

Book Review

The Ethics of Development

by Des Gasper. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2004. 247 pages.

Ethics used to be discussed only in a philosophy or religion class. Is ethics relevant in development studies and practice? Des Gasper strongly believes that it is.

Ethics involves choices. It is about standards in decision making. The question, however, is: what point of view informs such standards? Des Gasper wrote his book, not in a manner of an ideologue proposing political correctness, but as a philosopher, asking questions and provoking the reader to think through his or her own unrecognized premises and values.

In his book, *The Ethics of Development*, Gasper reiterated ideas articulated by different authors on development ethics. He was able to weave philosophical discourse with realities as he moved to convince the readers of the importance of the ethics of development.

Gasper reviewed the evolution of the concept of “development” long before the era of development as a Western project. He dissected not only the usage of “development” but related concepts such as efficiency and effectiveness, equity, violence, human security, needs and basic needs, and human development. He uncovered the liberal-utilitarian premises and philosophy in mainstream development evaluation theory and practice evident in what he called “economism,” or “overreliance on narrow economic ideas.” Citing Peter Brown (2000), he posited that “economics is too important to be left to conventional economists alone.”

Using actual country situations, he examined the use of the concept "equity" and illustrated its different interpretations. He argued that equal benefits to people with unequal needs will not result in equality in well-being. He illustrated his arguments by presenting cases like the Great Irish Famine and the Great Bengal Famine. He brought to the fore the relationship of violence and development and raised questions which for him were not given attention by development policymakers and planners such as, "is violence integral or accidental in particular development path, and on what scale?" From unearthing the connection of violence and development, Gasper proceeded to analyze the meanings and syntax of "need" and the discourses on "needs." He argued that the real issue is "who defines needs?"

After investigating "development" and its corollary concepts, Gasper raised questions instead of prescribing standards of right and wrong. In his epilogue, he reiterated the importance of incorporating development ethics in development studies and development practice.

Students of development studies and development practitioners will find the book thought provoking as it uncovers issues left unsaid in many reference materials. To fully appreciate the book, however, it is recommended that the reader should know the different perspectives and strategies in societal development.

YOLANDA G. EALDAMA
Dept. of Social Work
CSWCD, U.P.