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**‘Moral knowledge’ in Development:  
A Concept for the Analysis of  
Norms and Values in Developmental Policy Making**

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## Abstract

This paper looks at the role of moral norms and values in developmental policy-making. Based on a literature review, it concludes that the moral facet of development practice is characterised by different strands of ambivalence. This ambivalence, as a general condition of concrete interaction then evokes the question of how people deal with this condition in daily practice – a question that seems to be of decisive importance for understanding the processes and outcomes of development policy-making.

The paper therefore offers a suggestion of how moral norms and values may be approached in order to capture more comprehensively their influence on developmental practice. The suggestion is to understand moral norms and values *as moral knowledge*. This notion allows for covering a variety of aspects regarding the role of moral norms and values in development practice, namely that people as moral subjects and members of moral communities are (i) restricted by moral frameworks; that they are also (ii) enabled by such frameworks as they derive (moral) orientation from them; and that they can make use of norms and values as a repertoire, both in a (iii) individual, strategic sense and in a (iv) collectively constructive sense.

Moreover, the notion of knowledge makes the conceptualisation of moral norms and values compatible with a strand of social theory that will prove to be of great importance for the subject, namely *structuration* theory. This body of theory allows for addressing the *structural* aspect of morality (norms and values as framework) systematically together with the *agency* aspect (norms and values as repertoire).



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## ***I. Introduction: subject and ambition; main results; outline***

This paper looks at the role of moral norms and values in developmental policy-making. Based on a review of some seminal works in the field of 'anthropology of development', it concludes, at a first stage, that the moral facet of development practice is characterised by different strands of ambivalence. This ambivalence, being a general condition of concrete interaction, then evokes the question of how people deal with this condition – supposing that they are not (only) self-centred strategic utility maximisers, but also (and among other things) moral subjects.

This question is taken to be of decisive importance for understanding processes and outcomes of development policy-making. The second part of the paper is to be understood as an answer to this question that is conceptual rather than substantial, empirically based. Moreover, the paper does not present a ready-made concept, but constitutes a draft of conceptual considerations: it offers a suggestion of how moral norms and values may be approached in development research, in order to capture their influence on developmental practice more comprehensively and systematically.

The suggestion will be to understand moral norms and values *as moral knowledge*. Note that there are two conceptual steps involved in this. Firstly, norms and values are understood *as something else*. The intention of this step is to shift these particular components of (development) interaction into a category where other important components may figure as well. This may facilitate considering moral norms and values and their role for practice alongside with, in comparison with, or even in a conceptually integrated manner with these other components.

Secondly, they are understood as a particular kind of *knowledge*. This notion allows for covering a variety of aspects that the literature review has pointed to regarding the role of moral norms and values in development practice. These aspects are that people, as moral subjects and members of moral communities, are (i) restricted by an established moral framework; that they are also (ii) enabled by this framework as they derive (moral) orientation from it; and that, as individual and knowledgeable agents, they can make use of moral norms and values as a repertoire, both in a (iii) individually strategic sense and in a (iv) collectively constructive sense.

The notion of knowledge furthermore makes the conceptualisation of moral norms and values compatible with a strand of social theory that, based on the review of the anthropology of development, proves to be of great importance for the subject, namely *structuration* theory. This body of theory allows for systematically addressing the *structural* aspect of morality (norms and values as framework) together with the *agency* aspect (norms and values as repertoire).

The course of the paper is as follows. First, an initial understanding of moral norms and values is briefly suggested. Second, in a review of literature from the anthropology of development, important aspects of the empirical importance of these norms and values to development practice are collected.

Based on this, the suggestion is made to consider norms and values as moral knowledge in order to analyse them as well as their role in policy processes. Fourth, this suggestion is linked with structuration theory, in order to point to the direction that a further conceptualisation of moral knowledge may take for development analysis. Instead of a summary, which was offered in this introduction, the last section contains a brief outlook.

## ***II. Terminological considerations: moral norms and values***

In this paper, *values* in general are understood as ideas of what makes something good, right or desirable, and according to which people evaluate things, situations etc. As a particular case of this, a value is a *moral* value to the extent that it qualifies one's relations with *others*: justice in a participation process would be a moral value, while the beauty of a project report may be a value, but would not readily be considered a moral one. Based on such values, *moral norms* are ideas of how one should generally act. Such norms may be held individually and/or collectively (as social norms). They may be concretised and formalised for instance as legal norms (e.g. norms of just taxation).

Note that these distinctions are analytical ones from moral *theory* (in a descriptive sense, i.e. of theory of how social practice is, rather than normative ethics as a theory of how practice ought to be, or be evaluated). The distinctions only serve to conceptualise and, later on, to analyse an *empirical* research object – such as for instance which particular norms and values that would be termed 'moral' according to this terminology are relevant, and how they are practiced, in a concrete context of development politics. Regarding the outline of an approach to researching the role of these norms and values in development<sup>1</sup>, this is important to note for a formal and a substantive reason.

The formal reason is this that the general understanding of 'what values are' may well differ in political practice as opposed to moral theory and to development research that draws upon distinctions from moral theory. In politics, human rights may be understood as values, while in ethics they may be understood as entitlements to

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<sup>1</sup> If not indicated otherwise, 'development' is used in the sense of a political *practice* (policy-making, implementation etc.) by development agencies, NGO etc. Following Thomas (2000), this meaning differs from development as *vision* of a better society, and from development as *historical process*.

values. Hence, as they are used in this paper, 'norms and values' are exogenous analytical notions of the researcher rather than emic notions of the actors themselves. They convey a perspective that tries to get some systematic grip on, and thus needs to differ from, the 'messiness of practice' that will be pointed to in the following section. Moreover, as part of this difference of analytical and emic notions, any understanding of what makes norms and values moral ones, and thus which norms and values are moral, is of course a culturally particular one. Moral ideas vary across contexts. Thus, despite the fact that much of the moral vocabulary in development practice stems from Western contexts (and these are heterogeneous, too), empirical research relating to the suggested terminology when looking at development practice in rural Northeast Brazil may encounter moral ideas that are well different from those in German academia.

The substantive reason is a conceptual *limitation*. The description of norms and values – notions of what one should do and how to evaluate things – as moral is only linked to an attribute of these norms and values *themselves*, namely that they concern one's action towards or as affecting others. The description does not imply to any extent that the motivation of people following these norms, or realising these values, is a moral one. Thus, one may observe a practice of norms and values in concrete development contexts that would be termed moral in this terminology – namely that people use explicitly moral terms like 'distributive justice', or that they deal with explicitly moral issues like the distribution of access to drinking water, but this practice may be motivated strategically. Nevertheless, as the conceptual limitation would imply, no matter what the motivation behind their practice, these norms and values would be termed moral.

### **III. Background: moral norms and values in development practice**

What does the literature on development state regarding the role of moral norms and values? This needs to be scrutinised in advance in order to suggest an empirically informed conceptualisation of this role. In the following, seminal works from the anthropology of development are reviewed to gain a first picture. The constitutive feature of this research is the more or less critical ethnography and analysis of development practice, in particular the interaction between (donor) development agencies and 'beneficiaries'. Thus, the very field of research is 'Aidland' (Apthorpe, n.d.), understood as a setting of political interaction with its own particular institutions, meanings, life-styles etc. In order to make the envisaged research approach plausible, these works are differentiated into those that focus on agency aspects vs. those that focus on structural aspects.

At the outset, note that the literature addresses the moral facet of development interaction mainly in an opposition of (normative) policy vs. (deviant, resisting etc.) practice. Policies as normative statements of how, and where to, development ought to be done, i.e. notions such as 'accountability of development agencies', are rather explicitly moral. The moral facet of individuals' action as related to and embedded in such framing notions and policies seems less present in the literature.

*Appropriation, brokerage/translation, interfaces: agency in development arenas*

A major strand of German anthropology of development has developed from the 'theory of strategic groups', a theory on collective agents of societal change (Evers/Schiel 1988). Analyses in this tradition have shown how aid resources are *appropriated* ('aid as loot', Beck 1990) in the strategic cooperation of actors, for instance in development projects (Bierschenk 1992). For instance, Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan (1997, 2003; see also L. Engberg-Pedersen 2003) show how 'participation' is diverted from its official intention when actors strike the donor's participation chord by staging participatory practice in order to secure the influx of aid. Thus, these analyses point to policy-deviant agency and the undermining of those normative policies that are actually intended to frame practice.

Related to this and other research recurring on the notion of appropriation, another strand of literature has approached development practice based on the notion of *brokerage* (Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan 2000; see also Neubert 1997). This "new social category" (Bierschenk et al. 2002) has emerged from observing how some actors manage to manoeuvre in the complex arenas of development, and how they gain access to resources by mediating between different groups and their respective rationalities, interests and practices. More than the perspective of resource appropriation, this category points to the constructive, functional adaptation or manipulation of policies: the mediation activity helps managing a structurally complex setting of multiple and heterogeneous (moral) communities. A recent collection (Lewis/Mosse 2006) has complemented this work by referring to the notion of *translation*. This notion was not so much understood in the sense of mediating between already existing arrangements and systems of meanings, norms and values. Rather, it points to the co-production of these social realities, the mutual enrolment of actors in the creation of the very context in which brokerage and other practices take place.

The notions of brokerage and translation thus raise the question to what extend moral terms like 'participation' are both results of translational processes and, at the same time, conditions for brokerage. Therefore, one would need to look at how the meaning of such term is created in interaction, and how it functions for instance as a

cross-ideological boundary concept. This, together with the aspect of the strategic manipulation and, consequently, undermining of policies in order to secure access to and appropriation of resources will be addressed more explicitly in section IV.

This perspective on development as translational practice, including the practice and creation of moral terms, also builds upon the ideas of discontinuity, *discrepancy* and interface. These ideas have been put forward especially by the Wageningen development sociology (Long 2001, Arce/Long 2000, 1992), which approaches development as a constellation of distinct social fields in which knowledgeable agents pursue projects. These social fields are heterogeneous, transitory outcomes of continuous struggles over resources, meanings *and values*. Among each other, the fields are considered discontinuous, though in a complex rather than clear-cut way. The approach assumes that there are distinctive points where discrepant knowledge, values etc. intersect. These 'interfaces' are the analytical entry point for understanding social practice as a manifestation of agency, especially across distinct social fields.

This perspective on the intersection of different moral systems points especially to how norms and values are heterogeneous (in and across social fields), contested (by agents when they 'pursue projects') and (therefore) dynamic. The approach has been criticised for picturing agents in an overly exclusive manner as strategic – rather than also moral etc. – agents. This tendency has to be understood as a (side-) effect of the approach's intention to balance an overly structuralist perspective on development by deconstructing development intervention to show its complex dynamics. Seeing "development as process" (Mosse et al. 1998) is a similar dynamisation of the analysis. It was recognised that in development projects even procedures, rather than being mechanic, are subject to endogenous change.

This has led to focusing the unintended and *unmanageable* side of development; development is understood as a process in which (normative) order, as it is expressed in policies, is created in struggles out of contingency. Thus, it needs explanation how order emerges despite the contingency and messiness of interaction. Given a limited implementability of policy, this view sees practice and policy as autonomous of each other (Mosse 2005a). Rather than carried out in practice, policies are performed in representations of practice (for instance in reports, "after the fact", p. 28), in which a project's success is fabricated in order to maintain support for it.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the already mentioned aspect of development as a process of *creating* (moral) order, this perspective points to the orderly *representation* of actually 'unordered', or differently ordered, practice. It also links the moral side of development to the management not only of the unimplementability of policies, but also of the

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<sup>2</sup> This is similar to public policy analysis' recognition of 'backward' moves: policies are first adopted ('practiced') and *then* problems are (re-) formulated accordingly (Hill 2005: 89).

aforementioned interfaces between different forms of knowledge, i.e. the “contingent struggle between different kinds of knowledge, including the moral” (Quarles van Ufford/Giri/Mosse 2003: 20).<sup>3</sup>

#### *Discourses of development and the structural facet of moral norms and values*

Agency related to moral norms and values needs is situated in and related to situational and structural contexts. Agents draw upon, manage, resist to and change structural elements of interaction – including normative policies.

This structural side has been addressed particularly in a Foucault-inspired perspective, seeing development as a Western-modern hegemonic discourse that actively construes its objects in order to submit it to its interests: Ferguson (1990) held that the World Bank in its country report considered Lesotho an agrarian economy, thereby becoming able to apply its instruments for agrarian change. By such construction of societies as objects of policies, the Western ‘development’ machinery would structure power relations and interaction (Escobar 1995, Sachs 1992, Hobart 1993, Crush 1995). In that perspective, normative frameworks stemming from and implying culturally particular systems of – also moral – norms and values are imposed by the ‘development machine’ onto other cultural and moral contexts.

Seen as an overly monolithic, mechanic and one-dimensional picture of development, the approach was differentiated by pluralizing the notion of discourse (“Discourses of Development”, Grillo/Stirrat 1997), and it was pointed to the differences among actors, the internal heterogeneity of ‘Western thought’ (e.g. Crewe/Harrison 1998), and to actors’ reflexivity and agency.

Nevertheless, Rossi’s (2004) reconsideration of the Foucauldian perspective underlines that a dominant discourse may still “impose itself *in spite* of the interests and negotiations of different [...] actors” (p. 9) and needs to be taken serious, despite all context-specificity, internal complexity and agency. Similarly, in their analysis of three pervasive development buzzwords, Cornwall/Brock (2005) show how dominant vocabulary continues to restrictively frame practice. Recognising that “words make worlds” (p. 17), they call for more attention to language.<sup>4</sup> Related to this, discourse analysis of environmental politics – a field as morally constituted as development – has

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<sup>3</sup> See also the contributions in Salemink et al. (2004), several of which focus on religious aspects of the morality of development, in sense of having particular moral aims and frames (‘development as ideology’) and being morally effective (the impact of development on moral-spiritual practice).

<sup>4</sup> See also the discourse analyses in Gouge (2003), *Ethnography* 2001(2), especially on the production of authoritative knowledge, and Gould/Marcussen (2004) with some contributions focusing on methodology (see also Apthorpe/Gasper 1996). The post-structuralist critique has been criticised as empirically weak (at least the earlier work, Watts 2001: 286) and for being a self-referential ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Quarles van Ufford/Giri 2003: 10f.).

analysed the “discursive nature of nature” (Dingler 2005), showing how the environment and its moral status are constructed discursively for policy argumentation. Combining the two fields, work carried out at IDS (Sussex University) shows the discursively structured, though negotiated and contested character of institutions and practice in natural resource management.<sup>5</sup>

With regards to moral norms and values, this inextricable interrelatedness of structural conditions of interaction and the agency taking place in it points to the following.<sup>6</sup> While development may be a process of continuous negotiation of meanings and (moral) values, at each point in time there *are* certain normative references that, however contingent and transitory, do influence – restrict and make possible – the agency of individuals. To understand how and to what extent discourses and other structural elements concretely shape practice, or are ignored, overcome and re-shaped by practice, is an empirical question. This general observation may be assumed to hold as well for the more specific case of moral structures (discourses) and practice.

Some studies have specifically addressed how development agencies are themselves stricken into (‘their own’) moral frameworks. Hanke (1996) has shown how a development bank struggles with contradictory expectations of its environment, namely to lend money to debtors with limited credibility and, at the same time, to make sure that this money is invested effectively, in morally good manner and with morally good outcomes. Needing to act (in that case: to invest), organisations thus undercut their own policies, or simply ignore deviance from policy (Quarles van Ufford 1993). Underlying such incompatibilities of moral frameworks and exigencies of stakeholders with real conditions of practice, there are also incompatibilities on the level of the framework itself. An example is the double-bind to a legitimising egalitarian rhetoric of partnership vs. a constitutive asymmetric idea of (Western) progress:<sup>7</sup> officially it is up to the target groups/partner countries, but – for equally moral reasons – aid remains conditional to their decisions being ‘the right ones’.

With regards to this, Rottenburg (2002) has reconsidered the staging of development as a merely ‘technical fix’. He interprets it as a shift to a ‘neutral’ discourse that is necessary to manage this moral double-bind: it maintains the moral

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<sup>5</sup> Leach et al. (2002), Fairhead/Leach (2003), Keeley/Scoones (2003). Goldman (2001) has analysed how ‘green knowledge’ is ‘fabricated’ in the World Bank.

<sup>6</sup> Another example for reminding the structural factors of interaction is Webster/L. Engberg-Pedersen’s concept of ‘political space’, taken to be more comprehensive than Clay/Schaffer’s actor-based concept of ‘room for manoeuvre’ in that it also considers the “broader conditions for political action” (2002: 19) that are sources of constraints of individual actors.

<sup>7</sup> See also Moore (2001: 183). In their analysis of the international development system, Degenbol-Martinussen/P. Engberg-Pedersen (2003: 1) point to this double-bind and a “tendency to obscure actual power relations by using words [...] that make it appear [...] collaboration between equal partners”.

idea of the partner countries' autonomy, but also allows for inducing donors' (at least presumably moral) ends – the moral and political character of which is hidden in the technical rationality of 'solutions'. The technical discourse then functions as a meta-code that enables negotiation; it is a means to overcome the ambivalent moral environment in which development practice takes place.

In some literature, not only technical but also moral discourses are understood as functional (rather than simply imposed and restrictive). Similar to Mosse's (2005b) argument of the representational function of moral-laden policy discourse, Kühl interprets development organisations' excessive use of buzzwords like 'accountability', 'capacity building' etc. as a means to secure public legitimacy for the organisation's practice (Kühl 2004). Moreover, moral notions may function as 'intellectual boundary objects' between different communities that need to make their respective ends, means and terminologies compatible. This strand of analysis thus complements the restrictive side with the constructive side of 'given' moral notions and concepts (and of discourses that give these notions and concepts particular meanings and order). Considering agency along with this structural aspect, changes in these moral notions, concepts and discourses can be seen not only as caused by their undermining, but also to their co-creation, as was pointed to by the notion of translation.

As conclusion from this overview, it seems appropriate to characterise development as highly *complex and ambivalent with regards to moral norms and values*: (1) Most generally, development is, or represents itself as being, a moral enterprise, officially structured by notions like participation, accountability etc. On the other hand, its practice is highly political. It is characterised by interests and strategies and, for instance and more specifically, the contestation and undermining of policy. (2) However, this general ambivalence needs to be seen in the light of the limited manageability of practice: it is not so much some strategic bad will of actors, but especially the complexity of interaction that impedes the realisation of normative policies – which, on the other hand, were to legitimate this interaction. (3) Adding to this policy/practice gap, policies themselves, as they result from processes of mediating interests, are often contradictory themselves. For instance policies (as well as practice to the extent that need to respond to a fundamental double-bind to an egalitarian rhetoric of partnership and, at the same time, to an asymmetric rhetoric of (Western) progress. (4) A main way of managing contradictory rhetorics, the political character of development is often concealed by staging and conducting development as a merely 'technical fix'. To the extent that this is the case, the ambivalence of the conditions of moral practice is perpetuated in the efforts of agents to deal with these conditions.

#### **IV. Conceptualising norms and values as *moral knowledge***

It is especially the last observation that leads to asking *how individual agents practice moral norms and values under these complex and contradictory conditions*. It is to this question that the paper offers a conceptual answer. The importance of the question results from the following *assumptions*:

(1) Given the moral load of the development enterprise and the pervasiveness of moral notions in policies and daily practice, it can be assumed that ‘the moral’ is a *general* facet of interaction. I.e. there is most often a moral side to what people say and do – be this because development issues are moral as such, because they are handled in moral terms, and/or because they are in fact handled with moral motives.

(2) Moreover, it may be assumed that these conditions of practice, and the ways people deal with them, *significantly influence* development practice. The way that people relate to moral norms and values in daily speech and (inter-) action, how they manage issues that are considered moral, and how they do so in moral terms, may be considered a key aspect for understanding policy processes and outcomes.

(3) Finally, in this paper people are thought of as being not only strategic agents in a self-oriented sense, but also *moral subjects*. They are (at least partly) embedded into a context of norms and values, and even (at least potentially) morally motivated. To understand their ways of practicing moral norms and values under the conditions of development solely as strategic (‘the cleverness of the target groups’) or moral (some Rousseau-inspired romantic idea of the ‘moral peasant’) would be a gross oversimplification.

Thus, in the following a suggestion is made to conceptualise the daily practice of moral norms and values by concrete individuals in a way that captures to at least some extent the complexity of the conditions of practice.

Firstly, it seems helpful to understand norms and values as *something else*, i.e. to shift these particular components of (development) interaction into an analytical category where other important components may figure as well. The intention of this is that it may facilitate considering moral norms and values and their role for practice alongside with, in comparison with, or even in a conceptually integrated manner with these other components. An example for this would be typical approach of new institutional economics that understand moral norms as but one particular kind of socially established, or at least effective, rules that govern behaviour in a predictable, reliable way and thereby reduce transaction costs of interaction.

However, given the importance of agency against policies as prescriptive ‘rules’ of development interaction, it seems odd, or at least incomplete, to consider moral norms and values as institutional rules if one aims at understanding why people

practice these norms and values as they in fact do. Following the literature review, both structural aspects (e.g. dominant moral discourse) and agency aspects (e.g. deviance from policies) matter for the practice of norms and values in development. Moreover, restrictive/strategic as well as constructive/cooperative facets of both structure and agency were identified. These two dimensions, as heuristic means, would cover quite a few aspects of the practice of moral norms and values in general. These aspects are that people, as *moral subjects* and members of moral communities who act conform to an established moral *framework*,

- (i) are *restricted* by this framework, as it allows for certain actions as adequate, just, good or the like, and that prohibits others;
- (ii) are also *enabled* by this framework to autonomous action, as they derive (moral) orientation from it, being able to decide upon alternatives of action according to this framework;

and that, as individual and *knowledgeable agents*, they can make use of moral norms and values as a *repertoire*, for instance in an

- (iii) individually or collectively *strategic* sense, for instance by ‘striking the donors’ participation cord, as was described by several ethnographies of aid, or by delegitimising one’s adversary’s positions by denouncing it as immoral;
- (iv) but also in a collectively constructive sense of deploying normative notions as boundary concepts that are flexible enough to embrace different rationales, interests etc., and that are somehow binding and thus uniting by their moral load, which fosters agreement to them.

Note that this is a *heuristic* matrix. It is not to suggest that concrete actions, utterances or intentions could be assigned unequivocally to one or more of the fields (i-iv). Whether observed structure-conform action of a moral framework is compliance with the rules or a positive orientation derived from this framework, and whether it stems from internalised values (e.g. individual “core beliefs”, Sabatier/Jenkins-Smith 1999: 122), less conscious routine, peer pressure or other social force, or all these at the same time, is a undoubtedly complex empirical question.

The suggestion is now to consider moral norms and values as moral knowledge, i.e. as a particular kind of knowledge. In a first effort of definition, this denotes the overall ensemble of moral norms and values that people relate to in thinking and interaction. It includes ‘*knowing that*’ something is (or is considered as) good, just etc., i.e. the knowing of the moral structures – discourses, systems of norms, the meanings and relations of value-notions etc. – as well as ‘*knowing how*’ to deal with a given, relevant system of norms and values. This differentiation is similar to the one by Mittelstraß (1982) between *Orientierungswissen* (orientative knowledge, i.e.

knowledge of justified ends and goals) and Verfügungswissen (instrumental knowledge, i.e. knowledge of causes and means that may be used to put goals into practice). However, what is meant here are not different entities of knowledge, but different ways of relating to (the same) entities of knowledge – for instance to a moral notion like ‘participation’. Moral knowledge thus means that the established moral framework of interaction that is restricting/enabling a person is, at the same time, a repertoire for action that the person may draw upon – in a way that may be restrictive for others or enabling her and/or others.

One reason why understanding moral norms and values as moral knowledge seems useful is that *before* ‘obeying’ to, or realising moral norms as well as before ‘instrumentalising’ them, people *know* them, and this knowing opens up the whole complexity of potential ways of practicing these norms and values. The notion of knowledge conveys a particular abstract relation of people to moral terms (namely that of knowing them) without, however, restricting by this how people concretely relate to these terms. For the analysis of real practice, this would mean that one could approach a broad variety of practices *but* in a specified perspective.

Related to this, the notion of knowledge does not only cover the different aspects mentioned above, i.e. different ways of how people relate to moral norms and values, but also for instance the aspect of different frameworks and repertoires – moral knowledges – being dynamic, created and dynamically interlinked. These aspects had been pointed to by the literature for instance in the terminology of ‘translation’ (Lewis/Mosse) and ‘interfaces’ (Long), though in the latter moral values would figure as one dimension of discontinuity *besides* (rather than *as*) knowledge. Again, the notion of knowledge seems to be most compatible with the idea of norms and values being socially co-constructed, and insights from the social constructivist sociology of knowledge should add to understanding how moral norms and values as particular entities of knowledge are created, loaded with meaning, reformed and embedded. Notions like the one of ‘local knowledge’, as opposed to some ‘global’ knowledge from which the former has contextualised certain elements, would be helpful for instance to understand how a particular set of ‘global’ development notions becomes contextualised, loaded with context-specific interpretations, relevance etc.

Also, similar to the idea of culture as text, understanding norms and values as moral knowledge would allow for picturing the intangible, immaterial, seamless but nevertheless somewhat structured, web-like character of an ensemble of norms and values – which makes it possible to look at discontinuities and interfaces between different ensembles without assuming well-defined, stable or even internally homogeneous and coherent frameworks and repertoires. If one considers moral norms

and values as knowledge rather than as an ordered framework, their interpretedness, internal dynamics and contestedness come to the fore even when one introducing a somewhat grouping perspective that takes some norms and values as 'the' ensemble that is relevant in a particular context.

Finally, in a particular strand of social theory, knowledge has been differentiated regarding how reflexive and conscious it is: Giddens' (e.g. 1984) distinction of 'practical' vs. 'discursive' consciousness raises the question to what extent people reflect on how they practice moral norms and values. To the extent that their practice is rather an expression of their ability to 'go on' as embedded agents, i.e. to move in a given setting that is also characterised by moral standards, they would thus relate to moral norms and values in a 'practical' manner. To the extent that they actively reflect upon the moral side of their decision, action etc., they relate to the same knowledge in an explicit, reflexive, 'discursive' manner. Again, using the notion of knowledge in order to capture may be helpful in that it allows for a further differentiation of the different ways of how people relate to norms and values. To give an example, relating to a moral notion as an integrative boundary object aspect (iv) may an act of highly reflected intention, so that we have a case of this notion being an element of discursive knowledge – but it does not need to be. It may just as well be practiced more intuitively, more like the intuitive change of register by an empathically communicating person – in that case, from the analytical point of view, the same moral notion would still be referred as a knowledge, though in a less 'discursive' and more 'practical' manner.

## **V. Structuration theory**

After having drafted several suggestions why it seems to be helpful for the analysis of development practice to conceive of moral norms and values as moral knowledge, a last aspect raised in the literature review needs consideration. While it needs further elaboration how this would link up in detail with the conceptualisation of norms and values as knowledge, the strand of social theory mentioned in the last paragraph, namely *structuration* theory as put forward by A. Giddens and others, addresses the structural aspect of morality (as framework) together with the agency aspect (as repertoire). So far, both aspects have been considered, but separately and statically. What needs to be taken into account in analysis, however, is not only how moral structure and morality-related agency are linked in the sense of how agency draws upon and is situated in structure. It also needs to be considered how agency – the undermining of policies, their contestation etc. – influences structure, i.e. the dynamic interdependence of structure and agency, and how this can be pictured with regards specifically to moral norms and values in development.

Put briefly, structuration theory assumes a recursive co-constitution of structure and agency: social structure orders and allows for social practices; performing these practices in agency draws upon and reproduces or changes structure.<sup>8</sup> There are two important consequences implied by this perspective. As a first consequence, none of the two elements can be *reduced* to the other. Structure is practiced and, and the same time, structures this practice ('duality of structure'); practice is structured and affects structure. Moreover, as a second aspect of this, structure is structure *by* being put into practice – it does not exist independent from practice. In the case of moral knowledge, this second aspect of the 'duality of structure' means that moral frameworks are not only 'always under practice', i.e. being implemented, contested and negotiated, are opposed to, but that these frameworks are frameworks *by* being practiced – especially by being practiced in a conform, affirmative way. This understanding of moral structure links the observation of 'translational' processes quoted in the literature review, i.e. the creative co-constitution of moral order in development arenas, to the structural effectiveness that these translated orders have *nevertheless*.

Furthermore, there is a seemingly paradox causal circuit involved, namely that moral values are values because they are practiced – and they are practiced because they are values. This circuit affects both the question of the *genesis*<sup>9</sup> of moral values in development (where do they 'come from', both in general and the concrete value notions that prevail?) and the question of the *effect* of moral knowledge on the policy process (which values count, how powerful are they, which practice to they affect etc.). Rather than avoiding this circuit as a dilemma, however, it needs to be taken into account – which leads to a second consequence of structuration theory. While the first consequence has a more ontological character, telling about how social realities may be assumed to be like, the second consequence is a more analytical one in that it tells how social realities may therefore be approached – in our case: how development may be approached regarding moral knowledge and its practice. Here, a point persistently made by Archer (1995) is that structure and agency should, despite all interdependence, be *kept distinct* in analysis (and ontology). This means that even a constant negotiation of moral knowledge needs to be analysed by drawing a line at some point in time; the circuit of recursively linked structure and agency needs to be broken up analytically by taking one state of moral knowledge as given *and then* practiced, altered etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Stones (2005) provides an overview on the seminal contributions especially by A. Giddens (1984; see also Haugaard 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Joas (2001) offers a view on „the genesis of values“ that is based on neo-pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, seeing values as resulting from practice. Similarly, Wimmer (2004) has conceptualized in more detail the idea of culture (as a system of meanings) as the always transitory result of process of negotiations of meanings (see also Wright 1994).

## VI. Outlook

This paper is an attempt to conceptualise moral norms and values in a way that would facilitate the analysis of development interaction regarding the role of these norms and values. What has been tried is to capture different facets of development practice in this regard, as they had been identified in a literature review, in one category, namely the category of (moral) knowledge. Several suggestions were made as to why this may be helpful; connections were made with structuration theory in order to link the suggestion with a broader framework of social theory. What lies ahead?

First of all, it needs to be discussed whether the notion of knowledge *does* capture the several aspects of moral norms and values, as was held in the sections above; whether it is of use to capture all these facets by *one* category; whether *this* category is of advantage as compared to other categories; etc. Secondly, if moral knowledge turns out to be a plausible and helpful approach, how do *other* facets of development interaction (that are equally important for policy processes and their outcomes) fit in this picture? As *what other kinds of knowledge* would they figure? Thirdly, apart from the rather abstract structuration theory, how can the idea be substantiated drawing upon more concrete theories of how people produce, rely on and deal with knowledge – for instance the already mentioned sociologies of knowledge? Which other theories of knowledge would enrich the perspective? Etc.

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