

## ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*In the context of the Inter-American initiative on Social Capital, Ethics and Development and taking its cue from the Latin American tradition in social, ethical and theological theory oriented around the concept of 'liberation', this paper reflects on the ethical implications of three inter-related concepts/phenomena in contemporary development discourse: vulnerability, social inclusion and social capital. In order to overcome a widespread, yet somewhat simplistic discourse on vulnerability built on an illusion of invulnerability that in consequence undermines basic human values, a two-dimensional understanding of human vulnerability is proposed: It should be seen as a fundamental human condition that both calls for ethical response and enables moral agency. In this way the paper seeks to counter a possible return of paternalistic, passivity-inducing and purely 'instrumental' approaches to development. The emphasis on the moral and political agency of 'the vulnerable' or 'the excluded' themselves, leads to a renewed consideration of the role of social movements in constructing more inclusive and participatory societies. Building on E. Dussel's 'ethics of liberation' that sees these movements as forming 'anti-hegemonic communities of communication' and vehicles of 'conscientização'(P. Freire), it is argued that what could be called a 'social intrusion' by these groups is an important contribution to developing sustainable societies. Such an ethical appraisal of the political mobilization coming to expression through such movements in civil society, in turn, leads to a critique of a depoliticised understanding of 'social capital' (Putnam). It furthermore points to the challenge of establishing arenas and mechanisms for the peaceful negotiation of the conflicts of interests that comes to the fore through such a political mobilization. This challenge relates to the actors of the civil society as well as to the state.*

*This study relates to and supplements the report presented by Benedicte Bull on social capital, civil society and the democratic welfare state in Norway, and to Asun St. Clair's, Desmond McNeill's and Bull's work on development ethics and effectiveness.*

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## WINDS OF CHANGE

At the beginning of 2006 we are witnessing winds of political change in Latin America. Commentators and political analysts discuss the significance, causes and probable outcome of an undeniable 'leftist tendency' where now Bolivia and Chile have followed in the footsteps of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay in electing socialist or social democratic political leaders. A somewhat surprising turn to many, the neoliberal heyday of the nineties has given way to a – albeit moderate and somewhat contradictory and confusing – socialist and social-democratic climate, in which there are heated debates about what such political ideas as independence, dignity, and democracy should mean in the continent today. Some would hear in these debates distant echoes of the 1960's, which put Latin America on the political and academic map globally with, most notably, the dependency theory in development economics, Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' in the science of education (Freire 1978, 1977) and – in my own academic field – the 'theology of liberation'. In fact in 2006 it is 35 years since the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote his famous book with that title (Gutiérrez 1971), presenting a different theological discourse with relevance far beyond the coasts and communities of Latin America.

Whether one would see this as a return of the golden years of Latin American political and academic debates, or rather a re-lapse in to the errors of the past, this situation arguably influences the work of the IDB. Today, we are invited by the IDB Initiative on Ethics and Social Capital to once again look particularly at the ethical dimensions of development in Latin America. What is the relevance of ethics to economic and social development? How could an explicit reflection on ethics make a real and positive difference in the efforts aimed at constructing a better tomorrow for the peoples of Latin America? And, in most practical, not to say instrumental, terms: How can ethical values and social capital contribute to development projects?<sup>2</sup>

## VULNERABILITY, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND STRUGGLES FOR INCLUSION

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is a result of a project on ethics and development in the IDB in which four researchers at the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo have participated: Asun St. Clair, Benedicte Bull, Desmond McNeill and myself. I am grateful to my colleagues for an inspiring cooperation and constructive comments to earlier drafts of this paper. They are, however, not to be held accountable for what follows.

'Development ethics' reflects critically on the value issues that are implicit in any development discourse.<sup>3</sup> It goes beyond the – important, yet insufficient – “ethics of the means”, and seeks through e.g. philosophical and theological thinking to clarify what 'development' might mean and how it can be fostered. In doing so, an important task is to seek to provide a basic understanding of the human condition. It is also an important task to critically scrutinize the prevalent concepts and discourses that define the development field. As a modest contribution in this endeavor, I shall reflect on human being as '*homo vulnerabilis*', arguing that an exploration of ethical implications of human vulnerability can make a significant difference in development theory and practice.

In this paper I will make two basic steps. I will argue, first, that we should distinguish between two dimensions of human vulnerability which have ethical relevance. Thus, I will criticise a common use of the concept, and move on to seeing vulnerability *also* as an ethical value and resource in particular for those who are often called 'the vulnerable', 'vulnerable groups' etc. This leads me, second, to the issue of social exclusion/inclusion. I will underscore the ethical importance of the moral and political agency of the 'vulnerable', excluded ones in the development process. Hence I will relate to social struggles for inclusion in Latin America as they come to expression in the social and popular movements. In this context I will criticize an understanding of 'social capital' which tends to favor a de-politicized version of civil society, since this does not give sufficient weight to the ethical and political significance of the social struggles for inclusion.

I have made this particular choice of interrelating vulnerability, social inclusion and social capital for several reasons. Firstly, a dominant use of the concept of vulnerability seems to me to presuppose and further promote an illusion of invulnerability which undermines an adequate understanding of the fundamental anthropological condition, as well as important ethical resources. Secondly, the above-mentioned political climate of change in Latin America is closely related to particular, organized struggles for social inclusion, such as the labor movement and the landless movement (MST) in Brazil, the indigenous movement and the organized social struggle against the privatization of water in Bolivia, and the women's movement in Chile to mention but a few. It is therefore urgent to pay renewed attention to these movements – and to the role of the state vis-à-vis them – in the context of the debate on ethics and development. Thirdly, the IDB has recognised social exclusion as a serious obstacle to development – in economic as well as human terms –, and has in recent years accordingly launched particular programmes for social inclusion in its portfolio. Ethical reflection on the aims and methods of social inclusion are thus called for. Fourthly, in a common understanding of the concept of social capital, in particular the use inspired by Robert D. Putnam (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Putnam 1995, cf. Norges Forskningsråd 2005), there is a tendency to focus more

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the International Development Ethics Association (IDEA), [http://www.development-](http://www.development-ethics.org/)

on the mere existence of a civil sector and voluntary organisations as a value for democratic development, and less on the particular *content or agenda* of those organisations or movements making up civil society. There even seems to be in Putnam (increasingly so in his later writings) a preference for an overly harmonious and non-conflictive view of civil society; Putnam's repeated examples of bird-watching clubs and bowling is a case in point.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, I will point to the importance of taking into account and valorising also the more conflictive and explicitly political element of the emergence of the civil sector for the development of democratic and stable societies. The social struggles for inclusion play a crucial role, in their contextual varieties and more or less co-ordinated inter-contextuality. One important reason for this, I argue, is that through these struggles people who are marginalised, excluded, 'vulnerable' in different ways, gain critical awareness of their own situation, and of the need and potential to change that situation. This process is of ethical significance, not only for the excluded themselves, but for the prospects of founding a democratic and stable development for the community at large.<sup>5</sup>

## **VULNERABILITY: FROM POLITICAL BUZZWORD TO ETHICAL CONCEPT**

"Paying attention to the ways in which particular development buzzwords have come to be used (...) sheds interesting light on the normative project that is development" (Cornwall and Brock 2005, 1044).<sup>6</sup> 'Vulnerability' is commonly used as a term for situations and phenomena that are to be avoided through intervention or protection. 'The vulnerable' seems to be the new name of 'the poor'. Women and children are described as the 'most vulnerable', particularly in times of armed conflict and humanitarian crises. Risk analyses are presented assessing the level of vulnerability of certain communities to natural catastrophes. Vulnerability is a central concept in research related to climate change. In security policy, particularly post 9/11, the surprising vulnerability of even the only remaining super-power has been a key concern.

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[ethics.org/document.asp?cid=0&sid=0&did=1113](http://ethics.org/document.asp?cid=0&sid=0&did=1113), accessed February 2006.

<sup>4</sup> One may ask whether such an understanding of social capital is not the prevalent one in the context of the IDB Initiative on Ethics and Social Capital? Could this be seen as reflected in a certain lack of interrelation between the struggles of the social movements for inclusion and the IDB Initiative?

<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian experience, as it is presented by my colleague Benedicte Bull in her report "Social capital, civil society and the democratic welfare state in Norway: Is there a link and does it have any relevance for Latin America?" (2006), can be seen as confirming such an interpretation.

<sup>6</sup> This is the point of departure for an interesting critical analysis of 'participation' 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction' made recently by Cornwall and Brock. They show how the meaning and use of these words change according to the context in which they are used, and depending on which other words they are seen as closely linked to or synonymous with, thus sustaining their claim that "discursive framings are important in shaping development practice" (Cornwall and Brock 2005, 1045). In the same vein, but with a different methodology and theoretical framework, I propose a closer look at 'vulnerability', 'social inclusion' and 'social capital'.

All of this is obviously not wrong. Vulnerability means ability to be wounded; it is susceptibility to physical or emotional injury or attack. As such, it founds the legitimate claim of all human beings to protection from harm, want and fear. However, in common use we often find a one-dimensional focus on vulnerability *only* seeing it as something that should be removed, or as ‘the degree of probable loss.’ This is often combined with a listing of ‘vulnerable groups’ (women, children, the elderly, people living with disabilities, etc.), that are treated in a generalized and rather objectifying way. Ben Wisner, who himself advocates a more ‘situational and pro-active’ understanding, sees this as a ‘weak’ and ‘de-politicised’ concept of vulnerability, which is widespread in mainstream development discourses today (Wisner 2005, 6).

This one-dimensional approach is often driven by, and carries with it, an implicit or explicit quest for invulnerability. Such a quest can lead seriously astray. Take these words of the influential US psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton in his recent analysis of what he calls the “superpower syndrome”:

At the heart of the superpower syndrome then is the need to eliminate a vulnerability that, as the antithesis of omnipotence, contains the basic contradiction of the syndrome. For vulnerability can never be eliminated, either by a nation or an individual. In seeking its elimination, the superpower finds itself on a psychological treadmill. The idea of vulnerability is intolerable, the fact of it irrefutable. One solution is to maintain an *illusion of invulnerability*. But the superpower then runs the danger of taking increasingly draconian actions to sustain that illusion. For to do otherwise would be to surrender the cherished status of superpower (Lifton 2003, 133).

Thus the illusion of invulnerability leads to a situation in which “...both the superpower and the world it acts upon may become dangerously destabilized” (ibid.).

Lifton’s observation is in my judgement also relevant in other areas of politics and human interaction, not least in the field of development. Hence in an effort to overcome the limitations of a one-sided approach to vulnerability nurturing illusions of invulnerability, I will argue that we should distinguish between two ethical dimensions of vulnerability. Vulnerability is not only a condition that *calls for* moral action; it is also *constitutive* of being human as well as of *acting* morally. It offers an ethical critique and an ethical demand, as well as moral resources. In this way vulnerability is also of ethical *value*. Let me try to spell this out more clearly.<sup>7</sup>

## TWO ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN VULNERABILITY

Human vulnerability can be seen as having two related but distinguishable dimensions. I hold that distinguishing rightly between them can make a significant difference with regard to how we see the ethical implications in the development process, in particular in the meaning and mechanisms of ‘social inclusion’ and our understanding of ‘social capital.’

The first ethical dimension of human vulnerability is the most obvious: It refers to the actual, contingent fact of being wounded, or in a situation of immediate danger or risk. When development agencies, governments and multinational bodies speak of protecting the ‘most vulnerable’, this is usually what they mean. This is vulnerability understood as a situation calling for protection, for help, for intervention by someone. In other words, it issues an ethical demand (Løgstrup 1997; Goodin 1985; Levinas 1987, 133-140).

Evidently, there is no guarantee *a priori* that this demand will be heeded at all, or responded positively to by relevant others, be they relatives, close ‘by-standers’, or political authorities. Yet the very presence of exposed vulnerability, of human persons’ wounds, is generally (although not necessarily; cynicism is also an option) seen as a call for moral and political response.<sup>8</sup> It may be in the form of altruism, charity or mercy. Or it may be seen as a call for justice, for the protection of human rights. The dissymmetry present in someone’s exposed vulnerability can be interpreted in terms of power. Vulnerability implies dependency; to be vulnerable vis-à-vis something or someone is to be *dependent* on the same factors or persons.

The awareness of the (ethical significance of the) first dimension of human vulnerability is basic, and to a certain extent self-evident. In this sense, vulnerability is something that can and should be reduced.

There is however, also a second dimension to human vulnerability. This is the permanent, anthropological condition of being vulnerable, i.e. having sensorial, receptive, relational, perceptive, corporeal, fragile ‘existence’. In contrast to the first dimension, this is a kind of vulnerability that neither could nor should be removed from human existence. To be a human being is to be vulnerable, by definition. An invulnerable human being, if that were to be possible, would be inhuman. That is why any dream of complete invulnerability undermines humanity. In this sense, the second dimension of vulnerability is an anthropological condition; in fact an anthropological *constituent*.

But furthermore and perhaps more surprisingly, this anthropological condition of being vulnerable is also the *basis* for moral *agency*. In this sense vulnerability can also be seen as an ethical *value*.<sup>9</sup> Vulnerability means ability to be affected, to feel pain. In general it is part of the receptivity and sensibility of humans. Since it is receptivity to *negative* impact, pain, it is particularly relevant for ethics and moral agency. Since the pain of the other human being issues a call for moral response (as we saw in considering the first dimension of vulnerability), a key question is whether and how this call is actually heeded by relevant others, or by ‘me’. How can I perceive the pain of others?

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<sup>7</sup> The following outlining of an ‘ethics of vulnerability’ builds on and further develops thoughts presented in i.a. Stålsett et al. 2002; Stålsett 2004, 2004, 2005. I am particularly grateful to Raag Rolfen for our ongoing dialogue and cooperation on this approach, see e.g. his Rolfen 2004, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> In his book *Protecting the vulnerable* (1985) R. Goodin argues that our social responsibilities are defined by the persons and communities who are actually vulnerable to our action. Goodin addresses the ethical implications and responsibilities related to what I call the first dimension of vulnerability. He does not pursue the more radical thought that vulnerability also is an ethical value and resource. In other words, his argument does not reflect what I call the second dimension of human vulnerability.

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, there is much to be gained from engaging in a conversation with the so-called ‘ethics of proximity’ as developed by e.g. K.E. Løgstrup (Løgstrup 1989 (1956), 1968, cf. Christoffersen 1999), and more famously, E. Lévinas (Lévinas 1972, *et passim*), as well as with feminist ethics of care with its emphasis on human corporeality. Interestingly, in her book entitled ‘The Fragility of Goodness’ Martha C. Nussbaum makes a similar point from the perspective of Aristotelian ethics, asking how far is human good living, *eudaimonia*, vulnerable? (Nussbaum 1986, 318-372).

My contention here is that it is one's awareness of one's own vulnerability that makes it possible to perceive and hence recognize the ethical call issued by the pain of another person. In this way, vulnerability is a precondition for moral perception and agency.<sup>10</sup> This experience is rooted in the recognition of the shared human condition of being vulnerable. And yet, this shared vulnerability is not necessarily mutual (I need not be vulnerable to you in the same way or to the same degree that you are vulnerable to me) nor symmetrical (some are more vulnerable than others).

## VULNERABILITY AS AN ETHICAL VALUE

In this second dimension, vulnerability becomes an ethical value since it makes me aware of the ethical demand present in the vulnerability of the other person. It can in this way be considered as a *source of empathy* and a *foundation for solidarity*. Furthermore, since my vulnerability contains concrete experiences of different kinds of pain and harm and how to reduce them or overcome them (coping strategies), vulnerability is also *source of ethical imagination*: It can tell me something about in what ways I should carry out my ethical responsibility in the concrete circumstances.

The awareness of this second dimension of human vulnerability is less often taken into account. And yet it is crucial for actually enabling and facilitating an adequate response to the ethical demand issued by the vulnerability of others (first dimension).

What is important to be aware of in the context of development discourses and strategies, there are ways in stressing the first dimension (the efforts at reducing vulnerability as being wounded, or being at risk) that limits the possibility of becoming aware of the second dimension – vulnerability as an ethical value. It may even contribute to covering up the second dimension, thus undermining adequate development strategies. This happens particularly when attempts at reducing vulnerability in the first dimension are explicitly or implicitly motivated and informed by an illusion of invulnerability.

As we can see, vulnerability as a constitutive anthropological condition and an ethical pre-condition (the second dimension), makes aiming at invulnerability not only illusory, but actually become counter-productive: It can increase vulnerability in its first dimension, rather than diminishing it. Here Lifton's observation in the field of security policy has its relevance also in the field of development. The dominant use of 'vulnerability' and 'the vulnerable', only taking into account the first dimension, easily fosters paternalistic, top-down approaches to development. Being vulnerable is basically

presented as a passive condition, from which one will not be able to free oneself through one's own means. There is a need for the strong external helper, the protector, the *patrón*. Such an approach to development aid is, as we know, thoroughly criticised. It is prone to strengthening clientelism and affirming the usual low self-esteem among the 'beneficiaries'. Thus it contributes to maintaining a distinction between 'us' and 'them', the 'helpers' and the 'ones in need', the 'strong' and the 'weak' which in the long run undermines a basic precondition for a democratic and participatory development: the awareness of a *shared* vulnerability expressed as interdependency.

It furthermore leads to ignoring and ultimately undermining the ethical qualities and resources already present among the so-called vulnerable persons and groups. When vulnerability is seen as a deficiency, vulnerable persons and groups are primarily being defined by what they *lack*. The ethical qualities and resources implicit in vulnerability itself are not taken into account. The whole theme of 'resilience', and of the capacities, opportunities and initiatives of 'the vulnerable', is thus ignored.

By contrast, being aware of this second dimension of human vulnerability as an ethical value and resource, is, if not a precondition, so at least a huge advantage in any effort at relieving vulnerability in the first dimension. This is not least important for the 'vulnerable groups' themselves. Wisner (2005) offers a much richer and more helpful definition of vulnerability than the dominant one referred to above. In Wisner's version the 'self-assessment of capacity and vulnerability' of people themselves plays a key role. He sees vulnerability as "...the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with (*sic*) resist and recovery (*sic*) from the impact of a natural hazard ..." (Wisner 2005, 1). My main point here then, is that such a stronger notion of vulnerability is called for and can be sustained by ethical reflection on the two distinct dimensions of vulnerability.

## **FROM VULNERABILITY TO SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE 'LIBERATION ETHICS' OF E. DUSSEL**

In pursuing this point further trying to relate the 'ethics of vulnerability' to the challenge of 'social inclusion', I will now turn to a leading Latin American ethicist and philosopher who was also one of the early proponents of a theology of liberation. I refer to Argentinean-Mexican Enrique Dussel and

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<sup>10</sup> In a similar way, Germán Gutiérrez distinguishes between vulnerability as 'weakness, fragility, dependency' and vulnerability as 'sensitivity and capacity to embrace' (Gutiérrez 2005).

his architectonic *Ética de Liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Dussel 1998, see also Dussel 1985, 1988, 1978).<sup>11</sup>

Any ethic is based on a determined anthropology, a view of the human being, of human nature. Dussel's ethics is clearly anchored in the tradition of Semitic humanism according to which it is basic that the human being does not 'have' a body, but 'is' a body. (Dussel 1969, 21 ff). In this way, Dussel seeks to overcome the indo-european/Greek dualism between soul and body (see e.g. Dussel 1998, 93 [par. 58],) etc. re-affirming a unitarian (1998, 103 [par. 71]) and material, i.e. bodily, corporeal understanding of human existence (1998, 37-38 [par. 19]). A 'subject' is understood as a 'ser viviente' a living being, an embodied person always already imbedded in numerous relationships with other embodied human beings. The ultimate 'good', the 'bonum', is the 'production, reproduction and development' of the living human person in community with others (1998, 91 [par. 57]). As we can see, 'development' here is at the centre of the ethical endeavour.

The main focus of Dussel's ethics of liberation then, is human life in its concrete, creaturely meaning, a 'material' life with needs and potentials (cf. 'capabilities' in Sen's terms) which evidently goes beyond the mere survival of the individual. And yet, survival is a key concept (1998, 65 [par. 44]). It is the very minimum which is turned into a critical criterion questioning all political and ethical systems ('eticidades'). It is a material ethical criterion that Dussel claims to be universalizable: Is the production, reproduction and development of human life secured by the given ethical or political system?

Thus situating ethics in the everyday sphere of corporeality rather than in an abstract field of principles and ideas, Dussel opens up a particular room for senses and sensibility (and not merely awareness, consciousness or reflection) in the ethical endeavour. The corporeality of both the ethical subject and the persons with whom and to whom this subject stands in an ethical relation, becomes decisive. The key ethical subject in Dussel's proposal is not the human person in general, however. He leads our attention in particular to the human person whose survival is denied or in danger, the 'victim' (1998, 298-9 [par. 205]).

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<sup>11</sup> Enrique Dussel's impressive scholarly work consists in the publication of more than 50 books ranging from comprehensive volumes on church history in Latin America, through groundbreaking and original contributions in ethics, theology and philosophy. Although his main field is that of philosophy and philosophical ethics, he should also be reckoned as one of the 'founding fathers' of liberation theology. He is particularly known for developing what he calls an 'ethics of liberation', the 661 pages volume of that title from 1998 being so far the most developed presentation of this ethics. When I turn to this comprehensive and complex work, it is with a particular interest in the role a renewed reflection on human vulnerability might play for valorising social struggles of inclusion in the context of Latin America in general and the work of the IDB in particular.

Dussel is aware of the possible negative connotations and effects this term may have. Being a 'victim' may easily become a stigma and lead to passivity and self-pity. And yet, Dussel holds that the reality of victims in our world makes this concept a qualified ethical term which in fact forms the point of departure for a critical ethics of liberation. The victim is outside the system, she is the one whose life is *not* being produced, reproduced and developed within the framework of the present order of things. In this way the victim becomes the embodiment of the critical material criteria: The present order of things must be judged as unsatisfactory or even invalid from an ethical point of view, since it produces victims. In fact, the 'good' (*bonum*) of this system becomes 'bad' (*malum*) when judged from the point of view of the victim.<sup>12</sup>

The strong influence of Emmanuel Lévinas on Dussel's ethics is notable here, in the emphasis on corporeality/sensibility and on the primacy of the Other (Dussel 1998, 359-368). In Dussel's application of Lévinas' fundamental categories of sensibility, exteriority and alterity we may find a political – even geopolitical – concretization: 'The Other' in general becomes in Dussel's work the concrete poor, the excluded, the victim. And Lévinas' 'totality' becomes a contextually given ethical and/or political system, it becomes Latin-America in its 'neoliberal' guise.<sup>13</sup>

## **'SOCIAL INTRUSION:' STRUGGLES TO OVERCOME SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

Thus, in Dussel, we clearly see the *critical* character of ethics. It is set in motion by the awareness of a negation – the negation of the life of the victim by a given system. No system, ethical, political or other, can actually prevent becoming in one way or another 'closed', and thus excluding and victimising others, according to Dussel. Furthermore, the system creates many victims unintentionally. And from within the system, this exclusion will be seen as a necessary moment. Victims will thus be made 'inevitable', 'natural' and ultimately invisible in the eyes of those sharing the values of the system. That is why ethical thinking is and always must remain critical. It must go beyond and eventually against the prevalent political and ethical order (*eticidad*). The only way of accomplishing that is through becoming aware of the presence of victims (1998, 377 [par. 269].)

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<sup>12</sup> "El dolor de la corporalidad de las víctimas (...) es exactamente el *origen material (contenido) primero* (equivoco ciertamente) de toda crítica ética posible (...)" (Dussel 1998, 302 [par. 208]). If this is true, it shows how fundamental vulnerability is to such a perception of ethics, since vulnerability is the condition of possibility for the corporeal pain of the victims.

<sup>13</sup> In both Lévinas and Dussel we see reflected what I called the two dimensions of vulnerability. To Lévinas, the concrete face-to-face encounter with the Other as other is the very origin of ethics, in fact the origin of any human experience. That is why ethics is the 'first philosophy', it is prior to ontology. In this encounter it is the 'nudity', the vulnerability of the Other person which calls me into being; I become from the very first moment responsible for the wellbeing of this other, vulnerable person. And it is my own sensibility or vulnerability that makes it possible for me to recognise this 'call' from the face of the other person at all.

How does this 'becoming aware of' happen, and what does it consist in? In Dussel there is an emphasis on the subject status and the agency of the Other/ victim. It is the Other who breaks into our world, our system, our closed rationality and makes it possible to see ourselves, the other and the world in a new perspective. It is the victim who cries and rebels. Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who also was influenced by Lévinas, spoke repeatedly of the 'irruption of the poor' on the world scene (Gutiérrez 1971, 1982). In a similar way, perhaps in stead of social inclusion, we should speak of the necessary social *intrusion* of the excluded? I will come back to this. The point here is that there is an initiative stemming from the Other/victim, through which both she/he and I/we become responsible, ethical subjects.

And what is implied in this process of becoming aware of the reality of victims? Firstly, it means becoming aware of the other as vulnerable, as wounded, as a victim. Hence it is becoming aware of a *negation*: The life of the other is negated. Secondly, the critical moment of breaking out of the hegemonic mentality and logic of the present system consists in an *affirmation*: the affirmation of the *dignity* of the victim. It is when this other person whose life is negated is seen as an autonomous person, entitled to being able to produce, reproduce and develop his/her life in freedom, that the system becomes ethically illegitimate since it is not able or willing to ensure the conditions for his or her life. This affirmation of the dignity of the victim, which is also the negation of the system's negation of that person, is then the fundamental moment for the possibility of change and novelty. Constructing something new, something better for and together with the victims of the present systems, starts in the affirmation of their dignity (1998, 371 [par. 269]).

Not least important here is that this process of discovery, of affirmation of one's dignity, is first and foremost necessary for the victims themselves. The powerful ethical hegemony of the prevalent system is expressed most clearly when the victims accept the 'necessity' of their exclusion, thus preventing them from affirming their own dignity as human persons.

## CONCIENTIZAÇÃO AND ANTI-HEGEMONIC COMMUNITY OF COMMUNICATION

This process of 'becoming aware of exclusion/victimization' is what P. Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1972) once called *concientização*. A basic characteristic of this process is that it is something that takes place in community. It is necessarily a social, collective and dialogical process, taking place among the oppressed themselves. In recent ethical theory, the school of discourse ethics (Habermas, Apel) holds a leading position. It claims that ethical truth is dependent on a consensual and dialogical process, in which ideally all potentially affected subjects are permitted to participate in an open discussion on a given ethical challenge or dilemma. The validity of the answer given or norm issued as a response to the dilemma, is thus dependent on the formal procedure leading to consensus on its decision. This is – as Freire's *concientização*, – a communal process. This thought experiment of all potentially affected persons participating freely and without coercion in the discussion leading to ethical decisions, is decisive in discourse ethics – even when admitted as being an ideal which is necessarily contra-factual.

Accepting to a certain extent the validity of this thought experiment, Dussel nevertheless criticizes it for not really being able to open a room for the Other, for the victim (1998, 413 [par. 278]). In fact, the victim in this sense is exactly the one being affected by the ethical decision stemming from the consensual procedure, yet not included in this discussion. There will always be someone affected but not included, Dussel insists. Hence, reaffirming Freire's insight on this point, Dussel develops what he calls the anti-hegemonic validity of the community of victims: This formal procedure of seeking consensus on ethical questions through an open dialogue among the affected should be applied by the excluded ones themselves in community. That is in fact what is happening in many cases, e.g. in the numerous and diverse social movements of our day, according to Dussel. But in general their reasoning, their ethical judgement is not (yet) considered valid by the hegemonic, dominant system. This is hence an *anti-hegemonic* formal inter-subjectivity, which questions the validity of the prevalent consensus and sets the whole system in motion, aiming at a future validity (1998, 411-494).<sup>14</sup> This motion is what Dussel sees as the process of 'liberation', which may take many forms and shapes, but which in the end aims at the inclusion of the excluded, the restoration of the possibility for the victim to produce, reproduce and develop her life in community with others (1998, 495-583, see also Dussel 1985).

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<sup>14</sup> The basic critical-ethical principle according to Dussel: "Who acts critically-ethically has always already recognized in actu the dignity of the ethical subject that is negated in a hegemonic community of life that prevents the sur-vival of the dominated (impossibility of living), and in a real communication community that excludes them asymmetrically from argumentation"(Dussel 1997, 16).

## ‘SOCIAL CAPITAL’ AND THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

This line of thought clearly points to the critical relevance of including social movements in the development process. They may be the place and instrument for nurturing of a decisive ‘anti-hegemonic’ ethical reasoning which is able to continually put into question the dominant view of the social and political state of affairs, and thus ‘break open’ the ‘system’ from the ‘outside’ (‘*exterioridad*’ in Levinas’ / Dussel’s term). In this way the ones who have so far not been able to ‘produce, reproduce and develop’ their lives within the present political framework, the ‘victims’, may claim their right to participation on equal terms. Social movements are often vehicles of *concientização*, and as such crucial not only for the excluded groups, but for the development of a more stable and just society in general. It may be interesting here to note what Benedicte Bull points out in her report on the ‘Norwegian case.’

...the foundation of the Norwegian welfare state was crucially dependent on social movements. Indeed, one author argues that one can hardly overestimate the importance of the popular movements for the type of democracy that has characterized the Scandinavian countries since the beginning of the twentieth century (Bull 2006, 23.)

But this process, since it is a critical process, will never be without tensions. It will have an inherent conflictive character. The dominant system must be made aware of and hence willing to accept the inclusion of what and whom it has so far excluded. The excluded ones must forge their way, claim their rights, and insist on a role in the development of society as a whole.<sup>15</sup> This is what one might want to rather see as a kind of social *intrusion*. As seen above, both Freire (*concientização*) and Gutiérrez (*irrupción de los pobres*), as well as Dussel (*liberación*), pointed to the necessary initiative and agency of the excluded groups themselves.

This point is helpful in order to take a closer look at another ‘buzzword’ in development ethics, namely ‘social capital.’ According to the influential definition suggested by Robert D. Putnam, ‘social capital’ “...refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 167). It is interesting and somewhat surprising to note a tendency in Putnam’s use of ‘social capital’ to

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tone down the potentially conflictive and political side of civil society, preferring “singing groups and soccer clubs” (op.cit., 176) to more politically engaged interest groups and movements (see also Bull 2006, 6 and 14). It is surprising, since he in his famous study on the differences between Northern and Southern Italy actually finds no evidence for the theory that “...social and political strife is incompatible with good government” (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 117). Such an a-political interpretation easily lends itself to neo-conservative versions of trust and social capital, like e.g. F. Fukuyama’s. Fukuyama stresses the a-political character of civil society. He uses this to argue for a ‘hands off’ strategy from the state in these areas, claiming that welfare states in fact destroy social capital when they interact or intervene in the interest sphere of civil society.

As Benedicte Bull shows in her report, an interpretation of social capital along these lines does not find confirmation in the Norwegian case. Referring to the research presented by Wollebæk and Selle she points to the fact that whereas members of organizations in general do not show a higher level of trust and networks than other people, members of “political organizations and other forms of organizations that conduct advocacy or other actions to forge social change” in fact *do*: They “have more dense social networks, and show more trust and confidence than the population in general” (Bull 2006, 14). And furthermore, while it is true that “the foundation of the Norwegian welfare state was crucially dependent on social movements” (op.cit., 26), it is also true that “...the Government throughout the period after World War II was particularly active in shaping civil society. It is precisely this two-way relationship between the state and civil society which is among the keys to understanding the case of Norway” (op.cit., 15)

Nevertheless, stressing the value of popular and social movements in the development process, particularly in their critical challenge to the existing relations of power, raises the question of how this element of conflict can be handled in a non-violent and democratic way. This critical question must be directed to both these movements themselves and to the state.

Freire, Gutiérrez and Dussel certainly hold high expectations to the ability of the poor and excluded themselves and what they can accomplish. Are their expectations too high, and uncritical? What about the democratic status of the social movements? What happens if/when these ‘anti-hegemonic communities of communication’ become hegemonic and closed? What about those excluded from the groups and movements of the excluded? Anyone slightly familiar with the history of the Latin American left knows that these are serious and relevant questions (see e.g. Castañeda 1993). There is a permanent danger that excluded groups reflect and copy the dynamic of the hegemonic power, thus

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<sup>15</sup> It may be pertinent here as an example to recall a prevalent Zapatista slogan: *Nunca más un México sin nosotros!* [Never again a Mexico without us!]

responding to exclusion by counter-exclusion.<sup>16</sup> This is an ethical and democratic dilemma in the struggles of the social movements for inclusion.

At this point the role of the state vis-à-vis the social movements and civil society at large becomes important. Again, the Norwegian case analysed by Bull shows that there is a two-way influence between the state and civil society/social capital. A dynamic – and politically committed – civil society strengthens the possibilities for a democratic and well-functioning state. At the same time, such a civil society is to a large extent dependent on a proactive state in this field. It is in the interest of the state to actively promote, support and even contribute to financing the civil sector, including the social or political movements critical of the government. Here, interestingly, Bull argues that the Norwegian case points to the need for a certain de-politicization of the state in order to permit a politicized civil society. In this way the state can offer arenas for democratic negotiation of conflicts of interpretations and interests present in any given society. What the term ‘social capital’ rightly shows, in my view, is that society is dependent on a mutual recognition of vulnerability among its citizens and groups. One expression of this mutual recognition is the level of trust. In order to increase the level of trust the state should therefore provide meeting points between groups in society that enable a constructive articulation of this mutual vulnerability rather than allowing for violent defenses against it.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RELEVANCE FOR THE IDB

An incipient ‘ethics of vulnerability’ as presented here helps us bring out the critical ethical value and two-dimensional character of the basic human phenomenon of vulnerability. It also points to the affirmation of the dignity of the ‘excluded’, the ‘victims’ as a precondition for the possibility of setting off a process of human development. Finally it develops in a novel manner the ethical validity of the communities of excluded human beings and peoples, and their contribution to constructing another, more ethically satisfactory society.

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<sup>16</sup> Social movements are faced with i.a. the following dilemma: Putnam (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 173) distinguishes between horizontally and vertically structured networks and organizations in civil society and holds that this makes a significant difference on their potential contribution to ‘making democracy work.’ ‘Horizontal’ networks of interpersonal communication and exchange, both formal and informal, bring together agents of equivalent status and power, while ‘vertical’ link unequal agents in ‘asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence.’ Hence the horizontal ones are preferred by Putnam. Similarly, if the process of anti-hegemonic inter-subjectivity in Dussel’s sense should be thought of as practically realizable, we also seem to find ourselves at a quite small-scale, local level, where horizontal, face-to-face discussion and interaction is possible. Yet at the same time, as also the Norwegian case shows, the political effectiveness of social movements is to a large degree dependent on their ability reach beyond the local context, and thus make themselves present at a regional, national or international level. This requires a co-ordination that to a considerable degree must find patterns of representation that include a level of discipline and hierarchy.

Of what relevance can this ethical exploration be to the IDB? What is the 'added value' of ethics in development? Whether or not ethics can improve development *effectiveness* is a contested issue, very much depending on how effectiveness is to be understood. Yet it clearly can improve the *quality* of any effort aimed at promoting development, i.e., of any development project. First and foremost ethical reflection on development strategies provides a critical awareness on the principal subjects/agents and aims of development projects. From the point of view of the particular ethical approach chosen in this paper, it challenges politicians and development organisations such as the IDB to continually strive to adopt the standpoint of those presently excluded from the development process. The ethical legitimacy of the development process depend on their ability to include all those affected, in particular those groups and persons who are not permitted to fully sustain and develop their lives in freedom (cf. Sen) and community (cf. Dussel) within the framework of the existing conditions.

This can not be accomplished without a decisive willingness to open up for the agency of these groups themselves. In order for such 'opening up' to be made possible, it is necessary to explicitly recognise in words and deeds the dignity, effort and claims of these excluded groups. Such recognition will be greatly helped, I suggest, by focussing on our shared common humanity, and in particular, on the mutual, although dissymmetrical vulnerability that is both a call for protection and justice, and an irremovable human quality that actually enables moral agency.

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subordination of Latin American economies and populations in the global markets. As if turning those postwar debates on their heads, the neoliberal turn of the last decades embraced international markets to the rule of law, and the nature of the dependencies and vulnerabilities that are imposed on vulnerable groups by the weakness of public institutions and the strength of personal, patriarchal networks of power, resources, and influence. In its broadest sense, social vulnerability is one dimension of vulnerability to multiple stressors and shocks, including abuse, social exclusion and natural hazards. Social vulnerability refers to the inability of people, organizations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed. Research on social vulnerability to date has stemmed from a variety of fields in the natural and social sciences. Each field has defined the concept differently, manifest in a host of definitions and approaches (Blaikie, Cannon et al. The temporal and spatial aspects of vulnerability science are pervasive, particularly in research that attempts to demonstrate the impact of development on social vulnerability. Social ethics literature exemplifies multiple relationships between context and ethics. Authors use a concrete context as a jumping off point for development of a related idea or resolution.8 Articles share the results of theological reflection on a concrete social process or event.9 Still others apply church teaching or social ethical principles to concrete social issues.10

5 Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000). The dramatic transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) between 2000 and the 2010s was driven by fast growth, together with higher employment rates and increased real incomes. During this period of sustained growth, increased fiscal revenues supported the expansion of social protection programs, mainly in the form of non-contributory social assistance. Despite the increasing coverage of social assistance and positive impacts on consumption and other social dimensions, policy makers were aware of the limitations in ensuring the sustainability of those gains. Though the following presidents and publicists in Latin America, North America and Europe have jumped on the bandwagon; there is no uniform practice to match the public rhetoric. In many ways President Chavez's discourse and the Venezuelan government's policies define the radical outer limits of 21cs both in terms of its foreign policy challenging Washington's war policies and in terms of domestic socio-economic reforms. While the government has vastly increased social expenditures comparable or exceeding spending in some of the earlier social democratic governments, it has not reduced the great concentrations of wealth and income of the upper classes, via steep progressive tax rates as in Scandinavia and elsewhere.