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**Reconstituting development as a shared responsibility:  
Ethics, aesthetics and a creative shaping of human possibilities**

by

**Ananta K. Giri  
Philip Quarles von Ufford**

**Madras Institute of Development Studies**

79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar  
Adyar, Chennai 600 020

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# **Reconstituting Development as a Shared Responsibility: Ethics, Aesthetics and a Creative Shaping of Human Possibilities**

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## **Abstract**

The vision and practice of development has been subjected to much criticism and reconstruction in the recent years. While the advocates of development have striven to widen its vision and objective from economic development to human development, critics of development have pointed to the inherent imperial nature of such a project and have called for dismantling the whole project of development. But this paper argues that both the advocates and critics of development miss the important task of reconstituting development as a shared responsibility in which both the agents of development and the beneficiaries are involved. The paper strives to rethink development from the vantage point and practice of self-development in which both self and other are at work and in dialogue. The paper pleads that development is not only for the other, it is also for the self, and in development both the development of other and development of self should go hand in hand. In order to facilitate self-development, the paper pleads for both an aesthetic and ethical deepening of the agenda of development. While the aesthetic deepening of development builds on Foucault's agenda of care of self, Ankersmit's perspective of aesthetic politics and Seyla Benhabib's perspective of aesthetics as healing, the ethical deepening of development in this paper is based on the visions of Levinas, Gandhi, Kierkegaard, Sri Aurobindo, Amartya Sen and Alasdair MacIntyre. Finally, the paper calls for a transcendence of an either or approach to development and a creative embodiment of both ethics and aesthetics in our vision and practice.

## **About the Authors:**

Dr. Ananta Kumar Giri is on the faculty of the Madras Institute of Development Studies. He can be reached at: [ananta@mids.tn.nic.in](mailto:ananta@mids.tn.nic.in) / [anantag@hotmail.com](mailto:anantag@hotmail.com). Dr. Philip Quarles von Ufford is on the faculty of Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Non-Western Sociology, Free University, Amsterdam. He has a special interest in the analysis of development policy and has published many papers and books on NGOs, rural development, chaos theory, the ideology of the market, religion and development. Dr. Quarles von Ufford is one of the founders of the European inter-university initiative in research on development ethics called EIDOS. He can be reached at: [flipq@dds.nl](mailto:flipq@dds.nl)

## **Reconstituting Development as a Shared Responsibility: Ethics, Aesthetics and a Creative Shaping of Human Possibilities**

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We are at a cross-road now in our vision and practice of development. Much of our difficulties here relate to our inability to look at and participate in the field of development as a field of relationship and as a quest of a shared responsibility which brings the self and other together. Half a century ago, development began as a hope for a better human possibility but in the last 50 years, this hope has lost itself in the dreary desert of various kinds of hegemonies. But at the turn of the millennium there is an epochal challenge to rethink and reconstitute the vision and practice of development as a shared responsibility—a sharing which binds both the agent and the audience, the developed world and the developing, in a bond of shared destiny. This calls for the cultivation of an appropriate ethical mode of being in our lives which enables us to realize, be prepared for and worthy of this global and planetary situation of shared living and responsibility (Otto-Apel 1991). As Habermas tells us, “The moral or ethical point of view makes us quicker to perceive the more far reaching, and simultaneously less insistent and more fragile, ties that bind the fate of an individual to that of every other—making even the most alien person a member of one’s community” (Habermas 1990: 20).

But the self-confidence that Habermas poses in the ability of an ethical perspective and ethical engagement to help us perceive and be prepared for our shared responsibility may be difficult to proceed with as a guide to ethics and development in its entirety. For many critical commentators and interlocutors, an ethical agenda has almost always implied an agenda of the care of the other in a hegemonic manner where what is good for the other has already been defined by the benevolent Self. In fact, the problem with the practice of development in the last 50 years has been precisely with such an ethical agenda which has been an agenda of hegemonic application of apriori formulations, in which the objects of development do not have much say in defining and shaping the contours of their development (Carmen 1996 ). Such an agenda makes development an other-oriented activity where the actors of development do not realize that the field and the practice of development provides, and ought to provide, an opportunity for learning (cf. Nederveen Pieterse 2000), self-development and self-transformation both for the object and the subject of development. In this context, there is a need to rethink development

as an initiative in self-development on the part of both the subjects and objects of development, and ethics not only as an engagement in care of the other but also as an engagement in care of the self. Such a redefinition and reconstruction of both ethics and development is a crucial starting point for a new understanding and reconstitution of development as a shared human responsibility, and as a shared human possibility.

Rethinking development from the vantage point and practice of self-development urges a shift of perspective from us: a shift from looking at development as ameliorating the condition of the other to looking at it as an initiative in self-development. But self-development here refers to the self-development of both the agents of development as well as the subjects of development, the so-called target groups of development interventions. In contemporary rethinking of welfare and well-being in advanced industrial societies, we are told that without the development of an "autotelic self" which takes upon itself the responsibility of one's development and for taking oneself out of the trap of poverty and unfreedom, no amount of development intervention and welfare work can help alter the initial situation of poverty and helplessness (Giddens 1994, 1999). At the same time, those who are engaged in developing others and creating a more capable and functioning environment have a need to develop themselves. So, a quest for self-development today has a potential to transgress the boundary of the subject and object in the field of development intervention and practice. Fortunately for us, there have taken place important movements in the development field such as Swadhyaya and Sarvodaya which reiterate that development is not only meant for the other, it is also meant for the self and in development, both the development of the other and development of self should go hand in hand (Roy 1993; Sheth 1994).

### **Towards an Aesthetic Deepening and Broadening of the Agenda of Ethics: Aesthetics and the Calling of the Care of the Self**

The emphasis on self-development in the field of development practice is accompanied by an aesthetic deepening of the agenda of ethics where care of the self as an artistic work par excellence becomes the heart of ethics. Traditionally, we look at ethics as concerned with the consequences of one's action for the other but ethics as care of the self urges us to realize that our action also affects ourselves and through care of the self, we are able to become worthy helpers and servants of the other. Such a deepening of the agenda of ethics draws its most immediate inspiration from Michael Foucault who urges us to realize that "the search for an ethics of existence" must involve an "elaboration of one's own life as a personal work of art" (Foucault 1988: 49). Foucault's agenda of an aesthetic ethics is

developed in the context of his discussion of ethical life and ethical ideals in Antiquity. But this is not meant only to be an archaeology of the past but suggest a possible mode and ideal of ethical engagement for the present and the future. For Foucault, in Antiquity, “the search for an ethics of existence” was “an attempt to affirm one’s liberty and to give to one’s life a certain form in which one could recognize oneself, be recognized by others, and which even the posterity might take as an example” (ibid). For Foucault, life as an work of art involves care of the self, a conversion to self, an intense relation with oneself. While ethics is usually conceived as care for the other, for Foucault, ethics at the same time, must help one to “take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation” (1988: 42). Furthermore, aesthetic ethics as care of the self involves cultivation of appropriate values in the conduct of life. The most important task here is not to be obsessed with exercising power over others and to be concerned with discovering and realizing “what one is in relation to oneself” (ibid: 85).

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

Creativity and the “concrete shaping of freedom” are at the heart of the Foucauldian aesthetic ethics. Such an aesthetic inspiration encourages actors of development to be creative, and discover and foster creativity in the life of others (Osborne 1997: 131). It also encourages them to produce “togetherness in different contexts” rather than “assert any founding principle of social order” (ibid). In this context, what a perceptive interpreter of

Foucault writes about the calling of an aesthetic sociology provides us helpful insights for developing an aesthetically attuned development anthropology:

An aesthetic sociology would entail an attentiveness to the different kinds of shape and significance that humans give to their creativity; it would involve historically specific investigation into that aspect of humans that problematizes them as free beings, that is, as capable of a creative and autonomous elaboration of life. An aesthetic sociology would not, then, be in any sense an aestheticist sociology, but would be a sociology concerned with the aesthetic problematization of life as a work of freedom. And the very existence of such a sociology might itself be indicative of the state of society's involvement in the question of freedom (Osborne 1997: 131).

### **From Mimetic to Aesthetic Representation: The Calling of Aesthetic Politics**

Like Foucault, in recent times, Frank Ankersmit has also urged us to be aware of the dangers of an agenda of prescriptive ethics by presenting us an alternative proposal of what he calls "aesthetic politics" (Ankersmit 1996). For Ankersmit, while "ethics makes sense on the assumption of a (Stoic) continuity between our intentions, our actions and their results in the socio-political world," aesthetics draws our attention to the gaps and discontinuities among them.<sup>1</sup> For Ankersmit, aesthetics originates in the gap between representation and the represented and it is important to develop an appropriate style of life and responsibility in this gap by first acknowledging that there is a gap. The problem with the ethical agenda of modernity, for Ankersmit, is that it has tried to sweep this gap under the carpet in the name of an ideal model of unity. Ankermit makes a distinction between mimetic representation which denies this gap between representation and represented and aesthetic representation which acknowledges this gap and builds on it. For Ankersmit, mimetic representation is against representation itself as "representation always happens, so to speak, between the represented and its representation; it always needs the presence of their distance and the ensuring interaction.." (Ankersmit 1996: 44). The problem with modernist politics for Ankersmit has been that it has been a hostage to the politically correct ideology of mimetic representation where political representatives are required to represent their represented constituency mimetically which creates a compulsion for politically correct mimetic representation rather than a representation which is based on one's autonomous self-identity—an identity which however is not fixed and is an evolving one-and negotiation between this identity and the aspirations of the represented. For Ankersmit, acknowledgment of this gap becomes an aesthetic work par excellence where actors learn to

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1 In his work, Philip Quarles von Ufford also draws our attention to the gap between intention an outcome as the most fundamental problem facing us in the field of ethics in general and development ethics in particular (Quarles von Ufford 1999).

develop an appropriate political style in the midst of fragmentation rather than with a valorized united whole, which does not exist any more. Aesthetic political representation urges us to realize that "the representative has autonomy with regard to the people represented" but autonomy then is not an excuse to abandon one's responsibility. Aesthetic autonomy requires cultivation of "disinterestedness" on the part of actors which is not indifference. To have disinterestedness i.e., to have "comportment towards the beautiful that is devoid of all ulterior references to use—requires a kind of *ascetic* commitment; it is the 'liberation of ourselves for the release of what has proper worth only in itself'" (Osborne 1997: 135).

In aesthetic politics, the development of appropriate styles of conduct on the part of the representatives is facilitated by the choice and play of appropriate metaphors. For Ankersmit, in the development of an appropriate style of conduct for a representative the metaphor of a "maintenance man" or woman is more facilitating for self-growth than an architect. While the architect thinks that she is designing a building of which she is the creator, a maintenance person has a much more modest understanding of one's role and does not look at his effort as creating a building out of nothing, rather continuing a work to which many others have contributed. Such a metaphor of "maintenance man" can provide new self-understanding to actors both in the field of politics and development where we do not have any dearth of actors, institutions and worldviews who attribute to them the role of the original creator, the architect, the god. But such a self-understanding of ourselves as architects leads to arrogance and dominance. In this context, there is a modesty in the metaphor of the "maintenance person" which is further facilitated by the choice of the metaphor of the captain of a ship. It is not enough for a captain to have only an a priori plan; she must know how to negotiate between a priori plans and the contingent situations on the ground. Such a capacity for negotiation which is facilitated by one's choice of an appropriate metaphor such as captain and "maintenance person" is crucial for development of appropriate styles of conduct on the part of the actors in the field of politics and development. In developing his outline of aesthetic politics, an outline which has enormous significance for reconstituting the field of development as a field of artistic rather than mimetic representation which calls for the cultivation of an appropriate style of life on the part of the actors of development, Ankersmit writes: "...when asking himself or herself how best to represent the represented, the representative should ask what political style would best suit the electorate. And this question requires an essentially creative answer on the part of the representative, in the sense that there exists no style in the electorate that is quietly waiting to be copied (ibid: 54). For Ankersmit, "aesthetics will provide us with a most fruitful point of departure if we desire to improve our political self-knowledge" and in this self-knowledge

autonomy of actors, units and institutions has a crucial significance. In fact, nurturing the autonomous spaces of self, institutions and society itself as spaces of creative self-fashioning and development of creative styles of action becomes an aesthetic activity par excellence. Of course, autonomy here has not to be meant in a defensive sense of preserving the established structures rather than transforming it in accordance with the transformative imagination of actors and a democratic public discursive formation of will (Giri 1998a, Habermas 1995).

Ankersmit's application of the perspective of aesthetics in the field of politics has important lessons for us. First, it is an attempt to reverse the contemporary tendency to evade our political responsibility in the name of an aesthetic care of the self.<sup>2</sup> Aesthetic ethics in Ankersmit involves an effort to "improve our political self-knowledge" which brings work on self-improvement and self-development much more closely to the public sphere than the Foucauldian care of self which, as we shall see shortly, is sometimes not sufficiently aware of its responsibility in the public domain. The aesthetic politics of Ankersmit also presents an alternative to the dominant mode of aestheticization of politics which has expressed itself in what David Harvey, giving the example of the Nazi effort to aestheticize politics, calls "aesthetics of empowerment" (Harvey 1989). But the aesthetic politics in Ankersmit is not geared to a will to power but inspired by a will to political self-knowledge and the will to develop oneself as a "maintenance man." As against the tyranny of unity in certain strands of German aesthetics such as Schiller's, Ankersmit's aesthetics celebrates and works "within an irrevocably broken world" (Ankersmit 1996:53) but the brokenness of the world is not an excuse to abandon one's responsibility.

### **Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics**

Ankermit helps us to unbound aesthetics itself from its narrow conceptualization as only art and in the process deepen and widen it. In order to come to terms with the predicament of development as we seek to reconstitute it with new possibilities from both ethics and aesthetics, it is important for us to have intimations of such a broadened view of aesthetics. In his important work, *Undoing Aesthetics*, Wolfgang Iser provides us with such a view. In preparing an outline of his agenda of what he calls "Aesthetics Beyond

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, in his dialogue with Richard Rorty, Ankersmit argues that the problem with Rorty is that he shows a "complete lack of interest for contemporary politics" (Ankersmit : 17) and his own specific engagement is a "continuation of Rorty's own evolution from anti-foundationalism towards ethics and politics" (ibid: 17).



Aesthetics," Welsch presents an aesthetic or elevatory imperative: "...in perceiving, keep yourself free of sensuous sensation.. don't just heed primary vital pleasures, but also exercise the higher, peculiarly aesthetic pleasure of a reflective delight" (Welsch 1997: 63). For Welsch, an aesthetic sensibility enables us to appreciate the significance of difference while not evading our responsibility to it. Urging us to realize that aesthetics has "an ethico-moral radiance," Welsch (building on Adorno) argues that it is "only in aesthetics that justice can be spoken of at all, not in the policies for the realization of the idea of justice" (ibid: 71). While political justice, being based on "the principle of formal equivalence" causes differences to disappear and exercise power over them, aesthetic justice acknowledges the differences and suggests a way out of the "machinery of domination" in which political justice remains imprisoned (ibid: 71). Welsch discusses in details the ethical implications and consequences of contemporary aesthetic awareness and some of these are: an awareness of specificity, an awareness of particularity, vigilance,<sup>3</sup> attentiveness,<sup>4</sup> tendency to acknowledge and tendency to justice (Welsch 1997: 73).

### **Aesthetics and the Quest for Authenticity**

Welsch urges us to realize that aesthetics is not simply a category of perception, it is also an aspect of our knowledge. Epistemology has an aesthetic dimension too.<sup>5</sup> This point of Welsch is illumined by Habermas's recent discussion that there may be modes of knowledge and expression where one wishes to be authentic, rather than seek for or communicate validity, in a strict scientific sense (Habermas 1996). Habermas links the former to an aesthetic mode at the heart of which lies a quest for authenticity. Thus the quest for authentic knowledge and the desire for authentic communication of that knowledge becomes an aesthetic work par excellence. Habermas gives an important role to the aesthetic quest of authenticity in the ethics of life and this is a significant move because this enables

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- <sup>3</sup> By this Welsch means: "One must not simply ponder the fact that each paradigm is specific, and hence that other paradigms legitimately and almost necessarily exist alongside it; rather one must also be sensitive to the unavoidable exclusions of any paradigm and to the contrariety of paradigms" (ibid: 73).
4. "An aesthetics sensitized for conditions of exclusion exhorts us to be attentive—in precisely those places where we perceive and suppose nothing, or where we believe we're faced only by things unworthy or undiscussable xxx In many ways modern art turned to just those things which were societally devalued" (ibid: 73).
5. Here Welsch draws our attention to both Kant and Nietzsche. For Kant, "We know apriori of things only what we ourselves put into them; and what we first put into them are aesthetic stipulations, namely space and time as forms of intuition" (Welsch 1997: 20). For Welsch, Nietzsche took this Kantian step further: "Nietzsche showed that our representations of reality not only contain fundamental aesthetic elements, but are wholly aesthetic in nature" (ibid: 21).

us to bring our aesthetic awareness to the wider field of politics and society, an engagement which is missing in many of the postmodern formulations of aesthetics. In such a calling, the quest for authenticity need not be apologetic; instead a responsible politics and collective action is based on one's authentic being and one's quest for self-knowledge. As one perceptive commentator writes: "[We need to replace] the inauthentic notion of the aesthetic under capitalism with an authentic one. This is Habermas's dream of a new aesthetic of reconciliation.." (Osborne 1997: 133).

In recent times, Charles Taylor was one of the first to put the agenda of authenticity on the table and not to dismiss this out of hand as narcissistic. Taylor urges us to realize that there is a "powerful moral ideal at work" in the quest for self-fulfilment on the part of the young in a society such as American society and "the moral ideal behind self-fulfilment is that of being true to oneself" (Taylor 1991: 15). Through this quest for being true to oneself, Taylor seeks to establish the connection between self-fulfilment and authenticity. Taylor (1991) also helps us understand the significance of authenticity not only for aesthetics but also for ethics and at the end helping us go beyond the limitations of the two through his perspective of self-responsibilization. For Taylor, "...we ought to be trying to persuade people that self-fulfilment, so far from excluding unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self, actually require these in some form" (Taylor 1991: 72 / 73). Taylor further argues, "Authenticity is clearly self referential: this has to be *my* orientations. But this does not mean that on another level the *content* must be self-referential: that my goals must express or fulfil my desires or aspirations, as *against* something that stands beyond these" (ibid: 82). For Taylor, "Authenticity opens an age of self-responsibilization" and "points us towards a more self-responsible form of life" (ibid: 74).

### **Aesthetics as Healing: Non-Repressive Solidarities as New Sources of Hope**

Authenticity as "self-responsibilization" actively seeks to establish a non-domineering relationship between self and other. We get intimation of such a perspective on aesthetics also from Seyla Benhabib. What is crucial to her perspective is a respect for difference and cultivating an appropriate relationship to difference—neither hegemonic universalism nor relativistic withdrawal which leaves differences to their own fate and eschewing any notion of responsibility on the part of the self—becomes an aesthetic work par excellence. Building on Adorno and Horkheimer, Benhabib, like Welsch, provides us a much broader agenda of aesthetics. Benhabib urges us to understand aesthetic engagement as recognizing the face of the other and then establishing a non-repressive solidarity with her. Such an engagement can nurture new hopes within us for a new relationship between the self and the other. In the

evocative words of Benhabib: "The overcoming of the compulsive logic of modernism can only be a matter of giving back to the non-identical, the suppressed, and the dominated their right to be. We can invoke the other but we can not name it. Like the God of the Jewish tradition who must not be named but evoked, the utopian transcendence of the compulsive logic of Enlightenment and modernism cannot be named but awakened in memory. The evocation of this memory, the 'rethinking of nature in the subject' is the achievement of the aesthetic" (Benhabib 1996: 333). Here, "The aesthetic emerges as the only mode of expression that can challenge the compulsive drive of Western reason to comprehend the world by making it like itself, by supplementing it. xx The aesthetic intimates a new mode of being, a new mode of relating to nature and to otherness in general" (ibid). Benhabib urges us to realize that "the aesthetic negation of identity logic also implies an ethical and political project" and has within it the seeds of a new utopia, an utopia, "not of appeasement and rest, but of constant integration and differentiation" (ibid: 338). What Benhabib writes deserves our careful attention: "The utopian content of art heals by transforming the sensibilities of the modern subject: art as utopia, art as healing, but as an ethical and political healing which teaches us to let otherness within ourselves and others be. Art releases the memories and intimations of otherness which the subject has had to repress to become the adult, controlled, rational, and autonomous self of the tradition" (Benhabib 1996: 336).

### **Recognizing the Limits of Aesthetic Ethics as Care of the Self.**

The broader agenda of aesthetics that we find in Welsch and Benhabib is also presented to us by Indian critic Chitta Ranjan Das for whom aesthetics refers to the quality of human relationships. For Das, an aesthetic awareness urges us to make this world a better and more beautiful place to live (personal communication; on Das, see Giri 1996, 1998). Beauty has a relationship with justice as Eliane Scarry argues in her recent provocative work, *On Beauty and Being Just*: "...an ethical fairness which requires a symmetry of everyone's relation' will be greatly assisted by *an aesthetic fairness* that creates in all participants a state of delight in their own lateralness" (Scarry 1999: 114). Furthermore, "This lateral position continues in the third site of beauty, not now the suspended state of beholding but the active state of recreating—the site of stewardship in which one acts to protect or perpetuate a fragment of beauty already in the world or instead to supplement it by bringing into being a new object" (ibid). But that an aesthetic engagement may not always share such a broad agenda of commitment and creativity has been presented to us by many critics of the Foucauldian agenda of aestheticized ethics, one of whom writes: "In Foucault's ontology of the subjects, there are only scattered and essentially gratuitous references to our relations with others, little real acknowledgment of the centrality of non-repressive solidarity and

dialogue for human existence. One must not have the care for others precede the care of the self, he [Foucault] bluntly declares at one point" (Gardiner 1996: 38). Critical reflections on Foucault's own scripting of life also points to a preoccupation with sado-masochism in his life which points to the limits of his aesthetic ethics (Miller 1993: 327). In this context, aesthetic ethics in itself cannot help us come out of the impasse in which we are in the field of development. A project of care of the self has always had a problem of recognizing the face of the other. For example, a spiritual care of the self is very much at the heart of many streams of Indian traditions but that it faces a similar difficulty is presented to us by critical Indian philosopher Daya Krishna. For Krishna, "[Once we begin to] see the 'other' as a subject in his or her own right and capable of being affected by one's actions...one will begin to see the self as 'responsible' to the 'other' and not just concerned with the state of one's own being. Yajñyalkya's [an important sage in Indian tradition] *atman*-centric analysis [Self-centric] of the human situation and his contention that everything is dear for the sake of the self would, then, seem to result from a one-sided analysis" (Krishna 1996: 58).

### **Ethics as Responsibility: The Face of the Other**

In our recent times, Emmanuel Levinas has been foremost in redefining the agenda of ethics as responsibility to the other. For Levinas, ethical engagement involves a transcendence where transcendence consists of a "passing over to being's *other*, otherwise than being" (Levinas 1974: 3). As Levinas tells us, in ethics "it is no longer a question of the ego, but of me. The subject which is not an ego, but which I am, cannot be generalized, is not a subject in general xx Here the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility.." (Levinas 1974: 13-14). Therefore when critics of ethics such as Ankersmit argue that ethics has always involved a hegemonic and prescriptive relationship with the other, they are enunciating only partial truths since ethical imagination in the works of savants such as Gandhi and Levinas involves a more caring relationship with the other. Here we can remember the two famous passages in the writings of Gandhi and Levinas. Gandhi writes:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use use to him; will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him control over his own life and destiny? In other words will it lead to *Swaraj* for the hungry and the spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and self melting away (Gandhi quoted in Chambers et al. 1989: 241).

And the following is the evocative passage from Levinas:

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. As such, the fact of the other is verticality and uprightness; it spells a relation of rectitude. The face is not in front of me but above me. ~~xxx~~ the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death (Levinas 1995: 189).

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

This passionate call for responsibility has important lessons for us in reimagining and reliving development as a transformative practice. It can help us reconstitute development as responsibility which can provide a self-critical and transformative supplement to the contemporary redefinitions of development as freedom (Sen 1999). In his recent passionate reflection, Amartya Sen has urged us to reconstitute development as a "momentous engagement with freedom's possibilities" (Sen 1999: 298). But Sen does not take his explorations of freedom's possibilities in a self-critical direction of responsibility where one's striving for freedom has within itself a space for criticism of the self-justificatory claims of one's freedom. In this context, a redefinition of human well-being in terms of "functioning" and "capability" of individuals and of development as freedom needs to be supplemented by a reconceptualization and realization of development as responsibility where freedom is an object of both ontological and social commitment. Embodiment of responsibility requires looking up to the face of the other and the mirrors of desires within oneself and going beyond the self-justificatory world of freedom itself. This, in turn, is facilitated by appropriate self-development. Development then means not only enhancing the functioning and capacity of bonded laborers or enhancing the life expectancy of disadvantaged groups

such as the Afro-Americans within an affluent society such as the US,<sup>6</sup> it also means self-development on the part of the free agents where they do not just assert the self-justificatory logic of their own freedom but are willing to subject it to a self and mutual criticism and "undergo the suffering that would come to [them] from non-ego" (Levinas 1974: 123). In Sen, freedom is an end state but without the self-development of actors and institutions from freedom to responsibility there would be very little resources left to rescue human well-being from the tyranny of freedom.

Sen considers realization of freedom as central to the vision and practice of development. But it is helpful to link both freedom and free choice to an art of life or what Foucault calls "form of life" which the actor has chosen and created for herself. Such a linkage would enable us to realize the aesthetic dimension in freedom too which has not received sufficient attention in Sen but its significance for the realization of human well-being can hardly be ignored. We get such an aesthetic connectedness between one's freedom of choice and the form of life that one leads in Gandhi. As Bhikhu Parekh helps us understand, for Gandhi, "freedom consisted in being true to oneself, in living by one's own light and growing at one's own pace. It was a form of wholeness or integrity. It involved knowing and accepting oneself as one was, recognizing one's limits and possibilities, and making choices on the basis of that knowledge" (Parekh 1997: 96-97). Thus self-knowledge is integral to the exercise of free choice where freedom does not consist in "choice per se" but "in making choices" that are "in harmony with and being capable of integrated into one's way of life" (ibid: 97).

Development as responsibility for the other is facilitated by appropriate self-development. But Levinas takes this readiness for self granted and thus in our effort to reconstitute development as a shared responsibility we have to go beyond Levinas while holding his very helpful and alchemical hands. In this context, it is helpful to explore the differential inspiration of Gandhi and Levinas. While in the Gandhian path, there is a simultaneous work on self-development and attentiveness to the other, Levinas only speaks of one's responsibility to the other and takes the task of self-preparation for granted (Giri 1998c). In this context, the significance of aesthetic ethics lies precisely in stressing the

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

point that attentiveness to and responsibility for the other requires appropriate self-preparation (Giri 1998). But here our choice is not one of either or, either the care of the self or the care of the other, between aesthetics and ethics, or between Foucault and Levinas. The task is to be attentive to both—both developing ourselves and taking care of others. But this simultaneous effort may never reach a successful balance and we have to be prepared for the slippery nature of this relationship. Thus both in the field of ethics and development we are simultaneously confronted with the challenge of being aware of the contingency of the other and the contingency of the self.

### **Beyond the Aesthetic and the Ethical and the Calling of Transcendence**

But in this pathway of simultaneous attentiveness, at one point we have to go beyond the aesthetic and the ethical in a spirit of transcendence. Here it is helpful to remember that Kierkegaard who is a great votary of the ethical project of the self does not grant it absolute primacy. While in Kierkegaard the aesthetic project of the self can be transformed by the ethical, the ethical at the same time is not granted absolute primacy. The perennial significance of Kierkegaard lies in urging us to realize the limits of the ethical as well. For Kierkegaard, the ethical has its limit in preparing us for our absolute duty as illustrated in Abraham's sacrifice of his own son at God's command (Derrida 1998). So, the limits of the ethical are supplemented by the transcendental which Kierkegaard calls Religiousness B which is different from religion as an organized way of life and code of ethics, the Religiousness A. But it is important to realize that Kierkegaard's three stages of existence—the ethical, the aesthetic and the religious are not "successive developments": "They are to be understood as co-present profiles and interlaced dimensions of selfhood, ways of existing in the world, that informs the odyssey of self as it exists from moment to moment. As the ethical stage does not leave the aesthetical behind but rather refigures it, so also the religious stage does not annul the ethical but rather effects its redescription" (ibid).

Thus neither the aesthetic nor the ethical in itself is adequate to help us come to term with the calling of life. Reducing the one to the other is not helpful and a reconciliation between them is always enriched by bringing a view from afar and beyond, by bringing a transcendental perspective. Both Sri Aurobindo and Kierkegaard provide us such a helpful suggestion. For Sri Aurobindo, before forcing a superficial reconciliation between care of the self and care of other, it is helpful to acknowledge the differences between them. For Sri Aurobindo, "There is in our mentality a side of will, conduct, character which creates the ethical man; then there is another side of sensibility to the beautiful, -understanding

beauty in no narrow or hyperartistic sense,—which creates the artistic and aesthetic man” (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 87). In an argument similar to Ankersmit’s aesthetic critique of the ethical, Sri Aurobindo argues that the self-mastery that is at the heart of the ethical can have an imperialistic implication.<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo here suggests that the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility can transform this relationship of domination. Thus the limits of the ethical in the field of development—ethical understood as a will to mastery (self-mastery as well as mastery over other) and as applying apriori principles to improve the lives of others without involving them in the determination of these principles and without simultaneously engaging oneself in a process of self-development—can be overcome by developing an aesthetic dimension in our lives as actors of development. But here aesthetics in itself is not enough. There is a need for combination between the two. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: “We can combine them; we can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight and introduce into it to correct its tendency of hardness and austerity and self-discipline which will give it endurance and purity” (ibid: 92). But this combination is difficult to realize when we start from the primacy of either the ethical or the aesthetic and Sri Aurobindo urges us to realize that the reconciliation between these two requires the work of a “higher principle” which is “capable of understanding and comprehending both equally and of disengaging and combining disinterestedly their purposes and potentialities” (ibid). And it is quite interesting that while talking of this higher principle, Sri Aurobindo does not immediately frighten us with the name of God or some other mystical agency. For Sri Aurobindo, “That higher principle seems to be provided for us by the human faculty for reason and intelligent will” (ibid: 92-93).

Sri Aurobindo’s appreciation of the role of reason and intelligent will in helping us realize a reconciliation between the ethical and the aesthetic, the care of the self and the care of the other, can help us look at our relationship with Kant, Foucault and Habermas in a new way. All of them in their own way urge us to continue the emancipatory project of Enlightenment. Foucault is of course not as enthusiastic a defender of Enlightenment as Habermas but it is quite interesting that in his dialogue with Kant, Foucault does not abandon him; instead he urges us to find ways of restoring Kant’s longing for freedom without making such a longing hegemonic. Foucault writes: “The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a

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<sup>7</sup> In this context, Sri Aurobindo writes: “Rome was the human will oppressing and disciplining the emotional and sensational mind in order to arrive at the self-mastery of a definite ethical type; and it was this self-mastery which enabled the Roman republic to arrive also at the mastery of its enviroing world and impose its public order and law” (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 80).



philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (Foucault 1984: 50). But Foucault's critical ontology and the "experiments of going beyond" can be enriched by spiritual efforts and realization as suggested by Sri Aurobindo and also hinted at by Foucault in his later works and writings. Sri Aurobindo while acknowledging the crucial significance of Reason in human life and of Enlightenment in human history urges us to understand the limitation of it and supplement the project of Enlightenment with a practice and imagination of spiritual transformation of the bounded and judgmental rational self and society. Such a spiritual supplement to the rational is a crucial help in going beyond the impasse in which we are today (Giri 1998d). But bringing such a spiritual perspective to our throbs of life and acts of reconciliation also goes beyond the imagination of Enlightenment and it urges us to acknowledge transcendence as an existence sphere and value sphere of self and society along with the "the standard threesome of science, morality, and art"—an acknowledgment we find insufficiently in Kant and Foucault, and almost altogether missing in Weber and Habermas. In this context, what Schrag argues building on Kierkegaard deserves our careful attention:

Transcendence in its threefold function as a principle of protest against cultural hegemony, as a condition for a transversal unification [as different from a hegemonic universalistic unification] that effects a convergence without coincidence, and as a power of giving without expectation of return, stands outside the economies of science, morality, art, and religion as culture-spheres. This defines transcendence as a robust alterity. Responding to the beckoning of this otherness of transcendence, the wayfaring self struggles for a self-understanding and a self-constitution within the constraints of an irremovable finitude (Schrag 1997: 148).

### **Transcendence as Transversality**

For Schrag, "The self in action is a self in transcendence—moving beyond that which it has become and going over to that which is not yet" (Schrag 1997: 111). But transcendence does not lie at one side of the bipolar division of transcendence and immanence. It does not lie high above the sky; there is a transcendental dimension within immanence as there is an urge for immanent embodiment within transcendence. In Sri Aurobindo, there is such a creative ongoing dialogue between transcendence and immanence. But despite this dialogue, Transcendence in Sri Aurobindo seems to work at a much higher level and has the predominant reading of it as a vertical process; Schrag brings this much closer to the ground through his concept of *transversality*. In transversality there is a quest for beyond across many diagonal lines in the lateral and horizontal plane. This quest for beyond in the horizontal plane makes it much more down to earth and thus transcendence as

transversality has a lot of significance for renewing development practice. The work of transversality while going beyond self and categories, at the same time, seeks to establish threads of connection between and among several identities and selves. The postmodern deconstruction of totalitarian functions of unity still faces this task of establishing connection among identities and differences and here transversal engagement offers us an alternative model of unification, a unification which is not totalitarian. As Schrag helps us understand this:

Radical transcendence operates transversally, and the salient point at issue is that the grammar of transversality replaces that of universality. The dynamics of unification in a transversal play of lying across and extending over surfaces, accelerating forces, fibers, vertebrae, and moments of consciousness is not grounded in a universal telic principle but proceeds rather as an open-textured gathering of expanding possibilities. As such it is a dynamics of unification that is always an "ing", a process of unifying, rather than an "ed", a finalized result. Xxxx the unity that functions as a coefficient of transversality is very much an open-textured *process of unification*. Moving beyond constraints of the metaphysical oppositions of universality versus particularity and identity versus difference. Transversal unity is an achievement of communication as it visits a multiplicity of viewpoints, perspectives, belief systems, and regions of concern" (Schrag 1997: 129, 133).

### **Transcendentality and the Calling of Virtues**

A transcendental awareness enables us to understand the limitation of an either / or approach to ethics and development and realize the contingent nature of this relationship. This transcendental awareness does not refer only to an abstract Spirit but also to our day-to-day realization of a "Beyond" in our lives which does not grant absolute authority to one's position and is open to listen to others. A transcendental awareness makes us much more modest in our claims, respects the contingencies of life but does not treat them as accidentality, and seeks to relate contingencies to a web of connectedness, an experience of a whole—a whole which however is not hegemonic nor totalitarian. Transcendentality is also an aspect of our day to day life and embodied experience, which helps us to understand the limitation of any particular location, position, worldview and be open to another self, worldview, and another world. Transcendentality also enables us to live with what Schrag (1997) calls the "grammar of paradox." But leading a life of ethics and aesthetics with a "grammar of paradox" requires cultivation of appropriate virtues in our lives. Virtue ethics here is concerned with development of appropriate skills of negotiation and relationship with contingencies, a skill which makes the cultivation and work of virtues a public affair. But the skill of negotiation, coping and creativity that is required in contingent locations—of knowledge and action—is not confined to the contingent location itself. It is not just a matter

of situational and transactional ethics; it is also trans-contingent and thus is a matter of ontological cultivation and is not only procedural. At the same time, the actor has to learn that there is no apriori principle by reference to which the contradictions between the different imperatives of life, the ethical and the aesthetic, can be resolved... Without our own capacity, we can not resolve these contradictions by a mechanical application of any apriori principle.<sup>8</sup> The resolution of this contradiction would always be contextual. Without the cultivation of appropriate virtues which have an ontological anchorage, this contextual resolution may not be a just and adequate one, and respect for paradox can easily degenerate into an excuse for sitting idle in one's home and doing nothing about and in the world. Without the cultivation of appropriate virtues, it is easy to fall into the trap and temptation of either the care of the self or care of the other.

### **Beyond the Narcissistic Trap of Development Interventions**

The field of development indeed has been in such a trap. For a long time, it has been a field for the care of the other. But development as a care of the other without appropriate self-cultivation has led and continues to lead to alienation and domination, the picture of which has been movingly portrayed for us by Arturo Escobar (1995). As an alternative to this, it is easy to fall into the trap of care of the self as an exclusive agenda of ethics, development and conduct of life. But an exclusive preoccupation with care of self makes actors narcissistic and unable to look up to the face of the other. That this is not only a theoretical possibility or a figment of imagination can be realized when we look at the field of development today where actors are more concerned with their own salary, money and power in the name of development rather than be engaged in responsible action for altering the condition which has created the need for development intervention in the first place.

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<sup>8</sup> In this cultivation of an appropriate virtue, we can build on the rich tradition of casuistry. In his book, *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Moral Reasoning*, Richard B. Miller offers us many helpful suggestions. Miller writes: "Owing to the importance of the particular in moral life, the value of deliberation, and the arguability of ethical matters, casuistry asks us to develop the habits of persuasion and painstaking reflection. It leaves policy to those who make the best case for their practical judgements, given available knowledge and a commitment to social responsibility" (Miller 1996: 11). For Miller, the person of virtue must negotiate his realm "by discerning the 'ultimate particular fact' from an array of competing loyalties, duties, and emotions" (ibid: 9). Moreover, "Casuistry is successful not merely because it offers a solution to a case; it must also strengthen our vision, our insight into the meaning and value of moral particulars" (ibid). And finally, to help us link the cultivation of this virtue with the art of democracy or to Ankersmit's engagement of aesthetic politics, Miller writes: "...the excellences required by casuistical practice are vital for what John Dewey called the 'habits of democracy.' Democratic politics is, if anything, an invitation to deliberate collectively over matters of shared importance, requiring citizens to attend carefully to details" (ibid: 11).

What Miller writes finds an echo in Georg Hariss's excellent discussion on agent-centered morality who creatively builds on Aristotle (Hariss 1999).

Here it is helpful to critically observe how a concern of care of the self manifests itself in the field of development. There has now appeared a new "theology of the market" in the field of development interventions. This theology of the market not only expects development organizations and development interventions to create more market-friendly and market-supportive conditions for people but pressurizes development organizations to behave as profit-maximizing market-organizations and corporations. So, there is now a radical change in the self-definition of development organizations and voluntary organizations. Earlier development organizations had the primary self-understanding of themselves as partners in people's struggle against the unequal and unjust systems and for a more dignified life and society. But now more and more development organizations have the self-understanding of themselves as entrepreneurs. They are more concerned with their own survival, their own profit-maximization rather than with the condition of the suffering of the struggling millions of Humanity.

This concern for one's own survival as an entrepreneurial development organization rather than for the lives of the poor create the problem of authenticity for development organizations.<sup>9</sup> Development organizations present an image that they are for the people but in reality they are interested in their own survival and success. It is probably in this context that Baudrillard's argument that there is no longer any relationship between representation and reality is applied to the field of development (Baudrillard 1993; Quarles von Ufford 1999). Development organizations now create a hyper-real world which is a world of illusion. People formulate agenda which they do not believe and neither do the listeners. Images do not have the role of representation any more. In order to mobilize funds they are more concerned about creating and maintaining an appropriate image about themselves rather than working and struggling with the poor. Development in technologies such as media and computer have here come to their aid. Many development organizations today are city-based and most of their leaders spend a lot of time in generating appropriate data in the computer rather than working and struggling with people.

The concern for one's own survival and success has also made development organizations erratic and flexible. In order to mobilize more funds, they do not feel reluctant to do anything or utter any *mantra*. In order to succeed and survive, development organizations now multiply their own initial programmes leading to a situation of cancerous multiplication rather than growth. In order to make most of the opportunities available in

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<sup>9</sup> In this context, it may be noted what the pre-eminent systems-theorist Robert L. Flood writes about these organizations: "For non-profit making organizations purpose and identity often have become increasingly elusive" (Flood 1999: 1).

the market, development organizations must present themselves as ever ready to do anything, so, they must not have any particular purpose or worldview. The question of the identity of development organizations is not relevant anymore. Both the funding organizations as well as development organizations look at the ability to produce result as more important than their identity of social partnership and struggle for the realization of a worthy goal. In fact, in order to be able to succeed and be acceptable in the new market condition, they think that they must erase the memory of their past as a struggling organization. This erasure of one's past makes the development organizations erratic in a Baudrillardian sense. They move from one agenda to another agenda and strive to be ever young and flexible in the market. And in this moment of triumph of the market, development organizations as well as concerned actors forget that if you lose your past, you also lose your future. This poses probably the most important challenge in our reconstructive initiative in the field of ethics and development. In developing agencies, now there is a loss of personhood and crisis of authenticity which affects the way they work. So, while the contemporary challenge of reconstruction and renewal calls for a creative interpenetration of consequentialist ethics and an ethics of care of the self, a majority of development organizations are interested in neither though in their preoccupation with market success they seem to be living under and creating the illusion that they are promoting an ethics of care of the self.

### **Reconstituting Development as a Field of Acknowledged Mutuality**

The above tells us of the narcissistic manifestation of the project of the care of the self at the contemporary juncture but this does not call for abandoning the spirit of self-cultivation and cultivation of appropriate virtues entailed in any genuine care of the self. In this context, meaningful action depends on our capacity to acknowledge the relative significance and limitation of each of these modes of engagement and to embody both in our vision and practice knowing that the balance between them may never be perfect which however does not make us abandon the quest for a perfect balance between the care of the self and the care of the other. This also calls for realizing development as responsibility, a responsibility which is aware of the contingent nature of our locations and the need for a transcendental and transversal opening of our vision. In more concrete terms, we can imagine the field of development as consisting of four important actors of hope, doing, and understanding--state, market, social movements \ voluntary organizations, and the creative and transformative self. Overcoming the impasse in which we are today in the field of development urges us to realize the significance of all these actors but on the part of each of these actors an acknowledgment of the contingency of its action and vision and a recognition of the significance of the other three in a spirit of mutual learning, dialogue, and conversation. In

such a reconstructed field of dialogue and multigonal conversation, none of the actors make an exclusive claim about their significance in the field of development and always look for and facilitate the creative unfoldment of the other. This is facilitated by an opening towards a transcendental and transversal point of view. In our earlier discussion of transcendence we have seen how transcendence helps us to acknowledge the four culture spheres of modernity--science, morality, art and religion--and go beyond the exclusive claim of each of these. Similarly in the field of development, a transcendental and transversal mode of engagement can help us to acknowledge the significance of the four agents of development--state, market, voluntary organizations \ social movements, and self--but not to grant absolute primacy to any. On the part of the agents of development, there is also the need for a transcendental mode of engagement which enables each of them --state, market, social movements \ voluntary organizations, and self--to do their best but not make exclusive and exclusionary claims on their behalf. Such a transcendental perspective is also helpful in going beyond the exclusive claims of the other three modes of development--development as hope, development as politics and administration, and development as scientific understanding.

Development as a multi-dimensional quest and conversation is facilitated by an awareness and cultivation of what MacIntyre (1999) calls "virtues of acknowledged dependence" which realizes the limitations of each of these units and modes of engagement and always try to reach out to the other in a spirit of creativity and transcendence. Thus we are in a relational field in the field of development where the four-fold agents of development--state, market, social movements \ voluntary organizations, and self--are animated by a three fold mode of being--willing, understanding, and hope. Living creatively in this field with an awareness of both contingency and transcendence is facilitated by the cultivation of virtues of "acknowledged dependence."

MacIntyre develops his outline of "virtues of acknowledged dependence" to help us understand the qualities that are required to participate in a relationship which involves not only an abstract self and an abstract other but a particular self and a particular other, or particular selves and particular others. For MacIntyre to participate in such a relationship, neither the language of self-interest nor the language of benevolence is enough.<sup>10</sup> Instead, it requires a language of giving and receiving in which both the self and the other, other and

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10 In this context, what MacIntyre writes deserves our careful attention: "The limitations and blindnesses of merely self-interested desire have been catalogued often enough. Those of a blindly generalized benevolence have received too little attention. What such benevolence presents us with is a generalized other--one whose only relationship to us is to provide an occasion for the exercise of our benevolence, so that we can reassure ourselves about our own good will" (MacIntyre 1999: 119).

the self are giver and receiver at the same time. To participate in such a relationship, there is a need to cultivate both virtues of giving and receiving, the virtues which lie at the intersection of two other virtues, the virtue of generosity and justice. While in the conventional understanding of virtues, these two virtues, i.e, the virtue of justice and the virtue of generosity are looked at as different from each other and approached in isolation, for MacIntyre it is important to bring these two virtues together in our art of relationship. We shall recall here the arguments of both Welsch and Benhabib about the need for the quest for political justice to be supplemented by an aesthetic sensibility, and here the virtue of generosity provides precisely to her sister, namely to the virtue of justice, such an aesthetic supplement. But these two sisters together make our lives beautiful, just and worth living. While the virtue of justice makes us aware what we owe to both the self and the other, the virtue of generosity helps us to move from conditional care to unconditional obligation both in our relationship with ourselves and in relationship to others.

For MacIntyre, any moral relationship between intimate particulars is sustained through such a virtue of acknowledged dependence and this can help us redefine development as a field of relationship which helps us to grow and be engaged in worthwhile activities which are nurturing and life-elevating both for the self and the other, the other and the self, the agent of development and recipients of development co-operation. But the major challenge we face in this task of reconstruction and reconstitution is that the actors in the field of development rarely behave as participants in a field of acknowledged dependence. Overcoming this distance and establishing an intimacy between and among different category of actors in the field of development is then the fundamental task lying in front of us. For this, along side our aesthetic engagement and ethical responsibility, we also need a transcendental inspiration of unconditional love and a quest for delight in each other's fellowship (Kierkegaard 1962).

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