Thinking about Development: The Lived Reality of Globalization

Eleanor M. Godway

Department of Philosophy

Central Connecticut State University

New Britain, CT
ABSTRACT

The case is presented for a more human vision of development which would mean a different attitude to globalization. The philosophy of John Macmurray goes beyond traditional dualism (of body and mind) and the dialectic of Hegel (both of which influence much current theorizing) to give priority to action over thinking. He challenges contemporary orthodoxy by emphasizing the personal and thus raises questions about the value of scientific knowledge to solve the problems of globalization. The strategy of writing development “under erasure” as introduced by Jacques Derrida emphasizes its problematic status. Thus we do have tools to reflect on what is meant by progress and economics and efficiency, and reconsider what we might be doing (or destroying) if we are trying to impose change on the “underdeveloped” of the world. Macmurray (1995a): “All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship” (p. 15). The thinking of Howard Richards and associates, and his account of a specific development project in Chile (P.P.H.) are offered to illustrate this new way of approaching these issues, as it becomes possible to move away from the impersonal conception of efficiency towards the ultimate value of the personal. Thus we can perhaps come to see our future in terms of what we can do to try to build community (community) from the local to the global.

Keywords: Globalization, development, knowledge, science, economics, dualism, thinking, action, reflection, power, change, the personal, “under erasure,” Jacques Derrida, John Macmurray, Howard Richards, community, friendship
THINKING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT: THE LIVED REALITY OF GLOBALIZATION

By “globalization,” I mean the continuing absorption of “emerging” nations into a global economy which is apparently being accomplished by fostering or imposing “development” on communities deemed to need it. Indeed, some people say, with more or less satisfaction, “you cannot stop progress!” This paper is intended to raise questions about such an attitude.

To regard “globalization” as an impersonal process accords a great deal of power to institutions such that they do seem to gain momentum and become unstoppable by the human beings who make them up (“constitute” them). We need to start to think about human existence from the grass roots rather than top down. Then it would be possible to judge and evaluate policies that affect human lives from the perspective of those living them, allowing us to scrutinize actions and interventions of supra-national bodies from a different angle. This is not merely a criticism of the ruthless exploitation of the “developing” nations, of the bizarre assumption that “economic growth” can go on forever, with continual expansion of untapped markets, or of the unbridled greed for wealth and power endemic in a system of international corporations – though such criticism is surely in order.

Well-intentioned interventions by charitable agencies and other NGOs have analogous models of efficiency and theories of how things should be done, which are often enough sadly out of touch with the personal lives and interests of those they affect. Somehow neither the perspective nor the scale of their activities can come close to addressing the situations they are concerned about, which can hardly be seen from so far outside, let alone understood. I am interested in reflecting on how we can best begin to learn to live together in a more human way, in a world that now has become so much smaller that what any of us does affects almost every corner of it, and we are affected in turn. There are patterns of thinking and acting that have been ignored by focus on the “big picture,” and I will argue that they may offer a new way to address
these issues if we can free ourselves from the assumptions and logic that “business as usual”
takes for granted.

The following, then, is a series of reflections on making sense of development with a
view to re-envisioning what is at stake. What exactly does the term refer to? Whose
development, of what, by whom, for what purpose? What is it, anyway? As I implied above, one
might immediately think of economic development in terms of the growth of capitalism and the
maximization of profits. It is not hard to put together a (moral?) case against this ideology with
evidence of the inequitable exploitation of natural resources and the inevitable further
impoverishment of the “less developed” areas of our world, not to mention the irreversible effect
on the world ecosystem.

Beyond that, however, even the well-intentioned may be trapped into judging success or
failure in implementing development according to criteria which really miss the point. By
considering the meaning of the word in contexts other than “globalization,” we may come to see
important aspects of the reality of what goes by its name which tend to be obscured when it is
thought of in purely economic/political terms. Thus this essay goes beyond decrying the
devastation of the planet by short-sighted greed to offer a critique of the kind of thinking that
underlies much of what is said and written about these issues. I will be referring to work by
Howard Richards, and ideas from John Macmurray, together with use of a move by Jacques
Derrida (1974) – that of writing the word “under erasure” (p. 19) – i.e. development.

I will say more about this later; for now what matters is the way this is supposed to work
in our use of the word. I follow the model of Derrida (1974) writing such words as
justice, friend,
gift: these words do not denote a fixed reality. What is today called “justice” can be found later
to be injustice. To claim to be a friend is to promise some things beyond what I am now in a
position to guarantee. A gift may turn out to have strings attached and so not really be a gift at
all. Etc. That is to say, if you think you’ve achieved it, you haven’t. It will always be further on, there is always more involved, more to do. And those who claim to have a handle on it – are sure of what “development” consists in and how to make it happen, are, as the existentialists would say, in bad faith. This is particularly clear in that it is usually being foisted on to other people who are said to be in need of “development.” So I am offering an invitation to what Derrida (1974, 1994) called “deconstruction.” I am not going to try to define that here, but I will say that it has a specific philosophical (grammatological?) meaning and application. It is not something you do, it is something you undergo. In a way this essay is offered as an example of how much this attitude is needed, and how it can work in the field, so to speak.

We can certainly start by trying to focus on economic development and without going so far as to want to write it economic, it should be clear its meaning can be contested. From the point of view of the material welfare of any group of people, “economics” describes how resources are shared, that is, the ways in which the needs for food, housing, etc., are met. While some have argued that these resources are not inexhaustible, the reality is that we have not even begun addressing the immediate problem of a more equitable distribution of what we do have, nor that of assessing what is really needed (as opposed to luxuries or superfluities). Whatever else it implies, “development” is supposed to make these arrangements in some sense more satisfactory. For which section of the population and in what ways will still be up for grabs: clearly in any case, development will be a matter of values – not reducible to the strictly monetary. Indeed a “subsistence” economy based on interlocking, overlapping patterns of co-operation and mutual support may have little or no use for anything resembling money. And such economics can be quite sophisticated. For example, in the Balinese village described by Clifford Geertz (as cited in Richards & Swanger, 2006), the elaborate systems of field crop cultivation are a far cry from “hunting and gathering;” integral to this community are the Sekas, which are
separate social/functional groups, such as the "irrigation society" consisting of all those individuals who own rice-land which is irrigated from a single water course – a single dam and canal running from dam to fields. Richards and Swanger (2006) discuss this example in a way that illuminates the role of values which are at odds with those of capital investment (p. 279). Geertz borrows from Karl Polanyi the term “embedded” to describe this pattern, but unlike Polanyi, Geertz considered doing things this way an obstacle to progress, and advocated “disembedding” as a process that had to happen for the sake of Indonesia’s economic development. It is just this sense of development that I want to put in question. (With reference to “embeddedness,” I will be discussing another version of economics as described in Gandhi and the Future of Economics (Richards & Swanger, 2013) after I have presented some implications of the insights of John Macmurray, below.)

In the terms of this discussion, we are likely to assume that development is supposed to be in a positive direction, but at all events, it denotes a process of change. How we account for any change will make a big difference to how we deal with it, whether we welcome or deplore it. That is to say, if we think the process is in a sense mechanical, following the laws of physics, then we have recognized, established ways of working with it. We can pull the baby out of the way if we see the heavy object begin to topple off the table towards her. And, of course, our civilization has used knowledge of the laws of physics to do amazing things. With the help of mathematics we calculate what will happen as a result of preceding conditions (and often of our interference in those conditions) on the assumption that we can rely on like causes producing like effects, ad infinitum. We expect the future to resemble the past. This technique has enabled us to develop (!) the science that has given us the power to change the world in ways unimaginable by earlier generations, and this knowledge, this “know-how,” seems to give us a great advantage. Many seem to believe that we can look to such knowledge to solve some of the problems that,
one might say, have themselves been created by it: for example John Davenport (2012). And yes, why not?

There are several reasons why not. Even if we could rely absolutely on the continued uniformity of nature (as we usually can, as I have suggested, in the case of gravity) it is obvious we can never have a complete account of all the conditions that might be relevant to the situations that we are concerned with. The scientists’ reliance on replicating conditions and their use of control groups would hardly fit here any more than they do, for instance, in meteorology or geology. And often sources of change, one being human interference, not being calculable in an obvious way, tend to be left out of account. To say that economics is an inexact science is probably a generous understatement. (And what exactly is it about Political Science that qualifies as scientific?)

But suppose in fact we had the knowledge (and we do have some that is relevant) is it still the advantage we need? Knowledge, as the byword has it, is power. Power itself – like change – is neither good nor bad, but it can be dangerous. (Let’s at least acknowledge the intractable problems of nuclear power, not to mention the bombs.) Dangerous, then whether because we do not know how to control it or what to use it for, or because people can wield it to accomplish short-sighted, destructive, or even evil ends.

I will be drawing now on ideas of Scottish philosopher John Macmurray. Macmurray (1995a, p. 182; 1996, p. 57) refers to the scientific perspective as that of looking at the world as “means,” that is, as possibly useful, and within that context, what it is, or could be, useful for, does not come up. Like money, we may or may not use it wisely. We may merely hoard it.

First, some background about John Macmurray’s philosophical position. His “Copernican revolution” (Macmurray, 1995a, p. 85) challenges the traditional standpoint of philosophy, taken for granted since the Greeks, in giving priority to action over thinking, subordinating theory to
interaction with what actually affects us in experience. If action is primary and thought secondary, then a number of philosophical (and practical) issues appear in a new light. In particular, the dualism which has dogged our thinking at least since Descartes, and which was apparent in Dr. Oakley’s (2012b) picture of the mind or “rationality” astride the lumbering elephant moving rather clumsily in the world. To Descartes’ cogito ergo sum, Macmurray’s (1995a) riposte is cogito ergo non sum (p. 81). That is to say, if the only evidence I have for my existence is that I am thinking, there is no way of proving (even to myself) that I am really here. Descartes himself relies on God’s intervention to get back to trusting his experience. When I am thinking, if that is all I am doing, I am, as the saying goes, “out of it.” If I am only a thinking thing, I am forever isolated, trapped in the solitude of my own mind, with no escape. And I would not even know that much: as Merleau-Ponty (1992) said, “a true solipsism (if it were possible) would not know it is isolated, would be unaware that it is alone” (p. 165). The old joke about Descartes in the bar has bite, as does Dr. Johnson kicking the stone in refutation of Berkeley. (Descartes has just finished one beer, and when the barkeep offers him a second, he says “I think not” and disappears.) J. L. Austin (1979) (another undervalued philosopher) also worries about trusting thinking over experience, calling it, “Perhaps the original sin by which the philosopher casts himself out of the garden of the world we live in” (p. 90).

Thinking, of course, is something that we do, but it is not itself action; in an important sense it is valuable because it is not real. (A mental note is a note we do not actually make.) To imagine what is likely to happen if we do X can help us avoid undesirable consequence of Y. Of course acting, doing things, involves some thinking: we do not usually regard a movement as an action if the agent does not know (at least on some level) what is is he or she is doing. This is because to do something is to make a choice: this and not that, whether or not we have articulated the decision in words. We must somehow have “seen” and considered a possibility of
action that we then reject. Macmurray (1995a) describes this tension, this bifurcated attention, as the positive constituted and sustained by the negative (pp. 98ff.); I will come back to this idea later.

The skilled carpenter intentionally guides his tool in this direction, not that, so the move he decided not to make is being taken into account (Macmurray, 1995a, p. 180). (And he can correct what he recognizes as not being the better move...) His actions are making a real change in the world, as the resisting wood gives way. If however he were to find his project going seriously awry, he will stop work, lay down his tool and think, taking time to consider a number of options before choosing one and starting again. This kind of thinking Macmurray (1995a) calls “reflection” (p. 181) and we all do it from time to time when we need to withdraw from action that is not going well and have to imagine doing something different which could turn out better.

But the kind of thinking philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals engage in is not integrated into present action. It is, as they say, “academic” (!). Society has a place for such reflection, and as the work of intellectuals begins to address themes that matter to the wider culture, their work will have an impact and their influence will eventually be felt far from the laboratories and studies of the thinkers. Although I have been a little flippant in my references to Descartes, it is partly to try to dislodge his hold on our taken-for-granted metaphysical assumptions about body and mind. For, in fact, his stopping to think was significant, even crucial, as European culture faced the combined crises of the Reformation and the beginnings of experimental science. His heretical ideas (the Catholic church put his books on the Index) launched us into the modern world, and the rest, as they say, is history. But, of course, history continues and as a world community we face crises perhaps even more daunting; as Macmurray
(1996) points out, Descartes’ dualism has begun to do more harm than good (p. 57). And philosophy again needs to come out of “the schools” and take note of the current mess.

The problem is that sustained (detached) reflection is a bit different from what I described in the case of the carpenter. For it carries the risk of staying in the mode of withdrawal, focusing on the negative, what is not real, as if what matters is the theoretical rather than the practical. People start to trust the “scientific” account more than their own experience, as if what can be measured and counted is more real than what can be felt, what we “know in our bones.” Even Nietzsche (1956) worried that the scientist, as committed to the “ascetic ideal,” was beginning to be accorded a role that used to belong to the priest (in The Genealogy of Morals, p. 286-293) and sure enough some do turn to “Science” as if it could give answers to questions no scientist qua scientist is in a position to address. (I have already alluded to this attitude evident in the tendency of some to hope that technology will be able to solve the problems we continue to exacerbate throughout the world.)

The scientific project may have its own sense of purpose, but in the long run it needs to have some justification outside the search for “pure” knowledge. In the end, what is the point? It is time to introduce Macmurray’s credo, though fuller implications must wait till later. “All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship” (Macmurray, 1995a, p. 15).

Reflection according to the scientific model relies on mathematics, on seeing its data as units of stuff, which can be manipulated and used in a predictable way. From this perspective, “develop” is a transitive verb, meaning what I do to something, a change I cause from the outside, so to speak. I think this encourages the illusion that scientists are justified in regarding their work “impersonally,” as if nothing about them is relevant to what they are doing. While this
tendency is beginning to be recognized as a problem for the advancement of science itself, such a blindfolded attitude has already had disastrous effects for the whole human community.

“Develop” is also an intransitive verb, which can refer to a process that unfolds according to its own rhythm or telos, as in the life cycle of an organism. In such a case, change may be a response to something in the organism’s environment, but the source of change is internal, and the “reason” for it depends on the needs of the organism.

Biological processes do of course take place in the world as known to physics: that is, some changes are predictable according to regular patterns, and some interventions produce reliable results: but not all. Thus what is going on is not always calculable in the same way as in a mechanical system, and what happens as the result of any interference by us is going to be overdetermined; and we may not be able to imagine the consequences. But we are in a different relationship to living beings, as we are alive too, and share in a number of the same patterns of change. This has had some influence on the work of biologists, e.g. A Feeling for the Organism (Keller, 1983) (which has irritated some in the discipline who want biology to be more like physics).

But there is more at stake here than a new technique for an imaginative scientist: what I just called a “reason” for the organism’s response to a stimulus can be understood as a new kind of explanation for change which goes beyond the simple cause-and-effect account. There is a “logic” at work – we owe this idiom to Hegel (1967) – according to which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and individual elements are transformed and absorbed into the life of the larger entity. According to Hegelian logic, opposing energies spend themselves generating the next phase or moment in an unfolding pattern (i.e. Aufhebung), and what is happening at each stage can only be understood in retrospect when the telos is fulfilled. Thus, what an acorn is (really) includes its “destiny” (whether or not it actually comes about) – that is of being used up
in the process of becoming an oak tree. Deeper insight into ways humans can be more attuned to the natural order, and more sensitive to ecological issues would probably help us in relation to “development” as we go forward.⁷

Hegel made use of this living logic to create his system, mapping the whole of human history as the unfolding of possibilities through the creative tensions due to our needs and desires, leading to consciousness, individualization, and finally to some kind of fruition in an ultimate harmony. As a model for making sense of the human world this dialectic works better than a mechanistic model, and it continues to have a pervasive influence, to some extent analogous to that of Descartes. Certainly it had a profound effect on Marx, whose dialectical materialism brought us to communism. (Macmurray has some respect for Marx who, at least, was concerned with doing something, not simply finding a satisfying philosophical perspective.) But we are going to need a new “logic” that goes beyond this model and takes account of the ways human action is unlike the behavior of other species. (Something Marx (1971) does quite vividly in his account of “species being” (pp. 112-114)). But the organic dialectical model means that our individual lives find their ultimate meaning in something that is greater than we are, in which we will find a true fulfillment which transcends our personal aspirations and to which we owe our allegiance. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Will this help us deal with globalization? Has it? The version of human society which was offered by communism – again as mentioned by Dr. Oakley (2012b) – is one where what we may have to suffer now is to be justified by what it will make possible for the future. In the totalitarian vision of a planned society, when it is accomplished, every person has a fulfilling role which contributes to the welfare of the whole: “from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.” The ideal is for everyone to play his/her part within the social system and, over time, to help fulfill a goal deemed desirable for the community in the long term.
We may not think of this model as relevant to our current social arrangements or economy but much of our thinking about ourselves and society follows a similar pattern. I have tried to explain it as “organic” and Macmurray (1995a) says that this perspective sees “the world as end” (p. 194). It is no accident that we refer to the “organ”-ization of society which specifies the functions to be performed to serve the good of the whole. We come to regard ourselves as “members” of society. A member is, literally (physically) a limb, the point of which, its “meaning,” is defined by the contribution it makes to the whole body’s activity. This picture of human activity as justified by being subordinated to the greater good, the “bigger picture,” was exploded for Macmurray when he was in the trenches in the First World War. His actions, the actions of the warring nations, made no sense to him. It was irrational. Something had to be the matter with the kind of thinking that led to this impasse.

The Soviet Union was of great interest to Macmurray because it was an effort to put a philosophical theory into practice; in effect it was the first real-life test of any such theory. (He visited the Soviet Union a number of times.) And results have shown that the theory is false. It does not work. In fact, even Plato, the metaphysician of theory par excellence, recognized that his ideal state could only function if the citizens were lied to. The Soviet experiment did not work because it failed to take account of the third source of change, (which was itself the source of the experiment…) namely, human action. Action as we saw involves the capacity to say (think) “no,” to find something wanting in present experience, and envisage a reality which does not exist, and then do something which affects the world – and see if what happens next is an improvement. Changes brought about this way have to be understood as due to people’s actions, and they are radically different from those attributable to either organic processes or fixed mechanical (statistical) laws. Hence his focus on the “personal,” since it is as persons, as agents,
that we make changes in the human world, and a fortiori, as we embark on or participate in development.

I want to spend a moment now discussing “rationality.” Dr. Oakley (2012b) linked it with “mind” and with dealing with the facts. Macmurray’s account of thinking would not allow for the reification of mind and the dualism her picture suggested, so rationality would not apply to thinking as an isolated activity. Since for him action is fundamental, rational action is one that takes account of reality and brings about the desired (desirable) result, and we can only find this out in experience. However logical or consistent our theoretical exercise is, its value in the end is how it works in practice. The facts matter.

When I said that the Communist experiment failed, I did not mean that it was inefficient, and that capitalism has therefore been shown to be the better economic system. It was, perhaps, inefficient, but the point I was concerned to underscore is that life under communist rule proved less satisfactory for the people who had to live it; if it had turned out to be a desirable way to live together, people would have been glad to participate in it. (Whether democracy under capitalism is better is perhaps still to be decided.) That is, we come up against questions of satisfactoriness, “desirability,” of what we value, so what we want, our motives and goals, are the fundamental issues. Are our desires, our interests “causes” that are predictable or calculable? Are they biological, genetic, or conditioned? Or can we find out that we wanted the wrong thing, that what we got was not what we really wanted; that we can – indeed often need to – stop and reflect, if the outcome turns out not to be satisfactory after all. In other words, can our emotions, our feelings, be corrected in the light of experience? What would be an irrational emotion? The most obvious example is perhaps fear. Evidently we do sometimes experience fear in a situation which is not actually (currently) dangerous. The existence – and effect – of habitual fear or unconscious fear is surely undeniable. We recognize it in others, even if we are slower to
acknowledge it in ourselves. For Macmurray (1995a), emotion is the motive force, and he emphasizes the difference between motive and intention (p. 194). It is significant that, as just noted, motives may not be apparent to the person who is the agent; but intention is conscious. Acting to escape from, or deal with something dangerous is clearly (like all action) intentional, whereas coming to recognize that the threat has been averted, or is not imminent, can eliminate the fear that we see has no basis in reality. And acting to get what we want is also intentional, but without going far into psychology or psychoanalysis, I think it is clear that aiming for something that we know is unattainable or that would only bring about consequences we do not want begins to sound irrational. Supposing we now do know what we want, what prevents us from getting it? The problem may need to be addressed by reflection using one or other of the “logics” we have been discussing: by dealing with a material cause, or perhaps an organic issue (such as exercise or diet to improve our health, or meditation to put ourselves in a better mood) but often and most pressing is it not other people who want something which would interfere with us getting what we want?

Living with other people is integral to being human, or as in Macmurray’s (1995b) Persons in Relation, to being a person: personal relationships are what makes us human. The logic of the personal is, I believe, Macmurray’s important new contribution to philosophy, and it might also be expressed by writing the “human” or “person” under erasure. (Person) For we do not always act as humans, as persons. We are material objects, subject to the laws of physics, chemistry, biochemistry, neurophysiology; we are living beings with appetites, vulnerabilities and needs, and we respond to stimuli, positively and negatively. But we are also able to have purposes, make choices. And that, of course, is the whole issue before us. To say we do not always act as persons is not to say that the laws of nature or organic pressures overwhelm us, and we cannot help ourselves. Since the Garden of Eden, it’s the choice, the either/or moment
identified by Kierkegaard (1960), that marks us as human (p. 270). Person, under erasure, marks the “fact” that only a person can behave impersonally. Saying “yes” only has meaning if we can say “no.” We can only tell the truth if we can also lie. We can only ignore what (or whom) we know is there. Only a free being can be enslaved. Only a rational being can behave irrationally. Etc. And one choice open to us is to form an intention, make a commitment to try to live together as individuals in a community in a way that makes sense to us, that is personally fulfilling.

Integral to personhood, to being a person is knowing that I am me, not you, and simultaneously that you are an “I” that knows me (this other “I”) as “you.” I know it is tortuous to describe, but it is surely a taken-for-granted experience, and a commonplace of psychology, and especially psychotherapy. This begins in infancy: as the baby is drawn into relationship with whoever cares for her, she learns to recognize the other as other, and responds to the other’s presence and absence. Macmurray (1995b) calls this “the germ of rationality” (p. 61). This is the positive constituted and sustained by the negative. As we grow up, we recognize that you have your intentions and I have mine. And we can agree to act together, or I can choose to thwart your purposes and stop you. The final chapter of Macmurray’s Self as Agent (1995b) is titled, “The World as One Action” – the attitude which is distinct form either seeing the world as means to be used (as in scientific knowledge) or the world as end, that is, according to a final purpose, or destiny, to which we all contribute willy-nilly. If the world is to be one action, it will be due to our intention to act together – act, not react out of fear, with a sense of choosing to bring about what will be really desirable for us all.

“Community,” I have argued elsewhere (Godway & Finn, 1994), needs to be written community. It is never a matter of fact, but rather, as Macmurray (1995a) expresses it, a matter of intention (p. 213), as for instance is marriage, as well, as friendship, and the other examples I cited from Derrida. This does not mean these things are ideal and always out of reach, but it does
mean they are never totally present, they include their negative too, and are vulnerable to the future, always at risk. As behooves beings who are agents, we always have more to do.

Let me say more about this “community.” It is not a visionary ideal: like marriage even if well begun (with “good intentions”), it is always a work in progress. I mentioned earlier a book called Gandhi and the Future of Economics (Richards & Swanger, 2012). In it we have an explanation of how the traditional system of Indian village life could work without the oppression implicit in the caste system getting in the way of a community working together. Like the arrangement of Sekas in Indonesia described above, this would be another case of “embeddedness,” but would account for the economy as a whole. Each member of the community has a role which is needed, and has a claim on the whole which guarantees their livelihood which is not therefore at the mercy of “market forces.” The authors agree that Gandhi idealized it somewhat, but the system was actually working adequately to the point that at least two areas of India (Kerala and West Bengal) that had not been “developed” (because they were so poor) did not suffer from famine in the 1940’s while the greater part of the country was in desperate straits (Richards & Swanger, 2012, p. 211). In such a community each does contribute, each according to his ability, and the motivation to belong and enjoy being part of the community is the good will, the intention to express the positive. Another way to describe it is the “covenant community.” Change that might be offered from outside needs to be such as to encourage covenant community, and any invitation to accept one’s help must honor the human ties that already exist.

You can now see how I would apply these reflections to the question of development. What sort of change is envisioned? What sort of relationship can exist between those involved in development? One of the books I have found useful in reflecting on this issue is A Peace of Africa (Zarembka, 2011). It describes the experiences of an American (David Zarembka) who
has been living in Africa for more than 45 years and has been part of a number of initiatives which do improve the lives of people, especially in the Great Lakes Region. The projects which have worked have not been organized by large NGOs but have been more like co-operatives, on a much smaller scale at a more local level. The most powerful stories are about a movement called Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (H.R.O.C.) in which individuals who had participated in and/or suffered from the genocide in Burundi, have been able to connect with former enemies and victims and begin to rebuild personal relationships and trust. Some of the NGOs have made matter worse in a number of ways. I am reminded of Dr. Oakley’s (2012a, 2012b) criticism of altruism. She asks searching, even damning questions about the motivation for the philanthropic initiatives she describes without taking much notice of what is intended. But whatever the motivation (or intentions) of those involved in the organizations she describes, they are not personal. From Macmurray’s (1995a) perspective, what they are doing is not “meaningful.” Recall his thesis cited above: “All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship” (p. 15).

The actions (or activities) of the charities in Oakley’s study are not undertaken out of friendship, or consciousness of a personal bond. What we do for a friend, with a friend, or for someone we hope will become a friend, is not “altruistic.” “The Violence of Doing Good” (Godway, 1997) is the title of an essay I wrote, criticizing the kind of approach in which the Other is both the means and the obstacle to our goals. It is mostly about my experience with the Alternatives to Violence Project (A.V.P.) in Connecticut prisons. And incidentally H.R.O.C. is an application of what is practiced in the A.V.P. workshops. There are other examples of “development” which work at the personal level, giving participants an opportunity to become more human – Howard Richards (1985) describes the activities of the Parents and Children Program (P.P.H.) in Chile in his book, The Evaluation of Cultural Action. The program, an
earlier version of which Richards himself set up before the 1972 coup, embodies the philosophy of Paulo Freire’s (1972) The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. It involves the poorest peasants in various regions of Chile by inviting them to come to the meetings originally to discuss how to help their pre-school children get ready for school. It flourishes as participants begin to trust one another (and the leader whom they have chosen to send to learn how to be an organizer), and to feel less helpless as they have the opportunity to start to talk about their problems and aspirations.

P.P.H. provides worksheets with pencils, etc., for parents to do with their children, to help them start to read (and naturally it helps those who are illiterate, as they can learn alongside). Parents are encouraged to bring the completed sheets back to the group meetings, and with the children, celebrate the completion of the series. In the meantime, people talk about other issues and often begin to bring up ideas to deal with them co-operatively. At a certain point they may be ready to ask for information about nutrition, farming, etc. There is also a radio station ("The Voice of the Coast") that puts on programs linked with P.P.H., broadcasts news about its activities and offers courses that the peasants have asked for, helped by the foreign charity, which provides some materials needed to complete the courses.

Besides being a fascinating, moving account of a “development” project undertaken under frightening political and heartbreaking economic conditions, with all the stresses, successes, and failures that come with the territory of the personal, it is also an example of “illuminative evaluation” which functions as a devastating critique of what usually passes for evaluation. Such a process tends to require evidence that previously specified goals have been met, so that input and output can be calculated, and expense justified by proved success. The P.P.H. narrative is introduced by and interspersed with discussions with an (imaginary)
“Reasonable Social Scientist,” ostensibly employed by a charitable organization to decide whether to contribute to the project.

Thus, I return to a theme from the beginning of this essay, namely the idea of efficiency as crucial to judging development. And such a criterion begins to seem hardly relevant to the lives of the people involved: time spent socializing, gossiping, even dancing, is not time wasted; time spent with the children doing the worksheets is valuable whether or not they do better in school than other children. Thinking about their shared lives and problems, and planning events together are fulfilling activities and they nourish friendships in ways that cannot be measured in terms of productivity, etc. In spite of all the difficulties and setbacks – and they are legion – as one participant put it: “We shall continue forward ... to show our children we are people” (Richards, 1985, p. 23).

By the end of the book, the Reasonable Social Scientist has seen P.P.H. in person and has begun to understand how it works (what the participants call “the spirit of P.P.H.”) (Richards, 1985, p. 160)). She knows what concerns her boss will raise and the kinds of data he wants, but she no longer believes in it (Richards, 1985, p. 237ff.). Such illuminative evaluation brings the lived reality of the people involved home to us and, I believe, gives us a sense of community with those campesinos. This kind of development project, and this way of thinking about change in our world should challenge what is generally offered to “developing” nations, even if well intentioned.

Things are not going well for our world: we must stop and think. But our reflection needs to be in a mode appropriate to what exactly is going wrong. The metaphysical perspective inherited from Descartes according to which the mind (a “thinking substance”) is more real than the body also restricted thinking to the kind that makes sense of inert stuff. Rethinking Thinking (Hoppers & Richards, 2011) documents the failure of such thinking (identified as the search for
invariant relationships; see especially p. 22f., but almost passim.) when applied to human history – the account of human actions. The second mode of reflection can at least take account of motivation and see human activity in context and not as something to be reduced to statistics, but is still inadequate to address our situation. It is possible to describe what is going on in its terms, as the unfolding of a telos built into our species, or perhaps as the play of different energies interacting with each other in a mega ecosystem in which we must also play our parts, fulfill our function. Here at least is some kind of meaning, of logos as Hegel put it, but as Kierkegaard (1960) noted, it is still impersonal (p. 270ff., p. 275). What is missing is the sense of future, room for action, in a word, intention.

Society, as mentioned earlier, can be thought of in terms of an organism, and so is not a community. Society, like the objects of science, can be described from the outside: what is true of it is a matter of fact. But for Macmurray, community is not like that. It is a matter of intention. It expresses a commitment of persons to one another, which is why I want to write it community. So I come back to the Derridean move: matters of fact are relevant, but they tempt us to ignore the role of persons, agents. To write development “under erasure” is to signal that it is as one might say, problematic, being a matter of intention, a question to be addressed by what we do next. The future is not yet: it confronts us as the undecidable in the face of which decision must be risked (Derrida, 1992, pp. 359ff.). Thus, we need to rediscover the possibility of approaching one another in an attitude of trust, each recognizing the others as persons. I earlier used the phrase “covenant community” and this implies a promise which is more than a contract, a sense of responsibility for keeping faith, analogous to but broader than marriage and family, in which one cares more about what one can give than what one is to get. There is, in other words, a value to “embeddedness” which we might do well to rediscover (or re-invent) and rather than it being an inherited custom, make it a conscious intention. The challenge is to envisage development
as the way to heal our dysfunctional global society, and commit ourselves to a global community. If this is what “development” should be, the values and practices of all need somehow to be harmonized, and it is where Western politics and economics have not been allowed to ride rough-shod over the locals that there is cause for hope.
References


Davenport, J. (2012). Sustainable development figures and tentative projections. Lecture given during the meetings of the Philosophy and Society Circle. Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT.


Oakley, B. (2012b). Creating development good luck. Lecture given during the meetings of the Philosophy and Society Circle. Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT.


Notes

1 For a fuller explication of “under erasure” (sous rature) see Gayatri Spivak’s introduction to Derrida’s Of Grammatology (which she translated (Derrida, 1974)), especially pp. xiv-xix. Derrida uses it and variations of the general idea (deconstruction, différance, catachresis, etc.) in many of his books. In fact Derrida was copying Heidegger (1958, pp. 81-83) who wrote Being, but his use of this “strategy” differed from Heidegger’s. Derrida (1992) discusses “gift” at some length in pp. 34-70.

2 See Rethinking Thinking (Hoppers & Richards, 2011) especially chapter 2, which identifies geographically and historically who are the agents and who the recipients and why.

3 Gayatri Spivak describes deconstruction as “a radical acceptance of vulnerability” in The Post-Colonial Critic (Spivak, 1990 p18)

4 I and my colleague, Geraldine Finn, have edited a book, Who is This “We”? Absence of Community (Godway & Finn, 1994), which explores the notion of community, offering a number of examples which show how crucial it is to avoid the assumption one has “arrived.”


6 1891-1976. See Interpreting the Universe (Macmurray, 1996), and his Gifford Lectures, given in 1953 and 1954, published as The Self as Agent (Macmurray, 1995a) and Persons in Relation (Macmurray, 1995b). See also my article, “The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism and the Challenge of Philosophy Today” (Godway, 2010).

7 See my article, “The Being Which is Behind Us: Merleau-Ponty and the Question of Nature” (Godway, 1998).

9 We may nevertheless note in passing the point made in Rethinking Thinking, that in fact the Soviet Union differed from the West only to the extent that its capital was accumulated by the state (Hoppers & Richards, 2012, p. 22).

10 Efficiency is of course a judgement of means, rather than ends: we will come back to this issue with reference to Howard Richards (1985) The Evaluation of Cultural Action, below.

11 See the full argument in Dilemmas of Social Democracy, especially the example of Sweden (Richards & Swanger, 2006; see Chapter 11).

12 I have published a paper with the same title, exploring this idea and linking MacMurray’s thought with that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Godway, 2008).

13 Derrida (1992) puts “community” in question: “I do not much like the word ... I am not even sure I like the thing” (p. 355).


15 Nor an impossible dream: take, for example, the Transition movement which has begun to transform some town in the UK and the US. See The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience (Hopkins, 2008).