New Directions in Development Ethics: Essays in Honor of Denis Goulet

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This detailed volume, with contributions from economists, historians, sociologists, philosophers, public policy and development experts was put together in honor of Denis Goulet’s work on development ethics. Goulet is viewed by many as a human development theorist and the founder of development ethics as a separate field of study. According to Goulet (1971), development ethics “is a field that examines the ethical and value questions related to development theory, planning, and practice.” Readers have an opportunity to gain more insight into different aspects and perspectives on this growing field through the lenses of the various contributors to the volume.

According to Goulet, there are three main complementary levels of inquiry in development ethics: reflection, application, and practice. The book is divided into three parts along these levels. It is over 400 pages in length and has twenty essays alongside its introduction, making it a challenge to provide a robust summary of each essay in this review. Given this constraint, the primary focus here will be to briefly highlight the key features of each essay.

The volume begins with an introductory essay by the book’s editors, in which Wilber and Dutt offer a brief review of the life and work of Goulet. They also present a brief history and overview of development economics and the changing meaning of development over time. Their main goal is to promote and make more accessible to a broader group of scholars the field of development ethics. The editors attempt to do this by providing an overview of development ethics, relating its themes to the study of economic development.

The first section of the book focuses on reflection, and consists of seven essays. Nigel Dower, in “Development and the Ethics of the Means,” focuses on the complex relationship between means and ends and the parallel between this way of thinking, Goulet’s approach, and the view of Ghandi. Andrew Yuengert, in “Prudence and Development Ethics,” argues that one limitation of development ethics is the dearth of an explicit theory of practical action. He discusses in detail how Aristotle’s theory of prudence can make a significant difference in development. In
“Development Ethics, a Road to Peace.” Adela Cortina presents a model of development ethics based on both Goulet’s ethics of development and her own applied ethics of development, rooted in the Kantian ethics of discourse and the Aristotelian tradition. The fourth essay, by James Sterba, focuses mainly on his arguments for why libertarians should endorse a right to basic need fulfillment that leads to equality for all people now and future generations. Invoking the “ought” implies “can” principle, Sterba discusses the conflicting liberties of the poor and rich and the need to recognize the liberties of the poor, including the requirement to meet basic needs. In chapter five, Sheldon Gellar explores the core religious values shaping the definition of development according to Goulet. He argues that underdevelopment can be overcome by building upon traditional religious values, and dedicates a substantial part of his essay to exploring the influence of religious values in faith-based development institutions and communities. The sixth essay, by Amitava Krishna Dutt, provides an introduction to the basic tenets of Hinduism. He examines Hinduism and Hindu society with respect to issues such as consumption, poverty, inequality, and gender. In his discussion of these areas, Dutt makes the case as to how Hindu philosophy could provide a basis for development ethics, but also raises some reasonable objections to the view that development ethics can be based on religious traditions. Chapter seven is Luis Caincho’s essay, which is primarily focused on vulnerability and its relevance. He delves into the ideas put forward in Goulet’s work, especially the concept of vulnerability and its use in the ethical analysis of development.

The second part of this book is focused on applications and consists of five chapters. In Charles K. Wilber’s “Economics and Ethics,” he highlights ways economics is influenced by ethics and argues that development ethics should not be sidelined by mainstream economists, as development theory is not complete without incorporating development ethics. Javier Ma Iguiniz Echeverral argues in chapter nine that there is a need for sacrifice by people during the process of economic development. He reviews three approaches to the relationship between economics and human costs in a bid to support a sacrifice-reducing approach in the economic development process. In “Technological Nightmares,” by Paul Streeten, the benefits and costs of technological advancement over the last twenty years are highlighted. He draws attention to the unpredictability of the consequences of inventions and the principle of opposing effects. The eleventh essay, by Chloe Schwenke, examines important issues related to violence in Africa, the moral obligation of the Western world, international assistance, and development ethics. She dedicates a portion of her essay
to discussing the case of Northern Uganda, which provides a current real world context for some of the issues she highlights. In chapter 12 Asuncion St. Clair makes the case for redefining the meaning of both development and globalization, given the ethical aspects of global poverty that have been previously ignored. He raises issues regarding the possible fusion or entangling of development and globalization, and suggests a need to reframe poverty as a global and moral problem.

The last section of the book is on practice relating to development ethics. R. Scott Appleby and Carl Bindenagel, in chapter 13, highlight the fact that religion in some form informs the worldview behind Goulet’s writings on the ethics of development. Their essay, based on the work of Goulet, emphasizes the importance of religious perspectives and organization in development. In chapter 14, David Crocker focuses on both highlighting the theory of participation, from the view point of Goulet and Amartya Sen, and the critique of this theory. He then tries to expand this theory by focusing on deliberative democracy, a concept he developed. The next essay is written by Jay Drydyk, and focuses also on participation. Drydyk differs from Crocker by focusing on empowerment and democracy and what they mean for participation. He also argues that despite the link between empowerment, democracy, and participation, they do not always coincide. In chapter 16 Des Gasper tries to understand how Mahbubul Haq was able to achieve a significant impact with his work. One of Haq’s most important contributions is the Human Development Report; Gasper examines Haq’s work with reference to factors that promote social justice and effective initiatives for development. The chapter by Katherine Marshall explores issues related to equity and the misuse of the concept of equity. She draws links between equity and poverty, rights, and social policy. Marshall motivates her discussion using stories, anecdotal evidence, and data. She raises many important questions and challenges which relate to the path to equity and how to foster fairness. Kenneth P. Jameson, in “Ethics and Contemporary Macroeconomic Policy,” analyzes contemporary macroeconomic policy in the U.S. The basis of his analysis is Goulet (1971). Jameson describes Goulet’s ethical principles for macroeconomics. He dedicates a large part of the chapter to discussing and reflecting on the attack on the State in the last twenty-five years in the U.S. He highlights specific performance flaws in what he calls the conservative economic individualist approach, which overtly favors the market over the State. In chapter 19, written by Roland Hoksbergen, contemporary Romania is the focus. Once again building on the principles of Goulet’s work on authentic development, the author tries to answer
questions related to how a country can build up local values or promote participation in the midst of constraints. Hoksbergen focuses most of his essay on showcasing an NGO trying to do this presently in Romania. The last essay, “Mexico’s Development Strategy Since 1983,” by James Ros, reviews the development strategy for Mexico post-1983. Goulet wrote a book on Mexico’s development strategy in 1982, and Ros’s goal is to continue where Goulet left off. Ros discusses market reforms in Mexico after the 1980s crises, and the effects of these reforms on welfare. He also highlights current challenges facing development policy makers in Mexico.

The essays in this volume provide discussions that are potentially useful to anyone who is interested in development ethics, or interested in gaining a basic understanding into issues related to development ethics. However, I do feel that some of the essays, especially those in the first section of the volume, may not be accessible to a general audience because of their style of delivery. Many people are interested in issues related to development and many grapple with ethical issues regularly. This volume might usefully serve as a reference for these individuals, but the limited real world examples of ethical dilemmas faced in development-related work, and how to handle these situations, makes the book less helpful for such needs. Another minor issue is that the volume comes across more as a collection of essays with links to Goulet’s work, some obvious, others less obvious, versus a unified set of essays on development ethics.

This book should be of interest to Christian economists, especially those working on issues related to development and growth. Development economists in general try to gain insight into challenges facing developing countries, and look for potential solutions so that the key objectives of economic development—i.e., meeting people’s basic needs, expanding choice, and improving economic welfare (Todaro & Smith, 2005)—are met. However, in trying to meet these goals, researchers are sometimes faced with ethical dilemmas which may arise because of faith, religion, or an individual’s moral philosophy. These dilemmas are relevant for Christian economists. Our concerns regarding ethical issues and finding ethical means for achieving development could make it easier to embrace the work of Denis Goulet and the field of development ethics. Moreover, these concerns may also make this volume, with its focus on different aspects of development ethics, a helpful read for the Christian economist.
References
