In Memoriam: James Midgley

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James Midgley, distinguished scholar of social development, social policy, and international social welfare, passed away on 21 June 2026. He joined the University of California, Berkeley, where he became Dean of the School of Social Welfare in 1997 and served as the Harry and Riva Specht Professor of Public Social Services until his retirement in 2016.

Before joining Berkeley, James taught at the University of Cape Town, the London School of Economics and Louisiana State University. Over a long and exceptionally productive academic career, he published widely on social development, social policy, international social welfare, and social protection. Among his best-known works are *Social Development: The Developmental Perspective in Social Welfare* (1995), *Social Welfare in Global Context* (1997), *Social Policy for Development*, with Anthony Hall (2004), *Social Development: Theory and Practice* (2014), and *Social Welfare for a Global Era* (2017).

James made a seminal contribution to understanding the relationship between social security, social assistance, and social protection, on the one hand, and economic and social development, on the other, particularly in the countries of the Global South. He was ahead of his time in challenging the view that social welfare and social security were merely remedial or redistributive interventions, separate from economic development. Instead, he argued consistently for an integrated approach in which social policies and economic development could be mutually reinforcing and contribute to inclusive and equitable development.

This concern was evident from his early work, including *Social Security, Inequality and the Third World* (1984), and continued through *Social Security, the Economy and Development*, with Kwong-Leung Tang (2008), and *Inequality, Social Protection and Social Justice* (2020). His *Advanced Introduction to Social Protection* (2022) further consolidated his contribution to this field. His final book, *Social Protection and Development: Growth, Welfare and Equity* (2026), published shortly before his death, fittingly returned to a central theme that ran throughout his scholarly life: the vital relationship between social protection, economic development, human welfare, and social equity.

James received numerous honors in recognition of his scholarship and contribution to the field. He was a member of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare and received three honorary doctorates, including, most recently, an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the University of Cape Town in 2020.

In remembering James Midgley, we honor both his groundbreaking scholarship and his enduring commitment to improving the socioeconomic conditions of people experiencing poverty and insecurity. His work was never concerned with theory alone. He sought to generate knowledge that could help researchers, practitioners and governments devise effective responses to the social and economic challenges facing their societies. As he notes in his last book, he

demonstrates that "social protection contributes to economic development, promoting productive employment, and maintaining economic stability"[i] and he adds in the postscript, that "social protection has made a positive contribution to development and fostered human betterment and progress. …These schemes have also met people's financial needs and reduced poverty, as well as enhancing human and social capital with beneficial implications for social welfare around the world. In addition, social protection plays a major role in economic development, promoting growth, investment, work, and stability" [ii] Thus, Jim not only forge a new approach to development and social policy, but also contributed to the improving the life of many.

We also remember Jim as a generous colleague, mentor, teacher, and friend. His influence extended far beyond the institutions in which he worked. Across countries and continents—from South Africa to Chile and well beyond—he supported and inspired generations of researchers, students, and practitioners. His intellectual generosity, openness to different perspectives and commitment to nurturing younger scholars were hallmarks of his academic life.

James Midgley embodied some of the finest qualities of academic life: intellectual curiosity and rigor, a commitment to scholarship in the service of human wellbeing, generosity towards colleagues and students, and an abiding belief that social policy could contribute to a more equitable world. While we mourn his passing, his ideas will continue to shape the fields of social development, social policy and social protection, and his influence will endure in the work of the many people whom he taught, mentored, and inspired.

References

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[i] James Midgley, Social protection and Development: Growth, Welfare and Equity, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, 2026 p.6

[ii] James Midgley, Op. Cit. 2026, p.171