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Rationality and Community
Ethics, Political and Social Theory in Development Studies

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Abstract

The argument of this paper is that giving ethics (the question: ‘how ought one to live?’) a preponderant position in issues of development, both undermines politics (that pose the question: ‘what ought the fate of our community be?’) and pretends that social-sciences (that pose the question: ‘what is our community’ and relatedly, ‘how ought we to know it?’) are ethics-free disciplines. Formulated the other way around, this also means that if politics and social sciences give two very different, though related, answers to uncertainty, they both involve an ethical positioning. Neglect of this complex relation, says this paper, has all but prevented the broaching of two fundamental issues that emerge from the above questions, namely the rationality of development and the community of development.

Rationality and Community

The Ethical Turn in Development Studies and the Response from Political and Social Theory

There is a story by Heinrich Böll, 'The Black Sheep', that tells the amoral tale of Uncle Otto, and his godson, and the godson of his godson...As the generations succeed each other, these men are the black sheep of their family: indolents, idlers, never faithful to one idea, one plan, one job; and perpetually borrowing money. Until, just before each generation gets irremediably fed up with them, they come across a big amount of money – and stop bothering the family.

Development, and development studies, are a bit like the black sheep of the social sciences – not proper sciences, really, always tugging at the serious politics and theories' sleeve and asking for attention; and asking for money. Mostly in vain. Until, one day they stumble on the big sum of money: a war, say, or a World Summit, or a Global Forum. Then, they stop bothering the family and they are elevated to the rank of high politics.² Or are they?

This paper argues that development issues could have stopped being the black sheep of the social sciences long ago; that they should duly reintegrate the family, but under certain conditions. In a context of an unresolved crisis in development studies (it is still not certain whether they want to be the black sheep or not) and although there is an increasing political awareness of the importance for the 'North' of matters of the global South, social and political theory have not accepted to examine issues of development – or rather, they have not cared to look again at elements of a radical critique of development that were forged by these very social and political theories since the 1970s. And they should, says this paper.

But first things first. Where does the tale of the crisis of the development studies' departments start? The origins of the crisis must be traced back to when the different strands of sociology of development diluted with political economy and political science gave birth to 'development theory': development theory, emerging in the United States and then migrating to Europe, took shape with a very practical orientation, towards new countries that had to be won over in a Cold War context and accompanied by the Bretton Woods financial and trading regime.³ Once the solidity of these elements was shattered because, for example, of the fundamental changes in the 'practical world' that development theory addressed, it faced a crisis too. Far from being unique to 'development theory' this crisis touched most social sciences, including other forms of sociology, under the combined threat of the 'post-modernist' wave and a reinvigorated Marxism. This crisis brought 'development theory' face-to-face with an 'impasse' - one which stirred a great deal of controversy in the departments of development studies.⁴ Its overcoming, when finally announced, involved the vision of a new theoretical systematicity that has not yet seen the light.⁵

Instead, as in other social sciences, on the one hand, 'development studies' ended up producing a wealth of empirical studies, focused on a great variety of subjects and 'groups'; studies that show an apparent aversion towards grand theoretical narratives. Again as in other areas of sociology broadly understood, the theoretical foundations of these studies - that went often unacknowledged both as theory and as mainstream – was to be found in neoinstitutionalism and its predilection (at least for a certain time) for rational choice theory.⁶ As vastly different in their substance, as neoinstitutionalism, these studies can be related to 'issue politics', which despite its advantage of lending saliency to issues like gender or environment, presents the major disadvantage of cutting up the political into specialist slices.

And on the other hand, 'development studies' turned to ethics.

In other words, the black sheep, not wanting to get bleached but not sure about its blackness either, was opting for a trickier shade of grey. Both of these solutions, empirical eclecticism with a problem-solving approach and a turn to ethics, had and have problems. The first solution has the same problems as 'the

original position': the same uneasy closeness to development agencies and other such institutions, including governments (a problem that, in the case of civil society, has created a rupture between 'co-opted' and 'radicals'); the same problematic source of funding which defines the research directions; and the same administrative approach of 'developing countries' (this promotion of the object of study comes after appellations of 'backward' and 'underdeveloped' and no doubt reflects a newly found dignity of development departments) as problems to be solved. It is not necessary to look into this in more detail – it is well documented in critical literature.⁷ It is more useful to focus on the problems raised by the second solution, the (re)turn to ethics; and on attempts to overcome them.

The argument of the paper is that giving ethics (the question: 'how ought one to live?') a preponderant position in issues of development, both undermines politics (that pose the question: 'what ought the fate of our community be?') and pretends that social-sciences (that pose the question: 'what is our community' and relatedly, 'how ought we to know it?') are ethics-free disciplines. Formulated the other way around, this also means that if politics and social sciences give two very different, though related, answers to uncertainty, they both involve an ethical positioning. Neglect of this intricate relation, says this paper, has all but prevented the broaching of two fundamental issues that emerge from the above questions, namely the rationality of development and the community of development. And the questioning of these issues must be fruitfully sought in social and political theory – potentially, the most subversive part of the family; and surely the only one that can bring the black sheep back.⁸

I. Things are not white or black: ethics, politics, social sciences

(Re)turn to Development Ethics

Before embarking on a description of the unavoidable ethical side of the social sciences that were preoccupied with development, economics and sociology, it may not be a bad idea to make a brief point about the newfound hope that developmentalists (i.e. scientists concerned with the development of countries in the periphery of the North *and* who, still today, subscribe to some form or other of stages model) have in ethics and its relation to politics. And to say that what may have been thought as a novelty – ethics in development, at last! – is a rather old story.

Indeed, the current (re)formulation in ethical terms of issues related to 'development' is not the first, historically, ethical questioning induced by development discourse; but it differs radically from the other three broadly identifiable periods when 'ethics of development' were an issue. The first period, that of the end of 19th century colonialisation,⁹ was very explicit in its 'morality', understood here as an avowed conformity to the standard moral codes, in particular under the form of religion (or as a stance that has answered the ethical question or, that assumes the answer has been given). The second period, the post-World War II period up to the 1970s, had such a particular historical frame that an advance in capitalistic development meant, geostrategically, a retreat in socialist development.¹⁰ Finally, the late 1970s saw the emergence of an anti-development agenda, founded on a radical philosophical (including ethical) questioning of development discourse.¹¹

With the first period, the current era differs significantly in moral explicitness. Less explicitness does not mean less effective grasp on the discourse: although 'conservative' developmentalists are more explicit than 'progressive' ones, looking at the justifications used by both reveals strong religious and otherwise moral beliefs. The American academic attitude towards Iraq, and in particular the Iraqi regime transition, in 2003 encompasses this variety. Additionally, there is a recent resurgence of explicit morality within the institutional development discourse (in development agencies), not unrelated to the recent invigoration of 'development ethics' in academia. In comparison to the second period, the current 'ethical questioning' is not situated in opposition to a clearly defined enemy and evil. However, the current 'war on terrorism' can be read as a dramatic effort to re-shape the international world in

terms of allies and adversaries, à la Huntington (development studies may be close to encountering the big cash amount again). Finally, by contrast to the third period, the current ethical questioning does not reject the idea of development as such.¹²

Keeping in mind that the millennium morality about development is thus less explicit, non-oppositional and non-radical, we can reformulate this more forcefully: it is indeed often by reverting to the political and intellectual times of crises that we can find out when ‘ethics’ seemed to jump back into, or even purportedly created, the debates around development.¹³ Thus, for example, the famous Truman address when, according to Gustavo Esteva’s imagery, the ‘underdeveloped’ were ‘created’, intervenes at the end of the Cold War, when a destroyed Europe must be reconstructed.¹⁴ Similarly, the most recent series of ethical questionings spring up with the realisation that the continuing development practices are not bearing the expected results (even social theorists have heard about the *déboires* of the IMF and the World Bank in Africa, of the unforgivable cruelty of structural adjustment programmes and of their unforgettable failure); and that in fact, the mosaic of previous justifications for development aid does not longer hold – that a new mosaic must be put in place.

However, as we just saw, these recent ethical questionings do not put into doubt the idea of development altogether: on the contrary, they seek to find different justifications for it. This is not a minor problem for an ‘ethics’ that insists on its separation from its constituted object of study (or in the words that we used above: that has not foreclosed the answer to the question it poses).

In a short text significantly called ‘le cache-misère de l’éthique’ (that which hides the poverty of ethics), Castoriadis has equated, in dramatic and perhaps exaggerated terms, what he sees as a ‘return to ethics’ to individualism, the private sphere and a rejection of politics.¹⁵ Before endorsing his main arguments, we need to note that we can raise objections to Castoriadis’ dichotomy between all types of ethics and politics not only because of the too sharp individual/collective divide but also because, in contexts like this one, the presence of ethics often signals the possibility of a political questioning. In other words, on the one hand, we do not need to see ‘individualism’ and ‘the private sphere’ as the only possible expressions of human or personal autonomy, and thus we do not need to see this type of autonomy as a state that cannot coincide with social solidarity. And second, as this paper argued before, ethics and politics are intertwined and the presence of one always points to the presence of the other, even if the latter is neglected or hidden.

We nevertheless need to retain the emphasis Castoriadis places on two elements: the first one is an aversion vis-à-vis abstract universalistic individualist thought (a certain current of ethics) justified by the observation that human beings are social beings: our existences are moulded by their contexts. At the same time, he points out that ‘ethics’, or as we would preferably say: ‘a particular type of ethics’, may act as a waiver for individual and political responsibility. And we can well see the point: turning the political question (‘what ought the fate of our community be?’) into a merely ethical one (‘how ought one to live’), not only increases the vagueness in the face of uncertainty, but it also effaces the major interrogation of the discussion: are *we* a community? And this element, as we will later see, has only been underlined by political and social theory.¹⁶

Social Scientific Ethics

Looking for the niches created by ‘development ethics’ in ‘development theory’, ‘development economics’ and ‘development sociology’ is a first step towards understanding that what we are talking about is politics and not *only* economics or sociology. It must be taken because, in a discussion like this (an academic discussion, and thus one that involves standards other than merely political), arguments derived from politics cannot directly be used *instead* of arguments based on a reflection on scientific disciplines. In the case of development studies, a reflection on scientific disciplines hinges on their ethical presuppositions. If we now take a slightly twisted cue from Castoriadis’ analysis above, we

immediately see how although ethics may well veil politics, it is only by means of a thin veil – one that covers sensitivity to the collective context: in other words, for our purposes, ethics is the quickest way to politics. And showing how ethically tainted development sociology and economics are (or: that they are not ethics-free disciplines) is thus a necessary step towards showing their political relevance. It is necessary but it is not sufficient: this unsufficiency can be remedied by the call to social and political theory of the second part of this paper.

The ethicality, as it were, of social sciences is most obvious in critique – in critical development thinking of the present. This is due to the above-mentioned coincidence between critique and crisis, a coincidence that allows ethical positions of exteriority to be occupied – but that seldom reverts to a direct political questioning. There is a big variety of typologies of current critiques of development (discourse): from the more traditional division of critical approaches between those that advocate for different ways of providing aid (pro-aid, interventionist) and those that refuse aid and claim it must be substituted by trade (trade-not-aid, market); to the division that Jan Nederveen Pieterse has drawn between ‘alternative development’ and ‘alternatives to development’¹⁷; to Bob Sutcliffe’s triptych of attacks on development: polarisation (the centre-periphery anti-imperialism critique), attainability (ecological/environmentalist critique) and desirability (the equivalent to Pieterse’s ‘alternatives to development’ – what I would call radical critique)¹⁸; or, in a way that joins the more general debate in the social sciences and social and political theory, the divide among ‘post-structuralists’, critical theorists, and those that try to build simultaneously on the better insights of both of these poles¹⁹. Despite their diversity, all these critiques share one element: the existence, in each of them, of a normative (ethical) character that is an integral part of them - and that I take to be most obvious in the diverse criteria that are used to distinguish between these theories.

However, if the ethical character of the social sciences preoccupied with development is most acute in current formulations of critique, it has been there all along and with far-fetching consequences, in the past and in less critical versions.

To make this clear, it is possible to take a step out of ‘development studies’ and look at the use of ethics by ‘International Relations’; a neighbouring discipline. In his groundbreaking discussion of International Relations as political theory, R.B. Walker tells us that although ethics in International Relations asks fundamental questions about the link between modernity and community, it is quite quickly dismissed as trivial, either because the world is how it should be (the ‘modernistic’ argument) or because ‘how it is to be known’ and ‘how it should be’ are understood to be separated.²⁰ Thus, ‘questions about ethics are either deferred as mere theory and philosophy or simply subsumed into an account of the way the world is presumed to be’.²¹ These observations may not completely fit the above discussion (in development studies, ethics is not dismissed anymore – and politics/activism and social-scientific knowledge do offer different answers to different questions, although not ever strictly separable), but Walker’s observation is still precious insofar as the separation between ethics and ‘non-ethics’ is as strict as earlier and, of course, as unacknowledged. Unveiling the ethical presuppositions of accounts of how the world is, that carry in fact an ethical suggestion about how it should be, is a necessary step for discussion. As Walker says about International Relations, ‘[they are] a crucial site in which attempts to think otherwise about political possibilities are constrained by categories and assumptions that contemporary political analysis is encouraged to take for granted’.²²

And in the context of this paper, ‘attempts to think otherwise about political possibilities’ is a political question – a question, as should now be clear, that can be posed after shedding light on its ethical version. There is thus, unfortunately, no good reason to not apply the same analysis to a reflection about development social-sciences and ethics.

Thus, with regard to the social sciences that were directly preoccupied with development, one may as well start with development economics; it is by far the discipline that kept itself most unencumbered from doubts of this sort. There are various accounts of the predominance of economics in the field of development as knowledge: indeed, development studies started out as ‘*de facto* development

economics'.²³ Although Marxism was and has always been a serious challenger of the mainstream development economics, it was neoclassical economics that ended up dominating the discipline²⁴; and it is concepts of neoclassical economics, such as efficiency, that still haunt developmental thought – and that point at its irrationality. Other contenders, structuralist economics or dependency theory, gained momentum at certain periods, particularly in the 1970s, only to lose it again later.²⁵ With very few exceptions (individual authors), the philosophical presuppositions of each of these economic currents all shared one fundamental and straightforward stance, that of *contempt*. Contempt is an *ethical* stance, since it answers the question of 'how ought one to live one's life?' by a negative assertion on 'the other's way of life': 'one ought *not* to live one's life like *this*'.

Albert Hirschman has told the story of 'the rise and decline of development economics': in the end, he says, development economics as a broad social-theoretical endeavour failed because it did not get rid of the colonisers' contempt towards the colonised: 'with the new doctrine of economic growth, contempt took a more sophisticated form: suddenly it was taken for granted that progress of [the developing] countries would be smoothly linear if only they adopted the right kind of integrated program...these countries were perceived to have only interests and no passions'.²⁶ In a more recent article on violence, Des Gasper adopts this metaphor of interests and passions in the same direction – he shows how violence and suffering have been downgraded and denied through the economic world-view and its reductionist conception of people.²⁷

Thus, the discrediting of economics, whose simplifications were fully understood once they had done a lot of damage to the 'developing countries', is not an unimportant explanation of the rise of 'development ethics'. But at the same time, we now see how in fact, development economics was woven into a particular development ethics, one which spoke contentedly about the superiority of the 'developed' – one which pointed unambiguously to a certain, hierarchical, understanding of community.

The second social-scientific realm that was involved in development theorising, (macro)sociology, carried the same type of reductionism as far as community was – implicitly - concerned; and the same type of irrationality with regard to the 'logic' of societal 'progress'. Its two main tendencies closely followed the economics divide; and as with economics, different solutions were tried out that attempted to find third ways between modernisation (later transformed into rational choice/institutional) theory and (neo)Marxism.²⁸ Although it was for a long time formally dominated by development economics, development sociology adopted not few of the assumptions that still underpin development thinking: in various guises, development sociology was assuming modernity and tradition to be clear cut and separated, and change to go in a certain direction. The implicit ethical foundations of these sociological theories range from the unequivocal preference for the "Western model" of the later diffusionism to the belief in superior societal forms of evolutionism, to the idea that structures (and institutions) count more than people's choices in the shaping of social life in structural functionalism.

Splitting 'development' from its 'ethics' fails to grasp the profoundly ethical roots of development discourse - in its modernisation, (neo)Marxist, or most current social-scientific versions. Instead of looking for stringent directions towards a happy ending in a usually edifying and universalising 'development ethics', we should turn towards those that have thought such directions impossible to give – and undesirable. Social and political theorising not centred on development *per se* (and thus, by definition, ignoring the black sheep position of development studies) has the immense advantage of asking questions that are disruptive – also of these very disciplines. It has the immense advantage of making a political questioning directly possible.

II. How *will* we live? Rationality and community in development

There are two fundamental themes that the supposed separability of ethics, development politics and social sciences prevents us from questioning. The first, and oldest, is the very (ir)rationality of development and it addresses development as a never-ending process. Although rooted in a philosophical critique, the (ir)rationality of development is a theme that is often, if unwittingly, encountered in the social sciences. To take an example already mentioned, a concept like efficiency that seems unquestionable in its oldest economic guise and that stands, precisely, for the epitome of rationality becomes irrational when couched in political terms or in terms of the most urgent goal to be attained in development.

The second theme is the idea of community. Viewing development as a community is a political necessity. It is a political necessity because it does three things at the same time: a) it underlines the ties that have historically been woven and are *there now*, and can therefore not be neglected or forgotten b) it therefore raises the crucial questions of responsibility and membership c) it takes in the paradox of every actual community, which is its inequality and d) attempts to find political ways in which this fundamental inequality can be superseded, thus opening up to the idea of community as imaginative creation.

Both of these themes are and can be convincingly addressed by social and political theory; both of them can form an effective critique to the spirit of development. Here is why.

Theorising on development has been more radically, if much less systematically, pursued under the general rubrics of social and political theory. A look to those writings in social and political theory that have included development in their reflection reveals a freshness and a capacity to challenge developmentalist clichés. But even social and political thinking that has not explicitly aimed (also) at development issues offers insights into a broader framework in which development discourses and practices must be understood. In fact, social theory and political theory alone have managed to contextualise ethical questions around development by inserting them into a broader interrogation on capitalism and modernity. Thinkers like Cornelius Castoriadis, Alain Touraine, or Zygmunt Bauman²⁸ have all looked at development at one point of time or another - although in very different ways - and it is in their writings that the most fruitful (in terms of 'development' issues) current trend in social-theoretical thought has found inspiration. That their sometimes radical viewpoints have for a long time not managed to gain more generality as potentially devastating critiques of 'development' is part of the reason why the crisis in 'development studies' and discourse has not come to a satisfactory end.

These thinkers have dealt with the two aforementioned fundamental questions in development - namely its 'rationality' and 'the reason for helping/giving', a fundamental characteristic of the community. In other words: 'why should anyone wish to develop' and 'why should anyone wish to help someone else develop/why should anyone want others to develop'. Although both of these questions are profoundly ethical - in that they ask, at different levels, what ought to govern human conduct -, they are questions that are formulated in a particular manner under the eras of modernity and capitalism: here, we may hint at the question of irrationality of capitalism, a never-ending accumulation process, as the one that touches on the rationality of development; and to the tandem of mastery and, in particular, autonomy, the double characteristic of modernity, as the one that touches the community of development.

Development's (Ir)rationality

Cornelius Castoriadis' formulation of a critique of development on the basis of its irrationality is the most acute. In an article first published in 1976, Castoriadis effectively challenges the premises of a rational path to economic growth, on which the idea of development is based, and more generally of

the rationality of the idea of unlimited progress²⁹. He starts by defining development as the process of achieving or actualising what was previously in a virtual state, a process implying the determination of a 'maturity' (that can be reached or, in other words, that is already present as potential in what will develop) –i.e. of a *determined* state that *exists*. Castoriadis then shows that, by contrast, the present understanding of development is devoid of any such determination of a 'mature' point that must be reached in order for something to become 'developed'. Present-day 'development', being the expression of the injection of the idea of the infinite into the social-historical world, seeks to exit from all finite states in order to attain ever renewable states (an observation linked, if only implicitly, to Castoriadis' critique of capitalistic accumulation).³⁰

To this observation, a second one is crucially added: the absurdity of the idea of total mastery over things. Technique and its mastery is an important component of development discourse (and mastery as such is a constant theme of Castoriadis' theorising of modernity). It leads to absurd results when it purports to be total: thus, development is based on the fallacy that a constant acquisition of more - power, in particular, whether political, economic, or scientific - does not suffer limits. But as Castoriadis underlines, no technical improvement can avoid the risk of being used in a direction opposite to that originally planned: more power is less power and it is also anti-power. It becomes clear that not only is development less rational than is usually thought because of its strive for control that can annihilate it, by turning against it, but it is also absurd in the never-ending process that it creates.

The Castoriadian critique has been succeeded later by other authors' writings, in particular following his suggestion to deconstruct (though he would never have used that word) the myths that prevent the coming about of a different human society.³¹ These authors are not all directly inspired by Castoriadis, and are often less elegant or stringent in their approach. The observation that there are by now *topoi* of anti-development discourse and that those that criticise development discourse produce a discourse in its own right does not seem to strike a lethal blow to this 'anti-development discourse'.³² Indeed, it seems quite natural that writers inspired by the same type of objections to the mainstream discourse will have developed their own 'discourse'. Moreover, in the realm of 'development studies' (if these works still belong there), it is this current that comes closer to an effort of allying empirical observation with social and political theoretical insights as well as explicit ethical questioning. In this sense, these authors have not only uncovered that the social sciences are political philosophy applied,³³ but they have also attempted to both hang on to the possibilities proper to the social sciences and simultaneously re-discover political philosophy as such. It is, indeed, the ongoing interrogation on development's rationality that brings back together ethics, politics, and the social scientific endeavour. It is also this interrogation that leads us to ask the question of the community of development. Because, on the one hand, the (ir)rationality of development has more practical consequences than its mere analytical uncovering may lead to assume. Indeed, it is the – most often, very successful - imposition of the idea that development is perfectly rational (indeed, the most rational way to...development) that makes development unchallengeable. But once 'rationality' is challenged in one or the other manner (as the appanage of 'Western' thought or as one among other ways of communicating with people or as a non-priority in the face of other urgencies), then the premises on which understanding and living development stand are challenged: the commonalities that were heretofore thought to be inevitable are shattered.

On the other hand, having said this - that development is ultimately irrational - leaves us lacking a constructive reappropriation of the problem and only solves, to an extent, an analytical problem (occurrences that often go together). In other words, if the black sheep is to reintegrate the family, saying that it is mad or that it does not exist is not more felicitous than having big amounts of money shoved on it so that it stops bothering us.

The Community of Development

The best way to root the analytical conclusions on firm social and political ground is to suggest that development (discourse) creates a community – and that this community is profoundly unequal. Such a view does not presuppose a community as pre-existing closed ‘space’. We may again here use Castoriadis’ words: the community (or world in common) that is envisaged here is one that is self-instituted, also in the present. This means that what happens to this community is by no means predetermined; that its space is malleable and its inequality avoidable.

In this perspective and to come back to terms of the introduction, it is possible to see development as seeking to answer the profoundest uncertainty of a future world lived in unequal conditions – alarming for security reasons for some, intolerable because of poverty, oppression, sickness for others: it creates a community between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’. However, in its present form, development cannot achieve some of the basic requirements of a common world, and this, while there already is one (and this is why analytical solutions are never enough).

Indeed, the first paradox of development is that as long as it condones itself, in the view of achieving equality of conditions in this unequal community (in the form of interminable stages to be reached), it condemns the members of that community to perpetual inequality. Thus, development’s irrationality goes hand in hand with its creation of a community between the less and more developed: the very words that we use to characterise members of this community are witnesses to this.³⁴ This paradox is more than a mere witticism; it contains the seeds of tragedy: from the moment we uncover this, one question looms larger than all. What are *we* to do with the developing countries? Once their relation to the developed countries is revealed to be bogus, should *we* send them home, so to speak? What would that home be, in a world fashioned to a great extent by what we used to call ‘the West’?

Insights about what makes a community must be sought to answer this: social and political theory are there to provide us with them. What those insights show us is that there will always be a paradoxical situation in the making of a community, but that it is possible – if we acknowledge that a community is what we are talking about – to try to overcome them.

Michael Walzer’s view of community as a good to be distributed offers two crucial ideas for thinking the development community. The first concerns the element of *mutual aid* that Walzer identifies as constitutive of the community.³⁵ The second insight is that the distribution of community is decided from its inside, from within it. “The community is itself a good – conceivably the most important good – that gets distributed. But it is a good that can be distributed only by taking people in, where all the senses of that latter phrase are relevant: they must be physically admitted and politically received. Hence, membership cannot be handed out by some external agency; its *value depends upon an internal decision*”.³⁶ This is very important to an understanding of what is considered ‘domestic’ in this relation and what ‘external’³⁷; to a critique of who decides who can come in the community³⁸; to an interrogation of the imaginary sources of the duty to give in the community (vocations).³⁹

These are all questions treated under the registers of redistribution and recognition in social theory. In these terms too, to leave these issues unturned in the case of development is to overlook how the common world it creates deals with its inequalities. Because redistribution and recognition are two different but interrelated senses of justice; they make sense only in the (formal) framework of the community – by this token, they are specific answers to uncertainty. In other words, on the one hand, redistribution is a very classic understanding of social/distributive justice; it is there to protect those who *have* less in the community, to erase partly their uncertain future: in our case, the developing countries. But certain forms of redistribution loosely understood do nothing but enhance the existing inequalities: in our case, the existing form of development community.

The consequences for the development relations of such an understanding of community are quite clear. First of all, including/excluding ‘others’ or strangers in a development community must be seen

not (only) as a matter of circumstances, structural changes or economic performance but primarily as a matter of (political) *choice*. Second, the mere 'aid' given from one part of the community to the other must be understood to be pointing at a sense of community when it is deemed to be 'mutual'. This takes place through references to interdependency, partnership etc., as is currently the case in the European development discourse, for instance. In fact, the reciprocity of European-African relations has particularly been stressed either by the African 'dependentistas' addressing the Europeans or by Europeans addressing their internal public opinion. Whether a true 'mutuality' of aid is possible - given income inequalities - is not irrelevant but it is a question that must be posed only after the following is established: that, as Walzer admits, every community is somehow a welfare state and if there is not strictly speaking redistribution, there is always distribution.⁴⁰ With this remark, Walzer suggests that although 'mutual aid' – one of the foundations of the community – and 'redistribution' are opposites, they are both to a certain extent inherent in the community.

On the other hand, recognition is there to protect those who *are* (perceived to be) lesser in the community (again: the developing countries) – it is thus also a form of distributive justice, if social respect is seen as a good to be distributed.⁴¹ And here too, more than for redistribution, development has a very long way to go.

In the end, these are all questions that point an accusing finger to the vast majority of development relations. For indeed, who else than the 'developed' instigates, creates and chooses to continue or discontinue relationships of aid?⁴² And if this question is only rhetorical, then we must proceed to accomplish a 'double movement' – one towards the explicit acknowledgment of responsibility by the 'developed', a responsibility painted in the colours of solidarity – and one, seemingly opposite, that attempts to found this solidarity in the others of the 'developed'. But this is another story, the long story of a different black sheep.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

² In a lucid appraisal of the position of development issues in academia, Anna Dickson says: ‘Development has been consigned to the realm of low politics, except when the international order, as it has been constructed, is threatened. Thus, the Third World is studied, not so much for its substantial contribution to that order, but as a potential destabilizer of world order. This conservative disposition permeates much of IR and has led to a particular and exclusive view of the international order which effectively excludes 85 per cent of the world population’. Anna Dickson, “Development and International Relations” in *International Political Economy* 5: 2 (Summer 1998): 362-377.

³ I am talking here about ‘development theory’, in particular, that is, the organised and institutionalised scientific efforts of theoretically mapping problems and solutions of development; the antecedents of this must, however, be sought in the 19th century. See M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, R.W., *Doctrines of Development* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴ The ‘impasse’ is David Booth’s expression in David Booth “Marxism and Development Sociology: Interpreting the Impasse”, *World Development*, Vol. 13, No. 7. For a somewhat mellower view, see David Booth (ed.) *Rethinking Social Development, Theory, Research and Practice* (Essex: Longman, 1994). From another perspective, Ronaldo Munck explains how this ‘impasse’ was nothing else than the discredit of neoMarxism and the retreat towards the old modernisation paradigm, due to the confusion of ‘radical’ and ‘Marxism’ (hence dependency was understood as in a Marxist lineage) and to the belief that Marxism was absolutely opposable to the modernisation paradigm. See Ronaldo Munck, ‘Deconstructing Development Discourses: of Impasses, Alternatives and Politics’, in Ronaldo Munck and Denis O’Hearn, *Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a new paradigm*, (London: Zed, 1999). For similar views on the ‘impasse’, see David B. Moore, “Development Discourse as Hegemony: Towards an Ideological History – 1945-1995”, in David B. Moore, and Gerald J., Schmitz, (eds.) *Debating Development Discourse: Institutional and Popular Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

⁵ Colin Leys identifies five main theoretical responses to the problem of development theory facing a changed world, ‘apart from neoliberalism’: - the theoretical impasse, to be overcome by better concepts – eclecticism as usual – further evolutions of dependency theory – neo-institutionalism – renunciation of commitment to development. See Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). But: the ‘delinking’ advocated by some currents of ‘dependency theorists’ can be seen as quite close to the rejection of development – it is the rejection of a certain development: the location of ‘post-development’ advocates in Latin America is an indicator, e.g. Arturo Escobar “Beyond the Search for a Paradigm? Post-Development and beyond” in *Development*, Vol 43, n 4 (2000): 11-14.

⁶ Of course, other influences, such as Amartya Sen’s approach, or Marxism are also perceptible and even, sometimes, significant.

⁷ Examples of incisive such critiques are: Moore, op.cit; and, in particular concerning development economics, Alice Sindzingre, “‘Truth’, “Efficiency”, and Multilateral Institutions: A Political Economy of Development Economics”, paper presented at the conference “Towards a New Political Economy of Development: Globalisation and Governance”, Political Economy Research Centre, University of Sheffield and the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick, Sheffield, 4-6 July 2002.

⁸ ‘Political and social theory’ are always mentioned together in this paper, not least because of the difficulty in characterising certain authors as exclusively belonging to one or the other type of thinking, but also because the paper’s stance advocates switching viewpoints.

⁹ That we can somewhat roughly/symbolically date with the 1884-85 Berlin Conference that formalised the second European descent on Africa into a neat territorial division – still visible on the map. On the impression that Africa was a vast blank territory both then for Europeans (for a famous example, see Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) and later, for Africans at the moment of decolonization, the classic is Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Vintage, 1993). ‘Berlin’ was less homogeneous a result than was often presented – there were very distinct British, say, or French or German commercial strategies; and the agreements signed there were after some years altered. For the commercial aspect, see Hélène d’Almeida-Topor and Monique Lakroum *L’Europe et l’Afrique. Un siècle d’échanges économiques* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1994).

¹⁰ For accounts of this period, see Moore, op.cit, and Leys, op.cit.

¹¹ See, for a rare renewal of this type of critique, the work of Arturo Escobar. For example: Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in development: Michel Foucault and the relevance of his work to the Third World”, *Alternatives X* (1984-85); Arturo Escobar, “Imagining a Post-Development Era” in Jonathan Crush (ed.), *Power of Development*, (London: Routledge, 1995); and Arturo Escobar 2000, op.cit.

¹² Des Gasper’s classification offers a good overview of the field in chronological-conceptual lines. He identifies three ‘stages’ of development ethics: the first stage ‘reacts to and reflects on problems and horrors of development and non-development, capitalist or socialist, and puts forward views of human interests, rights, duties and dilemmas’. This stage is focused on the ‘meaning’ of development and concepts used in development discourse: one of its main proponents is Goulet. The second stage of ‘development ethics’ ‘tries to refine and relate different principles and build systematic theoretical alternatives’; and its representatives are Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and Onora O’Neill. But according to

Des Gasper, a third stage is also needed which looks to ‘the real worlds of practice and compromise’. See Des Gasper “Culture and Development Ethics: Needs, Women’s Rights, and Western Theories” in *Development and Change*, Vol. 27 (1996), p. 629.

¹³ On the relation between critique and crisis, see the introduction of Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

¹⁴ Gustavo Esteva ‘Development’ in Wolfgang Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary* (London: Zed, 1995), p. 6.

¹⁵ See Cornelius Castoriadis, “Le cache-misère de l’éthique” in *La montée de l’insignifiance, Les carrefours du labyrinthe IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

¹⁶ In other words, applying this to the current ethics means that: the lack of self-reflexivity of such development ‘ethics’ is mirrored in the fact that its institutionalised mainstream is liberal universalist: efforts to render its liberalism more ‘substantive’ and context-bound are ultimately impeded by its insistence on an abstract, universally valid concept of justice.

¹⁷ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “After Post Development” in *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 21 (2000): 175- 191.

¹⁸ Bob Sutcliffe, “The Place of Development in Theories of Imperialism and Globalisation” in Munck and O’Hearn, op. cit.

¹⁹ E.g. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “On Oppositional Postmodernism”, in Munck, and O’Hearn, op.cit.

²⁰ R.B.J Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²¹ Ibid: 55.

²² Ibid: 5.

²³ John Cameron, “Kant’s Categorical Imperative as a Foundation for Development Studies and Action” in *European Journal of Development Research* (1999) Vol. 11, No 2.

²⁴ John Brohman, “Economism and critical silences in development studies: a theoretical critique of neoliberalism” in *Third World Quarterly* (1995) Vol 16, No 2.

²⁵ Colin Leys, however, sees a renaissance of dependency theory in the 1990s. See Leys, op.cit. For a brief but enlightening presentation of these movements before the 1980s, see Kevin P. Clements, *From Right to Left in Development Theory. An Analysis of the Political Implications of Different Models of Development* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: 1980).

²⁶ Albert O. Hirschman, “The rise and decline of development economics” in Albert O.Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing, Economics to Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 24.

²⁷ To such analyses, it is possible to object that on the contrary ‘developing countries’ have been often pictured as the ‘emotional’ counterpart of the (‘rational’) developed ones and that they are thus depicted as overwhelmed by their passions regardless of their interest. However, the main point, one which insists on the simplifications operated by economics, is valuable. Gasper 1999, op.cit.

²⁸ This is a simplification: as Leys (op. cit) points out, the most virulent critiques of neoMarxists were Marxists *tout court*, for instance, and the current debate within institutionalism speaks of a more complicated situation.

²⁸ See Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘Reflexions sur le “développement” et la “rationalité”’ in *Esprit* (1976) No 5; Alain Touraine, *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble? Egaux et Différents* (Paris: Fayard, 1997): 219-226; and Zygmunt Bauman ‘On Universal Morality and the Morality of Universalism’ in *European Journal of Development Research* (1998) Vol. 10, No 2.

²⁹ Castoriadis, *ibid*.

³⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘La rationalité du capitalisme’ in Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures du Pensable, Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe VI* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

³¹ The critique of development as a myth is an intellectually enticing one. But such a denunciation misses the exceptionality of development’s justification in terms of rationality. As Castoriadis remarks with regard to capitalism, ‘le capitalisme est le premier régime social qui produit une idéologie d’après laquelle il serait “rationnel”. La légitimation d’autres types d’institution de la société était mythique, religieuse ou traditionnelle’ Castoriadis, *ibid*: 66. So, to credibly attack ‘development’, one must attack its claim to rationality rather than its mythical essence. In other words, precisely because development (or capitalism) poses itself as the ultimate dissolver of myths, an analysis of it in terms of myth runs counter to its objective. Additionally, since the academic analysis itself uses the ‘rationality’ tool, denunciation aimed at development’s foul play in the same field of rationality, seems more plausible than a denunciation in terms of myth.

³² But if it is not lethal, this observation points at an unavoidable loss of radicality engendered by repetition and banalisation. In other words, the emergence of an anti-development discourse in its own right loses the potential of Castoriadis’ unique critique. It is then more disturbing (and perhaps more accurate) to think of this anti-mainstream discourse as indeed belonging in fact to the ‘mainstream discourse’ – much as capitalism and critique belong together – instead of marking a radical, and thus irreversible, obstacle to development’s propagation. One can find a list of authors, who are critically reviewed, and who write in this direction in Des Gasper ‘Essentialism In and About Development Discourse’ in Raymond Apthorpe and Des Gasper, (guest editors), ‘Arguing Development Policy: Frames and Discourse’, *European Journal of Development Research* (1996) Vol.8, No. 1: 170.

³³ The expression is Peter Wagner's in 'Certainty and order, liberty and contingency. The birth of social science as empirical political philosophy' in Johan Heilbron, Lars Magnusson, and Björn Wittrock (eds.), *The Rise of the Social Sciences and the Formation of Modernity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

³⁴ To start immediately with a possible change, it has been suggested that instead of talking about 'poor', we should talk about 'impoverished', instead of marginal, about 'marginalized', instead of victims, about 'victimized', etc., formulations that points at responsibility. See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Toward a New Common Sense: Law, Science, and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition* (NY: Routledge, 1995), p. 353; and Rajeev Patel, *Resistance in a time of fascism: Solidarity, feminism and global capital from Zimbabwe*, (Ph.D. Dissertation: Cornell University, 2002). Additionally, the historical reappropriation of another element of community by development discourse betrays the same irrationality. The community of development discourse, following Hegelian inspiration, is one of 'interdependence'. Although the word is currently used in a distinct effort to depict equality in the relations between the developed and the developing countries, it has roots in a conceptualisation of master- slave relationships. According to the Hegelian vision, the master is at least as dependent on the slave as the slave on the master. In fact, the master is deprived of the slave's satisfaction of being able to change reality through work. Thus, there is an interdependency between the powerful and the powerless. If it is in Marx himself that we must locate the first use of this idea with regard to the relationship between colonisers and colonised (see Shlomo Avineri, [ed.] *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, [New York: Doubleday & Company, 1968]), the intellectual development movement that most explicitly found its inspiration there was the Latin American 'dependencia'. But in a twist, the 'dependentistas' insisted on Latin America's dependence situation vis-à-vis the capitalistic centre. Inheriting this understanding, the current development discourse emanating hastily adds 'inter' to 'dependency' without realising that it comes back to a formulation that was originally set up to denounce inequalities.

³⁵ Indeed, if we look at the development discourse of the EU towards the ACP countries, mutuality of 'giving' (help, aid, debt, exchange) is present as a crucial justification of the very existence of the community.

³⁶ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Martin Roberston, 1983), p. 29, my emphasis.

³⁷ We may reflect on this division between domestic and external (or insider/outsider) at both the global 'social' level and at the international 'political' level. In the first case, Zygmunt Bauman's writings are interesting, as they deal with the abandonment of the old type of community. The new, 'postmodern' community that Bauman describes is a community of the thinnest efforts, of the lowest engagement, and of the fewest long-term commitments – in fact, it is a community where 'ethical responsibilities' do not have a place. Such a thin community is possible because of the *likeness* of its members. Those who do not belong to these like-minded, who happen to be the most flexible and the best endowed in financial and educational terms, are left behind in a community of their own, the community of the weak. The main problem of such conceptualisation is the 'victimization' of the weak and, equally importantly, the refusal to conceive of a common world. But it offers a clear picture of what exclusionary politics can be. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Community, Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2001).

To Zygmunt Bauman's foreboding (that concerns a global 'social' level) can be added R. B. J. Walker's particular reading of international relations theory. Indeed, according to the latter, development can be seen as one of the consequences of the relaxation of an exclusionist logic within the state sovereignty framework. To make this clearer, we must first of all see that 'the principle of state sovereignty did not appear out of thin air. It embodies a historically specific account of ethical possibility in the form of an answer to questions about the nature and location of political community' (Walker, op. cit, p. 62) In the discipline of international relations, the object of Walker's study, 'state sovereignty' serves as that principle which makes international relations, 'IR', precisely just *relations* between states (anarchy) and not a *community* between states – a community being equivalent to politics (the space and time where they can be discussed): in other words, sovereignty serves to establish an outside and an inside (also in 'disciplinary' terms). But if this division of inside/outside or inclusion/exclusion is relaxed, there appears the reverse temptation of moving from anarchy (a division exists) to community (no division), from particularistic (the nation-state claim to sovereignty) to universalistic. This second temptation often takes a temporal form: development for instance, or a linear history, or progress.

Finally, bringing these separated levels close to the idea of the community between developed and developing shows how pervasive development discourse is; and as far as the European case is concerned, how it is impossible, as much as the European Union may have wanted it, to consider the Lomé Conventions (multilateral contracts binding the EU with the ACP countries for almost thirty years) an exclusively 'domestic matter'; and how it is impossible, now that the community is wished away, to consider that these relations are prey exclusively to uncontrollable 'global' forces.

³⁸ Later on, Walzer says: "[W]e who are already members do the choosing, in accordance with our own understanding of what membership means in our community and of what sort of a community we want to have....But we don't distribute [membership] among ourselves; it is already ours. We give it out to strangers. Hence, the choice is also governed by our relationships with strangers – not only by our understanding of those relationships but also by the actual contracts, connections, alliances we have established and the effects we have had beyond our borders". Walzer, op.cit, p. 32.

³⁹ Recognition/redistribution (or: mutual aid/membership) can be thought as different forms of exchange that are criteria of intensity of the community in terms of solidarity; then the community created by development is of low intensity.

⁴⁰ We see the problematic consequence of this distinction: distribution is not, like redistribution, about equality of conditions. To be content with simple distribution is often the objective in current European politics and in Europe's relation with its ex-colonies.

⁴¹ See, for different views on this, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); and Nancy Fraser 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age' in Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus, Critical Reflections on the "PostSocialist" Condition*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁴² One can again take the example, at a large scale, of the end of the Lomé relationship (multilateral) but a glance at countries like Zimbabwe only confirms the same at an individual country level (bilateral). In the case of the multilateral Lomé framework, one must know that the historical process of accession to the community that the Lomé Conventions has built was marked by the difficulties faced by some countries to 'be part of it'. The Convention has managed to face the problem of (economic) uncertainty in such a manner that despite its immense drawbacks and failures, the decision to start dismantling it was accepted only grudgingly by the ACP states. It must be underlined that the end put to this Community is initiated again by one only of its members, the EU.