What if We Loved the Poor?

By Eric Meade

Abstract

This article explores what the future might look like if strategies to reduce poverty were centered on love for the poor. First, the author provides a conceptual description of parenthood, drawing on complexity theory and developmental psychology. The author then shows that the same concepts apply to poverty reduction. These concepts serve as the basis for the description of a visionary scenario for the year 2030 in which poverty has been significantly reduced through strategies centered on love for the poor. The author then addresses a potential critique, arguing that, while rejecting this approach as "paternalistic" protects against the intentional denigration of the poor, it also constrains our thinking and delays the day when global poverty will ultimately be eliminated.

Introduction

This article is about love. Love is a term seldom mentioned in connection with poverty reduction, where one is more likely to hear terms like "effectiveness," "incentives," and "accountability." But isn't it love that impels us to act when we see other people suffering? Isn't it love that animates the actions and efforts of organizations and individuals around the world to reduce poverty? Isn't love always present? This article will put that love front and center to consider what the future might look like if we based strategies to reduce poverty on love for the poor. It is useful to begin by considering how we approach the most vulnerable people in our own lives: our children, and to use the example of a parent's love for a child as a starting point for discussing how an approach to poverty reduction could be centered on love.

The Parental Challenge

Raising a child is a complex task. As every father who has ever driven a newborn infant home from the hospital knows, there are no rules for this, nor is there any guarantee of success. Outcomes are shaped by a wide variety of factors and influences, many of which are beyond a parent's control. Thus, there is no way to plan in advance the life one would like one's child to have. And no parent ever knows at the beginning what the task will ultimately require.

Yet there is a growing field of study that can help us grapple with the complexity of raising a child. Complexity theory describes systems characterized by such properties as interdependence, feedback loops, emergence, surprise, chaos, and co-evolution (Prigogine, 1981; Gleick, 1987;Waldrop, 1992). Complexity theory takes us beyond determinism, which strives for certainty through objective logics in which a given set of causes will necessarily and predictably produce a certain set of effects. By contrast, complexity theory acknowledges that non-linearity, adaptation, and even random chance play important roles.

The constructs of complexity theory are useful in describing the lives of children. For example, unexpected patterns can suddenly emerge among a group of teenage friends, as in the 2008 case of

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a "pregnancy pact" at a Massachusetts high school, in which a group of female students agreed to get pregnant and raise their babies together (Kingsbury, 2008). Attending preschool can give a child a leg up in kindergarten, initiating a positive feedback loop of teacher praise (a so-called "virtuous circle") that spurs the child toward academic excellence. A seemingly innocuous friend can prompt a nonlinear change in a child's peer group whereby he or she "gets mixed up with the wrong crowd." A chance encounter with a good book can launch a lifelong passion.

While childhood is complex, it is not completely chaotic. There is an underlying order that guides a child's life. This underlying order is provided by a parent's love. In the vocabulary of complexity theory, parental love acts as a strange attractor. As the name suggests, this is one of the more surprising findings of complexity theory. A strange attractor constrains a complex system to a certain range of possible conditions, just as a parent may punish a child when the child's behavior exceeds certain boundaries. Also, a strange attractor exerts influence on a complex system to follow a certain evolutionary trajectory, just as a parent tries to guide a child toward a successful and fulfilling life. A parent does this in two ways that are anticipated by complexity theory: first by setting initial conditions and then by developing the child's own capacities to survive and thrive.

Complex systems are highly sensitive to initial conditions. For example, in the case of a ball being dropped onto an upward pointing wedge, a very slight change in the wedge's position will dramatically alter where the ball goes when it hits it. In raising their children, parents can leverage this sensitivity to initial conditions by, for example, providing a safe home environment, securing a good education, scheduling routine medical check-ups, etc. Even before birth, good maternal health and prenatal care can set the initial conditions for a child's success. For example, a mother with dental cavities during pregnancy has a higher likelihood of giving birth prematurely to a low-birth weight baby. Examples of initial conditions later in life include talking to children about sex, putting a lock on the liquor or gun cabinet, and making sure children get a good night's sleep before an exam.

In a deterministic world where a certain set of causes necessarily and predictably produces a certain set of effects, parental actions such as these might be sufficient to ensure a favorable outcome. In a complex world such as ours, however, parents also need to prepare a child for situations in which the child will have to make decisions on his or her own. As complexity theorist Yaneer Bar-Yam has written, "The rule of thumb is that the complexity of the organism has to match the complexity of the environment at all scales in order to increase the likelihood of survival" (Costa, 2010: 2). This is not just a matter of intelligence. There are other capacities to consider, such as self-control and long-term thinking, which have a profound influence on a child's life outcomes (Moffitt et al., 2011).

Developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget (1932), Erik Erikson (1950), Jane Loevinger (Loevinger and Wessler, 1970), Robert Kegan (1994), and others have mapped the process by which these capacities develop. This paper will use Loevinger's model of ego development, which regards the ego as the subjective frame of reference that forms the locus of one's identity. This frame of reference becomes qualitatively more complex through a fixed sequence of stages, with the highest stage reached varying from person to person. Like a set of Russian nesting dolls, each stage offers a more complex identity and the capacity to think in more complex terms. Thus, parents can set their children up for success by promoting their subjective development through these stages.

Loevinger's model describes the following stages: an Impulsive stage where the child is "a creature of physical needs and impulses, depen-

dent on others for control [with] little sense of causation"; a Self-Protective stage characterized by "more or less opportunistic hedonism [and a] lack [of] long-term goals and ideals"; a Conformist stage where the child "identifies self with the group or its authority [and] rules are accepted just because they are the rules"; a Self-Aware stage where the maturing child becomes "aware that not everyone … conforms perfectly all the time"; a Conscientious stage where "decisions are made for reasons [and] achievement is highly valued"; an Individualistic stage where the person "has a sense of individuality [and a] greater tolerance for individual differences"; an Autonomous stage characterized by "a deepened respect for other people and their need to find their own way and even make their own mistakes"; and an Integrated stage which few ever reach but that is similar to Maslow's description of a "self-actualizing person" (Hy and Loevinger, 1996: 4-7).

Because these stages are qualitatively different, the transitions between them are nonlinear. These transitions bring a fundamental change in how people view the world and themselves; they are the reason we sometimes say, "If I had known then what I know now." According to Kegan (1994), what is significant about these moments is that what had previously been the subject of experience (what the individual referred to as "I") becomes merely one object in a larger, more complex system, which the person now sees as the "I". The new identity transcends and includes the previous identity.

A subset of these transitions can be found in the field of criminology, where Sampson and Laub (2005: 34) have used the term "turning points" to describe the moment when a criminal decides to desist from criminal activity. Sampson and Laub note that these turning points consistently have several features in common, such as "situations that provide an opportunity for identity transformation and that allow for the emergence of a new self or script." Examples of these situations include getting married, being drafted into the military, and getting a new job. In this way, development results from the complex interplay between the individual and the environment.

Generations of parents have populated childhood with just the kinds of situations that Sampson and Laub suggest can promote a turning point. Scouting trips, first communions, summer camp, b'nai mitzvah, youth sports, senior proms, and graduation ceremonies all provide enough of an increase in status, freedom, or responsibility to challenge the child to grow, without risking a major setback. This is consistent with Kegan's view (1994) that development is fostered best when environments support children where they are (developmentally) while challenging them to go further. These symbolically supported turning points serve as feedback loops where elders help young people move along life's journey.

From this perspective, we can see how vital a parent's love is in guiding a child toward success and fulfillment. First, it constrains the system, defining situations that will not be tolerated. Second, wherever possible it sets initial conditions for the child's success. Third, it respects the child's ongoing development and provides an environment that supports the child where he or she is in that development. Fourth, it challenges the child with a graduated sequence of life events that stimulate the development of new capacities and a more complex identity. Love is a powerful force in the relationship between parent and child. But can this description of the parental challenge also inform our thinking on poverty?

The Poverty Challenge

Complex Environments

Like raising a child, reducing global poverty is a complex task. In 2005, 49% of the world's population lived on less than $2.50 per day. Many of these people live in places where legal systems, political freedoms, health infrastructure, and eco-

nomic opportunity are inadequate if they exist at all. War, terrorism, rampant crime, and other forms of violence often present further challenges to populations that are already struggling to survive.

Here again, we can find constructs from complexity theory. Collier (2007) notes the interdependence of multiple factors in his description of a "poverty trap," where low income, poor health, inadequate education, and other variables reinforce each other to keep people poor. Emergence and non-linearity can be seen in recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Middle East, where widespread protests were triggered by a seemingly minor incident of oppression. We can also find negative feedback loops, as in the case of a poor child whose work is graded by a middle-class teacher whose expectation that the poor are ignorant ultimately undermines the child's interest in learning. Sensitivity to initial conditions can be seen in the notion of a "resource curse," where an oil-rich country will have less desirable outcomes (for example, more corruption) than a similar nation that lacks resource wealth.

Conventional economics has traditionally ignored this complexity. Instead, economists have applied a more deterministic approach in which they seek to identify "causes of growth." Easterly (2002) has chronicled shifts in world expert opinion as to what causes development to occur, pointing out that none of the proposed causes was successful on its own. Sixty years of development experience has shown that poverty is far too complex to be eliminated by a single strategy or policy. There is no way to plan in advance the outcomes that our efforts will have. Rather, we must think more complexly about the problem of poverty and find new ways to increase the likelihood of the outcomes we desire.

Stages of Development

Before we address the relevance of stages of development to poverty reduction, we first need to understand the distinction between objective and subjective ways of approaching a problem. The term "objective" refers to a truth that is independent of any individual's frame of reference. Thus, objective analysis seeks to describe what is—either what the system looks like right now, or how the system might be expected to behave in the past, present, or future. The term "subjective," however, accounts for differences in the frames of reference used by different observers. Thus, subjective analysis would seek to understand how and why different people see the same objective reality in different ways.

Conventional analysis tends to conceive of poverty in objective terms—for example, by counting the people living on less than $1 per day, or by assessing the adequacy of resources, institutions, and infrastructure. We are less likely to grapple with the subjective differences in how people respond to those objective circumstances. When the behavior of other people deviates significantly from how we ourselves behave—or think we would behave under the same circumstances—we typically describe the difference using objective categories like ethnicity, nationality (this is reinforced by the collection of data by country) and culture. This approach focuses on those differences between us and the other people that can be identified objectively from the outside. We rarely ask ourselves under what conditions we might exhibit the same behavior that to us seems so strange. Yet taking this approach would focus on what we and the other people have in common.

This important distinction can be seen in the domestic poverty discussion in the U.S., where researchers have attributed a certain set of behaviors to a so-called "culture of poverty." American political scientist Edward Banfield (1990: 61, emphasis original) describes these behaviors as follows:

> [T]he lower-class individual lives

> moment to moment. If he has any awareness of the future, it is of something fixed, fated, beyond his control: things happen to him, he does not make them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident: whatever he cannot consume immediately he considers valueless. His bodily needs (especially for sex) and his taste for "action" take precedence over everything else—and certainly over any work routine.

While the term "lower-class individual" demands precise definition, Banfield seems to describe many U.S. communities in which poverty persists. Banfield takes an objective perspective that addresses what is different between four samples (upper-class, middle-class, working-class, and lower-class), and then creates a category for each.

However, there is another perspective to consider: one that would explain the observed behavior in the context of what all people have in common. The behaviors attributed by Banfield to the "lower-class individual" also show up in descriptions of the early stages of psychological development. These stages are not cultural; they are nomothetic. That is, they apply universally to all people everywhere. For example, in Loevinger's Impulsive stage presented above, a child is completely dependent on others for survival. In the Self-protective stage:

> [Children at this stage] are creatures of more or less opportunistic hedonism; they lack long-term goals and ideals. They want immediate gratification and, if they can, will exploit others for their ends. Seeing interpersonal relationships as exploitative, they are themselves wary and self-protective. If they "get in trouble," it is because they were with the "wrong people" (Hy and Loevinger, 1996: 5).

The commonalities between the Banfield and Loevinger descriptions—impulsiveness, passivity, immediate gratification, a lack of long-term goals—suggest that the behaviors associated with poverty may indicate a lower stage of ego development. Compare, for example, Kegan's (1994:66) statement that at lower stages the future only exists as the "present-that-hasn't-happened-yet" to the conclusion of Banerjee and Duflo (2011: 229) that "perhaps this idea that there is a future is what makes the difference between the poor and the middle class."

In fact, empirical research using the assessment associated with Loevinger's model has consistently shown a high correlation between low ego development and low income or socioeconomic status (Loevinger, 1998). Furthermore, low ego development can convey across generations where elders create unhealthy environments for the development of the young. Research has shown that parents with relatively low ego level tend to act in ways that constrain the ego development of their children (Loevinger, 1998). An objective perspective could accurately describe this cross-generational persistence as a distinct "culture."

Applying models such as Loevinger's to the field of poverty reduction can help us understand behaviors that have confounded development practitioners in the past. For example, efforts to eradicate polio in northern Nigeria have been set back by a vaccination boycott organized by Muslim leaders, who relented only after Saudi officials administered the vaccine to them during the annual Hajj pilgrimage. While an objective perspective might attribute the boycott to "superstition and religious extremism" (York, 2010), a subjec-

tive perspective would recognize that decision-making at earlier stages of ego development is focused on doing what the respected elders say to do.

Another example is the fact that many poor business owners do not expand their businesses even when offered a loan by a microfinance institution (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011). Many microfinance experts routinely refer to their potential clients as "entrepreneurs." However, the use of this term can create expectations that many in poverty may currently be unable to meet. The term "entrepreneur" as it is used in developed countries implies a high level of long-term strategic thinking and competitive drive. Such traits are much less pronounced at earlier stages of ego development, where survival instincts and immediate gratification are the norm. Because these earlier stages appear disproportionately among poor populations, many poor business owners may be "entrepreneurial" in the sense of creating their own livelihood, but not in the sense of creating a self-sustaining enterprise.

Having made a link between poor populations and lower stages of development, what should we do with this new information? One option would be to take an objective perspective—for example, turning stages of development into a new set of categories for explaining how poor populations are different from us. This is what some readers, who are concerned about "paternalism," may believe that I intend to do. However, what I am actually suggesting is that a motive similar to a parent's love for a child will make us more sensitive to the needs of the poor, and that we can only recognize these needs clearly when we are willing to see ourselves in them and accept them as they are. This makes the parenting analogy relevant. As with our own children, love requires us to take a perspective that not only notes our differences but also one that focuses on the identity and humanity we all share.

Consider the case of my 3-year-old daughter throwing a cup of yogurt across the room. If I want, I can analyze this situation objectively. She is a child and I am an adult. Throwing a cup of yogurt is against the rules. Punishment is warranted and I am in a position to give it. I could send her to her room, or I could forbid her from eating yogurt ever again. But I love my daughter. What she and I have in common far outweighs the distinctions (for example, adult/child) that divide us. As a result, I find the responses outlined above to be very unsatisfying.

My love for my daughter impels me to consider her behavior both objectively and within the subjective context of her own development. I recognize that acting out (for example, throwing the yogurt) is completely normal for her age. In fact, it is a signal of her emerging awareness that she can change her environment of her own will. While I may not like cleaning up the yogurt, I am proud of her initiative and I am thrilled to watch her as she grows up. My love impels me to place her behavior within the context of her own development, leading me to different conclusions than I would likely draw from an objective assessment alone. (Rather than shaming or punishing, for example, I may use diversion by introducing a new opportunity for her to behave appropriately, and then rewarding her appropriately.)

If we love the poor, then we begin to take a subjective perspective that puts many of the behaviors that correlate with poverty in a new light. For example, Daley-Harris (2010) tells of Wilson Maina, a microfinance client of Jamii Bora in Kenya, who at one point "was one of the most wanted criminals in the Mathare Valley slum in Nairobi. Wilson said he would rather die quickly from a policeman's bullet than die a slow death from hunger. That was why he had turned to crime." Facing a slow death from hunger, Wilson declared his independence from the cruel hand of Fate. Without condoning his crimes, can we at least admire the heroism of his declaration?

The same heroism can be seen in young

people living in poverty who are recruited by terrorist organizations. For many young extremists, perpetrating an attack is their way of saying, like my daughter and Wilson in their own ways, "I'm not going to take it anymore!" As one aspiring suicide bomber told an interviewer, "At the moment of executing my mission, it will not be purely to kill Israelis, the killing is not my ultimate goal. … My act will carry a message beyond to those responsible and the world at large that the ugliest thing for a human being is to be forced to live without freedom" (Post, 2007: 231).

What about corruption? Imagine a mid-level official who has somehow (perhaps through family connections) attained a position of authority but has not yet developed to the point where he has internalized social norms, such as rules and laws. To an outside observer who has internalized these things, the official's use of institutional power to take care of his own tribe (whether figuratively or literally) counts as "corruption." For example, Amartya Sen (1999: 275) defines corruption as "the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit."

In many cases, that is probably true. But if the bureaucrat has not yet internalized these rules, then from his perspective he is simply using the power he has to get what he can to benefit those with whom he most closely identifies. In such cases, corruption is more effectively reduced not by tougher enforcement of rules but by facilitating the internalization of rules by those who hold power. And this is precisely the approach we use with our own children to "socialize" them into good citizens. As Sen (1999: 276) points out, "in societies in which corrupt behavior of the standard type is quite unusual, the reliance is, to a great extent, on compliance with codes of behavior rather than on financial incentive to be non-corrupt."

Developmentally, we can think of this kind of corruption in two ways. As discussed above, it can be seen as the self-centered use of institutional power by a person who has not yet internalized rules and laws. But it also indicates a move upward from an earlier stage where this person would blindly follow his superiors without thinking for himself. This is the stage at which the person "is a creature of physical needs and impulses, dependent on others for control" (Hy and Loevinger, 1996: 4-5). This condition is even less conducive to success in a global economy, and for that reason the developmental progress indicated by corruption should in a sense be welcomed.

My purpose here is not to condone corruption, terrorism, criminality, or even throwing yogurt. The point is that if we loved the poor as we love our own children, we would view their behavior in the context of the stage of development represented by the person exhibiting the behavior. (For example, if my wife had thrown the yogurt, it would have been a totally different story.) Now there may be some readers who will decide there are some people in this world whom they just cannot love. But I suggest that in a future where we are willing to love everyone, we will find new ways to reduce not only poverty but a host of other problems as well.

Turning Points

Because the stages of development addressed above are qualitatively distinct, the transitions between them are non-linear. The field of poverty reduction already offers plenty of examples of this kind of transition. Consider the experience of Jorimon Khan, a Bangladeshi woman who took the initiative to improve her own life through microfinance. As Khan herself says:

I always believed that God would provide, but we kept waiting. My children were starving to death. … At first [when I heard about the Grameen Bank] I was afraid to take the loan. People told me that if I didn't repay it, the bank people would kill me for the money. So yes, I was very scared. But when I finally paid back that first $10, I felt brave. So I asked for more money. After that

I asked for $33 (Whitaker, 2005).

In reading Khan's story, we find that the $10 loan she received was perhaps less significant than the change it seems to have prompted in how she viewed her own situation—from a world ruled by fear and magic to one in which she was master of her own fate. Was this a consequence of the $10 loan or of the supportive and challenging environment provided by the Grameen Bank's approach?

Grameen borrowers are not simply given a loan and sent on their way. They participate in groups of five women who are mutually accountable, and in which three women do not receive their loans until the first two women to receive loans begin repayment. Borrowers must commit to "Sixteen Decisions" that include a wide range of behaviors, such as repairing one's house, keeping one's family small, planting vegetables, and digging pit latrines (Grameen Bank, 2010). In this respect, engaging in Grameen Bank microfinance resembles activities (such as 4-H Clubs and the Girl Scouts) that we routinely insert in the lives of our own children to instigate growth and identity transformation.

Another opportunity for identity transformation was provided to a gang leader, called "the general," after his gang destroyed a market during the post-election rioting in Kenya in 2008. Microfinance institution Jamii Bora convinced the general and his gang to participate in the market's reconstruction, paying them to guard the materials at night and rebuild during the day. Afterwards, they involved the gang leader in microfinance, helping him create a legitimate microenterprise that built crates in which boarding school students could store their things. According to Daley-Harris (2009):

> [The general] came to [Jamii Bora founder] Ingrid [Munro] last year and told her that he hadn't gone to his home village for 13 years because his mother was so ashamed of him. But he had just gone home and his mother cried for three days because she was so happy about how he had turned his life around.

Turning points can also be found in the stories of child soldiers who decide to escape. As Beber and Blattman (2010: 16) have noted:

> For those who remain [with the Lord's Resistance Army of Uganda] for long periods of time, the decision to escape is usually associated with a moment of "awakening." "When I grew up," explained one young man, "I saw that everything [LRA leader Joseph] Kony said was false. If it were really true then the government could have been overthrown. And here the people he abducted before me had all escaped."

In all of these cases, the change that took place in the person's life was nonlinear, fundamental, and life-transforming. Daley-Harris (2010) has brought new attention to these changes, which reflect what he calls the "transformational dimension" of microfinance. In fact, any intervention can have a transformational dimension if it is structured in a way that prompts a turning point in how a person sees him or herself. In the same way, we could talk about the transformational dimension of youth sports, the Girl Scouts, or religious confirmation.

Unfortunately, turning points such as these have yet to be analyzed in a systematic or meaningful way so that they can be designed into development programs. Conventional analysis would dismiss such evidence as anecdotal, allowing the statistician to go on ignoring it when calculating the overall trend. David Roodman (2010) highlights the cognitive dissonance that results: "Seeing women crowd into a branch of the Lead Foundation [microfinance institution] in Cairo

to get new loans forced me to confront this paradox: Thanks to work on the computer back in the hotel room, I was concluding that there was little solid evidence that microcredit helps on average—yet who was I to tell these women what to do with their lives?"

What the statistician ignores is that—from the standpoint of complexity theory—it is often not the aggregate trend but rather what is happening on the margins that matters most. Anecdotal evidence, if properly collected and analyzed, can point to the emergence of a fundamentally new state of affairs. People routinely ignore the margins, only to wake up one day and find that the patterns that emerged there have now become the norm, at which point they ask themselves, "How did that happen?" This raises an interesting question: Since it is fundamental, nonlinear change that we are trying to create in the lives of the world's poor, then why do we measure it primarily with aggregate, incremental measures?

Capturing and understanding these nonlinear "ah-ha moments" is central to understanding how people emerge from poverty. Turning points offer new capacities, new coping mechanisms, and new aspirations for a better life. The institutions, resources, and capabilities to which the development community pays much of its attention are necessary, but they are insufficient. The grinding poverty felt by billions of people around the world is not simply a matter of low income, market failure, institutional weakness, or even social exclusion. It is also a poverty of "ah-ha moments"—of turning points that provide new capacities and a broader sense of self.

A successful approach to poverty reduction would in many ways resemble the way we raise our children. First, we would establish safe, secure environments through clearly articulated ground rules supported by objective penalties and incentives. Second, we would set initial conditions where possible, for example, by providing access to basic nutrition, health care, and education. Third, we would appreciate the subjective development that occurs in all people, and we would meet people where they are. Fourth, we would deliberatively structure interventions to prompt turning points in the lives of those suffering from poverty, and we would develop the tools needed to identify when a turning point had taken place

A Vision for 2030

Imagine that the year is now 2030. Global poverty has been reduced significantly through efforts that were explicitly centered on love for the poor. This love required the rich of the world to change their approach to poverty in three important respects.

First, they were forced to confront the complexity and specificity of the situations in which individual people lived. Simplistic approaches and aggregate measures would no longer suffice. Second, love called upon them to meet poor people where they were, just as a parent appreciates the ongoing developmental process taking place in a child. This spurred an interest in psychological and sociological factors that had often been ignored by development experts in the past. Third, love required being present with people in poor communities as they faced the challenges of their own lives. Rather than prescribing policy from above, love called upon the rich to consciously design environments that promote each person's development to their optimum potential.

To grapple with the complexity, policy makers applied the learning of complexity theory, which had already prompted major shifts in thinking in other disciplines. This new thinking laid bare the inadequacy of deterministic models for prescribing policy and assessing impact, but provided a broader framework for setting the initial conditions that would tend to make favorable outcomes more likely.

At the most basic level, these initial conditions included good maternal health and prenatal care, which research suggested was a sine qua

non for a healthy human life. For children, access to healthy food, primary care, and good education became important as initial conditions. For students and those of working age, access to the Internet and other information technologies emerged as prerequisites for success in the twenty-first century. Policies were designed to set these initial conditions for the highest possible proportion of human beings living around the world. For example, a major push to expand wireless Internet access facilitated the creation of an online health information platform that could be accessed by people in poor communities around the world.

The massive expansion of Internet access and the integration of social networks into many aspects of life provided researchers with a wealth of new data. Mapping platforms allowed researchers to organize this data in order to understand the dynamics of social systems and community life. Areas where rich and poor thrive together, and where churches, schools, and networks of wise elders help people navigate through transitions to higher stages, were acclaimed and imitated. In more challenged areas, researchers used the mapping platforms to identify interdependencies and feedback loops that might be roadblocks to more positive development outcomes. These maps also provided input to agent-based models that allowed new policies and interventions to be tested and enhanced in virtual space before they were implemented in the real world.

The need to "meet people where they were" prompted an honest assessment of the expectations that development organizations had historically placed on poor communities. In many cases, these expectations were found to reflect not what poor people should do but rather what the rich people would do if they were confronted with similar circumstances. These expectations were often beyond the capacity of poor populations to achieve. Research showing the effects of adverse environments on human health (physical, social, and psychological) made development organizations more aware of the reduced capacities that often existed in highly stressed communities. Many policy makers recognized that improving these capacities was an important contributor to development efforts.

Development practitioners came to understand that improvements in these capacities often occurred through non-linear change—that is, through a fundamental shift in a person's perspective. The challenge then became figuring out how to engineer turning points that would mark the emergence of more complex perspectives. Some interventions, such as microfinance as practiced by the Grameen Bank, were found to already include features that prompted such turning points, and many were retroactively designed into existing social and economic interventions. In other cases, even the delivery of basic services was altered so as to maximize the personal growth of the recipients, allowing "co-production" of outcomes by donors and beneficiaries.

Technology offered new ways to engineer turning points. With so many social and economic interactions taking place online, development organizations were able to scan social networks to find people who had encountered a life event that would make a turning point more likely. Once such a person had been identified, they were contacted by a virtual mentor, often drawn from the overseas diaspora of their own community. This mentor would then help the person navigate through a period of transition by offering new ways of thinking about the problem at hand. In many cases, similar relationships emerged organically as new social networks linked diaspora communities to people in their country of origin.

By 2030, corporate social responsibility has evolved to a new relationship between business and society, in which businesses—like other stakeholders—are called on to promote human health and development in all forms. Business models that exploit those at lower stages of development,

such as payday lending and the selling of tobacco and unhealthy food and beverages, have been widely discredited, regulated, or banned. Marketing frameworks that long segmented consumers into developmental categories either explicitly (Young and Rubicam, n.d.) or implicitly (GfK Ukraine, 2009) have now been broadly rejected as exploitative. Business models for health promotion and community development, as well as online games that prompt turning points in players' lives, are universally accepted and respected.

The most remarkable application of this approach has been in efforts to reduce persistent social ills, such as crime, terrorism, and corruption. Whereas punishment for these offenses had previously been lifelong or life-ending, the widespread acceptance of restorative justice allowed authorities to engage these offenders in their own rehabilitation. While major offenses are still met with severe punishment, minor offenses are often seen by authorities as "teaching moments"—that is, as opportunities to shake up a worldview that is harmful to the perpetrator and to others.

In the two decades leading up to 2030, these efforts have not just helped billions of people around the world emerge from poverty; they have also improved the quality of life for the rich. Research has shown that positive emotions—for example, hope, love, faith, awe—are integral to a healthy, successful life. A global effort to reduce poverty has cultivated these emotions, and has made the lives of all people more meaningful. Compassion for others has become a central value of global society, one that is passed on to younger generations. With its explicit focus on love, the global success in reducing poverty has become a major source of pride and purpose for people around the world.

Back to the Present

While the visionary scenario for the reduction of global poverty between now and the year 2030 offered above may at first glimpse seem improbable, its plausibility is supported by the fact that many key drivers of this scenario already exist. For example:

- The Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI) and Outcome Mapping already reflect a move toward more sophisticated and holistic measures of impact. Some development organizations, such as the UK's Overseas Development Institute (Ramalingam & Jones, 2008), have already begun to apply complexity theory to the field of development.
- Mapping platforms like the Healthy Development Management Tool (www.thehdmt.org) and Ushahidi.org suggest an increasing ability to understand community dynamics at a local level.·
- WHO Patient Safety (2011) is developing a patient-held device to reduce infant mortality, particularly in the first week of life. The device will provide mothers with health knowledge and timely access to skilled medical care.
- The integration of "geotagging" into social networking platforms, such as Foursquare.com and Yelp.com, could enhance our understanding of how community dynamics affect individual people. This would open up an opportunity to intervene as described in the scenario.
- The recent upheavals in the Middle East can be viewed not just as political movements but also as the coming of age of a massive generation of young people. This is focusing attention on the young age structures that exist in many developing countries, and on the specific needs of young people.
- The growth of meditation, yoga, and other spiritual practices that emphasize compassion suggests that an important conversation about compassion may be emerging. Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion (Council of Conscience, 2009), which was created after she won the TED Prize in 2008, may prove to be an important statement in this regard.

While plausible, this scenario I have offered will require concerted action on the part of many

diverse stakeholders. For example, investments in technology will be needed to develop new platforms for intervening in poor communities. New research will be necessary to design models that will help leaders anticipate potential first- and second-order consequences of new policy initiatives. New methods for impact assessment will be needed that emphasize how much learning can occur from both success and failure, and that appreciate how interdependence and random chance inevitably influence outcomes. Turning this scenario into reality will require a huge effort on many fronts, but if we are successful we will change billions of lives for the better.

Concluding Thoughts

What I have presented here is a theoretical description of the complex challenge of raising a child, and an application of this description to the complex challenge of reducing poverty. In both cases, there are many interdependent factors in play. There is no way to predict the outcome, and one must rely on one's personal values (for example, love) to navigate a wide range of unfamiliar situations. Also in both cases, success can have as life-changing an effect on the benefactor as it does on the beneficiary, for raising a child and reducing poverty both help to ensure the future of humanity.

There may be some readers who reject this approach out of hand as "paternalistic," and thus inappropriate. I acknowledge this concern and will attempt to address it explicitly. There is good reason to be skeptical of any model that locates poor populations at an earlier point along some trajectory of development. History provides too many examples where models of this sort were expounded in an effort to subjugate or denigrate peoples around the world, or to assimilate them to Western religion or culture. More recently, policy initiatives to reduce aid to the poor have often been couched in terms like "compassionate conservatism."

But while skepticism in this regard may protect us from those who would intentionally deny others the human dignity to which they are entitled, it can also constrain our thinking and postpone the day when persistent poverty will finally be eradicated. One key implication of the argument made in this paper is that development organizations often place expectations on poor populations that those populations cannot meet. There is considerable evidence to support this point of view. I have already mentioned that research using Jane Loevinger's Sentence Completion Test has consistently found a correlation between low ego level and low income (Loevinger, 1998).

There is also evidence that those living in areas with a high prevalence of disease may have lower levels of intelligence because the energy required for brain development is diverted to immune response (Eppig et al., 2010). It would be inhumane to ignore this evidence and its implications for the expectations we often place on the poor. But ignore it we do. Instead, we err heavily on the side of thinking that all people have the same capacities we do, no matter what. We assume that all they need is a job, a schoolhouse, a doctor's visit, and so forth. Certainly they need all these things, but they also need healthy environments that help them reach the stages of development where they can best leverage these resources to improve their own lives.

Because we assume all people have the same capacities, we focus on holding them accountable for how they use the resources we provide them with; often, we decide that they have come up short. The result is a development policy that is quite paternalistic in practice, if not in theory. Strategies to strengthen accountability or to withhold funding until poor communities have achieved measurable outcomes on their own (Birdsall and Savedoff, 2010) are high on paternal discipline, but low on love.

We perpetuate this heavy-handed form of de-

velopment because we refuse to accept that many poor people are impoverished not only in their quality of life but also in the quality of their human experience. People living in poverty are generally (although with plenty of individual exceptions) denied not just material comfort but also the sense of meaning and purpose that come from a life well lived.

An initial skepticism toward the ideas presented here is surely warranted, given how seemingly similar ideas have been used to demean and shackle people in the past. But this initial skepticism cannot withstand the utter revulsion which is called forth by the tragedy of billions of people living life-long struggles for survival that end all too soon.

Compassion does not care who is placed above and who is placed below. Compassion does not recognize the categories of "us" and "them." Compassion calls on us—literally—to "suffer with" other people; there are no distinctions. As stated in the Charter for Compassion (Council of Conscience, 2009):

Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

To dethrone oneself and put another at the center of one's world—this is the love a parent has for a child. And it is this kind of love that has the power to eradicate poverty in the world. But are we ready to wield this power? Perhaps our reluctance to acknowledge the deep needs of the poor—beyond mere literacy, health, and income—reflects a reluctance to acknowledge our own deeper need for purpose and meaning. We can build a school here, a factory there, without ever having to confront the profundity of what we might accomplish if we really tried.

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