Ch.6). In Sen’s system the danger of consumerism is a formal possibility not a central concern; in Goulet’s system it is central. Often freedom from some constraints is achieved in ways that reduce human

autonomy (1971a: 126). Restraint of material desires is an essential requirement for freedom (pp.121-2), he argued, not only a prudent measure along a path of accumulation. “Genuine wealth, the [early Fathers of the Christian Church] contend, resides in the internal freedom which makes one use material goods instrumentally to meet needs, and as a springboard for cultivating those higher spiritual goods which alone bring deeper satisfactions: virtue, friendship, truth, and beauty” (Goulet 2006a: 146). There is nothing specifically Christian in such claims, which are found in many traditions, and for example in the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British economist Alfred Marshall, as well as in the accumulated results of modern research on well-being. Voicing such claims, in advance of and even now after these research findings, does not ensure popularity or attention; many writers prefer to pass by on the other side. The limited impact of Goulet’s development ethics reflects though also some other factors besides voicing of unpopular ideas, as we will see.

His policy ethics, including emphases on participation and on being the agent of one’s own development (see especially Goulet 1989a), grew out of the descriptive ethics that he built through his methodology of investigation. His model of value systems and value change posited an existential core that must be respected and built from, and an outer zone of flexibility where adaptation is possible.

...to build development from tradition is the very opposite of reactionary. ... Since the will of most Third World communities is anchored in the cultural values from which they derive their identity, integrity and sense of life’s meaning, there can be no justification for labeling a development strategy founded on the latent dynamisms in traditional, indigenous and local value orientations, as politically reactionary. On the contrary, the procedural commitment to respect values already in place constitutes a solid guarantee against falling in the twin traps of elitism and manipulation. To design and build development on tradition and indigenous values is to espouse a philosophy of change founded on a basic trust in the ability of people, no matter how oppressed or impoverished, to improve their lives, to understand the social forces that affect them, and eventually to harness these forces to processes of genuine human and societal development. (Goulet 1987: 176)

Goulet’s model for policy ethics is demanding: the examination in depth of a project, programme, policy or even a national development strategy, identifying and reflecting on its multifarious value impacts; moving to an evaluation only through an in-depth description and attempt at understanding—as illustrated in his work on technology transfer, Mexico, Guinea-Bissau, Sri Lanka and Brazil. Some work by others is on similar lines, even maintained over several years (e.g., Porter et al. 1991, Richards 1985; Uphoff 1996). It requires exceptional inputs of sustained and wide-ranging attention, and is not readily funded. Mainstream work on value change, such as in the World Values Surveys and even on the growth of consumerism or individualism, sometimes builds up sustained time series but is done through large periodic sample surveys and has a very different character.

More work on development policy ethics has been directly normative, addressing urgent questions of choice, responsibility and priority, by application or extension of frameworks proposed as relevant from philosophical ethics. Compared to Goulet’s call for an existentialist ethnography, human-rights based approaches for example contain



ready-made frameworks for observation, monitoring and evaluation and for contributing in policy design. They seek to establish principles concerning rights and responsibilities, including with transnational application.

Limitations of Goulet's type of field ethics, deeply illuminating as it can be, concern not just the time and skills it requires, but its relative disconnection from communicable theory. Goulet himself inevitably could do less fieldwork as he grew older. His mistrust of analytical philosophy that lacked a rich experiential base meant that he did not deepen his thinking much further by that route. Instead, he increasingly restated his earlier insights rather than extend them. What we see in the most interesting development ethics work in the past twenty years (e.g., Nussbaum & Glover 1995; Pogge 2002; Gready & Ensor 2005), including more and more in work presented in the Human Development and Capability Association, the International Development Ethics Association, et al., are attempts to combine case investigation and ethnographic insight with structured philosophical thinking. While in several respects Goulet had shown the way, we require also theoretical structures and systematic elaboration and ordering, in order to hold together and sustain practically-oriented movements. Here Goulet seemed to lack patience. He did not undertake further conceptual refinement of notions of freedom. His incisive "embryonic theory of priority needs" (1971a: 248) remained embryonic, never fully elaborated in relation to ongoing work in psychology and philosophy.<sup>iii</sup> Arguably he sought a different audience, more popular and less academic, and different lines of influence. He had indeed a conscious theory of the roles of ethics and of his own role. To these we now turn.

### **On influence: teaching, research and advocacy in ethics**

Ethics can play various roles, Goulet observed (1971a, Appendix 1). It has evaluative and critical roles in assessing and querying practices; a normative role in guiding the use of power and to constrain and coerce action; a role in grounding institutions, determining our view of what is normal, and our normal view, influencing where we look and how; a role to motivate action and "give exploiters a bad conscience"; and a pedagogical role, to teach critical awareness of the moral content of choices, including "as a pedagogy of the oppressed in case it is rejected as pedagogy by the oppressors" (1971a: 338).

Holding that "power without legitimacy must ultimately perish" (p. 341), he was aware that legitimacy and illegitimacy are not conveyed only through codes of ethics, but also through for example tradition and charisma. He had a clear vision then of the task facing development ethics, as more than "mere preachments addressed to the 'good will' and generosity of the powerful, and to the escapist sentiments of the powerless. It is...in the interstices of power and in the structural relationships binding the weak to the strong that development ethics must unfold itself" (1971a: 19).

Following Danilo Dolci, Goulet stressed the primary power in successful revolutionary change of "moral rather than material considerations", including "a new sensitivity, a new capacity, a new culture, new instincts" (Dolci, cited by Goulet 2006a: 25). At the same time Goulet urged that "mobilization strategies must protect the inner limits of old existence rationalities while expanding their outer boundaries" (1971a: 190), finding and using their "latent potential for change" (p.192). His chosen example of such a combination—revolution based on traditional identity—was Meiji Japan. Change that

does not threaten group survival, identity and solidarity may face little resistance (pp. 204-5).

Goulet was concerned thus not only with “The Ethics of Power”—seeking to instruct and guide the Prince—but with “the Power of Ethics”, its force in constraining, motivating, inspiring, reconceiving. For him “politics as the art of the possible” covered also politics as the “art of redefining the possible” (1971a: 336). He declared that:

Planners and other intellectuals find it so difficult to create a true professional ethic because they are crafters of words, ideas, and models. Consequently, they are timid about plunging into the heartland reality of ethics as existential power, and not as moral verbalism or conceptualism. Ethicists themselves constantly vacillate between ethical paralysis or compromise in the face of power, and energetic creativity newly released whenever they catch a faint glimpse of the power of ethics itself. ... the power of ethics to counter the power of wealth, of politics, of bureaucratic inertia, of defeatism, of social pathology. Such power can be won by a Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, a Danilo Dolci; it can never be institutionalized. But those others who lack ethical grandeur will inevitably lose hope in the face of larger powers, and accept compromises which strip their own ethics of its latent power. (Goulet 1976: 40-41)

Unfortunately, inspirational, charismatic leadership can as likely lead in bad directions as good. Further, leaders require a combination of a favourable conjuncture, capable supporters, strong networks, and relevant practicable proposals, in addition to an inspiring vision (Gasper 2007). Influenced by and interacting with figures such as Dolci, Fanon, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and the movement of liberation theology, Goulet’s emphasis on the possible prophetic roles of ethics, while valid, may not have provided the best guideline for his own work as a potential persuader through the crafting of words, ideas and models. He may have become dispirited in the era—one of charismatic leadership—of Reaganism, Islamism, born-again Protestantism, the suppression of liberation theology and the retreat from Vatican II, and of tragedies and disappointments in some countries he had engaged with closely such as Algeria, Sri Lanka or Guinea-Bissau.

Goulet was clear, in Gramscian fashion, that much of what he said—like calling for voluntary austerity as the path to freedom—was in one sense utopian: “one can only be pessimistic” (1971a: 263). But he saw it also as the only realism. He took a long-run perspective, and was resigned to eras of conflict, violence and confusion, as inevitable in processes of major change (1971a: Ch. 13 and Conclusion). In particular he held that “unless the ground rules of production and decision-making are profoundly altered within the United States, a world order of authentic development has no chance to be born” (2006a: 90; originally published in 1970). By 1995 he remarked that “Sustainable development, because it is found too difficult, may...remain untried” (2006a: 155).

In such a historical setting we require not only recognition of the potential existential power of ethics, but careful theorization of influence and change.<sup>iv</sup> Goulet constantly reiterated, through to perhaps his final published paragraph, that “the primary mission of development ethics...is to keep hope alive” (Goulet 2006b: 120). How? Three interconnected means are: incorporation of ideas in movements, incorporation in methods, and incorporation in education and training. Development ethics can seek in these ways to become, in Goulet’s key phrase, “the means of the means”, embedded in

and influencing the means of action: professionals and organisations, techniques and procedures, legislatures and courts. It must seek to not merely specify goals but to affect the processes and instruments through which the goals are, in practice, respecified and marginalised or given real weight.

### *Methods of policy analysis*

Goulet's perspectives did not become sufficiently embodied in methods and methodologies. He was aware of the central importance of how routine operation is structured, as seen in his work on incentives and indicators (e.g. Goulet, 1989b, 1992c), but was not fond of formalisms and formalised frameworks. He regretted "the excessive complexity and heaviness of [Lebret's] methodological instruments" (Goulet 1974; reprinted at 2006a: 62). Yet incorporation into methods is a vital part of institutionalisation, and formal methods are often key instruments for influence. Later he acknowledged that "Lebret's pre-planning studies offer a systematic way to engage in precisely such consultation" as is needed for a community to consider and clarify its value options and value choices (Goulet 2000; reprinted at 2006a: 180).

Various of Goulet's ideas have become embedded by other authors in relevant methodologies. His type of value-focused approach to local investigation and action has grown in the work led by Robert Chambers (1997) and others. His approach to policy ethics is close to the value-critical policy analysis of Martin Rein (1976), Frank Fischer (1995), Ronald Schmidt (2006) and others, which has been elaborated and applied quite extensively. His rethinking of development cooperation (1971a, Ch.8) has been greatly advanced by David Ellerman (2005) amongst others.

More broadly, UNDP's Human Development approach and the attempts to devise and apply human rights based approaches in development programming constitute important progress and suggest some lessons. Recent human rights based approaches go beyond listing and affirming human rights criteria, to using them to steer each stage of planning and management (see e.g. Gready & Ensor 2005). Similarly, the surprising degree of impact of the Human Development approach reflects more than a media strategy—the high profile launches and accessible form of the Human Development Reports, the attention-catching use of summary indicators that reveal more than does GNP per capita, and the evocative term 'Human Development'—significant though those are. It reflects the integrating force of a theoretical perspective—the thinking of Sen, Nussbaum and others about capability, and of Haq, Jolly, Stewart, Streeten et al. on human development—that brings a rationale and connection across a range of activities: the selection of focus, the language and measures for description, the choice of illustrative cases, the identification of alternatives, tracing of effects, and evaluation of processes and outcomes (Gasper 2008). The human development indicators not only catch attention, but provide a route to surfacing and publicly discussing value choices.

### *Education and training*

Goulet (1971a: Ch.8) espoused the educational model adopted by Lebret in his Paris institute: to train a corps of world developers, using a massive multidisciplinary syllabus and a professional code. He was not primarily interested in training apparatchiks or academics: "the aspiring generalist who does not gain his wisdom through the praxis of dialectical historical experience is doomed to fail" (1971a: 330). By 'generalist' Goulet

appears to have meant those in his own mould, “the philosopher of development, the specialist of generality” (2006a: 26). This can hardly be the main target-group.

The largest categories in development ethics education are general citizen education—including through popular media—and general school education. The UK and Ireland, for example, have taken steps in the space opened by national curriculum requirements for attention to international relations in general studies teaching. In the spaces of university and professional education several important alternatives exist. First, the special short course, including summer schools; second, the dedicated course within an academic or professional training programme; third, incorporation into other courses and training. The first two alternatives have the advantage, if the courses are optional, of keen minority audiences. They give a place to work with potential future key resource persons, and to test and develop ideas which can be used to interact with bigger mainstream audiences. But the larger target is the third alternative, incorporation into existing courses of policy analysis and planning, economics, public policy, management, social policy, research methodology, and indeed any foundation course in sociology, politics, economics, human geography or development studies. Those audiences are far larger, and the danger otherwise exists—seen sometimes in gender- and race-studies—that consciousness-raising with small groups goes hand-in-hand with mistrust and increased resistance amongst majorities. Incorporation into existing ‘regular’ courses addresses also the central requirements for influence: to relate ethics ideas to other bodies of knowledge and to apply them in working procedures. Ethics teaching for not only a sympathetic self-selected minority is not easy to make effective and fruitful though. Camacho (2006) illustrates a practical approach, of not trying to enforce any one doctrine, but providing a space for attention, heightened awareness and joint reflection.

#### *Social movements and the dynamics of change*

Incorporation of ideas into social movements is typically necessary for major social change (Murphy 2005; Krznaric 2007). Work in development ethics has to connect with significant movements, and eventually with agencies, if it is to be heard, tested, informed, upgraded, accepted and used; and it should study the instances of successful connection. Haq’s induction of Sen into his UNDP work, for example, was part of the mobilization of a network of networks required for the coherence, credibility and communication of the human development paradigm. Haq brought together networks of several kinds, each necessary: from academe, not least from economics; from within United Nations organizations; from wider development organizations, such as the Society for International Development and the Third World Forum; plus intergovernment networks from his long service as official and Minister (Gasper 2007). He further ensured that he could retain unimpeded access to them, by obtaining editorial independence for the Human Development Report Office.

While sympathetic to the UNDP-based movement of human development and to movements of participatory research and action, Goulet’s active affiliation and quest for partners appears to have been especially within movements of progressive Christian thinking. Here the 1980s and 1990s were often times of retrogression instead. Compared to the 1970s Goulet’s influence declined, in the absence of vehicles—organizations, journals, a clearly encapsulated methodology, related movements—that could extend, apply and adapt his approach. The model of an ethical grandee or Parisian prophet,

dissemination of whose ideas looks after itself thanks to their power and elegance and the presence of a large waiting audience, did not fit. Two of the key audiences were too remote, physically or psychologically: movements of the poor who lived far away, and the Northern rich, asked to reflect about their riches and about their relation to the distant poor.

Goulet was temperamentally close in some ways to the international human rights movement or movements, which has tried to institutionalize ideas of great existential power. He had doubts in the 1980s, however, about its generalizing and sometimes rather Eurocentric vision (Goulet 1984). A decade later he felt that: “The present intellectual climate and the political conjuncture are both favorable to a serious discussion of human rights and policies on their behalf. But a monumental problem arises: there are too many rights, too many competing claims. ... Thus the very proliferation of rights and claims is itself an obstacle to the implementation of any of them” (Goulet 1992: 243). Since then the human rights movement has continued to spread and gain influence, seen for example in campaigns for debt relief and for rights to food, water and basic drugs. There are lessons for the rest of development ethics, some perhaps sobering, some encouraging.

First, the rise of human rights thinking especially from the 1940s has not come primarily through ethics conferences or academic activities of any type. It represents a reaction to the experiences of totalitarianism in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a longer history of reactions to colonialism and imperialism (Crawford 2002). Also of fundamental importance have been the rise of global communications, bringing a spread of images and life-stories that contribute to “an ethics of recognition” (Schaffer and Smith 2004). The lesson would be familiar to Goulet: that much of any pressure behind development ethics will be from crises, national and global; and part will come from growing interconnection and communication. Development ethics then needs, in business language, a communications strategy not limited to waiting for leaders of ethical grandeur.

Second, the significance of human rights thinking is not solely dependent on its incorporation in legal systems. Human rights-based approaches now give attention to influencing all stages in public policy and management; to action in business, civil society, community groups, and everyday life; and to action on and through attitudes, and virtues, not only through attempted declaration and enforcement of duties. In such ways the approaches have important impact, despite the problem of many competing rights-claims. The general lesson for development ethics matches Goulet’s central theme: it must present ideas that function as “the means of the means”, pervading and influencing actual uses of the means of action. How should we organise for that intention?

### **The organisation of development ethics**

I suggested that Goulet’s distinctive strengths came through his ethnographic and sociological approach, rather than through a rethinking of welfare economics or application of Western moral philosophy. His intense exposure in a series of small and marginal communities provided profound insights, but also perhaps a distancing from more abstracted and formal languages. Yet just as village ethics cannot suffice for more complex societies, so more elaborated, multi-part, dissociated and in some parts abstract, intellectual systems, methods and projects are needed in analytical and practical ethics

(Gasper 1996). We saw that Goulet's type of work requires partnership with the streams derived from economics and philosophical ethics. He sought, and often reached, a broad audience, but unless one also reaches relevant specialists then one's impact can be ephemeral. Reaching out to diverse important audiences requires diverse tools: sometimes eloquence and profundity, sometimes formalism and precision, sometimes standard working procedures, sometimes specific personal networks.

To take forward this work in building a field of development ethics that makes some difference, with systematic incorporation of ideas into methods, movements and education, what is an appropriate organisational format? Goulet argued that a disciplinary or (as an area within philosophical ethics) sub-disciplinary format is appropriate. We criticised him for investing too little in theoretical system-building. If theoretical deepening and formalisation are important, is not a separate (sub-)disciplinary space essential? But the need is not for a specialist space within academic philosophy. The analyses required lie at the interfaces of different branches of philosophy, social sciences, management and humanities, and of academic work and practical action. It is important to reach the 'clerisy' of specialists, the 'religious orders' of the modern intellect, but not to create a new such order that will not communicate with nor be heard by the existing ones.

An intellectual area that calls itself development ethics needs instead to function like a nursery, cultivating ideas and persons that will be transplanted, even if they might remain in contact. The nursery is not the long-term destination. Such a self-conception would leave it as a minor ghetto. Influence on mainstreams is the objective. The characteristic development ethics perspective described earlier—comparative, intercultural, international, interdisciplinary, change-oriented and close to practice—implies that a disciplinary nest in which restricted and abstracted formulations of issues are pursued in great depth will not be ideal. It can form a permanent cocoon from which the fledgling does not graduate.

Goulet called for a form of philosophy which did graduate, into the world of action. We saw his advice: "...for moral philosophers to stop 'moralizing' and undertake serious analysis of ethical problems posed by development, underdevelopment, and planning...they must go to the marketplace, the factory, the planning board, and the irrigation project and create ethical strategies of social decision-making which enter into the dynamics and the constraint systems of major policy instruments: political, technical, and administrative" (Goulet 1988: 155). He never declared a moral position from on high, but based advice on in-situ investigation, as well as a perspective of long-term change that had been informed by history, social science and local immersion. Goulet moved beyond only highlighting the normative significance and priority of goals and criteria besides economic growth. He showed the centrality of such goals in motivating and guiding people's behaviour; and he sought to incorporate justified normative criteria into systems of decision-making. This moves development ethics' centre of gravity from philosophy towards anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics and management.

Yet, paradoxically, he called consistently for development ethics to be a distinct discipline and specialism, a sort of secular priesthood (e.g., Goulet 1988, 1997b). 'The development ethicist' was the protagonist in many of his writings, which remained set in the mould of his 1960s and 70s work. The envisaged development ethicist was a Goulet, engaged in technical cooperation programmes or employed as a specialist researcher and

adviser, a worker philosopher. He considered it “inevitable that a new discipline, based on systematic examination—both instrumental and philosophical—of comparative values must someday join the ranks of...comparative approaches to the study of development” (2006a: 26, originally written in 1976). In reality there has been as much regress as progress in this direction. Goulet’s own unusual career could not form a generalisable model.

Goulet’s insistence on evolution from tradition domestically in each country, and also on a separate specialism or sub-discipline of ‘development ethicists’, who should be added to decision-making in development policy and practice, form an uneasy combination. Where would a sub-discipline emerge except in North America where philosophical ethics is an enterprise of sufficient scale, in terms of numbers of courses and students and academics, for such a specialism to receive sustained attention? And what role would such implicitly expatriate or relatively distanced ethicists have in relation to domestic traditions? Goulet offered a parallel with specialist business- and medical-ethical advisors (1988: 160-2). But those in general live in the same cities as their clients. The paths of trying to influence methods, specialists and social movements are more relevant than trying to construct a new specialism or movement. To enrich and modify others’ work is more feasible and more fruitful.

For those working in development ethics, ‘discipline’ is a central concept that requires extended examination, just like ‘freedom’ or ‘need’ (see Gasper 2004 for one attempt). Goulet was aware of pitfalls in disciplinarity, and the vested interests of existing disciplinary redoubts that do not let new competitors readily emerge. Indeed he was based in a department of economics that was ultimately torn apart by conflict between a mono-disciplinary and an inter-disciplinary approach to economics. He himself never sought “to trespass on the proper autonomy of each discipline—which is something other than...hermetic closure upon oneself” (1960, republished at 2006a: 14)—nor did he seek “to win sectarian or partisan victories” (p.15). In arguing for development ethics as a separate discipline he perhaps though misread the challenge. The demands *for* interdisciplinary communication in development ethics are so central, and the demands *of* interdisciplinary communication so considerable, that a disciplinary or sub-disciplinary format does not fit well here.

Attempts to build a sub-discipline in academic philosophy have had slight impact. The difficulty to draw clear boundaries for development ethics contributes amongst other factors to the non-emergence of a sharply distinctive field. If we see development ethics in, for example, Dower’s sense—as the field that asks “How ought a society to exist and move into the future?”—then it cannot be a tidy subdiscipline. Rather it is a concern that belongs in many choice arenas. The place for development ethics is as an inter-disciplinary field in which a variety of relevant disciplines exchange and enrich each other (Gasper 1994). Development ethics authors in practice come from all backgrounds, not predominantly from philosophy.

Is such a framing of development ethics as an interdisciplinary meeting place, a looser academic and professional forum, truly fruitful as well as more feasible? If one is not a discipline – a self-enclosed, self-referential territory with one’s own induction and indoctrination, system of rewards and punishments, loyalties and captive population, border controls and flag – can one achieve and maintain the focus, continuity, and critical mass needed for deep intellectual work? Truong and I suggest that in fact most of the

areas of creativity and energy in development ethics lie at intersection points between a stream of practice—whether economic policy, human rights activism, emergency relief, business management or whatever—and a stream of ethically sensitive theorizing, whether from socio-economics, quality of life studies, religions, feminisms, jurisprudence, or so on (Gasper & Truong 2005). There are multiple linked sites of such conversations. Development ethics includes and interconnects these sites. To do this it has various ‘nursery’ functions: in shared conceptualisation, cross-fertilisation, education and training. These need a long-term institutional base of professional groups and associations, textbooks, journals, even traditions. But since the primary task is one of reaching out, and of connecting diverse other streams of theory and practice, it is more realistic and accurate to describe the resulting field as one of interdisciplinary interaction rather than as a new discipline. We see this principle largely at work in the Human Development and Capability Association, and in the change of subtitle of the *Journal of Human Development* from ‘Alternative Economics in Action’ to ‘A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People-Centred Development’.

In his late work Goulet recognised “two different roads” for development ethics (1997b: 1166). The first was his own model, of “a new discipline with distinctive methods and research procedures” (loc. cit.). The second road was of development ethics as a type of work that overlaps with other types, with which it cooperates as partners in interdisciplinary activity. Goulet still saw prospects in the first road, and called his article “Development Ethics: A New Discipline”. But he had become aware of the alternative model, of inter-disciplinary learning (Goulet 1992b). This path has been followed much more. An important number of development practitioners and social scientists have become more self-consciously and systematically ethics-oriented, for example through the spread of rights-based approaches and human development perspectives. The required investigation in the marketplace, factory, planning board and irrigation project has been done not by philosophers, but by ethically aware anthropologists, economists, geographers, health specialists, journalists, planners, political scientists and others. In his final book Goulet continued to talk of using findings from “other disciplines” (2006a: xxxiii), as if development ethics was a comparable discipline. But he recognised development ethics “as an intrinsically interdisciplinary effort” (p. xxxii), and spoke of ‘discipline’ often now simply in the everyday sense, as a disciplined activity—“systematic, cumulative, communicable, and testable” (loc. cit.).

Goulet was determined not “to pursue a vision of justice shrouded in a Utopian halo because it is not deeply imbedded in the world of real constraints” (2006a: 3). In the same spirit I have tried to draw lessons from his remarkable career, for ongoing work on human development and development ethics.



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<sup>i</sup> On other aspects of Goulet's work, see his own overviews (e.g., 1976, 1995, 1997a, 2006b), before proceeding to, especially, *The Cruel Choice*. On the ethical principles he advocated—(1) self-determination, individual and collective (2) "decent sufficiency" of basic goods for all, (3) solidarity, and (4) nonelite participation and democratic decision making—in ways that anticipate and can still enrich much of the later work on human development, Crocker (2006) and Chs. 4, 5 and 8 in Goulet's *Development Ethics* (1995) provide introductions. Crocker makes comparisons to the later work and also suggests where it has advanced on Goulet.

<sup>ii</sup> Appendix 3 to *The Cruel Choice* outlined its four stages. The approach is similar to the 'Verbal Image' form of reporting presented by Howard Richards (1985), that aims to give a broad picture, a description and understanding of how a program works in its societal context, not a focus only on a few aspects taken out of their context. It thus tries to ensure coverage of non-measurable impacts, to grasp the human meanings in situations, and to make sense, to outsiders and insiders, of what has happened; and to have insiders systematically check the 'verbal image' that is constructed on the basis of their contributions. See Richards, pp.79-85; Lee & Shute (1991).

<sup>iii</sup> Thus the important 1976 presentations that form Chs. 3 and 4 of his 2006 book were not extended later to relate to the wealth of relevant material from contemporary social science and philosophy.

<sup>iv</sup> See Gasper (2006) for a complementary discussion of these themes.