,The Development Dictionary

A Guide to Knowledge as Power

Edited by
Wolfgang Sachs

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Introduction

Wolfgang Sachs

The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary.

Like a towering lighthouse guiding sailors towards the coast, 'development' stood as *the* idea which oriented emerging nations in their journey through post-war history. No matter whether democracies or dictatorships, the countries of the South proclaimed development as their primary aspiration, after they had been freed from colonial subordination. Four decades later, governments and citizens alike still have their eyes fixed on this light flashing just as far away as ever: every effort and every sacrifice is justified in reaching the goal, but the light keeps on receding into the dark.

The lighthouse of development was erected right after the Second World War. Following the breakdown of the European colonial powers, the United States found an opportunity to give worldwide dimensions to the mission their founding fathers had bequeathed to them: to be the 'beacon on the hill'. They launched the idea of development with a call to every nation to follow in their footsteps. Since then, the relations between North and South have been cast in this mould: 'development' provided the fundamental frame of reference for that mixture of generosity, bribery and oppression which has characterized the policies toward the South. For almost half a century, good neighbourliness on the planet was conceived in the light of 'development'.

Today, the lighthouse shows cracks and is starting to crumble. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished: development has become outdated. But above all, the hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted: development has grown obsolete.

Nevertheless, the ruin stands there and still dominates the scenery like a landmark. Though doubts are mounting and uneasiness is widely felt, development talk still pervades not only official declarations but even the language of grassroots movements. It is time to dismantle this mental structure. The authors of this book consciously bid farewell to the defunct idea in order to clear our minds for fresh discoveries.

Over the years, piles of technical reports have been accumulated which show that development does not work; stacks of political studies have proven that development is unjust. The authors of this book deal neither with development as technical performance nor with development as class conflict, but with development as a particular cast of mind. For development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions. Perceptions, myths and fantasies, however, rise and fall independent of

empirical results and rational conclusions; they appear and vanish, not because they are proven right or wrong, but rather because they are pregnant with promise or become irrelevant. This book offers a critical inventory of development credos, their history and implications, in order to expose in the harsh glare of sunlight their perceptual bias, their historical inadequacy, and their imaginative sterility. It calls for apostasy from the faith in development in order to liberate the imagination for bold responses to the challenges humanity is facing before the turn of the millennium.

We propose to call the age of development that particular historical period which began on 20 January, 1949, when Harry S. Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas'. The label stuck and subsequently provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South. However, what is born at a certain point in time, can die again at a later point; the age of development is on the decline because its four founding premises have been outdated by history.

First of all, it was a matter of course for Truman that the United States — along with other industrialized nations — were at the top of the social evolutionary scale. Today, this premise of superiority has been fully and finally shattered by the ecological predicament. Granted the US may still feel it is running ahead of the other countries, but it is clear now that the race is leading towards an abyss. For more than a century, technology carried the promise of redeeming the human condition from sweat, toil and tears. Today, especially in the rich countries, it is everbody's best kept secret that this hope is nothing other than a flight of fancy.

After all, with the fruits of industrialism still scarcely distributed, we now consume in one year what it took the earth a million years to store up. Furthermore, much of the glorious productivity is fed by the gigantic throughput of fossil energy; on the one side, the earth is being excavated and permanently scarred, while on the other a continuous rain of harmful substances drizzles down — or filters up into the atmosphere. If all countries `successfully' followed the industrial example, five or six planets would be needed to serve as mines and waste dumps. It is thus obvious that the `advanced' societies are no model; rather they are most likely to be seen in the end as an aberration in the course of history. The arrow of progress is broken and the future has lost its brightness: what it holds in store are more threats than promises. How can one believe in development, if the sense of orientation has withered away?

Secondly, Truman launched the idea of development in order to provide a comforting vision of a world order where the US would naturally rank first. The rising influence of the Soviet Union — the first country which had industrialized outside of capitalism — forced him to come up with a vision that would engage the loyalty of the decolonizing countries in order to sustain his struggle against communism. For over 40 years, development has been a weapon in the competition between political systems. Now that the East-West confrontation has come to a halt, Truman's project of global development is bound to lose ideological steam and to remain without political fuel. And as the world becomes polycentric, the scrapyard of history now awaits the category `Third World' to be dumped, a category invented by the French in the early 1950s in order to designate the embattled territory between the two superpowers.

Nevertheless, new, albeit belated, calls for development may multiply, as the East-West division gets absorbed into the rich-poor division. In this light, however, the entire project fundamentally changes its character: prevention replaces progress as the objective of development; the redistribution of risk rather than the redistribution of wealth now dominates the international agenda. Development specialists shrug their shoulders about the long promised industrial paradise, but rush to ward off the flood of immigrants, to contain regional wars, to undercut illicit trade, and to contain environmental disasters. They are still busy identifying deficits and filling gaps, but Truman's promise of development has been turned upside down.

Thirdly, development has changed the face of the earth, but not in the way it had intended. Truman's project now appears as a blunder of planetary proportions. In 1960, the Northern countries were 20 times richer than the Southern, in 1980 46 times. Is it an exaggeration to say that the illusion of `catching up' rivals on a world scale Montezuma's deadly illusion of receiving Cortez with open arms? Of course, most Southern countries stepped on the gas, but the North outpaced them by far. The reason is simple: in this kind of race, the rich countries will always move faster than the rest, for they are geared towards a continuous degradation of what they have to put forth: the most advanced technology. They are world champions in competitive obsolescence.

Social polarization prevails within countries as well; the stories about falling real income, misery and desperation are all too familiar. The campaign to turn traditional man into modern man has failed. The old ways have been smashed, the new ways are not viable. People are caught in the deadlock of development: the peasant who is dependent on buying seeds, yet finds no cash to do so; the mother who benefits neither from the care of her fellow women in the community nor from the assistance of a hospital; the clerk who had made it in the city, but is now laid off as a result of cost-cutting measures. They are all like refugees who have been rejected and have no place to go. Shunned by the `advanced' sector and cut off from the old ways, they are expatriates in their own country; they are forced to get by in the no-man's-land between tradition and modernity.

Fourthly, suspicion grows that development was a misconceived enterprise from the beginning. Indeed, it is not the failure of development which has to be feared, but its success. What would a completely developed world look like? We don't know, but most certainly it would be both boring and fraught with danger. For development cannot be separated from the idea that all peoples of the planet are moving along one single track towards some state of maturity, exemplified by the nations 'running in front'. In this view, Tuaregs, Zapotecos or Rajasthanis are not seen as living diverse and non-comparable ways of human existence, but as somehow lacking in terms of what has been achieved by the advanced countries. Consequently, catching up was declared to be their historical task. From the start, development's hidden agenda was nothing else

than the Westernization of the world.

The result has been a tremendous loss of diversity. The worldwide simplification of architecture, clothing, and daily objects assaults the eye; the accompanying eclipse of variegated languages, customs and gestures is already less visible; and the standardization of desires and dreams occurs deep down in the subconscious of societies. Market, state, and science have been the great universalizing powers; admen, experts and educators have relentlessly expanded their reign. Of course, as in Montezuma's time, conquerors have often been warmly welcomed, only to unveil their victory. The mental space in which people dream and act is largely occupied today by Western imagery. The vast furrows of cultural monoculture left behind are, as in all monocultures, both barren and dangerous. They have eliminated the innumerable varieties of being human and have turned the world into a place deprived of adventure and surprise; the 'Other' has vanished with development. Moreover, the spreading monoculture has eroded viable alternatives to the industrial, growth-oriented society and dangerously crippled humankind's capacity to meet an increasingly different future with creative responses. The last 40 years have considerably impoverished the potential for cultural evolution. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that whatever potential for cultural evolution remains is there in spite of development.

Four decades after Truman's invention of underdevelopment, the historical conditions which had given rise to the developmental perspective have largely disappeared. By now development has become an amoeba-like concept, shapeless but ineradicable. Its contours are so blurred that it denotes nothing — while it spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions. The term is hailed by the IMF and the Vatican alike, by revolutionaries carrying their guns as well as field experts carrying their Samsonites. Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner. The term creates a common ground, a ground on which right and left, elites and grassroots fight their battles.

It is our intention, as the authors of this book, to clear out of the way this self-defeating development discourse. On the one hand, we hope to disable the development professional by tearing apart the conceptual foundations of his routines; on the other hand, we would like to challenge those involved in grassroots initiatives to clarify their perspectives by discarding the crippling development talk towards which they are now leaning. Our essays on the central concepts in the development discourse intend to expose some of the unconscious structures that set boundaries on the thinking of our epoch. We believe that any imaginative effort to conceive a post-developmental era will have to overcome these constraints.

The development discourse is made up of a web of key concepts. It is impossible to talk about development without referring to concepts such as poverty, production, the notion of the state, or equality. These concepts first rose to prominence during modern Western history and only then have they been projected on the rest of the world. Each of them crystallizes a set of tacit assumptions which reinforce the Occidental worldview. Development has so pervasively spread these assumptions that people everywhere have been caught up in a Western perception of reality. Knowledge, however, wields power by directing people's attention; it carves out and highlights a certain reality, casting into oblivion other ways of relating to the world around us. At a time when development has evidently failed as a socio-economic endeavour, it has become of paramount importance to liberate ourselves from its dominion over our minds. This book is an invitation to re-view the developmental model of reality and to recognize that we all wear not merely tinted, but tainted, glasses if we take part in the prevailing development discourse.

To facilitate this intellectual review, each chapter will dip into the archaeology of the key concept under examination and call attention to its ethnocentric and even violent nature. The chapters identify the shifting role each concept has played in the debate on development over the last 40 years. They demonstrate how each concept filters perception, highlighting certain aspects of reality while excluding others, and they show how this bias is rooted in particular civilizational attitudes adopted during the course of European history. Finally, each chapter attempts to open a window on to other, and different, ways of looking at the world and to get a glimpse of the riches and blessings which survive in non-Western cultures in spite of development. Each chapter will be of worth if, after reading it, experts and citizens alike have to blush, stutter or burst out laughing when they dare to mouth the old word.

This book, it must be said, is the fruit of friendship. Above all, it is our gift to one another. Over the years, all of us authors, in various contexts and associations, have been involved in a continuous conversation, spending days or weeks together chatting, cooking, travelling, studying and celebrating. We shared our uncertainties and championed our convictions; we lived through confusion and hit upon sudden insights; we challenged our idiosyncrasies and enjoyed inspiration. Slowly and sometimes inadvertently, a common frame of reference emerged and informed, in turn, our individual work. De-professionalized intellectuals, this is our experience, derive life from friendship and common commitment; otherwise, how could non-academic research be sustained? In our case, this would not have been possible without the personal and intellectual magnetism of Ivan Illich, in particular, who brought a number of us together and animated our thinking throughout the years. In the fall of 1988, sitting on the porch of Barbara Duden's wooden house at State College in Pennsylvania, we drew up the plan for this book after an intense week of debate interrupted by cutting onions and uncorking bottles.

I would like to thank Christoph Baker and Don Reneau for their help with translations. I gratefully acknowledge the institutional support of the Science, Technology and Society Programme at the Pennsylvania State University, where we convened several consultations, and of the Institute for Cultural Studies in Essen, Germany, where I carried out the editorial work.

Development

Gustavo Esteva

To say 'yes', to approve, to accept, the Brazilians say `no' — *pois nao*. But no one gets confused. By culturally rooting their speech, by playing with the words to make them speak in their contexts, the Brazilians enrich their conversation.

In saying 'development', however, most people are now saying the opposite of what they want to convey. Everyone gets confused. By using uncritically such a loaded word, and one doomed to extinction, they are transforming its agony into a chronic condition. From the unburied corpse of development, every kind of pest has started to spread. The time has come to unveil the secret of development and see it in all its conceptual starkness.

The Invention of Underdevelopment

At the end of World War II, the United States was a formidable and incessant productive machine, unprecedented in history. It was indisputedly at the centre of the world. It was the master. All the institutions created in those years recognized that fact: even the United Nations Charter echoed the United States Constitution.

But the Americans wanted something more. They needed to make entirely explicit their new position in the world. And they wanted to consolidate that hegemony and make it permanent. For these purposes, they conceived a political campaign on a global scale that clearly bore their seal. They even conceived an appropriate emblem to identify the campaign. And they carefully chose the opportunity to launch both — January 20, 1949. That very day, the day on which President Truman took office, a new era was opened for the world — the era of development.

> We must embark [President Truman said] on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.
>
> The old imperialism — exploitation for foreign profit — has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing.'

By using for the first time in such context the word, 'underdeveloped', Truman changed the meaning of development and created the emblem, a euphemism, used ever since to allude either discreetly or inadvertently to the era of American hegemony.

Never before had a word been universally accepted on the very day of its political coinage. A new perception of one's own self, and of the other, was suddenly created. Two hundred years of social construction of the historical-political meaning of the term, development, were successfully usurped and transmogrified. A political and philosophical proposition of Marx, packaged American-style as a struggle against communism and at the service of the hegemoni[c] design of the United States, succeeded in permeating both the popular and intellectual mind for the rest of the century.

Underdevelopment began, then, on January 20, **1949.** On that day, two billion people became underdeveloped. In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority.

Truman was not the first to use the word. Wilfred Benson, a former member of the Secretariat of the International Labour Organization, was probably the person who invented it when he referred to the 'underdeveloped areas' while writing on the economic basis for peace in 1942.[2] But the expression found no further echo, neither with the public nor with the experts. Two years later, Rosenstein-Rodan continued to speak of 'economically backward areas'. Arthur Lewis, also in 1944, referred to the gap between the rich and the poor nations. Throughout the decade, the expression appeared occasionally in technical books or United Nations documents. But it only acquired relevance when Truman presented it as the emblem of his own policy. In this context, it took on an unsuspected colonizing virulence.

Since then, development has connoted at least one thing: to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment. When Nyerere proposed that development be the political mobilization of a people for attaining their own objectives, conscious as he was that it was madness to pursue the goals that others had set; when Rodolfo Stavenhagen proposes today ethnodevelopment or development with self-confidence, conscious that we need to 'look within' and 'search for one's own culture' instead of using borrowed and foreign views; when Jimoh Omo-Fadaka suggests a development from the bottom up, conscious that all strategies based on a top-down design have failed to reach their explicitly stated objectives; when Orlando Fals Borda and Anisur Rahman insist on participatory development, conscious of the exclusions made in the name of development; when Jun Nishikawa proposes an 'other' development for Japan, conscious that the current era is ending; when they and so many others qualify development and use the word with caveats and restrictions as if they were walking in a minefield, they do not seem to see the counter-productivity of their efforts. The minefield has already exploded.

In order for someone to conceive the possibility of escaping from a particular condition, it is necessary first to feel that one has fallen into that condition. For those who make up two-thirds of the world's population today, to think of development — of any kind of development — requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries.

Today, for two-thirds of the peoples of the world, underdevelopment is a threat that has already been carried out; a life experience of subordination and of being led astray, of discrimination and subjugation. Given that precondition, the simple fact of associating with development one's own

intention tends to annul the intention, to contradict it, to enslave it. It impedes thinking of one's own objectives, as Nyerere wanted; it undermines confidence in oneself and one's own culture, as Stavenhagen demands; it clamours for management from the top down, against which Jimoh rebelled; it converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them, which was precisely what Fals Borda and Rahman wanted to avoid.

A Metaphor and its Contorted History

Development occupies the centre of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation. There is nothing in modern mentality comparable to it as a force guiding thought and behaviour. At the same time, very few words are as feeble, as fragile and as incapable of giving substance and meaning to thought and behaviour as this one.

In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural, complete, full-fledged form. Hence the metaphoric use of the term to explain the natural growth of plants and animals. Through this metaphor, it became possible to show the goal of development and, much later, its programme. The development or evolution of living beings, in biology, referred to the process through which organisms achieved their genetic potential: the natural form of the being pre-seen by the biologist. Development was frustrated whenever the plant or the animal failed to fulfil its genetic programme, or substituted for it another. In such cases of failure, its growth was not development but rather an anomaly: pathological, and even anti-natural behaviour. The study of these `monsters' became critical for the formulation of the first biological theories.

It was between 1759 (Wolff) and 1859 (Darwin) that development evolved from a conception of transformation that moves toward the *appropriate* form of being to a conception of transformation that moves towards an *ever more perfect* form. During this period, evolution and development began to be used as interchangeable terms by scientists.

The transfer of the biological metaphor to the social sphere occurred in the last quarter of the 18th century. Justus Moser, the conservative founder of social history, from 1768 used the word *Entwicklung* to allude to the gradual process of social change. When he talked about the transformation of some political situations, he described them almost as natural processes. In 1774, Herder started to publish his interpretation of universal history, in which he presented global correlations by comparing the ages of life with social history. But he went beyond this comparison, applying to his elaborations the organological notion of development coined in the scientific discussions of his time. He frequently used the image of the germ to describe the development of organizational forms. By the end of the century, based on the biological scale of Bonnet, he tried to combine the theory of nature with the philosophy of history in an attempt to create a systematic and consistent unity. Historical development was the continuation of natural development, according to him; and both were just variants of the homogeneous development of the cosmos, created by God.

Towards 1800, *Entwicklung* began to appear as a reflexive verb. Self-development became fashionable. God, then, started to disappear in the popular conception of the universe. And a few decades later, all possibilities were opened to the human subject, author of his own development, emancipated from the divine design. Development became the central category of Marx's work: revealed as a historical process that unfolds with the same necessary character of natural laws. Both the Hegelian concept of history and the Darwinist concept of evolution were interwoven in development, reinforced with the scientific aura of Marx.

When the metaphor returned to the vernacular, it acquired a violent colonizing power, soon employed by the politicians. It converted history into a programme: a necessary and inevitable destiny. The industrial mode of production, which was no more than one, among many, forms of social life, became the definition of the terminal stage of a unilinear way of social evolution. This stage came to be seen as the natural culmination of the potentials already existing in neolithic man, as his logical evolution. Thus history was reformulated in Western terms.

The metaphor of development gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life. The vernacular sequence (development is possible after envelopment) was inverted with the transfer. Scientific laws took the place of God in the enveloping function, defining the programme. Marx rescued a feasible initiative, based on the knowledge of those laws. Truman took over this perception, but transferred the role of prime mover — the *primum movens* condition — from the communists and the proletariat to the experts and to capital (thus, ironically, following the precedents set by Lenin and Stalin).

The debris of metaphors used throughout the 18th century began to become part of ordinary language in the 19th century, with the word 'development', accumulating in it a whole variety of connotations. This overload of meanings ended up dissolving its precise significance.

The *Encyclopedia of All Systems of Teaching and Education* was published in Germany in 1860. Its entry on 'development' indicated that 'this concept is applied to almost all that man has and knows.' The word, said Eucken in 1878, 'has become almost useless for science, except in certain areas.'

Between 1875 and 1900 there were published, in English, books whose titles alluded to the *development* of the Athenian constitution, the English novel, the transportation system in the United States, marriage, parenting and so on. Some authors preferred 'evolution' in the title of their books studying the thermometer or the idea of God. Others preferred 'growth' in the title, but even they used development in the text as the principal operative term.'

By the beginning of the 20th century, a new use of the term became widespread. 'Urban development' has stood, since then, for a specific manner of reformulation of urban surroundings, based on the bulldozer and the massive, homogeneous industrial production of urban spaces and specialized

installations. But this specific use, an anticipation of Trumanism, did not succeed in establishing the generalized image that is now associated with the word.

In the third decade of the century, the association between development and colonialism, established a century ago, acquired a different meaning. When the British government transformed its Law of Development of the Colonies into the Law of Development *and Welfare* of the Colonies in 1939, this reflected the profound economic and political mutation produced in less than a decade. To give the philosophy of the colonial protectorate a positive meaning, the British argued for the need to guarantee the natives minimum levels of nutrition, health and education.° A 'dual mandate' started to be sketched: the conqueror should be capable of economically developing the conquered region and at the same time accepting the responsibility of caring for the well-being of the natives. After the identification of the level of civilization with the level of production, the dual mandate collapsed into one: development.5

Throughout the century, the meanings associated with urban development and colonial development concurred with many others to transform the word `development', step by step, into one with contours that are about as precise as those of an amoeba. It is now a mere algorithm whose significance depends on the context in which it is employed. It may allude to a housing project, to the logical sequence of a thought, to the awakening of a child's mind, to a chess game or to the budding of a teenager's breasts. But even though it lacks, on its own, any precise denotation, it is firmly seated in popular and intellectual perception. And it always appears as an evocation of a net of significances in which the person who uses it is irremediably trapped.

Development cannot delink itself from the words with which it was formed — growth, evolution, maturation. Just the same, those who now use the word cannot free themselves from a web of meanings that impart a specific blindness to their language, thought and action. No matter the context in which it is used, or the precise connotation that the person using it wants to give it, the expression becomes qualified and coloured by meanings perhaps unwanted. The word always implies a favourable change, a step from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better. The word indicates that one is doing well because one is advancing in the sense of a necessary, ineluctable, universal law and toward a desirable goal. The word retains to this day the meaning given to it a century ago by the creator of ecology, Haeckel: `Development is, from this moment on, the magic word with which we will solve all the mysteries that surround us or, at least, that which will guide us toward their solution.'

But for two-thirds of the people on earth, this positive meaning of the word `development' — profoundly rooted after two centuries of its social construction — is a reminder of *what they are not.* It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others' experiences and dreams.

Colonizing Anti-Colonialism

In the grandiose design of Truman's speech, there was no room for technical or theoretical precision. The emblem defines a programme conscious of Mao's arrival, looking for evolution as an antidote for revolution (in the Herder tradition) while simultaneously adopting the revolutionary impetus with which Marx endowed the word. The Truman design sometimes uses development in the transitive sense of the British colonial administrators, in order to clearly establish the hierarchy of initiatives that it promotes. But it can also pass without difficulty to the intransitive use of the term, in the finest Hegelian tradition.

As it was taken for granted that underdevelopment itself was out there, that it was something real, 'explanations' of the phenomenon began to appear. An intense search for its material and historical causes immediately started. Some, like Hirschman, gave no importance to the gestation period. Others, on the contrary, made this aspect the central element of their elaborations and described in painstaking detail colonial exploitation in all its variations and the processes of primitive accumulation of capital. Pragmatic attention also began to be given to the internal or external factors that seemed to be the current cause of underdevelopment: terms of trade, unequal exchange, dependency, protectionism, imperfections of the market, corruption, lack of democracy or entrepreneurship .. .

In Latin America, the Peace Corps, the Point Four Program, the War on Poverty, and the Alliance for Progress contributed to root the notion of underdevelopment into popular perception and to deepen the disability created by such perception. But none of those campaigns are comparable to what was achieved, in the same sense, by Latin American dependency theorists and other leftist intellectuals dedicated to criticizing all and every one of the development strategies that the North Americans successively put into fashion.

For them, as for many others, Truman simply had substituted a new word for what had already been there: backwardness or poverty. According to them, the `backward' or `poor' countries were in that condition due to past lootings in the process of colonization and the continued raping by capitalist exploitation at the national and international level: underdevelopment was the creation of development. By adopting in an uncritical manner the view to which they meant to be opposed, their efficient criticism of the ambiguity and hypocrisy of the Western promoters of development gave a virulent character to the colonizing force of the metaphor. (How to ignore, Marx said once, `the indubitable fact that India is bound to the English yoke precisely by an Indian army supported by India?').

The very discussion of the origin or current causes of underdevelopment illustrates to what extent it is admitted to be something real, concrete, quantifiable and identifiable: a phenomenon whose origin and modalities can be the subject of investigation. The word defines a perception. This becomes, in turn, an object, a fact. No one seems to doubt that the concept does not allude to real phenomena. They do not realize that it is a comparative adjective whose base of support is the assumption, very Western but unacceptable and

undemonstrable, of the oneness, homogeneity and linear evolution of the world. It displays a falsification of reality produced through dismembering the totality of interconnected processes that make up the world's reality and, in its place, it substitutes one of its fragments, isolated from the rest, as a general point of reference.6

Conceptual Inflation

Development, which had suffered the most dramatic and grotesque metamorphosis of its history in Truman's hands, was impoverished even more in the hands of its first promoters, who reduced it to *economic growth.* For these men, development consisted simply of growth in the income per person in economically underdeveloped areas. It was the goal proposed by Lewis in 1944 and insinuated by the United Nations Charter in 1947.

Lewis' 1955 dictum 'First it should be noted that our subject matter is growth, and not distribution',' reflects the mainstream emphasis on economic growth which permeated the whole field of development thinking. Paul Baran, by far the most influential development economist among the leftists, wrote in 1957 on the political economy of *growth* and defined growth *or* development as the increase in the per capita production of material goods.' Walter Rostow, who had a very impressive impact on institutional thinking and the public, presented his 'non-communist manifesto' in 1960 as a description of the stages of economic growth, assuming that this single variable can characterize a whole society.' Both of them were, of course, dealing with a lot more than short-sighted economic growth, but their emphasis reflected the spirit of the times . . . and the crux of the matter.'°

Such an orientation was neither an underestimation of the social consequences of rapid economic growth nor neglect of social realities. The first *Report on the World Social Situation,* published in 1952, aroused unusual interest both inside and outside United Nations institutions. The Report concentrated on the description of 'existing social conditions' and only incidentally dealt with programmes to improve them. But the proponents of such programmes found in it inspiration and support for their concern with immediate measures for the relief of poverty. Like many others, they were trying to develop in the 'underdeveloped' countries the basic social services and the 'caring professions' found in the advanced countries. These pragmatic concerns, as well as early theoretical insights going beyond the dogmatic vision of economic quantifiers, were, however, overshadowed by the general obsession with all-out industrialization and GNP growth which dominated the 1950s. Optimism prevailed; according to statistical indices and official reports, both the social situation and social programmes of these countries were continually improving. Such progress, following conventional wisdom, was but the natural consequence of rapid GNP growth.

The endemic controversy between the economic quantifiers and the social service specialists was not eliminated by such evolution. The *Reports* on the social situation, prepared periodically by the UN, tangentially documented it. The expression 'social development', slowly introduced in the *Reports,* appeared without definition, as a vague counterpart for 'economic development' and as a substitute for the static notion of the 'social situation'. The 'social' and the 'economic' were perceived as distinct realities. The idea of a kind of 'balance' between these 'aspects' became first a desideratum and later the object of systematic examination. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (Ecosoc) in 1962 recommended the integration of both aspects of development. That same year, the *Proposals for Action* of the First UN Development Decade (1960-70) established that:

> The problem of the underdeveloped countries is not just growth, but development. . . . Development is growth plus change, [it added]. Change, in turn, is social and cultural as well as economic, and qualitative as well as quantitative. . . . The key concept must be improved quality of people's life."

The creation of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Unrisd), in 1963, was in itself an illustration of the concerns of the period. Another Ecosoc resolution, in 1966, recognized the interdependence of economic and social factors and the need for harmonizing economic and social planning.

In spite of this gradual change, throughout the First UN Development Decade development continued to be perceived as a definable path of economic growth passing through various stages, and 'integration' was the watchword linking the social aspect to the economic aspect. In the 1960s. as Unrisd acknowledged later, social development 'was seen partly as a precondition for economic growth and partly as a moral justification for it and the sacrifices it implied'.12

At the end of the decade, however, many factors contributed to dampen the optimism about economic growth: the shortcomings of current policies and processes were more conspicuous than at the beginning of the decade; the attributes demanding integration had widened; and it became clear that rapid growth had been accompanied by increasing inequalities. By then, the economists were more inclined to acknowledge social aspects as 'social obstacles'. Standard evidence permeated the official bodies:

> The fact that development either leaves behind, or in some ways even creates, large areas of poverty, stagnation, marginality and actual exclusion from social and economic progress is too obvious and too urgent to be overlooked."

Conceptually, there was a generalized revolt against the straitjacket of economic definitions of development, constraining its goals to more or less irrelevant quantitative indicators. The question was clearly posed in 1970 by Robert S. McNamara, president of the World Bank. After recognizing that a high rate of growth did not bring satisfactory progress in development during the First Decade, he insisted that the 1970s should see more than gross measures of economic growth.'[4] But the 'dethronement of GNP', as this crusade was then called, did not go very far: no international or academic consensus around any other definition was possible.

While the First Decade considered the social and economic aspects of development separately, the Second Decade involved merging the two. A new paradigm had to be formulated, that of integration, after recognizing the necessary interaction of physical resources, technical processes, economic aspects and social change. The International Development Strategy, proclaimed on 24 October 1970 called for a *global* strategy, based on joint and concentrated action in all spheres of economic and social life. The turning point, however, was not in the Strategy but in an almost simultaneous UN resolution establishing a project for the identification of a *unified approach* to development and planning, 'which would fully integrate the economic and social components in the formulation of policies and programmes'. This would include components designed:

(a) To leave no sector of the population outside the scope of change and development;

(b) To effect structural change which favours national development and to activate all sectors of the population to participate in the development process;

(c) To aim at social equity, including the achievement of an equitable distribution of income and wealth in the nation;

(d) to give high priority to the development of human potentials . . . the provision of employment opportunities and meeting the needs of children. '5

The quest for a unified approach to development analysis and planning thus began which looked simultaneously for cross-sectoral and spatial, or regional, integration and for 'participative development'. As a UN endeavour, it was a very short-lived and frustrating project. Its results were both controversial and disappointing. Its critique of prevailing ideas and methods of economic development encountered considerable resistance. And its failure to produce simple universal remedies doomed it to rapid extinction. But the project incubated most of the ideas and slogans and animated the development debate during the years that followed.

The Second Decade, which started with this concern for a unified approach, evolved in fact in the opposite direction: dispersion. 'Major problems', like environment, population, hunger, women, habitat or employment, were successively brought to the forefront. Every 'problem' followed for a time an independent career, concentrating both public and institutional attention. Later, the complex relation of each 'problem' with all the others was demonstrated and the pertinent exercise of unification started, with one of the 'problems' at the centre of the process. The key candidates for unification were constantly in dispute, arising from the old controversy over priorities and the day-to-day disputes among bureaucratic bodies for survival and allocation of resources.

The quest for a unifying principle continued on different terrain. In 1974 the Declaration of Cocoyoc emphasized that the purpose of development 'should not be to develop things, but to develop man'. 'Any process of growth,' it added, 'that does not lead to the fulfilment [of basic needs] — or, even worse, disrupts them — is a travesty of the idea of development.' The Declaration also emphasized the need for diversity and 'for pursuing many different roads to development', as well as the goal of self-reliance and the requirement of 'fundamental economic, social and political changes'." Some of these ideas were expanded in the proposals of the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, which suggested, in 1975, *another development,"* and specially in the search for *human-centred development.* Following Johan Galtung, for whom development has to be 'the development of a people', the experts judged that man should have a greater influence in the development process and that this should be, as Unesco insisted, *integrated development:* 'a total, multi-relational process that includes all aspects of the life of a collectivity, of its relations with the outside world and of its own consciousness'."

In 1975, the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly asked for an approach more effective than that of the International Development Strategy (adopted in 1970) for achieving social objectives of development. The Conference on Employment, Income Distribution and Social Progress, organized by the ILO in June 1976, offered an answer: the *Basic Needs Approach,* 'aiming at the achievement of a certain specific minimum standard of living before the end of the century'."

One of the documents supporting the Approach explicitly recognized that development would not eliminate hunger and misery, and that, on the contrary, it would surely worsen the levels of 'absolute poverty' of a fifth, and probably of two-fifths, of the population. The Approach proposed the idea of dealing directly with the task of coping with those needs, instead of expecting their satisfaction as a result of the process of development. For two or three years the proposal became fashionable. The World Bank found it particularly attractive since it appeared as the natural sequel to its experiments with 'target groups', which it had started in 1973 when its development strategy was concentrated on the rural poor and small farmers. The Approach was also promoted by many governments and the experts. It possessed the virtue of offering 'universal applicability', while being at the same time relative enough to be 'country specific'. In 1976, the satisfaction of the basic needs of each country's population defined the first and central portion of the Programme of Action of the Tripartite World Conference on Employment, Income Distribution and Social Progress and the International Division of Labour.

The experts of Unesco, for their part, promoted the concept of *endogenous development.* For some time, this conception won more acceptance than all the others. It seemed clearly heretical, openly contradicting the conventional wisdom. Emerging from a rigorous critique of the hypothesis of development 'in stages' (Rostow), the thesis of endogenous development rejected the necessity or possibility — let alone suitability — of mechanically imitating industrial societies. Instead, it proposed taking due account of the particularities of each nation. Little acknowledged, however, was the fact that this sensible consideration leads to a dead-end in the very theory and practice of development, that it contains a contradiction in terms. If the impulse is truly endogenous, that is, if the initiatives really come out of the diverse cultures and their different systems of values, nothing would lead us to believe that from

these would necessarily arise development — no matter how it is defined — or even an impulse leading in that direction. If properly followed, this conception leads to the dissolution of the very notion of development, after realizing the impossibility of imposing a single cultural model on the whole world — as a conference of Unesco experts pertinently recognized in 1978.

The next decade, the 1980s, was called 'the lost decade for development'. In spite of the fireworks of the four Asian Tigers, pessimism prevailed. The `adjustment process' meant for many countries abandoning or dismantling, in the name of development, most of the previous achievements. By 1985, a post-development age seemed to be in the offing.2°

The 1990s, by contrast, have given birth to a new development ethos. This follows two clearly distinguishable lines. In the North, it calls for *redevelopment,* i.e. to develop again what was maldeveloped or is now obsolete. In the United States and the Soviet Union, in Spain as in Switzerland, Austria, Poland or Britain, public attention is drawn by the speed and the conditions under which what was previously developed (socialized medicine, nuclear plants, steel production, pre-microchip manufacturing, polluting factories or poisonous pesticides) may be destroyed, dismantled, exported or substituted.

In the South, redevelopment also requires dismantling what was left by the `adjustment process' of the '80s, in order to make room for the leftovers from the North (atomic waste, obsolete or polluting manufacturing plants, unsellable or prohibited commodities . . .) and for the *maquiladoras,* those fragmented and temporary pseudo-factories that the North will keep in operation during the transitional period. The obsession with competitiveness, for fear of being left out of the race, compels acceptance of the destruction of whole sections of what was 'developed' over the last 30 years. Sacrificed on the altar of redevelopment, these will instead be inserted in transnational designs consistent with world market demand.

In the South, however, the emphasis of redevelopment will not be on such ventures, existing in the form of technological and socio-political enclaves. Rather, redevelopment implies the economic colonization of the so-called informal sector. In the name of modernization and under the banner of the war on poverty — pitting as always the waged against the poor, not a war against poverty itself — redeveloping the South involves launching the last and definitive assault against organized resistance to development and the economy.

Conceptually and politically, redevelopment is now taking the shape of *sustainable development,* for 'our common future', as prescribed by the Brundtland Commission. Or else, it is being actively promoted as green and democratic redevelopment, for those assuming that the struggle against communism, the leitmotiv of Truman's speech, is over. But in its mainstream interpretation, sustainable development has been explicitly conceived as a strategy for sustaining 'development', not for supporting the flourishing and enduring of an infinitely diverse natural and social life.

The current decade has also given birth to a new bureaucratic exercise to give development another lease of life. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published in 1990 the first *Human Development Report.21*

This clearly follows in the steps of the economic quantifiers, while paying appropriate consideration to Unrisd's efforts for measurement and analysis of socio-economic development and to the tradition of the *Reports* on the world social situation.

Following this new Report, 'human development' is rendered a process and a level of achievement. As a process, it is 'the enlargement of relevant human choices'. As a level of achievement, it is 'the internationally compared extent to which, in given societies, those relevant choices are actually attained'. The authors of the Report found very expedient ways to overcome the traditional challenges of quantification and international comparisons, as well as the conceptual puzzles of their endeavour. Human development is presented by them through an 'internationally comparative level of deprivation', which determines how far from the most successful national case are the other countries. The most ambitious goal of the Report is to produce a Human Development Index, 'synthesizing, along a numerical scale, the global level of Human Development in 130 countries'. The method: combining life expectancy deprivation, adult literacy deprivation and real GNP per capita deprivation. The Report also includes analysis of the social conditions existing in these countries for the period 1960-88, after gathering the data for a wide collection of variables and a series of projections, presenting 'viable social targets' to be achieved by the year 2000.

Adopting the yardstick of GNP per capita in real dollar terms is not without courage! The authors of the Report thought that expectancy of a long life, together with full literacy, are not enough to give a human being reasonable room for choice if he is at the same time deprived of access to resources for the satisfaction of his material needs. But measuring the latter is plagued with difficulties; the Report acknowledged them and opted for a simple solution — a technical refinement of the good old, universal yardstick, GNP.

Expanding the Reign of Scarcity

During the 19th century, but in fact starting much earlier in Europe, the social construction of development was married to a political design: excising from society and culture an autonomous sphere, the economic sphere, and installing it at the centre of politics and ethics. That brutal and violent transformation, first completed in Europe, was always associated with colonial domination in the rest of the world. Economization and colonization were synonymous. What Truman succeeded in doing was freeing the economic sphere from the negative connotations it had accumulated for two centuries, delinking development from colonialism. No more of the 'old imperialism', said Truman. In retrospect, it is possible to see that the emphasis on economic growth of the first post-Truman developers was neither a detour nor a mistaken interpretation of the Truman proposal: rather, it was the expression of *its* very essence.

As a conceptual construction, economics strives to subordinate to its rule and to subsume under its logic every other form of social interaction in every

society it invades. As a political design, adopted by some as their own, economic history is a story of conquest and domination. Far from being the idyllic evolution pictured by the founding fathers of economics, the emergence of economic society is a story of violence and destruction often adopting a genocidal character. Little wonder, resistance appeared everywhere.

Establishing economic value requires the disvaluing of all other forms of social existence.[22] Disvalue transmogrifies skills into lacks, commons into resources, men and women into commodified labour, tradition into burden, wisdom into ignorance, autonomy into dependency. It transmogrifies people's autonomous activities embodying wants, skills, hopes and interactions with one another, and with the environment, into needs whose satisfaction requires the mediation of the market.

The helpless individual, whose survival now becomes necessarily dependent on the market, was not the invention of the economists; neither was he born with Adam and Eve, as they contend. He was a historical creation. He was created by the economic project redesigning mankind. The transmogrification of autonomous men and women into disvalued 'economic man' was in fact the precondition for the emergence of economic society, a condition that must be constantly renewed, reconfirmed and deepened for economic rule to continue. Disvalue is the secret of economic value, and it cannot be created except with violence and in the face of continuous resistance.

Economics recognizes no limits to its application. This contention is predicated on the assumption that no society is free from the 'economic problem', as economists call their definition of social reality. At the same time, they proudly acknowledge that their discipline, as a science, was an invention. They love to trace its roots back to antiquity, using Aristotle and his worries about value as a case in point. But they see those ancient insights as mere initial intimations heralding the advent of the patron saints of the science, those who discovered economy in the 18th century.

Economists, of course, did not invent the new patterns of behaviour emerging with economic society through the creation of the modern market. But the founding fathers of the discipline were able to codify their observations in a form that fitted well with the ambitions of the emerging interests: they offered a 'scientific' foundation to the political design of the new dominant class. When that form was 'received' as truth by the public and absorbed into common language, it was able to transform popular perceptions from within by changing the meaning of previously existing words and assumptions.

The founding fathers of economics saw in *scarcity* the keystone for their theoretical construction. The finding marked the discipline forever. The whole construction of economics stands on the premise of scarcity, postulated as *a* universal condition of social life. Economists were even able to transform the finding into a popular prejudice, a self-evident truism for everyone. 'Common sense' is now so immersed in the economic way of thinking that no facts of life contradicting it seems enough to provoke critical reflection on its character.

Scarcity connotes shortage, rarity, restriction, want, insufficiency, even frugality. Since all these connotations alluding to conditions appearing everywhere and at all times are now mixed up with the economic denotations of

the word, as a *terminus technicus,* the popular prejudice about the universality of economics, with its premise of scarcity, is constantly reinforced.

Little understood is the fact that the law of scarcity' formulated by economist[s] and now appearing in every textbook does not allude directly to the commo[n] situations denoted by the word. The sudden shortage of fresh air during a fire is not scarcity of air in the economic sense. Neither is the self-imposed frugality of a monk, the insufficiency of stamina in a boxer, the rarity of a flower, or the last reserves of wheat mentioned by Pharaoh in what is the first known historical reference to hunger.

The 'law of scarcity' was construed by economists to denote the technical assumption that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited though improvable. The assumption implies choices over the allocation of means (resources). This 'fact' defines the 'economic problem' par *excellence,* whose 'solution' is proposed by economists through the market or the plan. Popular perception, especially in the Northern parts of the world, even shares this technical meaning of the word scarcity, assuming it to be a self-evident truism. But it is precisely the universality of this assumption that is no longer tenable.

A few years before Truman's speech, just at the end of the War, Karl Polanyi published *The Great Transformation."* Convinced that economic determinism was a 19th century phenomenon, that the market system violently distorted our views of man and society, and that these distorted views were proving one of the main obstacles to the solution of the problems of our civilization,[24] Polanyi carefully documented the economic history of Europe as the history of the creation of the economy as an autonomous sphere, disjoined from the rest of the society. He showed that the national market did not appear as the gradual and spontaneous emancipation of the economic sphere from governmental control, but quite the opposite: the market was the result of a conscious and often violent intervention by government. In the years that followed, Polanyi laid down the foundations for comparative economic history.

After him, many others have followed this road, retracing economic history as merely one chapter in the history of ideas. Louis Dumont, among others, has shown that the discovery of the economy through the invention of economics was, in fact, a process of the social construction of ideas and concepts.[25] The economic 'laws' of the classical economists were but deductive inventions which transformed the newly observed patterns of social behaviour, adopted with the emergence of economic society, into universal axioms designed to carry on a new political project. The assumption of the previous existence of economic 'laws' or 'facts', construed by economists, is untenable when confronted with what we know now about ancient societies and cultures, and even with what we can still see in some parts of the world.

Marshall Sahlins and Pierre Clastres, among others, have given detailed and well documented accounts of cultures in which non-economic assumptions govern lives and which reject the assumption of scarcity whenever it appears among them.[26] Men and women seen today on the margins of the economic world, the so-called marginals, find support in that tradition as they continue to challenge economic assumptions both in theory and in practice. All over the

world, descriptions of a whole new set of experiences of those peoples are trying to find a place in the shelves of the libraries, but they do not fit in well with any of the social classifications tainted by the economists' lenses.

New Commons

Struggling to limit the economic sphere is not, for the common man at the margins or the majority of people on earth, a mechanical reaction to the economic invasion of their lives. They are not Luddites. Rather they see their resistance as a creative reconstitution of the basic forms of social interaction, in order to liberate themselves from their economic chains. They have thus created, in their neighbourhoods, villages and *barrios,* new commons which allow them to live on their own terms.

In these new commons, there are forms of social interaction that have appeared only in the post-war era. Still the people in these new spaces are the heirs of a diversified collection of commons, communities and even whole cultures destroyed by the industrial, economic form of social interaction. After the extinction of their subsistence regimes, they tried to adopt various patterns of accommodation to the industrial form. The failure of both industrial society and the remnants of traditional forms of interaction to effect this accommodation was the precondition of the social inventions whose consolidation and flourishing has been further stimulated by the so-called crisis of development.

For people on the margins, disengaging from the economic logic of the market or the plan has become the very condition for survival. They are forced to confine their economic interaction — for some, very frequent and intense — to realms outside the spaces where they organize their own modes of living. Those spaces were their last refuge during the development era. After experiencing what survival means in economic society, they are now counting the blessings they find in such refuges, while working actively to regenerate them.

By equating education with diplomas, following the economic definition of learning, they lacked teachers and schools. Now, after re-embedding learning in culture, they have the affluence of constantly enriching their knowledge with a little help from friends bringing to them experiences and remedies from outside their tradition.

After equating health with dependence on medical services, they lacked doctors, health centres, hospitals, drugs. Now, after recognizing health again as the autonomous ability to cope with the environment, they are regenerating their own healing capability, benefiting from the traditional wisdom of their healers and from the richness of the curative capacity of their environments. This, too, with a little help from their friends, when something beyond their reach or their traditional realm requires external help.

After equating eating with the technical activities of production and consumption, linked to the mediation of the market or the state, they lacked income and suffered scarcity of food. Now, they are regenerating and enriching their relationships with themselves and with the environment, nourishing again

both their lives and their lands. And they are usually coping well with the shortages still affecting them — as a consequence of the time and effort required to remedy the damage done by development or their temporary inability to escape from the damaging economic interactions they still have to maintain. It is not easy, for example, to step out of commercial crops or give up the addiction to credit or industrial inputs; but intercropping helps regenerate both land and culture, in time providing an improvement in nutrition.

Peasants and grassroots groups in the cities are now sharing with people forced to leave the economic centre the ten thousand tricks they have learned to limit the economy, to mock the economic creed, or to refunctionalize and reformulate modern technology. The 'crisis' of the 1980s removed from the payroll people already educated in dependency on incomes and the market, people lacking the social setting enabling them to survive by themselves. Now the margins are coping with the difficult task of relocating these people. The process poses great challenges and tensions for everyone, but it also offers a creative opportunity for regeneration, once they discover how mutually supportive they can be for one another.

The basic logic of human interactions inside the new commons prevents scarcity from appearing in them. People do not assume unlimited ends, since their ends are no more than the other side of their means, their direct expression. If their means are limited, as they are, their ends cannot be unlimited. Within the new commons, needs are defined with verbs that describe activities embodying wants, skills and interactions with others and with the environment. Needs are not separated into different 'spheres' of reality: lacks or expectations on one side, and satisfiers on the other, reunited through the market or the plan.

One of the most interesting facets of the ongoing regeneration in the new commons being created by ordinary men and women is precisely the recovery of their own definition of needs, dismantled by development in perception or in practice. By strengthening forms of interaction embedded in the social fabric and by breaking the economic principle of the exchange of equivalents, they are recovering their autonomous ways of living. By reinstalling or regenerating forms of trade operating outside the rules of the market or the plan, they are both enriching their daily lives and limiting the impact and scope of the commercial operations they still have to maintain, and also reducing the commodification of their time and the fruits of their effort.

The leading actor of the economy, economic man, finds no feasible answers for coping with the 'crisis' of development, and frequently reacts with desolation, exhaustion, even desperation. He constantly falls for the political game of demands and promises, or the economic game of carpetbagging the present for the future, hopes for expectations. In contrast, the leading actor of the new commons, the common man, dissolves or prevents scarcity in his imaginative efforts to cope with his predicament. He looks for no more than free spaces or limited support for his initiatives. He can mix them in political coalitions increasingly capable of reorienting policies and changing political styles. Supported by recent experiences, the new awareness emerging from the margins can awaken others, broadening those coalitions towards the critical

point in which an inversion of the economic dominance begins to be feasible.

The economy of economists is nothing but a set of rules by which modern societies are governed. Men and societies are not economic, even after having created institutions and forms of interaction of an economic nature, even after having instituted the economy. And those economic rules are derived from the chronic scarcity of modern society. Rather than being the iron law of every human society, scarcity is a historical accident: it had a beginning and can have an end. The time has come for its end. Now is the time of the margins, of the common man.

In spite of the economy, common men on the margins have been able to keep alive another logic, another set of rules. In contrast with the economy, this logic is embedded in the social fabric. The time has come to confine the economy to its proper place: a marginal one. As the margins have done.

The Call

This essay is an invitation to celebrate and a call for political action.

It celebrates the appearance of new commons, creatively opened by common men and women after the failure of the developers' strategies to transform traditional men and women into economic men. These new commons are living proof of the ability and ingenuity of common people to react with sociological imagination, following their own path, within hostile environments.

This essay is also a plea. It pleads, first of all, for political controls to protect those new commons and to offer common men a more favourable social context for their activities and innovations. Such political controls can be implemented only after public awareness of the limits of development has become firmly rooted in society. Even those still convinced that development goals are pertinent ideals for the so-called underdeveloped should honestly recognize the present structural impossibilities for the universal materialization of such goals. The cynicism of those who, knowing such limits, continue to proclaim the myth, should be publicly exposed.

This essay requests public witness and invites public debate on the post-economic events now appearing everywhere, in order to limit the economic damage and give room for new forms of social life. It challenges the social imagination to conceive political controls that allow for the flourishing of post-economic initiatives.

This essay also pleads for research and public discussion of the issues that give content to citizens' coalitions for implementing political controls on the economic sphere, while re-embedding economic activities in the social fabric. It pleads for a new, dignified, public appraisal of the views now emerging as rumours among common men, defining limits to the economy while trying to renew politics at the grassroots level.

The new commons, created by common men, are heralding an era which ends privilege and licence. This essay celebrates the adventure of common men.

Development has evaporated. The metaphor opened up a field of knowledge and for a while gave scientists something to believe in. After some decades, it is clear that this field of knowledge is a mined, unexplorable land. Neither in

nature nor in society does there exist an evolution that imposes transformation towards 'ever more perfect forms' as a law. Reality is open to surprise. Modern man has failed in his effort to be god.

To root oneself in the present demands an image of the future. It is not possible to act here and now, in the present, without having an image of the next instant, of the other, of a certain temporal horizon. That image of the future offers guidance, encouragement, orientation, hope. In exchange for culturally established images, built by concrete men and women in their local spaces, in exchange for concrete myths, truly real, modern man was offered an illusory expectation, implicit in the connotation of development and its semantic network: growth, evolution, maturation, modernization. He was also offered an image of the future that is a mere continuation of the past: that *is* development, a conservative, if not reactionary, myth.

It is now time to recover a sense of reality. It is time to recover serenity. Crutches, like those offered by science, are not necessary when it is possible to walk with one's own feet, on one's own path, in order to dream one's own dreams. Not the borrowed ones of development.

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Library, 1961 [orig. 1880]) that reveals the fierce desire for inequality at the heart C democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville's portrayal of the intellectual, cultural and spiritual co equality-as-sameness in US society *(Democracy in America. in* two volumes, New Y..y: Schocken, 1961) remains unsurpassed. The classic work on conspicuous consumpYy written in *a* conspicuous rhetorical style, is that of Thorstein Veblen *(The Theory °:ie Leisure Class,* New York: Mentor, 1953). Two fine essays providing a map thr h contemporary discussions of equality have been written by John H. Schaar (`Some Way f Thinking About Equality' and 'Equality of Opportunity and Beyond', both in Sclyy, *Legitimacy and the Modern State,* New Brunswick and London: Transaction. 1981).

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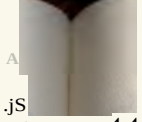
Much has been written on the disfigurement of the human spirit wrought by, and necesyy to sustain, human inequality. I shall limit myself to recommending only the following tly: Dorothy Dinnerstein *(The Mermaid and the Minotaur,* New York: Harper, 1976) and FranY Fanon *(The Wretched of the Earth,* Constance Farrington, ed., New York: Grove. 1966).



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W-ianne Gronemeyer

Tile times in which helping still helped, certainly in the form of 'development assOtance' as we shall see, are irrevocably past. The very notion of help has become enfeebled and robbed of public confidence in its saving power. These daoo help can usually only be accepted if accompanied with threats; and whoever is threatened with it had better be on their guard. Already more than a hu dred years ago, after he had withdrawn into the woods to live for a while otCoide the turmoil of the world, Henry David Thoreau wrote:

> f I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the onscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life . . . for fear that should get some of his good done to me.'

Hclp as a threat, as the precursor of danger? What a paradox!

'he yoking together of help and threat is contrary to common sense, ho vever, only because, despite manifold historical instances to the contrary, thi welcome ring of the idea of helping has survived in the consciousness of orollinary people. Help thus appears to them as innocent as ever, although it has lot g since changed its colours and become an instrument of the perfect — that is, olegant — exercise of power. The defining characteristic of elegant power is thot it is unrecognizable, concealed, supremely inconspicuous. Power is truly elc;ant when, captivated by the delusion of freedom, those subject to it stubbornly deny its existence. 'Help', as will be shown, is very similar. It is a moans of keeping the bit in the mouths of subordinates without letting them fei I the power that is guiding them. In short, elegant power does not force, it does not resort either to the cudgel or to chains; it helps. Imperceptibly the state monopoly on violence transforms itself, along the path of increasing inuonspicuousness, into a state monopoly on solicitude, whereby it becomes, nc t less powerful, but more comprehensively powerful.

Now, if help has become hypocritical, distorted to the point of ur recognizability, what should be its actual meaning? What advantageous euphony in the word has been inherited?

The positive image of help that is firmly seated in people's heads originates in ol i stories — the good Samaritan binding up the wounds of the man who fell vi :tim to robbers; or the legend of St Martin sharing his coat with a beggar. NAturally, or perhaps strangely, such stories — despite the modern disfiguration of the very idea of help — still appear today, stories in which, often at great cost, the life of some unknown person in danger is saved.

Common to all of these stories is their characterization of help as unconditional — given without regard to the person in need, the situation, the probability of success, or even the possibility of injury to the person offering aid. *Misericordia,* the 'rueful sympathy' that comes from the heart, [2] pity in the face of the need of another, is what simply prompts the act of helping. The

helper is literally overwhelmed by the sight of need. The help provided in these circumstances is — like the compassion itself — much more an event than a deliberate act; it is 'an experience that occasionally flashes out'.[3] It is the anomalous, momentary instance — spontaneous, unplanned.

Modern help has transgressed all the components of this traditional conception of help. Far from being unconditional, modern assistance is frankly calculating. It is much more likely to be guided by a careful calculation of one's own advantage than by a concerned consideration for the other's need.

Nor is help any longer, in fact, help to someone in need; rather it is assistance in overcoming some kind of deficit. The obvious affliction, the cry for help of a person in need, is rarely any longer the occasion for help. Help is much more often the indispensable, compulsory consequence of a need for help that has been diagnosed from without. Whether someone needs help is no longer decided by the cry, but by some external standard of normality. The person who cries out for help is thereby robbed of his or her autonomy as a crier. Even the appropriateness of a cry for help is determined according to this standard of normality.

That help might be furnished without first thinking carefully about the person in need hardly exists any more in the modern peson's mind, such is the extent to which help has been transformed into an instrument through which one can impose upon others the obligation of good conduct. Help as a means to discipline has a long tradition. Whoever desires help is 'voluntarily' made subject to the watchful gaze of the helper. This gaze has nowadays assumed the place of the compassionate.

And finally, it is no longer true that help is the unpredictable, anomalous instance. Instead it has become institutionalized and professionalized. It is neither an event nor an act; it is a strategy. Help should no longer be left to chance. The idea of help, now, is charged with the aura of justification. A universal claim to help is derived from the right to equality, as is an all-encompassing obligation to help. Nowadays the idea and practice of help have become boundless in their expansionist drive. Their blessings have made their way into the most distant corners of the world, and no sector of social or individual life is any longer proof against the diagnosis of a need for help.

In the area of development aid, the perversion of the idea of help has gone to particular extremes. Even the highly expensive installation of what amounts to the machinery for genocide on foreign terrain — which is ruinous economically, politically and morally for the recipient countries — is now called aid: military aid. And recently it has even been possible to subsume the convenient dumping of contaminated, highly poisonous industrial waste under the general rubric of economic help. The 'good' garbage remains at home in local authority dumps and recycling centres: the 'bad' garbage, on the other hand, is shipped to the Third World to be incinerated or stored there.

Even what is called rural development or food aid, in reality, holds out the prospect of an apocalypse of hunger. It prepares the way for the global domination of a handful of giant corporations wielding their control through seed grain. For 'seed grain is the first link in the nutrition chain. Whoever controls seed grain controls food supplies and thereby the world.'

However obviously fraudulent use of the word 'help' to describe development aid may be, the word continues to be taken as the gospel truth, not least by those upon whom the fraud is committed. The concept of help appears to have forfeited scarcely any of its moral self-justification. Its suggestive power remains unbroken. Evidently the mere gesture of giving is sufficient these days for it to be characterized as help — irrespective of the intention of the giver, the type of gift, or its usefulness to the recipient. The metamorphosis from a colonialism that 'takes' to one that supposedly 'gives' has been completed under the protection of this euphonious word, help.

How, then, did help become what it predominantly is today, an instrument for the sophisticated exercise of power? How did help become so thoroughly modern? What follows recalls a few of the key stages in this modernization of the idea of help.

Medieval Alms Giving

It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. This is the unsettling admonition under the threat of which the medieval system of alms giving came into being. From this bleak point of view, to be in need of help applies not to the recipient of gifts, but to the giver, for it is the salvation of his soul that is at stake. Since poverty is taken to be pleasing to God, the poor in this respect are already taken care of. In the poor,

> One saw the image of Christ himself. . . . The rulers and feudal lords customarily maintained a large number of beggars in their courts, gave them money and food and lodging. Great significance was (also) lent to the maintenance of beggars and persons in need in the cloisters. In Cluny, for example, in some years as many as 17,000 of the poor were nourished.3

It was not, however, the compassionate gaze upon beggars that stimulated the readiness to give, but the fearful contemplation of the future of one's own soul. The existence of the poor offered a welcome opportunity for taking care of the salvation of one's soul, without having to become poor in order to do so. Subsequently, in the course of secularization, there was a decline in fear for the soul. And with the rapid growth in the number of beggars, the latter lost their popularity, a process that was accompanied by a fall in the readiness of the powerful to give alms.

> Beggars from distant provinces appeared in the fields and streets of the town of Troyes in 1573, starving, clothed in rags and covered with fleas and vermin. The rich citizens of the town soon began to fear 'sedition' by these miserable wretches and 'in order to make them leave, the rich men and the governors of the aforesaid town of Troyes were assembled to find the expedient to remedy it. The resolution of this council was that they must be put outside the town, without being told why, and after the distribution to each one of his bread and a piece of silver, they would be made to leave the town by the aforesaid gate which would be closed on the last one and it

> would be indicated to them over the town walls that they go to God and find their livelihood elsewhere, and that they should not return to the aforesaid Troyes before the new grain from the next harvest. This was done. After the gift, the dismayed poor were driven from the town of Troyes.6

From then on it was downhill all the way for beggars, until they were eventually declared actual enemies of the state:

> In the 16th century a beggar was taken care of and fed before he was sent away. At the beginning of the 17th century, his head was shaved. Later he was flogged; and toward the end of the century repression resorted to its ultimate means and made him a convict.'

But before things had gone so far, the intercessory energies of the Church concentrated on the administration of heavenly wages, not so much the just distribution of earthly goods. Social assistance was more of a secondary undertaking. No wonder, then, that there was no question of planned, organized help for there existed no criteria of need for the giving of alms. Consequently, there was no distinction, which would later become so indispensable, made between those *unable* to work and those who were *unwilling.* The receipt of alms was neither bound up with humiliating procedures nor in any way made the cause of discrimination. The help given was also not educational in relation to the recipient; rather whatever educational purposes of improvement were connected with help applied much more to the givers.

Help was, however, already established as an economic category in one sense. It was subject to a well conceived cost-benefit analysis and owed its existence to the benefits which it resulted in — for the giver. Moreover it was still not the poor themselves who had to pay the bill. The maxim *do ut des* did not yet apply; rather the idea of 'God's reward'. And it was the *soul* not *profit,* that was at stake.

Help Overseas

In the 16th century the impulse to help turned to the conquered territories overseas in reaction to the indescribable atrocities committed by the conquistadors against the inhabitants of the Caribbean. To be sure, the natives had first to be raised by papal pronouncement to a status appropriate to salvation, that is, they had to be made *capable of being helped.*

Pope Paul III (1534-49), in his bull *Sublimis Deus,* took a position opposed to the claim that the Indians were not human beings. This followed Bartolome de las Casas who had already made himself an unflinching and passionate advocate of the Indians in 1514. The new papal position was that, in His glory, God had given to man the capacity to reach the pinnacle of being. 'All people are capable of receiving the gospel.' Only the archenemy of the human race — Satan himself — had led people to believe that the Indians were animals

> created to do our bidding, since they were incapable of comprehending the Catholic faith. We . . . nevertheless say that the Indians are truly people, and not only capable of comprehending our faith, but . . . also urgently desiring to do so. . . . Thus do we declare that the Indians are under no circumstances to be robbed of their freedom and their goods.'

To save the Indians, there had to be constituted a *single humanity* bound together through its filial relation to God. From the acknowledgment of their status as human, and only from that, stemmed both the Indians' right to the Christian message as well as the duty of the Church to Christianize them. At the *same* time the Indians were still in the stage of humanity's infancy and had to be brought up by education to the level that now prevailed (in Europe). Bernhardino von Sahagun, a Franciscan missionary to the Indians, put it very clearly: the missionary must regard himself as a doctor, and the alien culture as a kind of disease that has to be cured.'

Even if the papal decree on the enslavement of the Indians bore no great results in practical terms, the argument did add a number of elements to the repertoire of meanings surrounding the idea of help, which then stood in good stead for later secularization: (1) The *global dimension* of the right to receive, and duty to provide, help — an effort no longer applied only to the poor on one's own threshold or the beggars before the cloister door. (2) The *utopian content* — hopes of ultimate redemption were attached to the notion of help. And (3) the *idea of improvement* — only through help is the recipient raised to the level of true humanity. This implies a view of the cultural and spiritual superiority of the giver. Help still applies to the salvation of souls, but now not to the souls of the givers, but the souls of the recipients. But, at least, exploitation itself had not yet been — as it was in effect to become eventually — declared to be help.

Making the Poor Fit for Work

In the 18th and 19th centuries, with the beginning of the industrial revolution, production — strictly speaking, the mass production of goods on the basis of the division of labour — became the new myth. Inherent in it lies the promise that there will finally be enough for all. Simultaneously with this myth of production arose the myth of the machine. Thus began the long history of the subordination of people to the machines people themselves have made. The human being has to become fit for the machine — an idea which makes necessary a complete change in the fundamental conception of man. Henceforth he is conceived as *homo laborans;* he can realize his nature as a human being only through work. What is appropriate to his nature, and is therefore virtuous, is taken from the requirements of mechanical production. The new catalogue of virtues is dictated by the operating laws of the machine, as exemplified by that most perfect of machines, the clock — discipline, accuracy, order, diligence, neatness, stamina and punctuality.

The first generation of wage labourers was very far from agreeing to the veneration of production. In view of their lamentable situation, they were profoundly sceptical about the promises based on production. They put up a tenacious resistance to their training in factory discipline and their physical and

psychological subordination to the pounding rhythms of the machine. -71; had to be forced into the yoke of labour with draconian penalties and cor punishment.

> In Lancaster, as in other industrial cities, a steam whistle would blow at in the morning to wrest people from their sleep. If that proved insuffic employers would hire 'knockers up', men who went from flat to flat `rap on bedroom windows with long poles'. Some of the knockers up even pu strings 'dangling from a window and attached to the worker's toe'.'°

Churches and schools undertook the task of implanting in the workers it seeds of the virtues demanded by the machine:

> A wise and skilled Christian should bring his matters into such order every ordinary duty should know his place, and all should be . . . as tit parts of a clock or other engine, which must be all conjunct and each rigll placed. [And] the schoolroom is supposed to be a training ground for tOr `habit of industry', in which the children at the earliest possible age 'habituated, not to say naturalized, to labour and fatigue'."

Beggars, vagabonds and the unemployed were regarded from this perspecti' as anti-social elements and shunners of work. Poverty was interpreted as dr refusal to work. Begging, as a result, prompted diligent pursuit by the police and prisons and workhouses were built to see that no one escaped his fate labour. Thus did the perception of need also undergo a transformation. It no) longer called up pity, but provoked mistrust and surveillance. Alms in these circumstances, it was argued, could only worsen the situation. For that reason from now on the strategies that were proposed against poverty amounted to mix between discipline and remedial education.

Helping the poor no longer appeared as a gesture of charity, but in the form of social regimentation. The first commandment for helping the poor was that any help rendered must remain clearly below the level of a factory wage, even if that meant dropping it to an inhumane minimum. Despite its severity, helping the poor cloaked itself with the self-righteousness of philanthropy and believed itself fully justified in making use of the concept of help. After all, does it not act on human nature and thereby contribute to the general welfare? Certainly, with this change, help was fundamentally secularized. It no longer applied to the salvation of souls, but to the training of the body and the breaking of the will; in short, to the modelling of an extremely this worldly system of work.

Help became completely the subject matter of educational strategies. The productive person was of a crude make, as if in the raw state, so long as his obedience to the required virtues of labour had to be maintained by external compulsion. Of course, identifying help with an apparatus of compulsion was ruinous to the whole idea of helping, and destructive of social harmony. Only when the laws of production had been written into the worker, when they had entered into his very being, could the transformation be counted as completed. The enhancement of production had to correspond with the impulse to self-enhancement. Efficiency must become a need and acceleration a cherished value. Only once this was imprinted on human minds did labour become truly

available to employers.

Mass misery existed, to be sure, on a level that now exceeded the Church's capacity to care for the poor, and so help had to be gradually transformed into *a* bourgeois system. Helping the poor became a complicated balancing act between the exaction of strict discipline on the one side and the granting of concessions, to check revolutionary tendencies, on the other. This interplay of forces could only be severely disrupted by the Church's care of the poor, which still bore traces of the old idea of *misericordia* and the commandant to love thy neighbour. Help had to become as efficient and rational as factory labour itself. That required its bureaucratic organization. Therefore, it became increasingly the obligation of the state. This meant that the spontaneous readiness to help deteriorates into being only a marginal phenomenon, just as does the habitual, self-evident practice of giving help. Instead it is replaced by the newly institutionalized duty of the state, and increasingly by the codified right to help by means of which citizens can assert their claims.

Reaching for Worldwide Simultaneity

Modern help has learned its historical lesson. It has absorbed into its conception of help all the deformations accumulated by the end of the Second World War. It has learned to be calculating. Self-interest is how the decisive factor in the provision of help which — to rid itself of the ugly flavour of exploitation — is termed 'enlightened and constructive'.'[2] It has inherited universalism from the idea of the Christian mission and accepted the challenge of encompassing the whole world. It has understood its fantastic qualification as an *instrument of training* and prescribed to itself the demands for labour discipline and productive diligence, which, naturally, are to be worldwide as well. And finally, it has thrown off the ballast of compassion and accepted the necessity of being efficient and supportive of the state.

And yet the modern, up-to-date conception of help is more than the sum of its historically developed meanings. Its essential impulse nowadays is to overcome a deficit, *the* important deficit to be precise. It conducts a struggle against backwardness. It wants to achieve a worldwide simultaneity. It wants to make up for the 'delay of reason' (in H. Blumenberg's phrase) all over the world. Help is now 'the mobilization of the will to break with the past'."

Modernized help can only be understood as help rendered to the process of modernization. Modern help is the self-help of modernity. And what is modernity's fundamental impulse? For it, indeed, constitutes the deepest drive of the world encompassing idea of help. The cultural historian, E. Friedell, ventures to try and mark the date of modernity's advent precisely: 'The year of the conception of the modern person is the year 1348, the year of the Black Death.' Modernity, therefore for him, begins with a severe illness of European humanity."

Confronted with mortality on such a mass scale, Petrarch (1304-74) describes death for the first time in European intellectual history as a *life-denying* principle threatening the dignity of humanity. At the same time death was discovered to be a natural phenomenon, an immutable force of nature.'

Death ceases to be seen as a divine penalty and instead is declared to be a human scandal, one fit to be regarded as an outrage. As a natural phenomenon it is included in the essentially modern programme of mastering nature. Modernity's idea of progress is, in part, a rebellion against humanity's humiliating state of subjection to death, a declaration of war on the fundamental insecurity of human existence which seems to be directed by chance or capricious fate. Pre-modern consciousness, in contrast, had been deeply pervaded by the experience 'that things always turn out differently than one thinks'.

> Modernity has unhinged the old ecology of human power and impotence. Inspired by an epoch-making mix of optimism and aggression, it has posed the prospect of the creation of a world in which things turn out as one expects because one can do whatever one wants."

Opposition to death has in the meantime — as long as death cannot be actually overcome — two thrusts: it must make life *more secure* and it must make it *faster.* More secure in order to free it from chance; faster in order to make optimal use of our biologically limited lifespan. The gigantic endeavours that result are tellingly characterized by P. Sloterdijk as a 'general mobilization'. His choice of a metaphor from the world of preparations for war is deliberate. The modern person places him or herself under an uncompromising optimization imperative. No one is allowed to rest until everything that is has been improved. i.e. No one is ever allowed to rest. For everything that has been improved is good only for a fleeting historical moment. Afterwards it is once again overdue for being surpassed.

Improvement in the service of security means increasing the degree of predictability, planning, manageability, understandability and homogeneity. In the service of acceleration, it means increasing the mobility of people, materials and social relations. Progress is only conceivable as 'those motions . . . that lead to a higher capacity for motion'."

The idea of development is enthusiastic about this gigantic project of standardization. 'The main cause of fear,' as Descartes wrote, 'is surprise.' Being secure means to be secure against surprises. Security demands exclusion of the unforeseeable. This understanding of security involves establishing the same degree of familiarity and knowledge the world over. And in order to produce a worldwide homogeneity, one has to undertake the eradication of all that is foreign. 'The best surprise is no surprise,' according to the advertising slogan of an international American hotel chain. The idea of development promises that one will be able to feel at home everywhere in the world. The unalterable precondition of homogeneity is worldwide simultaneity. Everything backward, everything that has not yet been drawn into the whirlpool of the 'general mobilization' of modernity represents resistance to it and must therefore be brought into the present in order to become fit for the future. And what is not matched to the time will be relegated to a place in the museum or a reserve. This relegation is made with all the conscientiousness requisite to historical responsibility and the diligence of the collector.

And for the standard by which the tasks of development are set, it must be

the world's most advanced organization and the most fast-paced lifestyle; in short, the model of life in the highly developed industrial nations. Modern help *is* help to flee. It offers the possibility — at least it claims to do so — of slipping off the shackles of one's native culture and falling into line with the thoroughly organized bustle of the unitary world culture.

SOS is the old signal of an emergency at sea: Save Our Souls. The seamen in need summon others to save them and they issue their call by referring to the fact that their souls are in danger. If one takes the idea of an emergency call literally and turns it on its head, then the abbreviation SOS is also applicable to modern help. The emergency call of those in danger has become the call to battle of the helpers. Help turns into the act of saving oneself. The object being saved is not the soul, but that which is soulless — SOS: Save Our *Standards.* Help is extended for the sake of the achievements of one's own (Western) civilization. It serves to confirm and secure the standards of a normality raised to the level of a worldwide validity. It is at the same time a runway for new high altitude flights of fancy on which the standards valid a moment ago are constantly being left behind as the obsolete fashion of the past. Help signifies, for those who 'need' it, the long haul still be be covered before arrival in the brave new world of modernization. Not salvation from emergency, but a promise of the future is its leitmotif.

Without people's scandalized consciousness in the face of death at the beginning of the modern period, however, and without the resulting 'general mobilization' (the idea of development) and the subsequent elevation of this project into a moral necessity, the most recent manifestation of help as worldwide aid for development would not have been plausible.

Aid and the Elegance of Power

It was only a matter of time before the onward movement of modernization would spring the bounds of the highly mobilized, productively unshackled Western industrial countries to discover an intolerable obstruction to its further movement in the sluggish stagnation of the backward 'Third World' countries. The arguments of both left and right in favour of development aid presuppose that this movement has to expand without hindrance. They only differ from one another on how the integration of the retarding rest of the world into the universal movement can be accomplished on terms that are economically efficient or morally acceptable. As the Pearson Report put it: 'the acceleration of history, which is largely the result . . . of modern technology, has changed the whole concept of national interest. . . . We must show a common concern for the common problems of all peoples.' The acceleration of history, taken as an established fact, makes it necessary to think of the world's population as a 'world community' and the planet as a 'global village'." Not the other way around: it is humanity that must be constituted as a `world community' in order to give free reign to the acceleration of 'progress'.

In 1949, President Truman postulated the obligation of the United States to offer financial and economic aid beyond its borders as a contribution of the Free World to global stability and orderly political development. Truman's

speech concluded a momentous process of reconceptualization, the guiding coordinates of which were marked by two *development plans:* the Morgenthau Plan, which both Roosevelt and Churchill favoured in 1944, and the Marshall Plan, which was put into effect in 1948. The Morgenthau Plan foresaw the complete reverse development of a dangerous industrial nation into an agrarian state. Defeated Germany was to be demilitarized after the war and comprehensively dismantled industrially. For only a short historical moment, to be sure, could the desire for punishment — directed against the nation that had set the world on fire — dominate the political calculus. Punishment is conceivable from the perspective of modernity only as enforced retardation — being detached from the general movement onward and upward. Within three years of the decision in favour of the Morgenthau Plan, the idea of help had triumphed over the thought of revenge. A Germany pushed back into the past and slowed down would have been disadvantageous in the extreme to the American movement for progress. It is fruitless to speculate as to what would have become of Germany had the Morgenthau Plan prevailed. In truth, this anti-modern proposal had no realistic chance of being implemented. The tracks of history had long since been switched to run in another direction. Integration into the West was the motto for Germany from then on, and this integration was conceivable only as an industrial mobilization, and subsequently a military mobilization as well.

Turning to the Marshall Plan (the European Recovery Programme), it must be regarded as a political master stroke that its designers succeeded in presenting it to the American population and to the recipient countries as a generous offer to *help.* Its high reputation has hardly worn thin to this day. In particular, in the western part of Germany, where the Plan was received as a visible expression of reconciliation with the victors, it was eagerly misunderstood. In reality, the package of measures was the prototype of all future development help. In it, help is conceived for the first time as pure self-help, though it nevertheless remained a *public gesture of giving.* World politics had never before been so elegant. The boundaries between giving and taking were blurred to the point of unrecognizability. There were two benefits stemming from this 'help': economic-material and political-legitimizing. On the one hand, the aid helped the stagnating American economy which was reorienting itself to peacetime production. Only a recovered industrial Europe could create sufficient demand for goods made in the USA. On the other hand, the aid programme confirmed America in the role of the leading nation of the 'Free World'.

Truman's speech thus expressed, although still only with reference to Western Europe, the three-fold nature of the motives for transnational help, which later, at the beginning of the First Development Decade, would also guide international development aid to the Third World. Help is offered for reasons of the helper's own *national security,* for the purposes of maintaining its own *prosperity,* and for the sake of *moral obligation,* to convey to others the good that has come to a nation in the course of history. This last motive is especially liable to cause confusion. There is to be recognized in it both national modesty as well as gratefulness for a benevolent historical fate. By virtue of having so benefited, however, it assserts, self-confidently and without doubt, hat it is superior to precisely this historical configuration. All three motives are hen bundled together in the overarching task of the 'Free World' (more accurately, the 'Free West') to create a 'bulwark against communism'. Henceforth, help is help against communism — until its collapse 40 years later in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991.

At the beginning of the First Development Decade in 1960, the moral appeal to his own nation's willingness to help was presented with great verve by the American President, J. F. Kennedy, in two major addresses to Congress (1961 and 1963).[19] Down to the very choice of words, the two Kennedy speeches are characterized by confidence and a revolutionary dynamic, determined and prepared to assume the role of the leading nation of the 'Free World' in the post-colonial era, and in the full consciousness of how weighty is the burden of responsibility:

> Looking toward the ultimate day, when all nations can be self-reliant and when foreign aid will no longer be needed . . . (with the) eyes of the American people, who are fully aware of their obligations to the sick, the poor, and the hungry, wherever they may live . . . as leaders of the Free

This corresponds to 'the deep American urge to extend a generous hand to those working toward a better life for themselves and their children.'

Behind President Kennedy's moral appeal to the American people to accept this last great historical exertion, there is concealed the self-consolation (and self-assurance), which, in one form or another, every epoch pervaded with a belief in progress has needed — the tendency of the present to conceive of itself as the penultimate stage of history, to fancy itself in a kind of positive final time in which only the last breakthrough remains before the harvest of history can be gathered into humanity's granary. The confidence with which an epoch fantasizes itself into the universal inheritance and final configuration of history is what protects it against the unbearable consciousness of the lostness of the present in time' (H. Blumenberg). The diagnosis of the 'end of history' — as an American State Department official put it in 1990 after the collapse of the bureaucratic socialist regimes in Eastern Europe — is offered up against the vexing experience of being always a mere transitional stage in a higher course of progress, whose beneficiaries will be those who come later. It serves the purpose of self-defence against an exaggerated sense of generational envy. At the same time, the sense of immediate expectancy aroused is a powerful historical impulse which has lent the idea of progress new force and compelled it to further acceleration whenever spirits have begun to flag.

The Ambiguity of Self-Help and Sharing

Compared to this euphoria, the non-governmental organizations supplying help, in particular the religious welfare agencies and grassroots groups, have maintained a critical scepticism from the very beginning. But let us not forget that they raise no opposition to the idea of development itself, but merely reject

the insinuation that the global responsibility for development can be had tr. the low cost of pursuing the national self-interest of the donor nations.

The changing discussion of international aid inside the Church is a got example. Ever since the end of the Second World War, it has been essentiat characterized by two tendencies. First, a widening of the range of the Churct responsibility, both geographical as well as substantive and institutional. At second, a continual displacement of the very idea of help. Help appears mot and more as a conceptually unsuitable means of promoting development. short, help does not help.

The programmatic statements of international ecumenical conferences it the 1960s illustrate the following, very important transitions: away from tt model of inter-church help (in devastated post-war Europe) to the idea lot *service* to the comprehensive world community; (New Delhi, 1961): away frot service to *social action;* away from personal piety to a concern with the problet of *justice;* away from the particular institution to the worldwide *ecumenicH* plane; away from inside to beyond the walls of the Church; an opening to tit world of societies; a movement beyond mere help to the *transformation °He structures and overcoming of the status quo.* 'Only a Christianity that is full conscious of its social responsibility can be adequate to a dynamic. changin society.' (Geneva, 1965) 'The great and constantly growing undertaking upoi which we have entered does not permit us to live from hand to mouth . . . [We must . . . *test, plan, and develop a kind of strategy*.'[21]

Doubtless these considerations are based in an ethic other than the merely strategic. In agreement with the protest movements of these years that were critical of capitalism, and in opposition to the misuse of foreign aid for purposes of power politics, help from the international Christian Church becomes politicized.

After the founding of the German church aid agency, Misereor in 1958, the talk was originally exclusively of person-to-person relationships and personal repudiation (`Those who have been driving a Volkswagen and can now permit themselves a Mercedes remain with the Volkswagen' and 'those who have money for four weeks of vacation might satisfy themselves with three.') As a goal, they set their sights on a victory over hunger and leprosy — not yet on poverty and underdevelopment. In a critical self-limitation, the church's welfare organization was obliged to stick by its instruments of government to the task of 'summoning to the works of charity' and to leave to the world concern for a just distribution of land, the creation of sufficient jobs, and the containment of Bolshevism. Even explicitly missionary motives were repudiated. The point was professedly 'simply . the confirmation of Christian compassion. For this reason everyone should receive assistance, without regard to faith and whatever the prospects for success.'"

The concept of help, however, became increasingly tricky: 'The ecumenical deaconry could no longer limit itself to help for victims, but had to find a way to contribute to overcoming the causes of human and social need.'" A critical consideration of development help requires one to understand the nature of need. That means — what enlightenment has always meant since the days of Copernicus — that one has to learn to distrust fundamentally the appearance of

hings. Need ceased being what it had appeared to be in the founding years of the aid agencies, namely need pure and simple, which could be subject to help. Need ceased to be something monolithic, cast in a common mould. Instead it came to be seen as a complex system of countless, mutually reinforcing obstacles to development. Theorists tirelessly construed 'vicious circles of poverty', in which the chess moves of power politics on the part of the rich countries find just as much place as the structural weaknesses of the countries of the Third World — ranging from the terms of trade to the population explosion and from the illiteracy of the impoverished population to the inadequacies of the infrastructure. From this perspective, everything that stands in the way of industrial production is a contributing cause of need.

To the extent that concrete human need disappears under the analytic gaze and necessarily gives way to an abstract system of powerful negative factors, the help or aid enterprise itself looks hopelessly backward, inadequate to confront the overwhelming facts at issue, too apolitical, almost irrational, criminally naive. Help proves itself to be counterproductive for the development venture, for, by taking need at face value, it affirms the delusory context that surrounds it.

But it is not only because it is abused for the purposes of power politics that help has fallen into disrepute. It ought to be much more discredited because of its quasi-feudal character, because of the power differential that it is itself responsible for establishing. The ecumenical movement's discussion of aid right up to the 1980s revolved around the 'problem of giving and receiving'.[24] What was meant here was the relation of superiority and inferiority that help creates; the shame of the receiver and arrogance of the giver. This tactfulness, however generous-hearted it might at first glance appear, has something astonishing about it. If we stick to the scenario of the person who innocently suffers need and to whom help is to be given, it is by no means obvious why help discriminates against that person. Nor does the act of helping in itself establish a power differential between the two. The person who is saved, naturally, owes their saviour thanks, but in no case submission. Help supplied does not always establish a paternalistic relationship, and it certainly does not occur when it is unconditional assistance given in an emergency.

The embarrassment surrounding foreign aid, which makes it so difficult to spare the receiver shame, comes from the fact that it is *development* help. Only under this rubric is help not help in need, but help in the overcoming of a deficit. Between these two types of help there exists an unbridgeable difference. To understand it, one has to have considered the equally profound distinction between need and neediness.

The person suffering need experiences it as an intolerable deviation from normality. The sufferer alone decides when the deviation has reached such a degree that a cry of help is called for. Normal life is both the standard of the experience of need as well as of the extent of the help required. Help is supposed to allow the sufferer to reapproach normality. In short, the sufferer of need, however miserable that person may be, is the master of his or her need. Help is an *act of restoration.*

The needy person, on the other hand, is not the master of his or her

neediness. The latter is much more the result of a comparison with a foreign normality, which is effectively declared to be obligatory. One becomes needy on account of a diagnosis — I decide when *you* are needy. Help allotted to a needy person is a *transformative intervention.*

Development help inherited the missionary idea, with its accursed crusade to win converts and mania for redemption. The message of salvation has been secularized compared to the missionary era, but that is precisely the reason why the condition of 'not yet partaking' appears in the shaming form of a deficit. However emphatically cultural particularity and historically evolved multiplicity, may be discussed, the modern missionary idea still declares that a shortfall of civilization must be remedied, an incorrect historical development corrected, an excessively slow pace accelerated. Even the self-criticism of development aid manoeuvres itself into a paradoxical situation. It regards its opposite numbers in the Third World as comprehensively needy, backward according to valid standards of normality, and subject to an essential catching up process. And at the same time it broods tormentedly over the arrogance of the rich nations, makes propaganda for the idea of the fundamental equality of foreign cultures, shows its willingness to engage in dialogue, and condemns tutelary and dependency relations and cultural imperialism.

The only help which, examined critically, did not prove disreputable or counterproductive, and which seemed to point a way out of the dilemma, was *help for self-help.* This perspective became the guiding principle for the development policy of non-state welfare organizations. In offering training for self-help, help apparently rediscovers its innocence. For this is help that renders itself superfluous within an appropriate time period and the dependency it establishes is allegedly a transitional stage with a tendency to dissolve of itself.

Help for self-help, however, still does not reject the idea that the entire world is in need of development; that, this way or that, it must join the industrial way of life. Help for self-help still remains development help and must necessarily, therefore, still transform all self-sufficient, subsistence forms of existence by introducing them to 'progress'. As development help, it must first of all destroy what it professes to save — the capacity of a community to shape and maintain its way of life by its own forces. It is a more elegant form of intervention, undoubtedly, and with considerably greater moral legitimacy. But the moral impulse within it continues to find its field of operation in the `development-needy countries', and to allow the native and international policy of plunder to continue on in its unenlightened course. In this light, the sole helpful intervention would be to confront and resist the cynical wielders of power and the profiteers in one's own home country. Help for self-help is only a half-hearted improvement on the idea of development help because it exclusively mistrusts help, and not development itself.

In the most recent phase of the Church's discourse on development policy, the guiding principle of help for self-help is being replaced by the concepts of one world and mutual sharing. What this brings into relief is much less a radical redistribution of wealth than 'relationships within the totality, . . . participation and mutuality'. It attacks the superiority complex of Western civilization created by economic efficiency and promotes the vindication of other cultures. Every culture in the `one world' is simultaneously giving and receiving. The point is to recognize the equality of all cultures and make mutual learning possible within a cultural dialogue. Mutuality is supposed to be drawn out of the fixed roles of giving and taking.

Once again, the idea is based on a peculiarly grandiose notion of culture: 'Every particular culture realizes a limited number of human possibilities . . [and], on the other hand, stifles others, which, then, are able to be developed in other cultures.'[25] What then is more obvious for transcending the limitations in a large-scale cultural project encompassing the entire world than bringing together into a whole the parts conceived as fragments of human possibilities? But in a reversal of the systems theory principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, this approach holds, in regard to cultural multiplicity, that the contradictory parts are more than the comprehensive whole, or, in other words, that the whole is the false (Theodor Adorno).

Herbert Achternbusch summarizes it:

> World (and 'one world') is an imperial concept. Where I live has meanwhile become the world. Earlier Bavaria was here. Now the world reigns. Bavaria, like the Congo or Canada, has been subjugated to the world, is ruled by the world. . . . The more the world rules, the more will the world be annihilated, will we, who inhabit this piece of the earth, be annihilated. . . . The imperial law of the world is understanding. Every point in this world must be understood by every other point. As a consequence, every point in the world must be equivalent to every other point. Thus is understanding confused with equality and equality with justice. But how is it that it is unjust if I cannot make myself understandable to someone else? Is it the oppressed or the dominated who want to make themselves understood? Naturally, it is the oppressor and the dominator. It is domination that must be understandable.26

To be a deacon (in Christian terms) involves being prepared to validate one's calling by service to life; it is claimed to be an 'option for life'. But even this formulation remains on the well trodden path. If one really opts for life, the discussion must return to the origin of the breakthrough into modernity. With that the doom of the development idea truly begins because it cannot supply the foundation for its own renunciation. E. M. Cioran complains that he finds himself on an earth

> where our mania for salvation makes life unbreathable. . . . Everyone is trying to remedy everyone's life . . . the sidewalks and hospitals of the world overflow with reformers. The longing to become a source of *events* affects each man like a mental disorder or a desired malediction. Society — an inferno of saviours! What Diogenes was looking for with his lantern was *an indifferent man."*

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Arguments against development aid can be raised on several levels. Most easily available are critical evaluations of aid projects. B. Erler, *Tbdliche Hilfe,* Freiburg: Dreisam, 1985, recounts the failure of numerous projects, even if they have been set up with local participation. Drawing also on her earlier work, T. Hayter, *Exploited Earth: Britain's Aid and the Environment,* London: Earthscan, 1989, surveys the political context of aid and particularly examines its effects on tropical forests. R. Gronemeyer, *Hirten und Helfer,* Giessen: Focus, 1988, bids a sad farewell to nomadic ways of life which have been devastatingly affected by aid. With regard to the discussion within the development establishment, see for instance G. Cassen, *Does Aid Work? Report to an International Task Force,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. A debunking insight into how development agencies work is offered by G. Hancock, *Lords of Poverty,* London: 1989, while R. Mooney, *Seeds of the Earth: A Private or Public Resource?,* London: International Coalition for Development Action, 1979, exposes the criminal practices of agribusiness.

Unfortunately, an intellectual history of the idea of international aid, to my knowledge, remains still to be written. It would have to take off from a history of helping in Europe. Changing European policies towards the poor are traced in B. Geremek, *La pieta e la forca: Storia della miseria e della carita in Europa,* Roma: Laterza, 1986, while Ch. Sachsse & E. Tennstedt. *Geschichte der Armenfursorge in Deutschland,* Stuttgart: 1980, outline the change in the institutional framework of assistance, focusing in particular on aid as education.

In the development context, aid has meant help for the purpose of modernization. It implied nothing less than drawing all peoples worldwide into a simultaneous reality and exposing them to the waves of global acceleration. I was stimulated to this way of thinking about modernity by P. Sloterdijk, *Euro taoi smus: Zur Kritik der politi schen Kinetik ,* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989; the wide-ranging reflections of H. Blumenberg. *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit,* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986; and the essay of J. Rifkin, *Time Wars,* New York: Holt, 1987, on modern civilization's concept of time. An early attack (1956), lucid but little known, on the global diffusion of the industrial revolution and the corruption of cultures in the face of consumer gadgets was launched by G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen,* 2 vols., Munchen: Beck, 1980.

I owe the insight about how modern experience, since the time of the plague, was shaped by the negation of death to E. Friedel!, *Die Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit,* Vol. *1.* Munchen: 1976 (originally 1926). How efforts at modernization can be read as attempts to achieve security in a world without afterlife, can be inferred from J. Delumeau, *La peur en occident,* Paris: Fayard, 1978. Security implies refusal of the Other as well. This is analysed in B. Waldenfels, *Der Stachel des Fremden,* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990.

Needs

Ivan Illich

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No matter where you travel, the landscape is recognizable. All over the world it is cluttered with cooling towers and parking lots, agribusiness and megacities. But now that development is ending — earth was the wrong planet for this kind of construction — the growth projects are rapidly turning into ruins, into junk, among which we must learn to live. Twenty years ago, the consequences of the worship of growth already appeared 'counter-intuitive'. Today, *Time* magazine publicizes them with apocalyptic cover stories. And no one knows how to live with these frightening new Horsemen of the Apocalypse, many more than four of them — a changing climate, genetic depletion, pollution, the breakdown of various immunities, rising sea levels and millions of fugitives. Even to address these issues, one is caught in the impossible dilemma of fostering either panic or cynicism. But even more difficult than to survive with these environmental changes is the horror of living with the habits of needing which four decades of development have established. The needs that the rain dance of development kindled not only justified the despoliation and poisoning of the earth; they also acted on deeper level. They transmogrified human nature. They reshaped the mind and senses of *homo sapiens* into those of *homo miserabilis*. 'Basic needs' may be the most insidious legacy left behind by development.

The transformation occurred over a couple of centuries. During this time the root certainty was change, sometimes called progress, sometimes development, sometimes growth. In this secular process, men claimed to have discovered `resources' in culture and nature — in what had been their commons — and turned them into economic values. The historian of scarcity relates the story. Like churned cream which suddenly congeals into butter, *homo miserabilis* recently appeared, almost overnight, from a mutation of *homo economicus*, the protagonist of scarcity. The post-World War II generation witnessed this change of state in human nature from common to *needy* man. Half of all individuals born on the earth as *homo* are of this new kind.

Archaeological estimates place the total number of adult individuals belonging to *homo sapiens* who have ever lived at no more than five billion. They lived between the time the Early Stone Age hunting scenes of Lascaux were painted and the year Picasso shocked the world with the horror of Guernica. They made up ten thousand generations and lived in thousands of different lifestyles speaking innumerable distinct tongues. They were snow men and cattle breeders, Romans and Moguls, sailors and nomads. Each mode of living framed the one condition of being human in a different way: around the hoe, the spindle, wood, bronze or iron tools. But in each instance, to be human meant communal submission to the rule of necessity in this particular place, at this particular time. Each culture translated this rule of necessity into a different idiom. And each view of necessity was expressed in a different way — whether it was to bury the dead or to exorcize fears. This enormous variety of cultures bears witness to the plasticity of desire and longing which is tasted so differently in each individual and society. Fancy drove Tongans on their outriggers across thousands of miles of ocean. It drove Toltecs from Mexico to build temple outposts in Wisconsin, Muslims from Outer Mongolia to visit the Ka'aba and Scots the Holy Land. But in spite of all the forms of anguish and awe, terror and ecstasy, the unknown following death, nothing indicates that the ancestral half of humanity experienced anything like what we take for granted under the designation of need.

The second and larger part of humanity was born in the epoch that I can remember, after Guernica, 1936. Most people who are now adults are addicted to electric power, synthetic clothing, junk food and travel. They do live longer; but if we are to believe the osteo-palaeontologists who rummage through cemeteries to study bones, the second half of humanity contains a large proportion of people who are malnourished and physically impaired. And most of these five billion currently alive accept unquestioningly their human condition as one of dependence on goods and services, a dependence which they call need. In just one generation, needy man — *homo miserabilis* — has become the norm.

The historical movement of the West, under the flag of evolution/progress/growth/development, discovered and then prescribed *needs*. In this process, we can observe a transition from man, the bungling toiler, to man, the needy addict. I divide this essay into two parts. In the first I gather together some observations on the phenomenology of needs, and in the second I trace the history of *homo miserabilis* as it is reflected by the term 'needs' in the context of the official discourse on development started by President Harry Truman.

Neither Necessities Nor Desires

It is difficult to speak convincingly about the historicity of needs. The existence of specifiable and measurable human needs has become so natural that we are prepared to attribute the need for oxygen to certain bacteria, while at the same time we reserve a condescending smile for Albert the Great who spoke about the desire of a heavy stone to fall downwards until it reaches the centre of the Earth.

The human condition has come to be defined by the needs common to its members. For the new generation, the needs that are common to men and women, yellow and white — rather than common dignity or common redemption in Christ or some other god — are the hallmark and manifestation of common humanity. With unscrupulous benevolence, needs are imputed to others. The new morality based on the imputation of basic needs has been far more successful in winning universal allegiance than its historical predecessor, the imputation of a catholic need for eternal salvation. As a result, needs have become the worldwide foundation of common social certainties that relegate inherited cultural and religious assumptions about human limitation to the realm of so-called personal values that, at best, deserve tolerant respect. The spread of needs that modern development has wrought will not be stemmed by the end of the development discourse.

It is easier to junk the inefficiently air-conditioned skyscrapers of San Juan de Puerto Rico than it is to extinguish the yearning for an artificial climate. And once this yearning has become a need, the discovery of comfort on an island exposed to the trade winds will become very difficult. The right to full employment will long have been exposed as an impossible pursuit, before women's need for full-time jobs will have been deconstructed. Twenty years after the public recognition that medical ministrations are marginal to a nation's health, the costs of unhealthy professional medicine continue to outpace those of a healthy life style. It will be much easier to gain a UN consensus that the development epoch has come to an end, that it is time to delink the pursuit of peace and justice from the organized satisfaction of needs, than it will be to find acceptance for the idea that needs are a social habit acquired in the 20th century and a habit that needs to be kicked in the next.

For people shaped by the moral climate of the last 50 years, questions about the notional status of needs sound offensive to the hungry, destructive of the one common base for morality we have and, in addition, pointless. These people need to be reminded that the social reconstruction of *homo sapiens* (the wise or tasteful human) into *needy man* has transformed the status of necessity. From being part and parcel of the human condition, necessity was turned into an enemy or an evil.

The development decades can be understood as the epoch during which, at immense cost, a worldwide ceremony has been celebrated to ritualize the end of necessity. Schools, Hospitals, Airports, Correctional and Mental Institutions, the Media can be understood as networks of temples built to hallow the deconstruction of necessities and the reconstruction of desires into needs. Well into the industrial age, for most people living in subsistence cultures, life was still predicated on the recognition of limits that just could not be transgressed. Life was bounded within the realm of immutable necessities. The soil yielded only known crops; the trip to the market took three days; the son could infer from the father what his future would be. For 'need' meant of necessity 'as needs must be'. Such needs, meaning necessities, had to be endured.

Each culture was the social *gestalt* assumed by the acceptance of needs at one place, in one particular generation. Each was the historical expression of a unique celebration of life within an art of suffering that made it possible to celebrate necessities. What mediated between desire and suffering differed from culture to culture. It could be good or bad stars — or just plain luck; ancestral blessings and curses — or personal karma; witchcraft and evil spirits — or providence. In a moral economy of subsistence, the existence of desires is taken as much for granted as the certainty that they could not be stilled.

When needs occur in the modern development discourse, however, they are neither necessities nor desires. Development is the word for a promise — for a guarantee proffered to break the rule of necessity, using the new powers of science, technology and politics. Under the influence of this promise, desires also changed their status. The hope to accomplish the good has been replaced by the expectation that needs will be defined and satisfied. Emphatically, expectations refer to a different 'not yet' than hopes. Hope springs from the necessity that fosters desire. Hope orients toward the unpredictable, the unexpected, the surprising. Expectations spring from needs fostered by the promise of development. They orient toward claims, entitlements and demands. Hope appeals to the arbitrariness of a personal other, be he human or divine. Expectations build on the functioning of impersonal systems that will deliver nutrition, health care, education, security and more. Hope faces the unpredictable, expectation the probable.

Hopes mutate into expectations. Desires mutate into claims when necessities fade in the light of development. When this happens, hope and desire appear as irrational hangovers from a dark age. The human phenomenon has ceased to be defined by the art of suffering necessity; now it is understood as the measure of imputed lacks which translate into needs.

This translation, for most of the world's people, has happened during the last 30 years. Needs have only very recently become a universal experience, and only just now, have people come to speak of their needs for shelter, education, love and personal intimacy. Today it has become almost impossible to deny the existence of needs. Under the tacit assumption of development, a heart bypass is no longer seen as a wanton desire or a fancy demand of the rich. Within the context of an obstinate rebellion against necessity, the stranger has become the catalyst who amalgamates desire and transgression into the felt reality of a need. Paradoxically, this reality acquires its absolute legitimacy only when the needs I experience are attributed to strangers, even when it is obvious that for the majority of them they just cannot be met. Need, then, stands for the normal condition of *homo miserabilis.* It stands for something that is definitely beyond the majority's reach. To see how this impasse was reached, it is instructive to trace the stages through which the notion of needs was related to economic and social development during the last few decades.

`Needs' in the Development Discourse

The political pursuit of development brought needs into the Western political discourse. In his Inaugural Address of 1949, US President Harry Truman sounded altogether credible when he advocated the need for US intervention in foreign nations to bring about 'industrial progress' in order 'to raise the standard of living' in the 'underdeveloped areas' of the world. He did not mention revolution. His aim was to 'lighten the burden of the poor', and this could be accomplished by producing 'more food, more clothing, more materials for housing and more mechanical power'. He and his advisers saw 'greater production as the key to prosperity and peace'.` He spoke in terms of legitimate aspirations, not about needs. Indeed Truman was very far from imputing to people everywhere a catholic set of defined needs which demand satisfaction that development must bring.

When Truman spoke, poverty — in terms of a market economy — was still the common lot of the overwhelming majority in the world. Surprisingly, a few nations appeared to have overcome this fate, thereby stimulating the desire in others to do the same. Truman's common sense led him to believe that a universal law of progress was applicable, not only to isolated individuals or groups, but also to humanity at large through national economies. Thus he

used the term 'underdeveloped' for collective social entities, and spoke of the need to create 'an economic base' capable of meeting 'the expectations which the modern world has aroused' in people all over the planet.2

Twelve years later, Americans heard that: 'People in huts and in villages of half the globe struggle to break the bonds of mass misery. . . . We pledge to help them to help themselves. . . . We pledge this, not because we seek their votes, but because it is the right thing." Thus spoke John F. Kennedy in his Inaugural Address in 1961. Where Truman had noticed awakening expectations, Kennedy perceived people's secular struggle against an evil reality. Besides meeting new expectations, development therefore had to destroy inherited bonds. His statement symbolized an emerging consensus in the US that most people are needy, these needs give them rights, these rights translate into entitlements for care, and therefore impose duties on the rich and the powerful.

According to Kennedy, these needs are not just economic in nature. The `poor' nations 'have recognized the need for an intensive program for self-help', a need 'for social progress which is an indispensable condition for growth, not a substitute for economic development. . . . Without social development the great majority of the people remain in poverty, while the privileged few reap the benefits of rising abundance."

One year after Castro's rise to power, Kennedy promised more than mere economic or technical help; he solemnly pledged political intervention — 'help in a peaceful revolution of hope'. Further, he went on to adopt fully the prevailing conventional rhetoric of political economy. He had to agree with Khrushchev who told him in Vienna: 'The continuing revolutionary process in various countries is the status quo, and anyone who tries to halt that process not only is altering the status quo but is an aggressor.'[5] So Kennedy stressed `the shocking and urgent conditions' and the need for an 'alliance for social progress.' For Truman, it was the modern world 'which arouses new aspirations', and he focused on the need `to lighten the burden of their poverty'. Kennedy believed that half the world 'lives in the bonds of misery' with a sense of injustice 'which breeds political and social unrest'. In the perspective of the 1960s White House, poverty ceased to be fate; it had become an operational concept — the result of unjust social and economic conditions, the lack of modern education, the prevalence of inadequate and backward technology. Poverty was now viewed as a plague, something amenable to therapy, a problem to be solved.

In 1962, the United Nations began to operationalize poverty. The Secretary General referred to 'those people who live below an acceptable minimum standard'. He gave credence to two notions: humanity could now be split into those above and those below a measurable standard; and a new kind of bureaucracy was called for to establish criteria of what is acceptable — and what is not. The first instrument that was created to establish this standard was called the GNP. This device, which was first publicly used in the late 1940s, is a surprising mental eggbeater that compounds all goods and all services produced by all people and defines the resulting omelette as the gross value of a nation. This gross national hotchpotch strains from reality all and only those characteristics that economists can digest. By the late '70s, it was obvious that, under the aegis of development, most people become poorer as GNP grows.

In 1973 the President of the World Bank declared that: 'Progress measured by a single measuring rod, the GNP, has contributed significantly to exacerbate the inequalities of income distribution.' For this reason, McNamara declared that the central objective of development policies should be 'the attack on absolute poverty' which resulted from economic growth and which affected `40% of the nearly two billion individuals living in the developing nations'. According to him, this side-effect of development is `so extreme that it degrades the lives of individuals below minimal norms of human decency'.[6] He established a brains trust within the World Bank which began to translate these `norms of human decency' into technical measurements of disembedded, specific needs that could be expressed in monetary terms. Reference to 'needs' became the method by which, henceforth, social scientists and bureaucrats could distinguish between mere growth and true development.

As long as poverty had been a synonym for the human condition, it was understood as a pervasive feature in the social landscape of every culture. Primarily and above all, it referred to the precarious conditions within which most people survived most of the time. Poverty was a general concept for a specific cultural interpretation of the necessity to live within very narrow limits, defined differently for each place and time. It was the name for a unique and ecologically sustainable style of coping with historically given, rather than technically construed, necessity, the 'need' to face the unavoidable, not a lack. Poverty, in Christian Europe at least, was recognized as the inevitable destiny of the powerless. It denotes the ontological situation of all those who 'need to die . . . but not yet'. Certainly, neither power, nor wealth, nor poverty were related to the productivity of groups or people.

This necessity to accept fate, kismet, providence, the will of God had been eroded with the spread of Enlightenment. During the earlier 20th century it lost much of its legitimacy as progress became the name for the technological and political revolt against all ideologies that recognize the rule of necessity. Already in the epoch of steam, the engineer had become the symbol of the liberator, a messiah who would lead humanity to conquer nature. By the early 20th century, society itself had become the subject of manipulative engineering. But it was only the social translation of progress into professionally guided development which made the rebellion against necessity a programmed infection. Nothing shows this more clearly than the identification of charity with the technical sponsorship of progress, as reflected in the social Encyclicals of Pope Paul VI. This Pope was deeply devoted to St. Francis of Assisi — the spouse of Lady of Poverty. And yet, he instructed his faithful on the duty to increase productivity and to assist others in their development.

> Individual nations must raise the level of the quantity and the quality of production to give the life of all their citizens truly human dignity, and give assistance to the common development of the human race.'
>
> The complete development of the individual must be joined with that of the human race and must be accomplished by mutual effort.'

In sentences of this kind, religious leaders of all denominations, shades and

political allegiance have given their blessing to the revolt against the human condition. Paul VI is remarkable because, in a way, he took the lead on the left. In this encyclical the Pope, however, still speaks in the language of the 1950s. As with Truman, poverty for him still represented a kind of common floor: a condition from which progress starts.

By 1970 poverty in public parlance had acquired a new connotation — that of an economic threshold. And this changed its nature for modern humans. Poverty became a measure of a person's lack in terms of 'needed' goods, and even more in 'needed services'. By defining the poor as those who lack what money could buy for them to make them 'fully human', poverty, in New York City as well as in Ethiopia. became an abstract universal measure of underconsumption.[9] Those who survive in spite of indexed underconsumption were thereby placed into a new, sub-human category, and perceived as victims of a double bind. Their *de facto* subsistence became almost inexplicable in economic terminology, while their actual subsistence activities came to be labelled as sub-human, if they were not frankly viewed as inhuman and indecent.

Politicians incorporated the poverty line into their platforms and economists began to explore the theoretical significance of this inelastic threshold. In economic theory it is improper to speak of (economic) wants below an income level where demands have become substantially incommensurable. People who have lost their subsistence outside the cash economy, and who under these conditions have only occasional and minimal access to cash, lack the power to behave according to economic rationality; they cannot, for example, afford to trade food for shelter or for clothing or tools. They are neither members of the economy, nor are they capable of living, feeling and acting as they did before they lost the support of a moral economy of subsistence. The new category of economic cripples, thus defined, may in fact survive, but they do not fully partake of the characteristics of *homo economicus.* They exist — all over the world — but they are marginal, not just to the national economy but to modern humanity itself, since the latter, from the time of Mandeville, has been defined in terms of the ability to make choices under the assumption of scarcity. Unlike their ancestors, they do have urgent economic needs, and unlike legitimate participants in the modern economy — no matter how poor — any choice between alternative satisfactions, which is implied in the concept of economic need, is ruled out for them.

No wonder that 'population characteristics' began to figure in the development calculus. Populations ceased to be the exogenous object for whom development could be planned. Instead they came to figure as endogenous variables alongside capital and natural resources. While, at the beginning of the 1950s, the problem of developing countries was viewed essentially as a problem of productive wealth, by the end of that decade it became widely acknowledged that the crucial factor was not production, but rather the capacity to produce which is inherent in people.'° People thus became legitimate ingredients of economic growth. It was then no longer necessary to distinguish economic and social development, since development — as distinct from a growth in GNP — automatically had to include both.

Insufficiently qualified or capitalized people were increasingly mentioned as a burden or brake on development. This third evolutionary step, which integrates the people factor into the economic growth calculus, has a history which throws light on the semantics of the word, needs.

In the mid-1950s, economists under the influence of W. Arthur Lewis had begun to argue that certain components of medical and educational services should not be understood as personal consumption because they were necessary prerequisites of economic development." The great differences in the results of similar development policies in countries at the same levels of monetary income, could not be explained without paying attention to the investments made in human beings. The quality and distribution of training, physical well-being, social discipline and participation came to be called 'the residual factor'. Independent of the amount of capital and labour available, economic development seemed to hinge on these social qualifications of people in terms of their relevance for the economy. Economic progress by the mid-1960s was conditioned by the ability to instil in large population groups the need for 'manpower qualifications'. Education, public health, public information and personnel management were prominently discussed as so many sectors of 'manpower planning'. Leaders of popular movements who promoted 'conscientization' from Trivandrum to Brazil, in effect, supported the same idea — until people change and recognize their needs, they cannot contribute to the growth of productive forces.

This euphoria did not last. During the 1970s, two empirical observations qualified the concept of human capital" that had been developed in the 1960s. On the one hand, the assumption that the value of education or medical services is directly reflected in manpower qualifications lost much of its credibility. No proof could be found that investment in schools or clinics was causally connected with the appearance of more productive people. On the other hand, the labour theory of value lost *its* meaning, even in the weak sense in which it had entered mainstream economics. It became obvious that, irrespective of available manpower qualifications, the modernized sector could not be made sufficiently labour-intensive to provide enough jobs to justify the economically necessary redistribution of income implied by social service expenditure. And no conceivable employment-oriented development strategy could create the paid work which would employ the most disadvantaged third of the population in any but the most exceptional of the developing nations. As a result, planners during the 1980s transposed the development melody to a fourth key. Under various designations, they undertook the economic colonization of the informal sector. Let people who have become conscious of their needs fend for themselves in satisfying them.

New stress was put on incentives for activities that would keep people busy in the black market, in the barter economy, or self-supporting in the 'traditional sector'. Above all, shadow work became quantitatively more important, not just in practice, but also in policy. By shadow work I mean that the performance of unpaid activities that, in a market-intensive society, are necessary to transform purchased commodities into consumable goods. Finally, self-help activities, which in the 1960s smacked of second best, became

a favourite growth sector of planners and organizers during the 80s. This is the context within which the resuscitation of the discourse on needs must be interpreted.

Under the Mask of Compassion

Development can be visualized as a process by which people are lifted out of their traditional cultural commons. In this transition, cultural bonds are dissolved, even though culture can continue to tinge development in superficial ways — one need only observe rural people recently transplanted to the megacities of the Third World. Development can be imagined as a blast of wind that blows people off their feet, out of their familiar space, and places them on an artificial platform, a new structure of living. In order to survive on this exposed and raised foundation, people are compelled to achieve new minimum levels of consumption, for example, in formal education, public health measures, frequency in the use of transportation and rental housing. The overall process is usually couched in the language of engineering— the creation of infrastructures, the building and co-ordination of systems, various growth stages, social escalators. Even rural development is discussed in this urban language.

Under the heavy weight of the new structures, the cultural bedrock of poverty cannot remain intact; it cracks. People are forced to live on a fragile crust, below which something entirely new and inhuman lurks. In *traditional* poverty, people could rely on finding a cultural hammock. And there was always the ground level to depend on, as a squatter or beggar. This side of the grave, no one could sink below ground. Hell was a real pit, but it was for those who had not shared with the poor in this life, to be suffered after death. This no longer holds. Modernized drop-outs are neither beggars nor bums. They are victimized by the needs attributed to them by some 'poverty pimp'. '[3] They have fallen through the poverty line, and each passing year diminishes their chances of ever rising again above the line to satisfy the needs they now attribute to themselves.

Welfare is not a cultural hammock. It is an unprecedented mediation of scarce resources through agents who not only define what need is, and certify where it exists, but also closely supervise its remedy — with or without the needy's approval. Social insurance is not reliance on community support in case of disaster. Rather, it is one of the ultimate forms of political control in a society in which protection against future risks is valued higher than access to present satisfaction or joy. Needs, discussed as criteria for development strategies, clearly have nothing to do with either traditional necessities or desires, as I suggested above. And yet, during the second and third development decades', people by the million have learned to experience their poverty in terms of unmet operationalized needs.

Paradoxically, 'needs' became a most powerful emblem in spite of the fact that, for the mainstream economist, 'need' is a non-word. Economic theory does not acknowledge that there are such things as needs. Further, economics can say much that is useful about wants, preferences and demands. But 'need' is

a moral, psychological or physical imperative which brooks no compromise or adjustment — or (economic) analysis.

Most economists, up to the present day, declare themselves incompetent to include needs in their analysis, and prefer to leave the needs discussion to philosophers or politicians. On the other hand, a growing number of economists, critical of conventional development theory and practice, place in `basic needs' the foundation for what came to be called 'the new economic order'.[14] They find in needs the term for non-negotiable, mutually incommensurable requirements of human nature. Powerfully, they root economic theory in the ontological status of being human. They argue that, unless basic needs are provided for by the economy, economic preferences, choices and wants just cannot be effectively formulated. Their new world order is built on the foundations of a humanity whose basic needs have been met, thanks to a new kind of economy that recognizes their existence.

But before the concept of needs could be incorporated in an economic argument, it had to be defined and classified. For this undertaking, Abraham Maslow's theory of a needs hierarchy somewhat belatedly became very influential. Indeed, physical safety, affection, esteem and, ultimately, self-realization needs underlie most current discussion as the key categories. Unlike wants which, since Hobbes, are considered as equal to each other— 'since they are simply what people want' — needs are consistently discussed as fitting into a hierarchy which has an objective and normative status. They are generally spoken about as realities to be disinterestedly studied by needs experts. Some of the new economists go so far as to make of this needs hierarchy the cornerstone of a new ethic. For example, Erich Fromm believed that 'the sane society' is an arrangement that

> corresponds to the needs of man, not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs (because even the most pathological aims can be felt subjectively as that which the person wants most) but to what his needs are objectively, as they can be ascertained by the study of man."

Up to now, the most complete critical study of the needs discourse and its implications has been made by Marianne Gronemeyer.[6] She argues that needs, in the current sense, are a new way of formulating the assumption of universal scarcity. Following her argument, it becomes likely that the public credibility of economic assumptions, which is already wavering, can survive only if a new economics reconstructs itself on the assumption of definable 'basic needs'. Further, Gronemeyer shows that needs, defined in terms of ostensibly scientific criteria, permit a redefinition of human nature according to the convenience and interests of the professionals who administer and serve these needs. An economy based on wants — whether it be for therapy, education or transportation — now inevitably leads to socially intolerable levels of polarization. By contrast, an economy based on needs — including their identification by experts and well managed satisfaction — can provide unprecedented legitimacy for the use of this science in the service of the social control of 'needy' man.

Needs, as a term and as an idea, occupy a place within current mental topology that did not exist in the constellation of meanings of previous epochs. During the Second Development Decade, the notion of needs began to shine like a supernova in the semantic sky. As Gronemeyer has argued, insistence on basic needs has now defined the human phenomenon itself as divisible — the needs discourse implies that you can become either more or less human. It is as normative and double-edged a tool as some powerful drug. By defining our common humanity by common needs, we reduce the individual to a mere profile of his needs.

From Needs to Requirements

Just as the Enlightenment's idea of progress prepared the ground for what was almost certain to happen anyway, the management of social change in the name of development has prepared the political environment for the redefinition of the human condition in terms of cybernetics — as an open system that optimizes the maintenance of the provisional immunity of individuals reduced to sub-systems. And just as needs became *an* important emblem which allowed managers to provide a philanthropic rationale for the destruction of cultures, so, now, needs are being replaced by the new emblem of `basic requirements' under which the new goal, 'survival of the earth' can be justified.

In the 1970s, experts presented themselves as servants who helped the poor become conscious of their true needs, as a Big Brother to assist them in the formulation of their claims. This dream of bleeding hearts and blue-eyed do-gooders can today be easily dismissed as the nonsense of an age already past. 'Needs', in a vastly more interdependent, complex, polluted and crowded world, can no longer be identified and quantified, except through intense teamwork and scrutiny by systems specialists. And in *this* new world, the needs discourse becomes the pre-eminent device for reducing people to individual units with input *requirements.*

When this occurs, *homo economicus* is rapidly recognized as an obsolete myth — the planet can no longer afford this wasteful luxury — and replaced by *homo systematicus.* The needs of this latter invention metamorphose from economic wants into system requirements, these being determined by an exclusivist professional hegemony brooking no deviation whatsoever. The fact that many people today already recognize their systemic requirements principally argues the power of professional prestige and pedagogy, and the final loss of personal autonomy. The process began originally with the loss of the commons and now appears complete as people are turned into abstract elements of a mathematical stasis. The latest conceptualization of these abstract elements has been reached recently through the reinterpretation of the common man, who is now seen as a fragile and only provisionally functioning immune system always on the brink of breakdown. The literature of this development accurately mirrors the esoteric character of its conceptualization. The condition of post-modern man and his universe has become, according to this view, so complex that only the most highly specialized experts can function as the priesthood capable of understanding and defining 'needs' today.

Thus, the human phenomenon is no longer defined by what we *are,* what we face, what we can take, what we dream; nor even by the modern myth that we can produce ourselves out of scarcity; but by the measure of what we lack and, therefore, need. And this measure, determined by systems theory thinking, implies a radically new conception of nature and law, and prescribes a politics more concerned with the provision of professionally defined requirements (needs) for survival, than with personal claims to freedom which would foster autonomous coping.

We are on the threshold of a still unnoticed transition from a political consciousness based on progress, growth and development — rooted in the dreams of the Enlightenment — to a new, yet unnamed consciousness defined by controls which ensure a 'sustainable system' of needs satisfaction. Development is dead, yes. But the well-meaning experts who propagate needs are now busily at work reconceptualizing their discovery, and in the process redefining humanity yet again. The citizen is being redefined as a cyborg. The former individual, who as a member of a 'population' has become a 'case', is now modelled in the image of an immune system that can provisionally be kept functioning if it is kept in balance by appropriate management.

Thirty years ago 'needs' was one of a dozen concepts out of which a global worldview was shaped. The term, like 'population', 'development', 'poverty' or 'planning', belongs to one category of words which I consider to be surreptitious neologisms — old words whose predominant current meaning is new while those who use them still have the impression of saying what has always been said. Within the development discourse, the word and the concept of 'need' became increasingly attractive. It became the most appropriate term to designate the moral relations between strangers in a dreamt of world made up of well-fare states. Such a world has lost credibility in the matrix of a new world now conceived as a system. When the term, needs, is now used within this new context, it 'functions' as a euphemism for the management of citizens who have been reconceptualized as subsystems within a population.

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Murray's original *Oxford English Dictionary in* 1892 divides the article on the noun 'need' into two parts only: (a) the necessity to do something, and (b) the imperial demand to have something. Through the centuries, to 'have *need to' meant* to be under an inescapable necessity of doing or obtaining something. The *OED* gives first evidence of a third meaning, *(c)* a state of physiological or psychological want that motivates behaviour towards its satisfaction, in 1929. It is only then that 'need' can refer to a want or claim to something. A similar shift, albeit much earlier, in German has been noted by J.B. 'Bediirfnis', in O. Brunner, W. Conze & R. Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe,* Stuttgart: Klett, 1972, Vol. 1, pp. 440-89. The book by P. Springborg, *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilization,* London: Allen and Unwin, 1981, seems to be the only monographic attempt at retracing the perception of the analogues of 'need' in Western thought from the Greeks to the present.

Discussions about true or false needs, basic needs, or social versus individual needs usually pay no attention to the commodity-intensity of society. They are therefore irrelevant to the argument advanced above. W. Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities,* Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1976, explored the genesis of needs in the transformation of desire into demand for commodities. A persuasive statement about the descent of man from the kingdom of preference into the bondage of needs was made by D. Baybrooke, 'Let Needs Diminish That Preferences May Prosper', in N. Resher (ed.), *Studies in Moral Philosophy,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1968. In a similar vein, I have published a number of essays, in particular *Towards A History of Needs,* New York: Pantheon, 1978.

The sudden resuscitation of discussion of needs in the 1960s was a reaction against the value-neutral approach of orthodox social science. It was first initiated by C. W. Mills and G. Myrdal in political economy, and taken up by A. Maslow and E. Fromm from the point of view of psychological anthropology. All four authors give central importance to the position of the young Marx, a heritage which has been thoroughly analysed by A. Heller, *The Theory of Needs in Marx,* London: Allison and Busby, 1976. Due to that tradition, maybe, the term 'basic needs' can be made to sound like a humanist invention when it is used within the development discourse. P. Streeten, *Development Perspectives,* London: Macmillan, 1981, and J. Galtung, 'The Basic Needs Approach', in K. Lederer et al. (eds.), *Human Needs: A Contribution to the Current Debate,* Konigstein: Athenaeum. 1980, pp. 55-128, were authoritative voices, and B. Wisner, *Power and Need in Africa.* London: Earthscan, 1988, shows the deep ambivalence of 'strategies' carried out under that slogan. However, it seems impossible to speak about 'basic needs' without implying the commodity-orientation of human nature. This has been forcefully argued by M. Gronemeyer, *Die Macht der Bedilrfnisse.* Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1988. M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers,* London: Chatto, 1984, has brilliantly pointed out how need is a term to designate moral relations between people who are strangers.

To understand how needs are being recast today as requirements to fit into the mental construct of systems thinking, insights can be gained from J. D. Bolter, *Turing's Man: Western Culture in the Computer Age,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984, and M. Berman, *Coming To Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West,* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989. Equally, W. R. Arney & B. Bergen, *Medicine and the Management of Living.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, and D. Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Post-modern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse', in *Differences,* 1 0989), pp. 3-43, provide instruments which can be used for analysing the medicalization of the planet.

The subtle and asymmetrical power relationship implicit in the concept of needs was clearly perceived by S. de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex,* New York: Bantam Books, 1952: 'In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying the need through his own action. Whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hopes and his fears, is quite conscious of the need he has for the master. Even if the need were, at the bottom, equally urgent for both, it always works in the favour of the oppressor and against the oppressed.'

One World

Wolfgang Sachs

At present, roughly 5,100 languages are spoken around the globe. Just under 99 per cent of them are native to Asia and Africa, the Pacific and the American continents, while a mere 1 per cent find their homes in Europe. In Nigeria, for instance, more than 400 languages have been counted; in India 1,682; and even Central America, tiny as it is geographically, boasts 260.' A great number of these languages cling to remote places. They hide out in isolated mountain valleys, far-off islands and inaccessible deserts. Others govern entire continents and connect different peoples into a larger universe. Taken together, a multitude of linguistic worlds, large and small, covers the globe like a patchwork quilt. Yet many indicators suggest that, within a generation or two, not many more than 100 of these languages will survive.

Languages are dying out every bit as quickly as species. While, in the latter case, plants and animals disappear from the history of nature never to be seen again, with the demise of languages, entire cultures are vanishing from the history of civilization, never to be lived again. For each tongue contains its own way of perceiving man and nature, experiencing joy and sorrow, and finding meaning in the flow of events. To pray or to love, to dream or to reason, evokes different things when done in Farsi, German or Zapotec. Just as certain plants and animals are responsible for the maintenance of large ecosystems, so languages often carry subtle cultures through time. Once species disappear, ecosystems break down; once languages die out, cultures falter.

Along with languages, entire conceptions of what it means to be human have evaporated during the development decades since 1950. And yet, the death of languages is only the most dramatic signal of the worldwide evaporation of cultures. Transistor radios and 'Dallas', agricultural advisers and nurses, the regime of the clock and the laws of the market have triggered an unprecedented transformation. It is, after all, scarcely an accident that Europe, the home of literacy as well as the nation-state, has only I per cent of all languages left. Whichever way one looks at it, the homogenization of the world is in full swing. A global monoculture spreads like an oil slick over the entire planet.

Forty years of 'development', fashioned on the model of 'one world', have gone by. The upshot of it all, if appearances do not deceive, is a looming vision of horror — modern man all alone for ever in the world. Ideas such as 'world society', 'unified world market', or even 'global responsibility' have in the past stimulated noble minds, and are again bandied about today, albeit with a tone of much more moral pathos than even a few years ago. But their innocence in an age of cultural evaporation is now tarnished.

One Manliind

There is a brass plate at the Fairmont Hotel on Union Square, San Francisco, to remind the passing visitor that it was here, on 4 May 1945, that a global hope was initialled. In Room 210, delegates from 46 countries agreed on the text of the United Nations Charter. Hitler's Germany was finally defeated and time was running out for Japan. The Charter promulgated those principles which were designed to usher in a new era of peace. No wars any more and no national egoisms. What counted was international understanding and the unity of mankind! After devastating conflicts, the Charter held out the prospect of universal peace, echoing the pledge of the League of Nations in 1919, but pointing far beyond a mere security system.

The Charter, in fact, conceptualized peace not just as the non-violent regulation of conflicts, but as the result of a global leap forward. Violence breaks out when progress is blocked. That was the conclusion the victorious powers drew from the past experience of economic depression and ensuing totalitarianism. Consequently, in the Preamble to the Charter, the United Nations solemnly announced the determination `to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom . . . and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'.[2] The delegates in Room 210 were not timid in their vision. In their eyes, Austrians and Australians, Zulus as well as Zapotecos, shared in the same aspiration for 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'. The histories of the world were seen as converging into one history, having one direction, and the UN was seen as a motor propelling less advanced countries to move ahead. The project to banish violence and war from the face of the earth was clearly linked to the vision of mankind marching forward and upward along the road of progress. Mankind, progress and peace have been the conceptual cornerstones for erecting the sprawling edifice of UN organizations. The idea that both mankind and peace realize themselves through progess/development is the expectation built into their structure. The UN's mission hinges on faith in progress.

The United Nations Charter appeals to ideas which had taken shape during the European Enlightenment. At the time of Voltaire, the all-embracing, unifying power of Christianity had faded and given way to 'humanity' as the dominant collective concept. Ever since the apostle Paul had shattered the validity of worldly distinctions in the face of God's gift of salvation, it had become thinkable to conceive of all humans as standing on the same plane. The Enlightenment secularized this heritage and turned it into a humanist creed. Neither class nor sex, neither religion nor race count before human nature, as they didn't count before God. Thus the universality of the Sonship of God was recast as the universality of human dignity. From then on, 'humanity' became the common denominator uniting all peoples, causing differences in skin colour, beliefs and social customs to decline in significance.

But 'mankind', for the Enlightenment, was not just an empirical concept meaning the inhabitants of the globe; it had a time arrow built in. 'Mankind', in effect, was something yet to come, a task to be realized as man moves along the path of progress, successively shedding the ties of authority and superstition until autonomy and reason would reign. In the perspective of the Enlightenment, neither social roots nor religious commitments mattered

much. The utopian intention aimed at a world of individuals who follow only the voice of reason. In that sense, the utopia of mankind was populated by men disembedded from their stories of the past, disconnected from the context of their places, and detached from the bonds of their communities, and united instead under the rule of science, market and the state. Hume as well as Kant saw humanity as something to be attained by spreading the universal values of civilization and drawing ever more people into the course of progress. Mankind was to be the result of becoming modern. The Enlightenment's idea of unity cannot be separated from the assumption that history moves towards the rule of universal reason. It was one of those ideas, typical of that period, which were pregnant with an infinite future.

However, the rise of humanity by no means obliterated the image of the Other in European thought. Just as Christians had their heathens, philosophers of the Enlightenment had their savages. Both figures embodied the negation of what the respective societies held as their self-images. Heathens were those outside the Kingdom of God, while savages lived outside the kingdom of civilization. But there was one crucial difference. Whereas for Christendom heathens populated geographically remote areas, for the Enlightenment savages inhabitated an infant stage of history. Europe of the Enlightenment no longer felt separated from the Other spatially, but chronologically. As a matter of fact, the existence of strange peoples like the Iroquois, Asante or Bengali at the borders of (European) civilization contradicted the very idea of one mankind. But the contradiction was resolved by interpreting the multiplicity of cultures in space as a succession of stages in time. So the 'savage' was defined as one who would grow up and enter the stage of civilization. The 'savage', though he lived now, was assigned the status of a child in the biography of mankind, a child which was not yet fully mature, and was in need of guidance by a strong father.

In the Preamble to the UN Declaration, the quest for peace was closely linked to the hope for advancement of peoples around the globe. Towards the end of the 18th century the traditional notion that peace would be the fruit of justice had lost ground. It gave way to the expectation that peace would be the result of mankind reunited under the achievements of civilization. Reason and freedom would overcome prejudice and narrow-mindedness, and the age of harmony would dawn. Peace, progress and humanity were for the Enlightenment nothing less than the different faces of an eschatological future to come. The belief that mankind could be improved upon has driven political action from Voltaire right through to our own time.

The philosophy underlying the UN Declaration makes little sense without the view of history as the royal road to progress upon which all peoples converge. The conception of achieving 'one world' by stimulating progress everywhere betrays the evolutionary bias. It inevitably calls for absorbing the differences in the world into an ahistorical and delocalized universalism of European origin. The unity of the world is realized through its Westernization. By the mid 20th century the term `underdeveloped' had taken the place of `savages'. Economic performance had replaced reason as the measure of man. However, the arrangement of concepts remains the same — the world society has to be achieved through the improvement of the backward. And indissolubly linking the hope for peace to this world-shaking endeavour leads to a tragic dilemma — the pursuit of peace implies the annihilation of diversity, while seeking diversity implies the outburst of violence. The dilemma is unlikely to be resolved without delinking peace from progress and progress from peace.

One Market

Today it seems almost strange, but the founding fathers of the United Nations, as well as the architects of international development policy, were inspired by the vision that the globalization of market relationships would be the guarantee of peace in the world. Prosperity, so the argument went, derives from exchange, exchange creates mutual interests, and mutual interests inhibit aggression. Instead of violence, the spirit of commerce was to reign on all sides. Instead of firepower, productive strength would be decisive in the competition between nations. The unity of the world, it was thought, could only be based on a far-reaching and closely interconnected network of economic relations. And where goods were in circulation, weapons would fall silent.

With a naivete hardly distinguishable from deception, the prophets of development polished up a utopia envisioned as long ago as the 18th century, as if time had stopped and neither capitalism nor imperialism had ever appeared on the scene. After Montesquieu, the Enlightenment had discovered commerce as a means of refining crude manners. In this view, trade would spread rational calculation and cold self-interest, precisely those attitudes which make the passion for war or the whims of tyrants appear self-destructive. Trade creates dependence and dependence tames. This is the logic which runs from Montesquieu through the UN down to the present-day integration of Eastern Europe and the USSR since the collapse of bureaucratic socialism there following the upheavals of 1989. And indeed, as the European Community and the Pax Americana after World War Two suggest, economic dominions have largely replaced military dominions. The conquest of foreign territories by bellicose states has given way to the conquest of foreign markets by profit-seeking industries. Global order, after World War Two, was conceived in terms of a unified world market.

One of the most highly praised virtues of the world market is increased interdependence. The network of interests created is supposed to knit the nations together, for better or worse. From that perspective, the Pearson Report exhorted the industrialized nations in 1969:

> There is also the appeal of enlightened and constructive self-interest. . . . The fullest possible utilization of all the world's resources, human and physical, which can be brought about only by international co-operation, helps not only those countries now economically weak, but also those strong and wealthy.'

Ten years later, this trust in the unifying power of mutual interest was reiterated

in the Brandt Report:

> Whoever wants a bigger slice of an international economic cake cannot seriously want it to become smaller. Developing countries cannot ignore the economic health of industrialized countries.°

But the ideology of mutual interests could not hide its major fallacy for long — the playing out of these interests takes place under unequal terms. The economists' doctrine of comparative advantage had it that the general well-being would increase if each nation specialized in doing things at which nature and history had made it most proficient — raw sugar from Costa Rica, for example, in exchange for pharmaceuticals from Holland. But the flaw in this reasoning is that, in the long run, the country which sells the more complex products will grow stronger and stronger, because it will be able to internalize the spin-off effects of sophisticated production. Pharmaceuticals stimulate research and a host of technologies, while sugar cane doesn't! The alleged mutual interest in free trade ends up cumulatively strengthening the one and progressively weakening the other. And when the richer country comes up with high tech innovations that render the products of the weaker country obsolete, as with natural sugar being replaced by bio-engineered substitutes, then mutual interest withers away to the point where the weaker country becomes superfluous.

Apart from its built-in tendencies to discrimination and inequality, however, the obsession with the market as the medium of unification for the whole world is rapidly pushing all countries into a tight spot. The world market, once brandished as a weapon against despotism, has itself turned into a closet dictator under whose dominion both rich and poor countries tremble. The fear of falling behind in international competition has seized governments North and South, East and West. Not to lose ground in the economic arena has become an obsession which dominates politics down to the local level. This overruling imperative drives developing countries further into self-exploitation, for the sake of boosting exports, and industrial countries further into the wasteful and destructive mania of accelerated production, for the sake of protecting their markets.

What is overrun in this hurly-burly is the space for a policy of self-determination. The categorical imperative of world market competition repeatedly thwarts attempts to organize societies creatively and differently. Mobilizing for competition means streamlining a country; diversity becomes an obstacle to be removed. Some countries cannot keep up without sacrificing even more of their land for agricultural exports, others cannot afford to drop out of the high tech race. There is scarcely a country left today that seems able to control its own destiny. In this respect the differences between countries are only relative: the United States enjoys more scope than India, but itself feels under intense pressure from Japan. For winners and losers alike, the constraints of the global market have become a nightmare.

One Planet

Since the late 1960s, another image of 'one world' has edged its way into contemporary consciousness — the globe in its physical finiteness. We share in `humanity', we are connected by the 'world market', but we are condemned to one destiny because we are inhabitants of one planet. This is the message conveyed by the first photograph of the 'one world', taken from outer space, which has irresistibly emerged as the icon of our age. The photo shows the planet suspended in the vastness of the universe and impresses on everybody the fact that the earth is one body. Against the darkness of infinity, the circular earth offers itself as an abode, a bounded place. The sensation of being on and inside it strikes the onlooker almost instantly. The unity of the world is now documented. It can be seen everywhere. It jumps out at you from book covers, T-shirts and commercials. In the age of TV, photographs are our eyewitnesses. For the first time in history, the planet is revealed in its solitude. From now on, `one world' means physical unity; it means 'one earth'. The unity of mankind is no longer an Enlightenment fancy or a commercial act but a biophysical fact.

However, this physical interconnectedness stands in relief against the background of proliferating dangers. From creeping desertification to ¡mpending climatic disaster, alarm signals multiply. The biosphere is under attack and threatens to cave in. Local acts such as driving a car or clearing a forest add up, when multiplied, to global imbalances. They turn beneficial cycles into vicious ones that undermine the reliability of nature. In the face of incalculable debacles, concerned voices call for a global political coherence which would match the biophysical interconnections. 'The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives.' After having intoned this leitmotif, the Brundtland Report spells out the fateful new meaning of unity:

> Today the scale of our interventions in nature is increasing and the physical effects of our decisions spill across national frontiers. The growth in economic interaction between nations amplifies the wider consequences of national decisions. Economics and ecology bind us in ever-tightening networks. Today, many regions face risks of irreversible damage to the human environment that threatens the basis for human progress.'

The Brundtland Report, the leading document on development policy in the late 1980s, takes unity for granted, but a unity which is now the result of a threat.

Things have come a long way since the promulgation of the UN Charter — from the moral hope of a mankind united by reason and progress to the economic notion of countries weaving themselves together through commercial ties, and finally, to the spectre of unity in global self-destruction. What used to be conceived of as a historical endeavour — to accomplish the unity of mankind — now reveals itself as a menacing fate. Instead of hopeful appeals, sombre warnings provide the accompaniment. The slogan 'one world or no world' captures this experience. Seen in this light, humanity resembles a group

of individuals thrown together by chance, each dependent on the others for his own survival. No one can rock the boat without causing all of us to be united — in our collective destruction. Living on earth, the ancient formula, appears to have taken on a new meaning. There are no terrestrial wanderers any more longing for the eternal kingdom, but only passengers clinging fearfully to their vessel as it splits apart. Talk about unity has ceased to hold out promises and instead has taken on a grim connotation. As already foreshadowed by the Bomb, unity in our age has become something which may be finally consummated in catastrophe.

Amidst the wailing sirens of the rescue operations undertaken in the name of some lifeboat ethics, the pressure on peoples and countries to conform to an emergency discipline will be high. As soon as worldwide strategies are launched to prevent the boat from capsizing, things like political autonomy or cultural diversity will appear as the luxuries of yesteryear. In the face of the overriding imperative to 'secure the survival of the planet', autonomy easily becomes an anti-social value, and diversity turns into an obstacle to collective action. Can one imagine a more powerful motive for forcing the world into line than that of saving the planet? Eco-colonialism constitutes a new danger for the tapestry of cultures on the globe.

It is perfectly conceivable that, in the face of mounting pressure on land, water, forests and the atmosphere, global measures will have to be taken to trim down the intake from nature as well as the output of waste worldwide. Satellites are already prepared to monitor the consumption of resources on the planet, computer models are being devised to simulate what happens when, and a new generation of experts is in the making to survey and synchronize the manifold gestures of society. It is not the engineer, building bridges or power grids, who will be the protagonist of this new epoch, as in the old days of development, but the systems analyst.

NASA, for example, has already got its own ideas about the 'one earth':

> The goal of Earth system science is to obtain a scientific understanding of the entire Earth system on a global scale by describing how its component parts and their interactions have evolved, how they function and how they may be expected to continue to evolve on all timescales. The challenge is . . . to develop the capability to predict those changes that will occur in the next decade to century both naturally and in response to human activity.'

The oneness of the earth is understood according to this paradigm in system categories, its unity as the interaction of component parts, and the historical task as keeping the vital processes from destabilizing irretrievably. What links the peoples of the world together is not the rule of civilization any more or the interplay of demand and supply, but their shared dependence on biophysical life-support systems. The metaphor of spaceship earth captures nicely the gist of this thinking. Consequently, unity is not to be pursued any longer through the spread of progress or the stimulation of productivity, but through securing the necessary system requirements.

But efforts to curb soil erosion, control emissions, regulate water consumption or save biodiversity, although done with the best of intentions, will put people's daily activities under a new kind of scrutiny. Neither collecting firewood nor opening spray cans are any longer innocent activities, and how you heat your home and the food you eat become matters of global relevance. In such a perspective, the world is perceived as a single homogeneous space, this time not constituted by reason or the fluctuation of prices, but by geophysiological macro-cycles.

The consequences, however, are not likely to differ from the effects already observed in the wake of the rise of reason and the market to world dominance — namely the slow evaporation of customs and cultures. The current changes in development language from 'people' to 'populations', 'needs' to 'requirements', and 'welfare' to 'survival' are indicative of a growing negligence towards cultures in favour of mere existence. Whatever has survived the rise of industrialism, is now in danger of being drawn into the maelstrom of its fall.

But recognizing the pitfalls of global eco-management does not solve the dilemma which will stay with us in the decades to come. Both alternatives — to think in categories of one world as well as not to think in such categories — are equally self-destructive. On the one hand, it is sacrilege in our age of cultural evaporation to apprehend the globe as a united, highly integrated world. On the other hand, a vision of the globe as a multitude of different and only loosely connected worlds cannot dispense with the idea of ecumenism in the face of lurking violence and the devastation of nature. Not surprisingly, calls for global consciousness abound. Given that local events can affect the conditions of life in remote places, these calls aim at bringing into congruence the range of our responsibility with the range of our effects. However, and here lies the dilemma, the urge for global responsibility tends to drive out the devil with Beelzebub — universalism is being invoked for salvation from the present predicament, while universalism was precisely the original sin by which the predicament was provoked.

Space Against Place

For centuries, universalism has been at war with diversity. Science, state and market have dominated this campaign, while an innumerable variety of communities with their languages, customs and cosmologies, though they have sometimes struck back and reinvigorated themselves through resistance, have been the losers. It has been an unequal clash. Not only did the protagonists often fight with unequal arms when the universalist powers employed guns and dollars but, more importantly, they were unequal in their cognitive might.

Science, state and market are based on a system of knowledge about man, society and nature that claims validity everywhere and for everybody. As a knowledge which has successfully shed all vestiges of its particular origin, place and context, it belongs nowhere and can therefore penetrate everywhere. In a certain sense, mechanistic causality, bureaucratic rationality and the law of supply and demand are rules which are cleansed of any commitment to a particular society or culture. It is because they are disembedded from broader contexts of order and meaning that they are so powerful in remodelling any

social reality according to their limited but specific logic. As a consequence, they are capable of unsettling all kinds of different cultures, each one locked in its own imagination. Since these cultures are connected to particular places with their own particular peoples, memories and cosmologies, they are vulnerable to a mental style which is not linked to any place, but rests instead on the concept of space. One way to grasp the fundamental difference between universalism and localism is to focus on the dichotomy of space and place. Universalist aspirations are generally space-centred, while localist worldviews are mainly place-centred. This distinction illuminates both the rise of universalism in the past, and the tension between universalism and diversity in the present.

In mediaeval times, when a person talked about the entire 'world', he did not evoke in his listeners the image of the planet with its many inhabitants, but instead the image of an earth overarched by several spheres or heavens in permanent revolution. The tiny earth was at the centre, yet not central. Most of the attention was concentrated on the relations between the chance-governed terrestrial realm and the immutable, eternal realm of the heavens. The mediaeval cosmos took shape around a vertical axis which linked a hierarchy of strata of different qualities. Man's view was directed upwards to grasp the vaulting architecture of the cosmos, as if attracted by the soaring arches and spires of a gothic cathedral. Though this 'world' was immense, it was nevertheless finite and had a definite shape — to look up to the heavens was like looking up to a high vault.

In early modern times, the concept of a stratified and bounded cosmos was gradually abolished in favour of a universe infinitely extended in space. The vertical axis was tilted over and laid out on a horizontal plane; what mattered now was no longer the view upwards, but the view into the distance. As the vertical dimension faltered, so the idea of qualitative differences between lower and upper layers of reality also faded away and was replaced by the conception of a homogeneous reality which could only be ordered through measurable differences in geometrical fashion. It is the horizontal plane which now dominates the imagination. The world is not seen any more as marked by boundaries and upward-rising, but as limitless and extending in circles of ever greater distance. As a result, not upward-downward movements, but geographical movements to destinations close and far, hold people's attention. World' now evokes the surface of the globe and not the height of the cosmos.

In other words, the abolition of the stratified cosmos has made possible the rise of 'space' to its prominent position in modern consciousness. And the rise of a space-centred perception has made it possible to conceive of 'one world'. In this perception, the world is on one level, stretching out as a two-dimensional plane where each point equals any other point; what distinguishes them is only their geometrical position. The purest case of a space-centred perception can obviously be found in cartography. On maps, the world is flattened out and places are defined by their locations in the grid of longitudinal and latitudinal lines.

However, nobody is capable of living only in 'space'; everyone lives also in 'place'. This is because being human means, all attempts to the contrary notwithstanding, to be in a physical body, and the body is necessarily tied to a place. Human experience, for that reason, evolves in specific local places. Some points in space, as a result, are always more important to people than others, since they have been the scenes of individual and collective imagination and action. Having a memory, relating to others, participating in a larger story, calls for involvement, requires presence. This presence, naturally, is lived out in particular physical settings like piazzas or streets, mountains or seashores. And these locations are in turn imbued with experience past and present. They become places of density and depth. Therefore, certain places have a special `thickness' for certain people. It is there that the ancestors walked the earth and the relevant memories are at home. It is there that one is tied into a web of social bonds and where one recognizes and is recognized by others. And it is there that people share a particular vantage point and that language, habits and outlook combine to constitute a particular style of being in the world. Consequently, thinking in terms of places means to work on the assumption that a place is not just the intersection of two lines on a map, but a concentration of meaningful human activity which gives it a distinct quality, a distinct aura.

Ever since the temples of Tenochtitlan were destroyed in Mexico and a Spanish cathedral built out of their stones, European colonialism has been busy ravaging place-centred cultures and imposing on them space-centred values. In ever new waves and on all five continents, the colonialists have been terribly inventive in robbing peoples of their gods, their institutions and their natural treasures. The establishment of universities in New Spain, the introduction of British law in India, the blackmailing of North American Indians into the fur trade, these were all instances in the history of spreading science, state and market throughout the world.

The period of development after the Second World War fits into that history. Viewed with the space-trained eyes of the West, numerous cultures appeared as backward, deficient and meaningless. The globe looked like a vast homogeneous space, waiting to be organized by universally applicable programmes and technologies. And the developmentalists did not hesitate. They went about transferring the Western model of society to countries of a great variety of cultures.

But place-centred perceptions are far from gone. On the contrary, the more universalism prevails, the more particularism thrives. Indeed, throughout the last centuries, the advance of space-centred perceptions has been both successful and unsuccessful. On the one side, universalism has gained the upper hand, but on the other, place-bound aspirations have affirmed themselves over and over again. Innumerable revolts against colonialism expressed the will of the particular to survive. Independence movements launched indigenous claims.

A similar picture has prevailed in recent decades during the development era. Nationalist demands. ethnic strife, tribal tensions abound. And not to forget: the failure of a universalist development is in large part due to people's tenacious adherence to the old ways proper to their respective places. To be sure, localist conceptions do not remain the same. They are reformulated, altered and newly invented in a continuous vortex of dialogue and antagonism.

Equally, universalist conceptions, though advancing powerfully, are constantly watered down, curtailed and adapted, to the perennial dismay of Western do-gooders. And repeatedly, from the Orientalist movement in the early 19th century to alternative travellers in our own days, dissident elites, deeply steeped in a space-intensive worldview, discover place-bound traditions and turn them into weapons against the European civilization.

Cosmopolitan Localism

Today, more than ever, universalism is under siege. To be sure, the victorious march of science, state and market has not come to a stop, but the enthusiasm of the onlookers is flagging. Few still believe that order and peace will dawn at the end of the march. The centuries-old movement of carrying the torch of reason and progress to the furthest corners of the earth is tapering off. To the degree that it continues, it is carried out more from inertia than from missionary conviction.

Utopias crystallize longings that arise from frustration with the state of society. The ambition to create larger and larger unified spaces — from nation-states to regional integration and world government — has been fuelled by frustration with chauvinism and violence. Yet that concern retreats into the background as the opposite frustration spreads — the disappointment with a world that has fallen prey to homogenization. All of a sudden, the customary association of differences with violence vanishes; differences are now something to be cherished and cultivated. Indeed, the fear that modern man will encounter nobody else but himself on the globe is about to revolutionize contemporary perceptions. The pursuit of space-centred unity is turning into the search for place-centred diversity. After all, it is only from places that variety crops up, because it is in places that people weave the present into their particular thread of history. Thus, native languages are beginning to be revaluated, traditional knowledge systems rediscovered, and local economies revitalized. And, as the popularity of the prefix 're-' indicates, the unconventional is today often launched under the guise of a renaissance. The disquieting anticipation of a world fully illuminated by the neon light of modern rationality motivates the search for the darker zones, where the special, the strange, the surprising lives. A world without the Other would be a world of stagnation. For, in culture as well as in nature, diversity holds the potential for innovation and opens the way for creative, non-linear solutions. And with these misgivings growing, the tide changes. The globe is not any longer imagined as a homogeneous space where contrasts ought to be levelled out, but as a discontinuous space where differences flourish in a multiplicity of places.

Moreover, the vision of a world integrated under the rule of reason and welfare was carried by a view of history which today is rapidly becoming ripe for the museum. The unity of mankind was a project of the future, made possible by the expectation that human action would keep the course of history always on an upward road. Progress was the guarantee of unity. In the space-centred perception, the differences on the globe would fall into oblivion because they were outshone by the bright light of progress; it was in relation to

that promise that they didn't matter any more. But clearly enough, if our present experience shortly before the end of the 20th century can be wrapped up in one formula, it is precisely this: that the belief in progress has crumbled, the arrow of time is broken. The future doesn't hold much promise any more; it has become a repository of fears rather than of hopes.

At this juncture, therefore, it is wide of the mark to think that the coherence of the world could be achieved by pushing ahead along a common path towards some distant promised future. Instead, coexistence has to be sought in the context of the present. Thinking unity within the horizon of the present is much more demanding for all the players involved, since the attainment of a peaceful world would then be on today's agenda and could not be postponed to a far future.

Three ideals emerge for conceiving a politics which could shoulder the responsibility of acting for a diverse but coherent world — regeneration, unilateral self-restraint and the dialogue of civilizations. Regeneration takes into account that the royal road of development has vanished since there is no longer any ideal of progress to indicate a common direction. Regeneration calls instead for actualizing the particular image of a good society which is present in each culture. As for unilateral self-restraint, this can take the place of the ideal of interdependent growth. It implies instead that each country puts its own house in order in such a way that no economic or environmental burden is pushed on to others which would constrain them in choosing their own path. And, finally, a dialogue of civilizations is imperative as the search for peaceful and sustainable coexistence puts the challenge of self-examination before each culture. A simultaneous process of confrontation and synthesis can lead to coherence, while avoiding the pitfalls of homogeneity.

Though universalism has exhausted its utopian energies, any new localism will have a window on to the world at large. The opposite of the dominion of universal rules is not egoism, but a higher capacity for self-observation. People are seldom residents of only one mental space. They have the ability to change their point of view and to look with the other's eye at themselves. In fact, people often hold multiple loyalities at one and the same time. In many instances they combine rootedness in a place with affiliation to a larger community. An inhabitant of mediaeval Cologne knew how to be a member of the Christian Church; a villager in Rajasthan was aware of Bharat, Mother India; and Croatian peasants as well as the citizens of Cracow were part of the Habsburg empire.

In a similar vein, the one world may be thought of in terms of a meta-nation instead of in terms of a super-nation. It constitutes the horizon within which places live out their density and depth. In this perspective, 'one world' is not a design for more global planning, but an ever present regulative idea for local action. Cosmopolitan localism seeks to amplify the richness of a place while keeping in mind the rights of a multi-faceted world. It cherishes a particular place, yet at the same time knows about the relativity of all places. It results from a broken globalism as well as a broken localism. Maybe Tzvetan Todorov wanted to illustrate such an attitude when he used a phrase of the 12th century Hugh of St. Victor: 'The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw

beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is like a foreign country is perfect'.'

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Poverty

Majid R ahnema

Destitution, or imposed poverty, no doubt hurts, degrades and drives people into desperation. In many places, hunger and misery cry out to heaven. Indeed, few development concepts find their proof in such a glaring reality. Yet poverty is also a myth, a construct and the invention of a particular civilization.

There may be as many poor and as many perceptions of poverty as there are human beings. The fantastic variety of cases entitling a person to be called poor in different cultures and languages is such that, all in all, everything and everyone under the sun could be labelled as poor, in one way or another. The list could include not only the weak, the hungry, the sick, the homeless, the landless, the crippled and the beggar; not only the mad, the prisoner, the enslaved, the fugitive, the exiled, the street vendor and the soldier; not only the ascetics and the saints, but also all the losers of the world, including the millionaire after the crash of the stock exchange, the fired executive and the artist who finds no buyer for his works.

Many Perceptions, Countless Words

World languages compete with each other for the number of words referring to the stations and conditions associated with the different perceptions of poverty.

In Persian, for instance, there are more than 30 words for naming those who, for one reason or another, are perceived as poor. In most African languages, at least three to five words have been identified for poverty) The Torah uses eight for the purpose.' In the Middle Ages, the Latin words covering the range of conditions embraced by the concept were well over forty.' To this impressive variety of words found at the national or dictionary level, many more should be added from the corresponding dialects, slang or colloquial expressions used at the vernacular level. A whole universe of insights into the murky depths of poverty is to be explored in the many thousands of related proverbs and sayings.[4] In most cases, it is extremely difficult for the outsider to grasp the full meanings and nuances of all those words and expressions, let alone to translate them into other languages.

For long, and in many cultures of the world, poor was not always the opposite of rich. Other considerations such as falling from one's station in life, being deprived of one's instruments of labour, the loss of one's status or the marks of one's profession (for a cleric, the loss of his books; for a noble, the loss of his horse or arms), lack of protection, exclusion from one's community, abandonment, infirmity, or public humiliation defined the poor. The Tswana people of South Africa recognized their poor by their reactions to the appearance of locusts. Whereas the rich were appalled lest the locusts ate the grass needed by their cattle, the poor who had no cattle rejoiced because they could themselves eat the locusts.'

In Europe, for ages, the pauper was opposed to the *potens* (the powerful), rather than the rich. In the 9th century, the pauper was considered a free man whose freedom was imperilled only by the *potentes*. In the texts of peace movements of the 11th century, the pauper had become the *inermis* who had to respect the force of the soldiers, the *miles.* The word, poor, could be applied to the owner of a little *alleu* (a tax-free property), a wandering merchant, and even to any non-fighter, including the unescorted wives of knights. [6] On the whole, the poor were quite respectable persons who had only lost, or stood in the danger of losing, their 'berth'.

In that same period in Europe, a whole new category of poor appeared on the social stage — the voluntary poor who chose to share the life of the destitute and the berthless. For these, living poorly was a sign of elevation rather than degradation.' Respect and admiration for the voluntary poor had, of course, always existed in Eastern traditions.8

It was only after the expansion of the mercantile economy, the processes of urbanization leading to massive pauperization and, indeed, the monetization of society that the poor were defined as lacking what the rich could have in terms of money and possessions.

A common denominator for most perceptions of poverty remains the notion of 'lack' or `deficiency'. [9] This notion reflects only the basic relativity of the concept, for a utopian 'complete man' would not be lacking anything. Besides, when poor is defined as lacking a number of things necessary to life, the questions could be asked: What is necessary and for whom? And who is qualified to define all that?'° In smaller communities, where people are less strangers to one another and things are easier to compare, such questions are already difficult to answer. In a world of the mass media, the old familiar horizons and communally defined bases of comparison are all destroyed. Everyone may think of themselves as poor when it is the TV set in the mud hut which defines the necessities of life, often in terms of the wildest and fanciest consumers appearing on the screen.

In the same way, the ambiguity of the concept takes on new proportions as the old familiar horizons fade away. There was nothing ambiguous about the pauper who lived on what he earned from some humble trade in his village, notes Mollat." 'His face was familiar, and despite his misfortune he remained, in his suffering, a member of the social group.' Ambiguity starts when one crosses the vernacular boundaries. Are these strangers rebels, vagabonds, disease carriers, really poor or genuinely ill? Are they saints or sinners? These questions not only deepen our ignorance about who the poor really are, but face us with serious cognitive problems as to what people are actually thinking.

Four Dimensions of Poverty

1. The materialities: The facts or materialities on which the various constructs of poverty are based are those 'things', the lack of which is perceived as poverty. These lacks, deficiencies, or deprivations are either of a non-material and existential kind, or of a material nature.

To the first category belong such factors as one's inability to meet one's end, lack of good fortune or self-confidence, not being respected or loved by others, being neglected or abandoned, etc. As to material factors, these could include discrimination, inequality, political or other forms of oppression and domination, absence of entitlements," non-availability of the minimum of necessaries'" required for economic or biological survival, as defined by one's particular culture; also, all other forms of deprivation, destitution, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, ill health, and exclusion from educational possibilities, etc.

Although the materialities referred to are relative to various societies and cultural spaces, it could be argued that: 'There is an irreducible core of *absolute* deprivation in our idea of poverty, which translates reports of starvation, malnutrition and visible hardship into a diagnosis of poverty, without having to ascertain first the relative picture."4

2. The subject's own perception of his condition: The materialities referred to are indeed essential to the understanding of poverty in its different perceptions. Yet none of them should be confused with the concept itself. It is only when one or a combination of these materialities is perceived by a subject as an expression of poverty, that they acquire the particular meaning attached to that word. And that perception is quite a personal and socio-cultural affair. **It** is, in fact, part and parcel of the subject's wider perception of the world and his place in it.

It has been noted that the poor — leaving aside voluntary mendicants— tend generally to attribute what they lack to conditions independent of their will and beyond their control — whether defined by metaphysical causes such as God's will, one's *karma* or *qismat,* or the unjust constitution of society. Their perception of the deprivations from which they suffer is also often aggravated by the feeling that they lack the necessary ability to overcome their condition.

The lack of particular material means is not, however, always perceived in negative terms. The case of the mendicants in medieval Europe, already referred to, is not the sole exception. For the Iranian Sufis, the Indian sanyasin, and some contemporary schools of thought, such as the Gandhians, to be free from alienating material possessions is a blessing indeed, and an opportunity for reaching higher forms of riches. The Prophet of Islam has been widely quoted as saying: 'Al faqro faxri' [Poverty is my pride and glory].

It remains true, however, that the destitute and materially deprived generally perceive their predicament in negative terms.' [5] Even when they attribute their condition to metaphysical or ontological reasons, they spare no effort in trying to put an end to their deprivations, if necessary through violence. Often, they tend to establish relations of dependency with more powerful persons, groups, faiths or ideologies, a relationship which gives them an inner feeling of security and, sometimes, of false strength.

3. How the others view the poor: The poor's perception of their predicament is inevitably affected by how others view them. The two perceptions are seldom identical.

Poverty is sometimes perceived as a virtue by others when it represents a free choice on the part of those subject to it. Otherwise, the poor are generally looked upon with feelings ranging from embarrassment to contempt and even violence. On another plane, while pauperism' [6] was perceived as abnormal and calling for remedial action, poverty in vernacular and pre-industrialized societies was considered, by contrast, as a rather natural human predicament, if not an irremediable and unavoidable fact of life.

Different views of the poor have led to basically two types of reaction. The first represents a variety of forms of direct or indirect intervention, based on social, cultural or ethical reasons such as charity, assistance, education, confinement, repression, etc. The second is grounded on philosophies of non-intervention, either justified by the belief that nothing should be done for the poor for they somehow deserve their condition, or on the assumption that nothing can be done, for all forms of intervention ultimately produce negative results, or no change at all, in their lives.

4. **Spimes (socio-cultural space-times) affecting various perceptions of poverty:** While the above dimensions are mutually interactive in shaping the construct of poverty, they are all, in turn, affected by the space-times to which they belong. This explains why, in different communities and at different times, the same materialities are perceived differently, both by those referred to as poor and by society at large. To take an example, Helena Norberg-Hodge mentions how the notion of poverty hardly existed in Ladakh when she visited that country for the first time in 1975. 'Today,' she says, 'it has become part of the language.' When visiting an outlying village some eight years ago, Helena asked a young Ladakhi where were the poorest houses. 'We have no poor houses in our village,' was the proud reply. Recently, Helena saw the same Ladakhi talking to an American tourist and overheard him say, 'if only you could do something for us; we are so poor!'"

The Global Construct

Global poverty is an entirely new and modern construct. The basic materials which have gone into the construct are essentially the economization of life and the forceful integration of vernacular societies into the world economy.

In one of its first reports in 1948, the World Bank closely correlates the problem of global poverty with countries' gross national products. It postulates that countries with an average per capita income of less than $100 are, by definition, poor and underdeveloped. It expresses the responsibility of the richer nations, the richest of them being the United States, to help the poor countries raise their living standards.

Thus, for the first time in history, entire nations and countries came to be considered (and consider themselves) as poor, on the grounds that their overall income is insignificant in comparison with those now dominating the world economy. Consequently, national income was introduced as a new global measure for expressing the various stages of economic development, the latter process being proposed as the final answer to poverty.

On another plane, the new construct no longer embraces the view that poverty is a multi-faceted human predicament. It considers it as a single

pathological phenomenon of universal character, but particularly acute in pre-economized societies. Following a consensus reached amongst the world elites on the diagnosis of the disease (underdevelopment and lack of income.) as well as its cure (economic and technological development), armies of experts, politicians, planners, bureaucrats, socio-economists and even anthropologists started acting as pauperologists, seeking to refine the discourse and practices related to world poverty. The gist of the new approach was expressed in President Harry Truman's famous Point Four Declaration: The economic life [of the poor] is primitive and stagnant. . . . Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.' Greater production, development, assistance, and a wider and more vigorous application of science and technological knowledge are recognized as the answer and the 'key to prosperity and peace'.

The new construct has indeed had a long gestation. The industrial era accelerated the breakdown of vernacular societies. It led to 'the great transformation' which dramatically reversed the traditional relationship between society and economy and, for the first time in history, *disembedded* the latter from its socio-cultural roots, thus subjecting society to its own economic rules and dynamics, rather than the other way round. 'Man, under the name of labor, nature under the name of land, were made available for sale,' notes Polanyi.'[8] The ensuing economization of society brought about, first, the hegemony of national economies over vernacular activities, then, that of the world economy over all others. These drastic changes affected largely the ways in which the materialities underlying the various perceptions of poverty came to be reinterpreted and reconstructed.

Firstly, the advent of a world economy, with all its realities and accompanying myths (the existence of unlimited resources, technological miracles, endless consumer goods, induced needs, etc.) created a set of universal referents. To go back to a case previously mentioned, this is how the Ladakhis came to perceive themselves as poor, once development and other national and strategic considerations had led to the economization of Ladakh. Similarly, not only individuals and communities, but entire nations and continents were led to believe that they were poor, and in need of assistance, only because their per capita income was below a universally established minimum.

Secondly, while the traditional answers to poverty were, in the past, often based on the pluralistic, culturally established and holistic perceptions of each particular space, the new programmes of action represented a universalist, one-track, income-based, and totally acultural recipe for abstract 'patients'. The recipe was composed of a mix of technicalities and 'neutral' economic referents which only experts and planners could master and use with authority. The new technologized approach to poverty developed its own cognitive bases in such new fields of study and intervention as employment policy, production strategy and the measurement of poverty, etc. It certainly overshadowed the exploration of such deeper and more sensitive issues as the processes of political and cultural domination, the pervasive role of institutions, and the very nature of the industrial production system.

Thirdly, the new fetish of a healthy global economy destined to save all the world's poor, not only helped the pauperizing economic and political systems to reinforce and legitimize their positions, but it also led their victims to perceive their own situation in the same terms. Thus, the new proletarians and impoverished wage earners, particularly in urban areas, focused their actions and struggles on such limited objectives as employment, income raising and access to public services. And, to this end, they sought to protect themselves through labour unions, sometimes totally disregarding the informal, and formal, community organizations which had traditionally helped the poor. Following the same patterns, even non-wage earning workers in rural areas came to think that earning cash or receiving economic assistance and public services were the most logical ways of alleviating their deprivations.

Finally, as more people were manipulated into sharing the new economic myth that poverty could now be finally conquered through increased productivity and the modern economy's 'trickle down' effects, the search for new modes of life and social organization based on simplicity, or on voluntary or moral forms of povery, were devalued and discredited."

Most traditional societies had resisted the view that all poverty reflected personal inadequacy. This view, that became characteristic of every capitalist society, especially in its Protestant versions, was now advanced as a major component of the new value system. Economic poverty was now to be perceived and acted upon, on a global level, as a shame and a scourge. The vast increases in wealth offered, or achieved, by modern societies fostering greed and profit-making, played a significant role in the sharp devaluation of moral poverty. Thus, the race for enrichment became not only a desirable goal for the economy but also a morally justified end.

The Construct in Action

Assumptions

To translate the construct into action, a particular discourse and set of programmes were initiated. Looking back at what actually occurred during the nearly 50-year old history of the exercise, it seems to have rested on the following assumptions.

Firstly, the poor are assumed to be 'underdeveloped' and— momentarily at least — deprived of their capacity to define their own interests. It is up to those in a superior position of knowledge and power (governments, institutions, professionals, competent authorities) to assist them on their behalf. People's participation' is indeed welcomed whenever that could help the populations concerned to manifest their support for the professionally designed programmes.

Secondly, the discourse on global poverty recognized the fact that the perceptions of poverty differed according to cultures. Yet it assumed that the perceptions in question all shared a common belief—that economic growth and prosperity was a *sine qua non* for coming out of poverty. Thus it posited economic development as the key to poverty eradication programmes, assuming further that the resolution of all non-economic or cultural problems

of the poor could be tackled later.

The above assumptions served, in turn, to justify three basic tenets of interventionist practices. Firstly, that poverty was too global and sensitive a matter to be taken out of the hands of professionals and institutions trained and empowered for this purpose. Secondly, that the programmes in question had to be mapped, basically, in terms of economic resources and needs. Finally, that the agents mainly responsible for the design and execution of such strategies would, naturally, be the governments and other institutions officially in charge of both the identification of needs and the production of the required solutions. Eradication of global poverty was thus considered yet another reason for consolidating the present structures of governance, both at the international and national levels.

Operations

Assessment of needs: Poverty alleviation programmes claim to be based on an assessment of 'needs'. Yet, what planners, politicians and economists tend to consider as their needs, has little or nothing to do with what different categories of the poor perceive as their needs.

In the global context, needs are first identified in an abstract manner, on a regional or national basis. To take an example, for UNDP, a golden rule was set in the mid '70s that 80 per cent of the organization's resources should automatically be allotted to the needs of LDCs (or Least Developed Countries), i.e. countries where the people's annual per capita income is lower than $300. The rule has now been extended to some other countries which, at their explicit request, are recognized, literally, 'as if they were LDCs' and, hence, given the same 'privileges'! The fact which is totally disregarded by the bureaucracies concerned is that, according to their own statistics and criteria, a much larger number of persons considered to be poor actually live elsewhere. The needs of these individuals are treated differently only because they happen to be citizens of countries where per capita GNP is higher.

As for the assessment of specific needs, these are evaluated on the basis of other sets of globally established economic criteria and systems of comparison. For Unesco, for instance, to have a percentage of illiterates above a certain figure, or a percentage of radios, books or newspapers below another, represents a set of needs calling for action. For WHO, the criteria of poverty are expressed in terms of the ratio of doctors, nurses, and health centres to the population. For FAO, the needs are evaluated in terms of per capita calorie or protein intake. In all these cases, needs are perceived as figures or combinations of elements disembedded from the particular mode of livelihood characteristic of each culturally defined vernacular space.

The promotion of institutions and professional skills at the country level: A major long-term component of all national and international programmes of poverty eradication has been what UN jargon likes to call 'institution building', the latter being generally coupled with the reinforcement of 'national capacities' and professional skills.

As in the case of needs assessment practices, this policy also represents a consensus reached amongst donors and recipients of economic and technical assistance. The policy is supposed to provide the governments concerned with the instruments necessary for them to design their plans of action and put an end to their structural dependence on foreign expertise. Strong ministries of planning and parastatal organizations were — at least until the 'roll-back' of the state that took place during 'structural adjustment' in the 1980s — presented as essential for assessing people's needs and responding to them. For the donors, the policy served not only to provide them with professionally respected counterparts, but also with institutions assumed to be in a better position to guarantee the protection of foreign economic and political investments, and in particular the further integration of these economies into the global one.

Production of goods and services: The production of economic goods and services is a major component of all poverty eradication programmes — economic growth being the general talisman.

Sectoral reforms: The need for more diversified and expanded services has led many of these programmes to reserve a leading place to sectoral reforms, particularly in such areas as unemployment, population control, co-operatives, and educational and health services.

Redistributive policies: For more progressive or democratic states, redistributive policies are considered to be the most effective and dignified means of stopping the structural processes of pauperization generally triggered by the dynamics of economic development. In this context, Japan, India and China represent three very different countries where interesting results have been achieved through political and legislative measures.

Assistance programmes: These programmes are the last of the activities which are generally pursued in the context of present day poverty eradication campaigns. They are meant to come closer to the actual and pressing preoccupations of the deprived. Whatever their value in practice, welfare states consider assistance to the poor as an obligation on society and an act of solidarity. More conservative governments, together with economists, tend to question the relevance of assistance to the long-term interests of a modern state.

Results

The actual impact of the above policies and programmes on the lives of the deprived are often very different from the planners' expectations. We shall try to explore them briefly, in the same order as above.

The needs which development and poverty-eradication programmes seek to identify and assess through their experts and planning institutions are basically the needs of a certain 'economy', a certain idea of poverty, and a particular category of consumers and tax payers whose rights and interests should he protected. They do not correspond to what the people at large need, confronted by the fact of having been cut off from their vernacular spaces. While these needs remain unmet, the very economic activities deployed in the name of the poor impute to them different needs of a more insatiable nature. On another

plane, the problematization of the poor's needs in modern economic terms further contributes to the disintegration of vernacular spaces, thereby exposing the poor to situations of even more complete helplessness.

To sum up, the whole exercise of needs assessment is justified on the ground that it provides the planners with a 'scientific' basis for their anti-poverty planning. In practice, it is often an irrelevant exercise. The very idea that it should start with an allocation of funds on the basis of the economic development of the particular country where the poor live, rather than the location and condition of the poor themselves, is enough to indicate the bureaucratic and highly irrelevant nature of the exercise. After separating the poor person's 'needs' from him as an active and living human being, it reduces him to only an inadequate ingredient of economic growth.

The absurdity of the situation is increased by the fact that the whole task is entrusted to predatory governments which happen to be in power in the designated poorer countries. While the sovereignty of these governments is often a matter of pure fiction, the fact is that their power resides, on the one hand, in their capacity to `milk' their own people and, on the other hand, in the assistance they receive from their richer foreign patrons. For these governments, poverty, like underdevelopment, is a catchword for legitimizing their claims for more centralized forms of control over their populations and, also, for more funds to implement their objectives. Foreign assistance, in particular, helps them to enrich themselves and strengthen their army, police, security and intelligence services. The latter operate to make the population pay for the services relating to their own exploitation and accept their forcible integration into the national and world economies, as well as the heavy burden of debts contracted for those very purposes.

On a different plane, the objectives of institution building and skill training create additional barriers between the vernacular world of the poor and the new economized world of their protectors/predators. Much more than serving the poor, the new institutions and their professionals help the rich to better organize themselves against their victims.

On the central issue of the production of economic goods and services, it is still difficult for many to agree that poverty is *not* a question of 'resources', in the sense given it by economists and planners. Yet it is a fact that, in most developing countries, neither the production of economic resources and commodities, nor the extension of social services have ultimately served the poor. More often than not, they have resulted in further diminishing their capacity to meet their real needs which they used to do in the context of their vernacular livelihood — which is a way of life under constant erosion by the forces of the modern economy.

In fact, there is no evidence that affluence has, anywhere, improved the poor's condition. Notwithstanding the fact that the so-called affluent societies are presently the ones posing the greatest threats to the very life of the planet. the reservoirs of plenty they produce create, at the same time, new islands of poverty. The United States, the richest country in the world, has to recognize that 30 million of its citizens live below the poverty line. [20] Similarly, in the richest city in Brazil, a country of the South whose development was once called miraculous, five out of its 15 million inhabitants 'live in extreme poverty, earning less than 65 dollars a month'.21

In short, what the poor need is not the production of economic resources or services which ultimately benefit others or the generations to come. It is rather the recovery of their actual capacity to tap their own vernacular, locally available resources — which are totally different from what economists call resources.

Sectoral reforms in the various fields of unemployment, population, education, health, etc., seem also to have had little or no positive effect in reducing discriminatory trends. Here again, even when these reforms have achieved their objectives, they have proved to be of little relevance to the specific needs of the deprived. 'Good' schools have generally served to produce greater numbers of drop-outs belonging to poor families. Contrary to their vocation, health centres, and hospitals in particular, have seldom given hospitality to the poor. Employment policies have hardly succeeded in stopping the mass exodus of millions of people from their communities to the slum areas of big cities.

In this long list of 'answers which are not', it could be argued that redistributive policies at least have achieved partial success in some important cases. The experiences of Japan, India and. China might suggest, each in a different way, that political measures aimed at fostering the principles of justice and equity as integral dimensions of development policies, have reduced some of the impoverishing side-effects of economy. The fact remains, however, that the dynamics and goals of a 'resource' generating economy (principles of profit, productivity, capital accumulation, etc.) diverge, by definition, from socially defined objectives. As such, it is perhaps too early to conclude that such redistributive policies will be able to keep pace with the more powerful pauperizing trends of economy. In any case, they may only succeed in replacing traditional poverty with the forms of modernized poverty proper to all 'developed' countries. Finally, there is no evidence to indicate that the successful economization of life, in these countries, can ultimately prevent the destructive side-effects of the process on people's livelihood, including the destruction of their natural environment.

Assistance policies, finally, have failed in many ways. It is now clear that all systems of aid ultimately serve to perpetuate processes of pauperization. As Georg Simmel has pointed out:

> The goal of assistance is precisely to mitigate certain extreme manifestations of social differentiation, so that the social structure may continue to be based on this differentiation. If assistance were to be based on the interests of the poor, there would, in principle, be no limit whatsoever on the transmission of property in favor of the poor, a transmission that would lead to the equality of al1.22

A World Economy against Vernacular Villages

Using the striking image of 'one world' or the 'global village', the development

discourse invites its 'target populations' to look at their predicament in a `modern', 'realistic' and indeed comparative way. It asks them to consider that the world has changed, and to learn from the experience of those who have finally made it. If the poor would only understand what historically brought the people of the North to higher standards of living and greater political, economic and technological power, they, too, would no longer hesitate to take the main highway of development. This is presented as the only transcultural and universal road for all would-be travellers to reach their modern destination.

In reality, what is proposed serves only the interests of the highway designers and their management system. For as one enters into it, one becomes a prisoner of its rules and logic. Not only does one have to use a car to drive on it, not only are the road, the destination, and the exits predefined, but the person engaged on the highway is no longer a free and incomparable human being. He becomes only a passenger in a car with a more or less powerful engine whose speed and performance henceforth define for him his comparative position and power on the common road.

As to the notion of the global village, it uses a vernacular concept only to destroy it. For it aims precisely at wiping out the thousands of villages whose great diversity has actually made the world's singularity and richness. The proposed 'one world' seeks to substitute the thousands of real and living worlds with a single non-world, a totally acultural and amoral economic corporation whose only purpose is to serve the interests of its shareholders.

Certainly, the economic approach to life may well lead for a time to a massive or more efficient production of goods and commodities, that is, a development of things. Yet both the resources and the needs it creates inevitably lead to a situation of permanent scarcity where not only the poor and the destitute, but even the rich, have always less than they desire. Moreover, regardless of the level of wealth reached by a society, it is a fact that the poor are always the ones who suffer the most from the gap generated between their needs and the economically produced scarce resources. This is particularly so as the same economy increasingly imputes to them new needs of its own, ever more difficult to meet. Thus, it is becoming clearer to many that, however their needs may be defined, it is not only an illusion, but a contradiction in terms, to expect that economy could ever satisfy their needs.

Economy can indeed produce a lot of commodities and services to relieve a particular set of needs. But as it disvalues and often destroys a whole range of other human activities which, for the majority of people, continue to be vital for meeting their needs, the disabling effects of those relief operations are indeed highly negative in the long run. The overwhelming majority in the world still shape and satisfy their needs thanks to the network of human relationships they preserve within their vernacular spaces, and thanks to the many forms of solidarity, co-operation and reciprocity they develop within their communities. Their activities are generally concrete responses to concrete and immediate problems, enabling the people involved to produce both the changes and the things they need. The modern economy disvalues these activities and presses, or forces, people to abandon them. It seeks to reduce everyone into becoming the agent of an invisible national or world economy, geared only to producing things for whoever can pay for them. In other words, in the name of poverty alleviation, it only forces the poor to work for others rather than for themselves.

In vernacular societies, abundance is perceived as a state of nature, inviting all living species to draw on it for meeting their specific needs. These are, in turn, perceived as limited, insofar as they represent a mix of organic and socio-cultural 'necessaries' for life. To share such plentiful resources as air, water and land, arrangements are generally made, similar to the original commons in Europe, which make it possible for everyone to have access to them. The extent to which a community organizes itself for drawing on nature's abundant resources and sharing them with its members defines the relative prosperity of that community.

Whenever the populations concerned are, for some natural or socio-political reason (drought, natural calamity, economic status, political or cultural oppression, etc.), prevented from drawing freely on those resources, they suffer from scarcity. Yet they continue to refine and diversify their activities. Their success in dealing with such situations is, however, more often than not, due to the non-economic aspects of these activities.

The modern economic construct of reality is based on a different, if not opposite, set of assumptions. It assumes that natural resources are scarce; that human needs, in particular those of *homo economicus* are unlimited; and finally, that a sound economy can make it possible for everyone ultimately to meet all their needs. This particular perception of reality tends to reduce human beings and their societies to their economic dimension alone. It strips the vernacular space of all its powerfully alive potentialities. It seeks to transform it into a mere economic machine, and one controlled and operated by others. In the same construct, human beings are perceived as simply one of the many resources required by economy for its own needs.

The insidious effects of the destruction of vernacular space are particularly dangerous at a time when many other alternatives need to be explored, taking into account both the incredible advance of certain autonomous and convivial technologies and the often very imaginative solutions that some grassroots movements are offering in terms of the regeneration of their people's life spaces.

Signals from the Grassroots

The way planners, development actomaniacs and politicians living off global poverty alleviation campaigns are presenting their case, gives the uninformed public a distorted impression of how the world's impoverished are living their deprivations. Not only are these people presented as incapable of doing anything intelligent by themselves, but also as preventing the modern do-gooders from helping them. Were these preposterous misrepresentations really true, three-quarters of the world's population would already have perished.

In the last couple of decades, promising signals are being received from the grassroots indicating their still amazing vitality — in many areas, in fact, where

the outsider would normally expect total resignation or submission. Not only in Asia where imaginative movements have been consistently witnessed since the Gandhian revolution, or in Latin America where much has equally been happening," but in Africa, too, interesting and original grassroots movements are now emerging. These movements vary greatly in their approaches to the regeneration of people's space and in their size. As a rule, they are localized and rather small in number. Yet the rapid growth of some, like the Chipko, or the Swadhyaya,' which already embrace several million people, indicate that even their size is growing in importance. Let me outline their significance and message.

Indigenous responses: For a couple of decades, the development discourse and its practices succeeded in manipulating and bullying their 'target populations'. Many of the present grassroots movements represent people's rejection of this. The victims now want their poverty or riches to be defined by themselves, and to deal with that, free from unwanted pressures.

Growing resistance to governments and their modernizing policies seems to have fostered the trend towards a return to roots. It is true that such trends have often been co-opted by a new breed of manipulators linked with fundamentalist or ethnic interests. Yet, as a whole, most grassroots movements are now aware of the dangers of sectarian ideologies. The lessons of the past, including the most recent coming from Eastern Europe, prompt them, more than ever, to rely on their own creative wisdom and cultures in responding to their reality.

Surfing over the threats: Another expression of this growing distance toward established ideologies is the rejection, by many a grassroots movement, of the old-established notions of power, including the much sought after objective of seizing power. Here, too, these movements have not only learned much from their own experiences, but from all the other revolutions. These have convinced them that violence only leads to superficial changes, to a transformation of the former victims into new victimizers, and often to new structural forms of violence. As the praxis of grassroots movements leads them to understand better the dynamics of violence and power, they seem continuously to discover new and more artful ways of looking at the world and themselves. As the common man realizes that the dominant Western form of modernity has, in fact, lost touch with the present it claims to represent, he becomes truly modern, in the original sense of the word, that is, one who is *of the present.* As such, he constantly refines his traditional, vernacular ways of facing the many waves threatening his life. To the thousands of tricks each culture has developed in order to preserve itself from such passing waves, the new grassroots are adding the art of *surfing over and inside* the waves.

Vernacular universes: As in the case of power, grassroots movements seem to differ considerably from planners and politicians on their approach to the macro dimensions of change. What essentially matters for them is to bring about, within the horizons with which they are familiar, changes which are both possible and meaningful to their own lives. It matters little to them whether what they do is replicable elsewhere, or in conformity with ideal models of society constructed elsewhere. As a rule, grassroots populations resent the man-made macro world to which they are asked to conform. The more they feel its artificiality and the danger it poses to all their dreams and aspirations, the more they consider themselves as parts of macro worlds of their own. These are the vernacular or religious universes which give them hope and strength, and in which they like to find refuge. The particularly subtle Hindu concept of dharma well expresses the relationship between everyone's 'micro' life and the 'macro' cosmic order, a relationship which also defines one's responsibilities and duties toward both.

Here lies another fundamental difference separating the grassroots universe from that of modern technology. The latter starts with a 'macro' blueprint, a predefined idea of what should be done and how. The technocrat's design consists, then, in transforming everything to meet that blueprint. For the communities at the grassroots level, what matters is, by contrast, what is, [25] and life, as it designs its own course. What finally decides is the living 'nose' of the people directly concerned for what is appropriate and sensible to do. In the other, the technocratic approach, the deciding factor is the dead data of an alien, often ideologically biased, knowledge system.

Spiritual dimension: Most contemporary grassroots movements have a strong spiritual dimension. It is not only in India where such movements, starting from the Gandhian Sarvodaya, to Manavodaya [26] and Swadhyaya, have attached seminal importance to such factors as inner transformation, moral purity, self-discovery, self-knowledge, or the notion of God in its many different interpretations. For other movements inspired by Islam, Christianity and/or Marxism (as in the Theology of Liberation), the outer and the inner conditions of freedom have also been closely linked together. The sense of sharing common spiritual ideals of a purifying nature can create new and contagious forms of enthusiasm and solidarity, which in turn greatly increase the operational effectiveness of the group. A reason for people's indifference to the dominant development ideology, and hence its failure, could well be the latter's utter insensitivity to this crucial dimension.

Convivial poverty: A last point of importance seems now common to most genuine grassroots movements — the belief that the answer to imposed forms of material poverty has to be found in the people's own ethical and cultural approach to poverty. In other words, as long as the present race for material riches continues, on the ground that nothing but technological limitations should stop human beings from wanting and having more, not only will the race itself continue to breed the most dehumanizing forms of imposed poverty, but it will ultimately impoverish and destroy the very planet which gives us our common riches. By contrast, convivial poverty — that is, voluntary or moral poverty — implies the ideal of a livelihood based on the age-old moral principles of simplicity, frugality, sufficiency and respect for every human being and all forms of life. It does not mean ascetism or the monastic life. It only tries to give back to everyone that holistic and compassionate dimension of being, without which no human relationship is possible, in the true sense of

the word. As such, convivial poverty could perhaps serve both as a means and an end to pauperizing economism.

In conclusion, the time has come to look at poverty in a different way. The time has come to regenerate the age old tradition of voluntary poverty as both a new form of individual liberation and a major instrument for reducing all other forms of brutalizing poverty. A tragic form of poverty, often perceived as an expression of modernity, is that of a world of economically obsessed individuals and nations fighting with each other over more greed, more violence, more exploitation and more destruction of the inner and outer life forces of humankind. That poverty, of both perception and lifestyle, is now being challenged by the ideals of a different form of poverty. Increasingly, more compassionate and informed human beings are realizing that the earth can only provide enough to satisfy all the needs of persons if they are liberated from greed. The Economic Age, like all its predecessors, is not an eternal state. The deep crises it is traversing in all its fields of activity and, above all, the threats it is now posing to the very existence of our planet, are already preparing for the coming of a new age. The flourishing of other, higher forms of convivial poverty may then appear as the last hope for creating different societies based on the joys of 'more being', rather than the obsession of 'more having'.

References

1. John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

2. *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* under 'Poverty'.

3. Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978, p. 3. This study is a classic for the history of poverty in Europe. Besides the word 'pauper', Mollat has listed the following words: referring to impecuniosity and destitution in general *(egens, egenus, indigens, mops, insufficiens, mendicus, miser);* shortage of food *(esuriens, famelicus)* or clothing *(nudus, pannosus);* physical defects such as blindness *(caecus),* lameness *(claudus),* arthritic deformity *(contractus),* infirmity in general *(infirmus),* leprosy *(leprosus),* injury *(vulneratus),* feebleness due to poor health or old age *(aegrotans, senex, valetudinarius); mental* deficiency *(idiotus, imbecillis, simplex);* temporary weakness affecting women during pregnancy and childbirth *(mulier ante et possum partum);* situations of adversity such as those involving the loss of one's parents *(orphanus),* husband *(vidua),* or liberty *(captivus),* and, finally, banishment and exile *(bannus, exiliatus).*

4. Here are some samples of proverbs and sayings from Africa: For the Igbos, 'The rich man puts down his basket in the market, the poor man fears'; 'The poor man gets a friend; the rich man takes him away'; 'Those who have money are friends of each other.' For the Tswana, `Where is no wealth, there is no poverty.' In Iliffe, op. cit., pp. 91, 78, 28, 85.

5. A letter from Hughes to Ellis, 13 March 1836, *Council for World Mission; Incoming Letters,* South Africa 15/1E/34, quoted by Iliffe, op. cit., p. 78.

6. Michel Mollat, *Etudes sur l'Histoire de la pauvrete,* publication de la Sorbonne, Serie Etudes, Tome 8, Vol. 2. Paris: 1974, p. 15.

7. St Francis of Assisi considered that charity did not consist in 'leaning over' the poor, but in 'elevating oneself' to their level.

8. For the Iranian mystic A. Nasafi, the only shortcoming of poverty is apparent, while its virtues are all hidden. In the case of wealth, it is exactly the opposite. Hence, he exhorts upon the dervish: 'Poverty is a great blessing; wealth, a great pain. But the ignorant ignores this, escaping poverty and sticking to wealth. Our prophet . . . chose poverty, for he knew it and its effei , as he knew wealth and its effects.' Translated from A. Nasafi, *Le Livre de Phomme partH,* Paris: Fayard. 1984. p. 268.

9. r Hie French Robert Dictionary defines the word as follows: 'Qui manque du nêcessaire ou n'aque qu'le strict n'écessaire' (Lacking what is necessary or having only what is strictly nec1 e, ary). t is necessary to a peasant in a rural area is quite different from a city dweller. And r..Wha le a Ladakh family in the Himalayas can still live lavishly on an average `income' of much less r an $1,000 a year, an American family of the same size living in the US could hardly meet whi ie /needs with a yearly income of $10,000, which represents the officially recognized their 'pox ty line'.

I I Michel Mollat, 1987, op. cit., p. 8.

] : The notion of 'entitlement relations' was coined by Amartya Sen, first in 1967. later elab rated in *Poverty and Famines,* Oxford: 1981.

] : For Adam Smith, the necessities were, interestingly enough, 'not only the commodities whir are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the counnttry renders it indecent for creditable people, even the lowest order, to be without.' See *An Inqky Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* 1776, p. 351.

Amartya Sen, op. cit., p. 1714.

] r 'Savanna Muslims viewed poverty with much ambivalence. Their traditions stressed the vale ; of wealth and generosity. At their best, traditions evoked the largesse of the rich and the hosr tality of common people which many European travellers admired. At their worst, the sam traditions bred contempt for poverty, both in others, expressed sometimes in mockery of the landicapped, and in oneself, for the shame of poverty could lead men (but apparently not wor :n) to suicide. John Iliffe, op. cit.

] r Pauperism describes 'a category of people unable to maintain themselves at all, or to martain themselves at the level conventionally regarded as minimal, without outside assi ance ."Poverty', as a social phenomenon, implies only economic and social inee.Jality, 'that is, a relation of inferiority, dependence, or exploitation. In other words, it imp es the existence of a social stratum definable by. among other things, lack of wealth.' See E. J Hobsbawm, op. cit., pp. 398, 399.

17 Peter Bunyard, 'Can Self-sufficient Communities survive the onslaught of Development?' *The .Cologist,* Vol. 14, 1984, p. 3.

] 8 'Traditionally, land and labor are not separated; labor forms part of life, land part of natu e, life and nature form an articulate whole. Land is thus tied up with the organizations of kinship, neighborhood, craft and creed — with tribe and temple, village, guild and church.' Pola yi, op. cit., p. 178.

] 9 In this tradition, Michel Mollat quotes a great teacher of the first millennium, the sixth centi ry North African abbot, Julianus Pomerius, who believed that: 'once an individual ensu ed his own survival and the survival of his family, he had the duty to give whatever he own d beyond his own needs to the *debiles* and *infimi,* that is, to the poor.' See Mollat, op. cit.,

20. For Michael Harrington, already in 1963, the deprived in the US numbered nearly 50 milli n people. Some startling facts on the phenomenon of poverty amidst affluence in the US recently reported in an article by Dolores King, a correspondent of the *Boston Globe.* 'Twenty years after a White House Conference was "to put an end to hunger in America itself for all time", as President Nixon phrased it, hunger is making a comeback in vengeance.' See 'Hunger's Bitter Return: Working poor, children seen as newest victims', in the *Boston Globe,* December 9, 1989.

21. See Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, 'Sincerity is Subversive', *Development,* No. 3, 1985, pp.

22. Georg Simmel, `The Poor', *Social Problems,* Vol. 13, 1965.

23. There is an abundant literature on the grassroots movements and networks in Latin America. Already in the '60s, some came to public attention which had been initiated in Chile and Mexico. Between the '60s and the '70s, the Freirian methods of `conscientization' were by a large number of them in other parts of the continent.

The mid-'70s witnessed the birth of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, conceived by a group of activists from different regions of the world, in particular Latin America and Asia. Their intention was, amongst others, to create with the populations concerned, the most favourable conditions for the creation and dissemination of 'grassroots knowledge'. The methodology was soon adopted by, and spread to, many grassroots movements, not only in Latin America, but all over the world. In April 1986, many networks of grassroots movements signed a solidarity agreement for working together.

Lately, a most innovative movement found its expression in the Mexican ANADEGES (Analysis, Decentralism & Gestion). This movement considers itself as a 'hammock' for peasants, marginals and `deprofessionalized intellectuals'. Around 500,000 persons are said to be involved in this `hammock', whose discourse and practices take the opposite course to those of 'development'.

24. Although Swadhyaya had its first tiny seeds planted in the early '50s by Dada (an affectionate nickname for the Rev. Pandurang Athvale Shastri), the movement is less known outside the Swadhyayi *parivar* (family). It took the first 'seeds' some 20 years to become `seedlings', and finally an impressive human forest of over 3 million people. 'Swadhyaya' means 'self-knowledge' or 'self-discovery'. The movement is entirely self-reliant and based on the Vedic belief that there is a God within each person. Swadhyaya has generated great material wealth without any assistance from anywhere. The 'family' has been using that 'wealth' and its regenerated relationships to improve the condition of its poorer members, in a most ingenious and graceful manner. See also, Majid Rahnema, 'Swadhyaya: The unknown, the peaceful, the silent, yet singing revolution of India'. in *IFDA Dossier,* No. 73, April 1990.

25. A vivid illustration of this approach is given in an article on Chodak, a movement of 'self-organization' of the poor and the marginalized in Dakar. In this excellent case study, the author indicates how the key to success, for this movement, became the people's concern 'to see and to understand "what is".' See Emmanuel Seyni Ndione, 'Lecons d'une animation au Senegal'. *IFDA Dossier,* No. 74, Nov./Dec. 1989.

26. 'Manavodaya'. in Hindi. means 'human awakening'. This is another grassroots movement whose 'organizing philosophy and practice start with self-awakening and awareness, leading to family, community and social awakening. . . . Recognizing a unity of purpose in all life and evolution, the end goal of development is seen by this movement as a society based on self-discipline and love.' See the mimeographed Preliminary Report of the International Workshop, *People's Initiatives to Overcome Poverty,* March 27-April 5, 1989, organized by the East-West Centre. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Bibliography

To compose a bibliography for this particular entry on poverty is an almost impossible task, as the two major means of expression for the poor are either silence or the spoken word. The written material on poverty is, at best, an accumulation of knowledge *about* the world of the poor and their needs. As such, the present bibliography represents only a poor selection of the sources on which the author has relied for his own personal reflections.

To obtain a wider view of the perception of poverty in vernacular, or pre-economic, societies, I found it useful to start by refreshing my memory of poems and old classical writings familiar to Iranians and other people of my region. Amongst these, the following are available in English and French: *The Ma thnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (translated by R. A. Nicholson), Cambridge, 1977; *The Gulistan of Saadi* (translated as *Kings and Beggars* by *J.* Arberry, London: 1945); Farid al Din 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awlia* (translated by Ed. Nicholson), London: 1905; Abd-ar Rahman Al Jami, *Vie des Soufis ou les Haleines de la familiarite,* (translated by Sylvestre de Sacy), Paris: 1979; A. Nasafi, *Le Livre de l'homme parfait,* Fayard, 1984; Ibn K halchin's *Muqaddima* (partly translated in French in Ibn Khalchin, Paris: Seghers, 1968) and Rabi'a al-'Adawiiyya's teachings in Margaret Smith's *Rabi'a al-'Adawiiyya: The mystic Saint of Basra,* Cambridge: 1928.

For more recent views on poverty in the pre-industrialized societies of the South, see, for the African region. A. Tevoedjrê, *Poverty: Wealth of Mankind,* Oxford: 1979; R. Palmer and N. Parsons, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa,* Berkeley: 1977; and John Iliffe, *The African Poor,* Cambridge: 1987. For Asia, see **R. R.** Singh (ed.), *Social Work Perspectives on Poverty.* Delhi: 1980, and Leela Gulati, *Profiles in Female Poverty,* Delhi:1984. And for Latin America, Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History,* New York: 1984, and the well-known studies of Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez,* New York: 1961, and *La Vida,* New York: 1966. Marshall Sahlin, *Stone Age Economics,* Chicago: 1972, provides unusual insight into the relation of poverty with material wealth as these were perceived in the earliest vernacular societies. On another plane. Richard Wilkinson demonstrates in his *Poverty and Progress,* London: 1973, that economic poverty, little known in societies with an ecological equilibrium, appears when man-made pressures of an economic or cultural nature disrupt the latter.

There are authoritative books on the historically changing perceptions of poverty in Europe. A classic is Michel Mollat's edited series entitled *Etudes sur l'Histoire de la pauvrete: Moyen Age-XVIeme siecle.* The studies were later compiled in a concise and revised English version bearing the name *The Poor in the Middle Ages, Yale.* 1987. Of similar importance is Bronislaw Geremek's work, *Litosc i szubienica,* as yet unpublished in its Polish original, although translations of it have appeared in Italian, *La Pieta e la forca.* Rome: Laterza, 1986, and French, *La Potence ou la pitie,* Paris: 1987. See also G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age,* New York: 1984.

For the processes leading to the 'modernization of poverty' (a term coined by Ivan Mich in 'Planned Poverty: The End Result of Technical Assistance', a chapter of his *Celebration of Awareness,* London: 1971), Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation,* New York: 1944, and *The Livelihood ofMan,* New York: 1977, remain outstanding references. Amartya Sen's important book, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation,* Oxford: 1981 expresses a thoughtful and convincing demonstration of the dangers of reducing the causes of famine and poverty to food supply. Charles Valentine, *Culture and Poverty,* Chicago: 1968. substantiates the concerns of a soul-searching anthropologist about the dangerous consequences of 'ill-founded conclusions and recommendations from the academic experts [which] are being accepted and acted upon by the public and policy makers alike'.

The phenomenon of poverty in the midst of affluence has been abundantly explored. For the United States, see Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States,* New York: 1956; Mollie Orshansky's numerous studies, in particular, his earlier often quoted article 'Recounting the Poor: A Five Year Review' in *Social Security Bulletin,* December 1960; Michael Harrington's two major works, *The Other America.* Baltimore: 1963, and *The American Poverty,* New York: 1984; Robert E. Will & Harold G. Vatter, *Poverty in Affluence,* New York: 1970; The Physician Task Force On Hunger in America, *Hunger In America: The Growing Epidemics,* Wesleyan University Press, 1985. B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Social Survey of York,* London: 1941, and Peter Townsend, 'The Meaning of Poverty', *British Journal of Sociology,* September 1962, describe the same phenomenon in England. P. de la Gorce in *La France pauvre,* Paris: 1965. deals with the case of his own country. Finally, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns describes the Brazilian drama in his short and moving article in the SID Journal, *Development,* No. 3, 1985.

Amongst the studies known to this author on the traditional wisdom of the poor in responding to their predicament, the following works are particularly useful. James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant.* Yale University Press, 1976, demonstrates, in the cases of Burma and Vietnam, how the peasants' 'moral economy' allows them to preserve and enrich their culture while safeguarding at the same time their security. Michael Watts, *Silent Violence,* Berkeley: 1983, is a remarkable study on the ways the Hausa in Northern Nigeria had always organized their poverty with intelligence and wisdom, until their mode of life was shattered by the rise of capitalist development. See also Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* Paris: 1966, and D. H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System: A socio-economic system inter-relating members of a Hindu village community in services,* Lucknow: 1936. Both studies reveal the subtleties of

vernacular societies in dealing with their `poorest' members.

In the abundant literature on more recent grassroots movements initiated by the poor, the following selected readings are suggested to give a bird's eye view of the situation in some of the areas exposed to rapid economization of life: Anisur Rahman (ed.), *Grassroots Participation and Self-reliance: Experiences in South and SE Asia,* New Delhi: Oxford & 1BH Publishing Co., 1984; G. V. S. de Silva al., `Bhoomi Sena: A Struggle for People's Power', in *Development Dialogue,* No. 2,1979, pp. 3-70; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* London: 1989; Majid Rahnema, *Swadhyaya:* the unknown, the peaceful, the silent, yet singing revolution of India', *IFDA Dossier,* No. 73. April 1990; Gustavo Esteva, `A New Call for Celebration', *Development, No. 3,* 1986, and `Regenerating People's Space', *Alternatives,* Vol. XII, 1987; Albert Hirschmann, *Getting Ahead Collectively: Grassroots Experiences In Latin America,* New York: 1984; Emmanuel Seyni Ndione, *Dynamique urbaine d'une sociere en grappe: un cas, Dakar,* Dakar: 1987; also his more recent article, 'Lecons d'une animation au Senegal', *IFDA Dossier,* No. 74, Nov.–Dec. 1989.

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Production

Jean Robert

A Man and A Concept

Don Bartolo lives in a shack behind my house. Like many other `displaced persons' in Mexico, he is a squatter. He constructed his dwelling of cardboard, together with odd pieces of plastic and tin. If he is lucky, he will eventually build walls of brick and cover them with some kind of cement or tin roofing. Stretching behind his hut, there is an expanse of barren unused land. From the owner he got permission to cultivate it, to establish a *rndpa:* a field of corn planted just when the rains start so that a crop can be harvested without irrigation. Bartolo's action may appear to us profoundly anachronistic.

After World War II, Mexico and the rest of the 'Third World' were invaded by the idea of development. According to President Harry Truman — whose inaugural address in 1949 did much to popularize the term — development consists principally in helping 'the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens') The key to development is greater production and 'the key .to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of scientific and technical knowledge.' Don Bartolo does not produce more than his father did nor does he use mechanical power to lighten his burden. Experts say that he is underdeveloped.

Once defined as the application of science and productivity, production gradually came to mean productivity itself — more outputs at less cost. And, according to mainstream Mexican economists today, Bartolo's behaviour is clearly *not* productive. But do they have the last word? Perhaps we should take a look at the history of the concept.

Production comes from the Latin verb, *producere* which meant 'to stretch', `to spend', 'to prolong', 'to draw into visibility'. It generally referred to an actualization of possible existence. In terms of this ancient meaning, production is a movement from the invisible to the visible, an emanation through which something hitherto hidden is brought within the range of man's senses. This idea of emanation fitted ordinary people's experience, the awareness that nature, husbanded by man, brings forth a people's livelihood.

In the European Middle Ages, production retained its ancient sense of emanation. The exceptions are found in the writings of those philosophers who tried to reformulate Christian thought in Aristotelian terms. They sometimes used production as a synonym for creation and, of course, God, not man, was for them the 'Producer'. However, most theologians insisted that God's creation must not be expressed by the same word as the products of nature. In the 15th century, Nicholas of Cusa clarified the difference between creation and production further by stating that God created the world out of nothing, while

Planning

Arturo Escobar

Planning techniques and practices have been central to development since its inception. As the application of scientific and technical knowledge to the public domain, planning lent legitimacy to, and fuelled hopes about, the development enterprise. Generally speaking, the concept of planning embodies the belief that social change can be engineered and directed, produced at will. Thus the idea that poor countries could move more or less smoothly along the path of progress through planning has always been held as an indubitable truth, an axiomatic belief in need of no demonstration, by development experts of most persuasions.

Perhaps no other concept has been so insidious, no other idea gone so unchallenged. This blind acceptance of planning is all the more striking given the pervasive effects it has had historically, not only in the Third World, but also in the West, where it has been linked to fundamental processes of domination and social control. For planning has been inextricably linked to the rise of Western modernity since the end of the 18th century. The planning conceptions and routines introduced in the Third World during the post-World War II period are the result of accumulated scholarly, economic and political action; they are not neutral frameworks through which 'reality' innocently shows itself. They thus bear the marks of the history and culture that produced them. When deployed in the Third World, planning not only carried with it this historical baggage, but also contributed greatly to the production of the socio-economic and cultural configuration that we describe today as underdevelopment.

Normalizing People in 19th Century Europe

How did planning arise in the European experience? Very briefly, three major factors were essential to this process, beginning in the 19th century — the development of town planning as a way of dealing with the problems of the growing industrial cities; the rise of social planning, and increased intervention by professionals and the state in society, in the name of promoting people's welfare; and the invention of the modern economy, which crystallized with the institutionalization of the market and the formulation of classical political economy. These three factors, which today appear to us as normal, as natural parts of our world, have a relatively recent and even precarious history.

In the first half of the 19th century, capitalism and the industrial revolution brought drastic changes in the make-up of cities, especially in Northwestern Europe. Ever more people flooded into old quarters, factories proliferated, and industrial fumes hovered over streets covered with sewage. Overcrowded and disordered, the 'diseased city', as the metaphor went, called for a new type of planning which would provide solutions to the rampant urban chaos. Indeed, it was those city officials and reformers who were chiefly concerned with health regulations, public works and sanitary interventions, who first laid down the foundations of comprehensive urban planning. The city began to be conceived of as an object, analysed scientifically, and transformed according to the two major requirements of traffic and hygiene. 'Respiration' and 'circulation' were supposed to be restored to the city organism, overpowered by sudden pressure. Cities (including the colonial chequerboards outside Europe) were designed or modified to ensure proper circulation of air and traffic, and philanthropists set out to eradicate the appalling slums and to bring the right morals to their inhabitants. The rich traditional meaning of cities and the more intimate relationship between city and dweller were thus eroded as the industrial-hygienic order became dominant. Reifying space and objectifying people, the practice of town planning, along with the science of urbanism, transformed the spatial and social make-up of the city, giving birth in the 20th century to what has been called 'the Taylorization of architecture'.'

Just like planners in the Third World today, the 19th century European bourgeoisie also had to deal with the question of poverty. The management of poverty actually opened up a whole realm of intervention, which some researchers have termed the social. Poverty, health, education, hygiene, unemployment, etc. were constructed as 'social problems', which in turn required detailed scientific knowledge about society and its population, and extensive social planning and intervention in everyday life. As the state emerged as the guarantor of progress, the objective of government became the efficient management and disciplining of the population so as to ensure its welfare and 'good order'. A body of laws and regulations was produced with the intention to regularize work conditions and deal with accidents, old age, the employment of women, and the protection and education of children. Factories, schools, hospitals, prisons became privileged places to shape experience and modes of thinking in terms of the social order. In sum, the rise of the social made possible the increasing socialization and subjection of people to dominant norms, as well as their insertion into the machinery of capitalist production. The end result of this process in the present day is the welfare state and the new professionalized activity known as social work.

Two points have to be emphasized in relation to this process. One, that these changes did not come about naturally, but required vast ideological and material operations, and often times plain coercion. People did not become accustomed to factory work or to living in crowded and inhospitable cities gladly and of their own volition; they had to be disciplined into it! And two, that those very operations and forms of social planning have produced 'governable' subjects. They have shaped not only social structures and institutions, but also the way in which people experience life and construct themselves as subjects. But development experts have been blind to these insidious aspects of planning in their proposals to replicate in the Third World similar forms of social planning. As Foucault said, 'the "Enlightment", which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.'[2] One cannot look on the bright side of planning, its modern achievements (if one were to accept them), without looking at the same time on its dark side of domination. The

management of the social has produced modern subjects who are not only dependent on professionals for their needs, but also ordered into realiti:s (cities, health and educational systems, economies, etc.) that can be govern d by the state through planning. Planning inevitably requires the normalizatiola and standardization of reality, which in turn entails injustice and the erasure)f difference and diversity.

The third factor in European history that was of central importance to tie development and success of planning was the invention of the 'economy'. Tie economy, as we know it today, did not even exist as late as the 18th century Europe, much less in other parts of the world. The spread and institutionaliz t

individualism, and the birth of classical political economy at the end of the 18 h century provided the elements and cement for the establishment of an independent domain, namely 'the economy', apparently separated fro n morality, politics and culture. Karl Polanyi refers to this process as the `disembeddedness' of the economy for society, a process which was linked to the consolidation of capitalism and which entailed the commodification if land and labour. There were many consequences of this development, beside s generalized commodification. Other forms of economic organization, those founded upon reciprocity or redistribution, for instance, were disqualified and increasingly marginalized. Subsistence activities became devalued or destroyed. And an instrumental attitude towards nature and people became the order of the day, which in turn led to unprecedented forms of exploitation of people and nature. Although today most of us take for granted the modern mark t economy, this notion and the reality of how it operates have not always existed. Despite its dominance, even today there persist in many parts of the Third World subsistence societies, 'informal' economies, and collective forms of economic organization.

In sum, the period 1800-1950 saw the progressive encroachment of those forms of administration and regulation of society, urban space and the economy that would result in the great edifice of planning in the early pos- World War II period. Once normalized, regulated and ordered, individualt, societies and economies can be subjected *to* the scientific gaze and social engineering scalpel of the planner, who, like a surgeon operating on the human body, can then attempt to produce the desired type of social change. If social science and planning have had any success in predicting and engineering social change, it is precisely because certain economic, cultural and social regularities have already been attained which confer some systematic element and consistency with the real world on the planners' attempts. Once you organize factory work and discipline workers, or once you start growing trees in plantations, then you can predict industrial output or timber production. In the process, the exploitation of workers, the degradation of nature, and the elimination of other forms of knowledge — whether it be the skills of the craftsman or those who live off the forest — are also affected. These are the kind of processes that are at stake in the Third World when planning is introduced as the central technique of development. In short, planning redefines social and economic life accordance with the criteria of rationality, efficiency and morality which are

consonant with the history and needs of capitalist, industrial society, but not those of the Third World.

Dismantling and Reassembling Societies

Scientific planning came of age during the 1920s and '30s, when it emerged from rather heterogeneous origins — the mobilization of national production during World War I, Soviet Planning, the scientific management movement in the USA, and Keynesian economic policy. Planning techniques were refined during the Second World War and its aftermath. It was during this period, and in connection with the War, that operations research, systems analysis, human engineering, and views of planning as 'rational social action' became widespread. When the era of development in the Third World dawned in the late 1940s, the dream of designing society through planning found an even more fertile ground. In Latin America and Asia, the creation of a 'developing sc ciety', understood as an urban-based civilization characterized by growth, political stability and increasing standards of living, became an explicit goal, and ambitious plans were designed to bring it about with the eager assistance of international organizations and experts from the 'developed' world.

To plan in the Third World, however, certain structural and behavioural *cc nditions* had to be laid down, usually at the expense of people's existing or ncepts of social action and change. In the face of the imperatives of 'modern sc ciety', planning involved the overcoming or eradication of 'traditions', `obstacles' and 'irrationalities', that is, the wholesale modification of existing hi man and social structures and their replacement with rational new ones. Given the nature of the post-war economic order, this amounted to creating the cc nditions for capitalist production and reproduction. Economic growth theories, which dominated development at the time, provided the theoretical Ol[ientation for the creation of the new order, and national development plans the means to achieve it. The first 'mission' — note its colonial, Christian missionary overtones — sent by the World Bank to an 'underdeveloped' *cc untry* in 1949, for instance, had as its goal the formulation of a `ciomprehensive program of development' for the country in question, C lombia. Staffed by experts in many fields, the mission saw its task as 'calling fc: a comprehensive and internally consistent program. . . . Only through a gt ieralized attack throughout the whole economy on education, health, hi using, food and productivity can the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, ill hi llth and low productivity be decisively broken.' Moreover, it was clear to the *nnssion* that:

> One cannot escape the conclusion that reliance on natural forces has not produced the most happy results. Equally inescapable is the conclusion that with knowledge of the underlying facts and economic processes, good planning in setting objectives and allocating resources, and determination in carrying out a program for improvement and reforms, a great deal can be done to improve the economic environment by shaping economic policies to meet scientifically ascertained social requirements. . . . In making such an

effort, Colombia would not only accomplish its own salvation but would at the same time furnish an inspiring example to all other underdeveloped areas of the world.'

That development was about 'salvation' — again the echoes of the colonial civilizing mission — comes out clearly in most of the literature of the period. Countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia were seen as 'relying on natural forces', which had not produced the 'most happy results'. Needless to say, the whole history of colonialism is effaced by this discursive way of putting it. What is emphasized instead is the introduction of poor countries to the `enlightened' world of Western science and modern economics, while the conditions existing in these countries are constructed as being characterized by a 'vicious circle' of 'poverty', 'ignorance' and the like. Science and planning, on the other hand, are seen as neutral, desirable and universally applicable, while, in truth, an entire and particular rationality and civilizational experience was being transferred to the Third World through the process of 'development'. The Third World thus entered post-World War II Western consciousness as constituting the appropriate social and technical raw material for planning. This status of course depended, and still does, on an extractive neo-colonialism. Epistemologically and politically, the Third World is constructed as a natural-technical object that has to be normalized and moulded through planning to meet the 'scientifically ascertained' characteristics of a 'development society'.

By the end of the 1950s, most countries in the Third World were already engaged in planning activities. Launching the first 'Development Decade' at the beginning of the 1960s, the United Nations could thus state that:

> The ground has been cleared for a non-doctrinaire consideration of the real problems of development, namely saving, training and planning, and for action on them. In particular, the advantages in dealing with the various problems not piecemeal, but by a comprehensive approach through sound development planning, became more fully apparent. . . . Careful development planning can be a potent means of mobilizing . . . latent resources for a rational solution of the problems involved.°

The same optimism — and, at the same time, blindness to the parochial and ethnocentric attitudes of the planners — was echoed by the Alliance for Progress. In President Kennedy's words:

> The world is very different now. For man (sic) holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. . . . To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery . . . we offer a special pledge— to convert our good words in good deeds — in a new alliance for progress — to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty.5

Statements such as these reduce life in the Third World simply to conditions of `misery', overlooking its rich traditions, different values and life styles, and long historical achievements. In the eyes of planners and developers, people's dwellings appear as no more than miserable 'huts', and their lives — often ti mes, especially at this early point in the development era, still characterized by subsistence and self-sufficiency — as marked by unacceptable 'poverty'. In short, they are seen as no more than crude matter in urgent need of being transformed by planning. One does not need to romanticize tradition to realize that, what for the economist were indubitable signs of poverty and backwardness, for Third World people were often integral components of viable social and cultural systems, rooted in different, non-modern social relations and systems of knowledge. It was precisely these systems that came under attack first by colonialism and later on by development, although not without much resistance then as today. Even alternative conceptions of economic and social change held by Third World scholars and activists in the 1940s and '50s — the most notable being that of Mahatma Gandhi, but also, for instance, those of certain socialists in Latin America — were displaced by the enforced imposition of planning and development. For developers, what was at stake was a transition from a 'traditional society' to an 'economic culture', that the development of a type of society whose goals were linked to future-oriented, scientific-objective rationality and brought into existence through t he mastering of certain techniques. 'So long as everyone played his part well,' planners believed, `the system was fail-safe; the state would plan, the economy Would produce, and working people would concentrate on their private a;endas: raising families, enriching themselves, and consuming whatever came tumbling out from the cornucopia.'6

As Third World elites appropriated the European ideal of progress — in the form of the construction of a prosperous, modern nation through economic development and planning; as other surviving concepts of change and social a :tion became even more marginalized; finally, as traditional social systems were disrupted and the living conditions of most people worsened, the hold of panning grew ever stronger. Elites and, quite often, radical counter-elites found in planning a tool for social change which was in their eyes not only it dispensable, but irrefutable because of its scientific nature. The history of dovelopment in the post-World War II period is. in many ways, the history of tLe institutionalization and ever more pervasive deployment of planning. The p:ocess was facilitated time after time by successive development `strategies'. FOom the emphasis on growth and national planning in the 1950s, to the Green Revolution and sectoral and regional planning of the 1960s and '70s, including Tasic Needs' and local level planning in the '70s and '80s, to environmental Panning for `sustainable development' and planning to 'incorporate' women, o the grassroots, into development in the '80s, the scope and vaulting annbitions of planning have not ceased to grow.

Perhaps no other concept has served so well to recast and spread planning as tt at of the Basic Human Needs strategy. Recognizing that the goals of reducing poverty and ensuring a decent living standard for most people were 'as distant a; ever', development theorists — always keen on finding yet another gimmick which they could present as a 'new' paradigm or strategy — coined this notion *wIth* the aim of providing 'a coherent framework that can accommodate the

increasingly refined sets of development objectives that have evolved over the past thirty years and can systematically relate these objectives to various types of policies',' including growth. The key arenas of intervention were primary education, health, nutrition, housing, family planning, and rural development. Most of the interventions themselves were directed at the household. As in the case of the mapping of 'the social' in 19th century Europe, where society first became the target of systematic state intervention, Third World people's health, education, farming and reproduction practices all became the object of a vast array of programmes introduced in the name of increasing these countries' `human capital' and ensuring a minimum level of welfare for their people. Once again, the epistemological and political boundaries of this kind of `rational' approach — aimed at the modification of life conditions and inevitably marked by class, race, gender and cultural features — resulted in the construction of an artificially homogeneous monochrome, the 'Third World', an entity that was always deficient in relation to the West, and so always in need of imperialist projects of progress and development.

Rural development and health programmes during the 1970s and '80s can be cited as examples of this type of biopolitics. They also reveal the arbitrary mechanisms and fallacies of planning. Robert McNamara's famous Nairobi speech, delivered in 1973 before the boards of governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, launched the era of 'poverty-oriented' programmes in development, which evolved into the Basic Human Needs approach. Central to this conception were so-called national food and nutrition planning and integrated rural development. Most of these schemes were designed in the early 1970s at a handful of US and UK universities, at the World Bank, and at United Nations technical agencies, and implemented in many Third World countries from the mid 1970s until the late 1980s. Comprehensive food and nutrition planning was deemed necessary, given the magnitude and complexity of the problems of malnutrition and hunger. Typically, a national food and nutrition plan included projects in primary health care, nutrition education and food supplementation, school and family vegetable gardens, the promotion of the production and consumption of protein-rich foods, and integrated rural development generally. This latter component contemplated measures to increase the production of food crops by small farmers through the supply of credit, technical assistance and agricultural inputs, and basic infrastructure.

How did the World Bank define integrated rural development? 'Rural development', the World Bank's policy dictated:

> is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people — the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in rural areas. A strategy of rural development must recognize three points. Firstly, the rate of transfer of people out of low productivity agriculture into more rewarding pursuits has been slow. . . Secondly, . . . their position is likely to get worse if population expands at unprecedented rates. . . . Thirdly, rural areas have labor, land and at least some capital which, if mobilized, could reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. . . . [Rural development] is clearly designed to increase production and raise productivity. It is concerned with the monetization and modernization of society, and with its transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy.'

That most people in the 'modern' sector, namely those living under marginal conditions in the cities, did not enjoy 'the benefits of development' did not occur to these experts. Peasants — that 'specific group of people' which is in reality the majority of the Third World — are seen in purely economic terms, not as trying to make viable a whole way of life. That their 'rate of transfer into more rewarding pursuits' had to be accelerated, on the other hand, assumes that their lives are not satisfying — after all, they live in 'traditional isolation', even if surrounded by their communities and those they love. The approach also regards peasants as suitable for moving around like cattle or commodities. Since their labour has to be 'mobilized', they must surely have just been sitting about idly (subsistence farming does not involve 'labour' in this view), or perhaps having too many babies. All of these rhetorical devices that reflect the `normal' perceptions of the planner contribute to obscure the fact that it is precisely the peasants' increasing integration into the modern economy that is at the root of many of their problems. Even more fundamentally, these statements, which become translated into reality through planning, reproduce the world as the developers know it — a world composed of production and markets, of 'traditional' and 'modern' or developed and underdeveloped sectors, of the need for aid and investment by multinationals, of capitalism versus communism, of material progress as happiness, and so forth. Here we have a prime example of the link between representation and power, and of the violence of seemingly neutral modes of representation.

In short, planning ensures a functioning of power that relies on, and helps to produce, a type of reality which is certainly not that of the peasants, while peasant cultures and struggles are rendered invisible. Indeed the peasants are rendered irrelevant even to their own rural communities. In its rural development discourse, the World Bank represents the lives of peasants in such a way that awareness of the mediation and history inevitably implicated in this construction is excluded from the consciousness of its economists and from that of many important actors — planners, Western readers, Third World elites, scientists, etc. This particular narrative of planning and development, deeply grounded in the post-World War II global political economy and cultural order, becomes essential to those actors. It actually becomes an important element in their insular construction as a developed, modern, civilized 'we', the 'we' of Western man. In this narrative, too, peasants, and Third World people generally, appear as the half-human, half-cultured benchmark against which the Euro-American world measures its own achievements.

Knowledge as Power

As a system of representation, planning thus depends on making people forget the origins of its historical mediation. This invisibility of history and mediation is accomplished through a series of particular practices. Planning relies upon, and proceeds through, various practices regarded as rational or objective, but which are in fact highly ideological and political. First of all, as with other development domains, knowledge produced in the First World about the Third gives a certain visibility to specific realities in the latter, thus making them the targets of power. Programmes such as integrated rural development have to be seen in this light. Through these programmes, 'small farmers', 'landless peasants' and the like achieve a certain visibility, albeit only as a development `problem', which makes them the object of powerful, even violent, bureaucratic interventions. And there are other important hidden or unproblematized mechanisms of planning; for instance, the demarcation of new fields and their assignment to experts, sometimes even the creation of a new sub-discipline (like food and nutrition planning). These operations not only assume the prior existence of discrete 'compartments', such as 'health', 'agriculture', and `economy' — which in truth are no more than fictions created by the scientist — but impose this fragmentation on cultures which do not experience life in the same compartmentalized manner. And, of course, states, dominant institutions, and mainstream views are strenthened along the way as the domain of their action is inevitably multiplied.

Institutional practices such as project planning and implementation, on the other hand, give the impression that policy is the result of discrete, rational acts and not the process of coming to terms with conflicting interests, a process in which choices are made, exclusions effected, and worldviews imposed. There is an apparent neutrality in identifying people as 'problems', until one realizes first, that this definition of 'the problem' has already been put together in Washington or some capital city of the Third World, and second, that problems are presented in such a way that some kind of development programme has to be accepted as the legitimate solution. It is professional discourses which provide the categories in terms of which 'facts' can be identified and analysed. This effect is reinforced by the use of labels such as 'small farmer' or 'pregnant women', which reduces a person's life to a single trait and makes him/her into a `case' to be treated or reformed. The use of labels also allows experts and elites to delink explanations of 'the problem' from themselves as the non-poor, and assign them purely to factors internal to the poor. Inevitably, people's lives at the local level are transcended and objectified when they are translated into the professional categories used by institutions. In short, local realities come to be greatly determined by these non-local institutional practices, which thus have to be seen as inherently political.

The results of this type of planning have been, for the most part, deleterious to Third World people and economies alike. In the case of rural development, for instance, the outcome was seen by experts in terms of two possibilities: '(a) the small producer may be able to technify his productive process, which entails his becoming an agrarian entrepreneur; and (b) the small producer is not prepared to assume such level of competitiveness, in which case he will be displaced from the market and perhaps even from production in that area altogether.' In other words, 'produce (for the market) or perish'. Even in terms of increased production, rural development programmes have had dubious results at best. Most of the increase in food production in the Third World has taken place in the commercial capitalist sector, while a good part of the increase has been in cash or export crops. In fact, as has been amply shown, rural development programmes and development planning in general have contributed not only to growing pauperization of rural people, but also to aggravated problems of malnutrition and hunger. Planners thought that the agricultural economies of the Third World could be mechanically restructured to resemble the 'modernized' agriculture of the United States, overlooking completely not only the desires and aspirations of people, but the whole dynamics of economy, culture and society that circumscribe farming practices in the Third World. This type of management of life actually became a theatre of death (most strikingly in the case of the African famine), as increased production of food resulted, through a perverse shift, in more hunger.

The impact of many development programmes has been particularly negative on women and indigenous peoples, as development projects appropriate or destroy their basis for sustenance and survival. Historically, Western discourse has refused to recognize the productive and creative role of women and this refusal has contributed to propagating divisions of labour that keep women in positions of subordination. For planners and economists, women were not, until recently, 'economically active', despite the fact that a great share of the food consumed in the Third World is grown by women. Moreover, women's economic and gender position frequently deteriorated in the 1970s as a result of the participation in rural development programmes by male heads of household. It is not surprising that women have opposed much more actively than men these rural development programmes. With the `technological packages', specialization in the production of certain crops, rigid lay-out of fields, pre-set cultivation routines, production for the market, and so forth, they contrast sharply with the more ecological and varied peasant farming defended by women in many parts of the Third World — in which production for subsistence and for the market are carefully balanced. Unfortunately, the recent trend towards incorporating women into development has resulted for the most part in their being targeted for what in all other respects remain conventional programmes. 'Target group categories are constructed to further development agency procedures to organize, manage, regulate, enumerate and rule the lives of ordinary women.'[°] Thus the development industry's clientele has been conveniently doubled by this shift in representation.

Another important recent instance of planned development is the industrialization schemes in so-called free trade zones in the Third World, where multinational corporations are brought in under very favourable conditions (e.g., tax breaks, assurances of cheap, docile labour and a 'stable' political climate, lower pollution standards, etc). Like all other forms of planning, these industrialization projects involve much more than an economic

transformation, and on an ever larger scale. What is at stake here is the rapid transformation of rural society and culture into the world of factory discipline and modern (Western) society. Brought into Third World countries in the name of development, and actively promoted and mediated by Third World states, the free trade zones represent a microcosm in which households, villages, traditions, modern factories, governments and the world economy are all brought together in unequal relations of knowledge and power. It is no accident that most of the workers in the new factories are young women. The electronics industries in South East Asia, for instance, rely heavily on gender forms of subordination. The production of young women factory workers as 'docile bodies' through systematic forms of discipline in the factory and outside it, does not go, however, without resistance, as Aihwa Ong shows in her excellent study of Malaysian women factory workers. Women's forms of resistance in the factory (destruction of microchips, spirit possession, slow-downs etc.) have to be seen as idioms of protest against labour discipline and male control in the new industrial situation. Moreover, they remind us that, if it is true that 'new forms of domination are increasingly embodied in the social relations of science and technology which organize knowledge and production systems', it is equally true that 'the divergent voices and innovative practices of subjected peoples disrupt such cultural reconstructions of non-Western societies.'"

Knowledge in Opposition

Feminist critics of development and critics of development as discourse have begun to join forces, precisely through their examination of the dynamics of domination, creativity and resistance that circumscribe development. This hopeful trend is most visible in a type of grassroots activism and theorizing that is sensitive to the role of knowledge, culture and gender in supporting the enterprise of development and, conversely, in bringing about more pluralistic and egalitarian practices. As the links between development, which articulates the state with profits, patriarchy and objectivizing science and technology on the one hand, and the marginalization of people's lives and knowledge on the other, become more evident, the search for alternatives also deepens. The imaginary ideas of development and 'catching up' with the West are drained of their appeal as violence and recurrent crises — economic, ecological, political — become the order of the day. In sum, the attempt by states to set up totalizing systems of socio-economic and cultural engineering through development is running into a dead end. Practices and new spaces for thinking and acting are being created or reconstituted, most notably at the grassroots, in the vacuum left by the crisis of the colonizing mechanisms of development.

Speaking about ecology movements in India, many of them started by women at the grassroots level, Vandana Shiva, for instance, sees the emerging process as:

> a redefinition of growth and productivity as categories linked to the production, not the destruction, of life. It is thus simultaneously an ecological and a feminist political project that legitimizes the ways of knowing and being that create wealth by enhancing life and diversity, and which delegitimizes the knowledge and practice of a culture of death as the basis for capital accumulation. . . . In contemporary times, Third World women, whose minds have not yet been dispossessed or colonized, are in a privileged position to make visible the invisible oppositional categories that they are custodians of.[12]

One does not need to impute to Third World women, indigenous people, peasants and others a purity they do not have, to realize that important forms of resistance to the colonization of their life world have been maintained and even nurtured among them. And one does not need to be overly optimistic about the potential of grassroots movements to transform the development order to visualize the promise that these movements hold, and the challenge they increasingly pose to conventional top-down, centralized approaches or even to those apparently decentralized, participatory strategies which are geared for the most part towards economic ends. ('Participatory' or local level planning, indeed, is most often conceived not in terms of a popular power that people could exercise, but as a bureaucratic problem that the development institution has to solve.) Shiva's argument that many groups of Third World people, especially rural women and indigenous peoples, possess knowledge and practices opposite to those that define the dominant nexus between reductionist science, patriarchy, violence and profits — forms of relating to people, knowledge and nature which are less exploitative and reifying, more localized, decentred and in harmony with the ecosystem — is echoed by observers in many parts of the world. These alternative forms, which are neither traditional nor modern, provide the basis for a slow but steady process of construction of different ways of thinking and acting, of conceiving of social change, of organizing economies and societies, of living and healing.

Thus Western rationality has to open up to the plurality of forms of knowledge and conceptions of change that exist in the world and recognize that objective, detached scientific knowledge is just one possible form among many. This much can be gleaned from an anthropology of Reason that looks critically at the basic discourses and practices of modern Western societies, and discovers in Reason and its key practices — such as planning — not universal truths but rather very specific, and even somewhat strange or at least peculiar, ways of being. This also entails, for those working within the Western tradition, recognizing — without overlooking the cultural content of science and technology — that:

> (1) The production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; (2) taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts."

As we have shown, planning has been one of those totalizing universals. While social change has probably always been part of the human experience, it was only within European modernity that 'society', i.e. the whole way of life of a people, was open to empirical analysis and made the object of planned change. And while communities in the Third World may find that there is a need for some sort of organized or directed social change — in part to reverse the damage caused by development — this undoubtedly will not take the form of `designing life' or social engineering. In the long run, this means that categories and meanings have to be redefined; through their innovative political practice, new social movements of various kinds are already embarked on this process of redefining the social, and knowledge itself.

The practices that still survive in the Third World despite development thus point the way to moving beyond social change and, in the long run, to entering a post-development, post-economic era. In the process, the plurality of meanings and practices that make up human history will again be made apparent, while planning itself will fade away from concern.

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Standard of Living

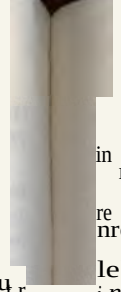
Serge Latouche

When, on June 24, 1949, in his message to Congress on his Point Four Programme, President Truman announced the necessity `to assist the people of economically underdeveloped areas to raise their standard of living',' he emphasized an objective which was already accepted as obvious and indisputable for all modern states. It was only a few years previously, in 1941, that the Charter of the United Nations had affirmed, in Article 55, the global objective `to promote higher standards of living'.

According to both popular opinion and scientific usage, `standard of living' refers to material well-being and constitutes a concept, susceptible of measurement, similar to per capita Gross National Product. `The standard of living,' wrote Jean Fourastie, 'is measured by the quantity of goods and services which may be purchased by the average national income.'[2] Any increase in the level of this indicator is considered the logical consequence of economic development. It is supposed to derive from an improved exploitation of natural resources through the utilization of science and technology in the form of industrial equipment. Equalizing this standard all over the globe suggested itself as the ideal towards which organizations throughout the world must strive. Bertrand de Jouvenel stated with authority in 1964: `The improvement of the material condition of the greatest number is, in our time, in fact, hope and desire."

While the hope of a satisfactory life *is* a very human concern, the obsession with this sort of `standard of living' is very recent. Interest in salary levels on the part of wage earners and as a general social preoccupation dates from the industrial era. As more and more people were turned into wage earners. the wage became the basic component of the standard of living. However, in the founding proclamation of the League of Nations on June 28, 1919, according to which `the well-being and the development of . . . people form a sacred mission of civilization:[4] the concept still did not exist as a measurable index. Nor had it attained the straightforward simplicity of GNP per capita, as for Stalin, and then Krushchev, drew up their ambitious plans for catching up with and overtaking the Americans. Even if one spoke of `standard of living', the concept was not yet a technical term referring to a precise and statistically determined economic aggregate, but a general notion that remained larger imprecise and subjective. In particular, the concept was still far from being used as a categorical imperative to the exclusion of all others.

Instead, specialists in human geography had long concentrated on studying different modes of living. They attempted to describe the ways of life which were specific to a given region or a given social milieu. Quantitative and normative measures were largely absent; a concern for the different qualities of living predominated. Economists today, however, are able to use the standard of living concept because ways of living have become increasingly uniform with



result that differences in *modes* of living can be more and more translated in terms of differences in *levels* of living.

The very widespread acceptance of the concept of standard of living has been the result of recent circumstances and events, although their roots date back a number of years into history. Examination of these circumstances may shed light on the implications and significance of the new concept. What immediately catches one's eye is that the concept's much vaunted universal relevance certainly cannot be assumed without further thought. In fact, looking at the world in terms of 'standard of living' is like looking through dark glasses; they make the rich variety of colours disappear, turning all differences into shades of the same colour. Whoever wants to appreciate the irreducible diversity of ways of realizing human existence, must step back and take off this conceptual spectacles.

GNP Per Head: A Post-war Invention

For the Anglo-Saxon reader, it may seem a travesty to date the emergence of this preoccupation with the standard of living to the period only following the Second World War. The expression itself is in fact very old. However, as we shall now see, its meaning has evolved in the meantime very considerably. Originally it indicated an *irreducible minimum income*, a subsistence level of living, the cost of the reproduction of the work-force, in the tradition of the classical economics of Malthus, Ricardo and Marx. It was still defined in this sense as late as 1934 in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.'* Without totally losing this connotation, and under the influence of the more recent rise in the level of living, the expression came to indicate a *desired* manner of living (plane of living), or normal living conditions (contents of living). It was on this conception that, in February 1945, the economist Joseph Davis insisted in his presidential speech to the American Association of Economics.6

It is clear that, in a short time, it became more and more difficult to dissociate this connotation of goal from that of fact. The concept also found itself oscillating uneasily between the two notions of the irreducible minimum and the desired level. The absorption of the descriptive (the actual level) into the normative (setting the standard) is revealing of the gradual degradation from concern with issues of quality to a sole preoccupation with quantity which has come to dominate the Western perspective. At least for once, the French language is less ambiguous than English; the expression *niveau de vie* clearly indicates a positively established fact, and its recent appearance has prevented any semantic ambiguity. The good fortune of this expression derives partly from the fact that it condenses a series of notions — subsistence level, income level, average per capita income, living conditions and a vital minimum wage . . .).

Among the specific circumstances that have led the standard of living to become the daily obsession of our contemporaries and the dominant horizon of economic politics, three phenomena appear to merit particular discussion. These include the general spread of the concept of national accounts, the growth of mass consumerism in the major industrial countries during the 30

'glorious years' (1945 to 1975), and the universalization of the myth of development in the Third World. Let us look briefly at each of these developments.

In the absence of any system of accounting, however imprecise, for the measurement of social conditions, it was vain to consider endowing with a quantitative capacity the concept of standard of living, and to generalize its usage. One cannot truly enjoy one's standard of living unless one is conscious of it. Today this consciousness is pushed extremely far amongst the majority of our contemporaries, engendering a veritable fetishism for the *amount* of income. To make up for lack of time to enjoy the fruits of our labour, the greatest satisfaction can at least be drawn from the contemplation of the amount one has earned in comparison with those lower down on the scalt.

Following the Great Depression, with the vogue for Keynesian ideas and the interest in macro-economics, the major industrial countries equipped themselves for the first time with statistical research institutes. Statistical data began to adorn economic concepts and to subvert them from within. As early as 1940, Colin Clark made a comparison between the incomes of different countries, and international organizations propagated the new cult of numbers. Even though certain Third World states were still living in the pre-modern age and did not function as national markets, they were a so adorned with arrays of statistics and all the attributes of a nation-state.

The attribution of standarized measurements became a categorical imperative. Living standards could at last be quantified and thus compared. The global ideal of a uniform standard of living ceased to be a futile concept; now came to be represented by a specific quantum of dollars which could at least be referred to, even if not realized. The utilitarian objective of the greatest happiness for the greatest number had found its scientific expression.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 proclaimed the equality of all human beings. This abstract universalism called for indicators of happiness which would be applicable everywhere. GNP per head provided a convenient measuring rod that claimed equal relevance all over the world. Before the War, under the conditions of colonialism, such a concern could hardly arise for it was meaningless to calculate the average standard of living for citizens of the British Empire, adding up for instance English and Indian incomes. It was only with decolonization that the idea of equality between English and Indian levels of living came to be considered as legitimate.

During the first 30 years after the Second World War, the developed economies experienced a phase of unprecedented growth, resulting in spectacular effects on the standard of living. The centuries-old poverty in the industrialized societies seemed almost to disappear. Work for all in a free society brought forth the spread of well-being under the guardianship of the welfare state. The expectation took root that universal affluence was just around the corner. Everybody, the moment he was conscious of his position, scrambled to catch up with those who were ahead. Disparities — the narrower they appear, the less tolerable they are — were considered likely to disappear soon, as they lacked any democratic legitimacy.

The myth of development was thus born. What had been produced in the

industrialized countries would generalize itself across the planet. The differences between countries came to be seen as mere delays, condemned as unjust and unacceptable, and the elimination of these gaps was planned. GNP per head, the basic indicator of the standard of living, became the fundamental criterion for measuring the level of development. Gradually additional criteria were established — non-monetary, but still quantitative, indicators of living standards, ranging from life expectancy to the number of doctors per square kilometre. The compilation of statistics required national accounts. The different indices were most often strongly correlated — which is why GNP per head still tends to have a veritable monopoly in official reports.

Periodically, there were reactions against this abusive reductionism. The World Bank, following the famous speech of Robert McNamara in 1973, called for other indicators. The speech criticized the increasing income disparity which, in most of the developing countries, was camouflaged behind statistics indicating growth in income per head. It called for the inclusion of other objectives besides the increase in the GNP, such as reductions in unemployment and increasing the income of the poor. Eventually, the World Bank approved the adoption of 'a socially oriented measure of economic performance'.'

Such a claim was by no means new. Concern with the need to take into account the multiple aspects of reality was present in the remarks of the earliest statisticians of development. A United Nations report in 1954 on the definition and measure of 'standards' and 'levels of living' called attention to 12 possible components of the standard of living for international comparison. They included:

> (1) Health, including demographic conditions; (2) food and nutrition; (3) education, including literacy and skills; **(4)** conditions of work; (5) employment situation; (6) aggregate consumption and saving; (7) transportation; (8) housing, including household facilities; (9) clothing; (10) recreation and entertainment; (11) social security; (12) human freedom.8

However, the practical import of such wider conceptions has been largely symbolic. Even where they have led to concrete action in favour of basic needs, self-sufficiency in food production, or appropriate technologies, their overall impact has been questionable. The results have not been without ambiguities and have certainly not attained a sufficient salience to modify the dominant GNP perspective.

In any case, war against misery was thus declared at the start of the so-called Development Decades and it broke out with great force. Has anyone been concerned about the underlying ambiguities? A few isolated voices, at times prestigious, such as G. Myrdal, have made themselves heard, but they were without influence. The struggle, daggers drawn, for the highest standard of living per head has become an obsession in the international arena, while the reduction of the gap between the well-to-do and the wretched has been declared a priority objective. Each country, by any means compatible with the maintenance of world peace, endeavours to increase its advantages over its

neighbours and to carve out a slice of the market for itself at the expense .f others. Tariff and non-tariff protections, subventions and fiscal •polici.., industrial policies (that of MITI, the Ministry of Industry in Japan, f.. example), the dismantling of social security systems, deregulation, and t.. most brazen instances of competitive wage bargaining comprise the gamut .f most visible means in this mad scramble. With a sometimes unconscio.. hypocrisy, the winners then lend a helping hand to the laggards so that tit., may catch up. The experts possess miracle prescriptions for any probletr. provided at both state and private enterprise levels they are left to opera. freely. They hope to succeed (though nobody knows how) in squaring t.. circle. The notion of the standard of living carries in itself the demand egalitarianism and at the same time a spirit of competition. All will be save.. and everyone will be a winner.

Well-Being and Well-Having

`Standard of living' encapsulates all the dimensions of the dominant paradigir. of the West, of modernity and of development. This paradigm constitutes perfectly auto-referential sphere containing only a very limited number o. elements. Need, scarcity, work, production, income, and consumption are th. key concepts within an enclosed semantic field that has no need of the outsid. world. The interaction of these elements is auto-dynamic and supposed t. provoke unlimited growth of material wealth. The concept we are dealing wit. here — the standard of living — thus has the same historical origins as the general economic paradigm itself.

An essential watershed in this history was the reduction of the *good* to the *amount.* This transition simultaneously eliminated the multiplicity of possible social values and allowed the quantification of the only dimension that was retained.

The objective of a `good life' can manifest itself in a whole host of forms — from the warrior's heroism to asceticism, from Epicurean enjoyment to aesthetic toil. However, as soon as the good life is expressed in terms of the global common good, the manifold personal arts of living and diverse ways of knowing tend to get reduced in favour of a single collective project, which easily leads — concerning its ends and even its means — to an homogenization of individual pursuits. It is not by chance that Truman as well as Kennedy — though themselves separated by a quarter of a century — still referred to the `common good'. This age-old Aristotelian and Thomist term evokes the ideal of the just and responsible city-state, rather than a rich and individualist society.

But in the modern world, the only good that appears as common to all people, above and beyond cultural differences, is life as a physiological property. Even this cult of life is very different from what can be found in non-Western cultures. In Brahman India for example, life also has pre-eminent value; however, it is envisaged as a cosmic whole. The earthly life of the human individual is of limited importance and animals and the natural world have as much right to live as man. The death of some individuals provides the condition

for the life of others, and it is the dynamic flux that assures the order of a glorified cosmos. Death is not excluded from life. The West, on the other hand, has long since declared war on death in all its forms — poverty, violence and natural death. This programme reduced the 'greater life' to a concern with survival. It became the priority to live more, and not well or better. This selection in Western thought of the quantum of life as the sole objective offers itself as both a physiological and a social frame of reference. The two tend to merge in the perspective of naturalism, with 'need' serving as the category joining both frames.

Spiritual needs were the first, if one accepts the analysis of I llich, to give rise during the Middle Ages to the figure of the specialist, capable of providing the answers.'° Passing into the secular sphere, this concept of needs retained its ambiguity. At the physiological level, it now refers to the number of calories per head along with its correlates like the amount of protein, fat and carbohydrate. At the social level, it is the number of dollars. Survival for all was the goal of the Leviathan, the great technocrat of the 17th century, while on the eve of the French Revolution, happiness (` a new idea in Europe' according to Saint Just) was the objective of the 'enlightened despot'.

The emergence of the utilitarian individual seeking to maximize his pleasure and to minimize his pain did not guarantee the immediate triumph of the pursuit of the highest standard of living for each and all. The logical consequence of the arrival of the calculating subject was rather an unbridled outburst of passions. In England Puritan restraint permitted a channelling of these passions into a search for material accumulation, thus assuring a minimum common interest. This reduction of the drama of life to transactions in the marketplace was achieved with much greater difficulty in France. The Marquis de Sade showed with implacable logic the type of anarchy towards which calculating individualism could lead when the passions were not suppressed. The incommunicability of subjective worlds (the 'no-bridge' problem) becomes insurmountable. Each individual can and should take advantage of the opportunities that his situation offers. It is quite in order to skilfully deceive one's fellow man provided one is not caught. It is acceptable to become a hypocrite (like the depraved monks of Justine), and to encourage the virtue and generosity of the weak in order that they may be more easily duped. Such have been the inevitable consequences of the loss of social bonds. Our present world, without faith or law, is an *anti-society,* impossible and unliveable. There is no invisible hand here; the pleasures of the butcher or the brewer do not converge on my satisfaction. It has been necessary for the passion for business to triumph over all others in order to permit a *common measure* of unbridled desires. The economic paradigm has succeeded very well in reducing our perspective to a single point of view. It has resulted in a one-dimensional reductionism.

When human fulfilment is interpreted as only material well-being, the differences between after-life, worldly happiness and physical survival get blurred. The promised after-life existed, in the West as in other societies, in the next world. Loss of contact with the deceased as respect for our ancestors declined in the West resulted in giving the resurrection of the body a more and

more abstract content — the abstract eternity of the beyond replaced th: concrete immortality of the ancestors. With the subsequent death of God in ou: own time, life has become the pursuit of a purely secular objective, that of mer: physiological survival. The gap was virtually bridged when economic growth elevated physical survival to the height of general 'well-having' as expressed it national consumption.

Well-having aims at the maximization of `objects' — i.e. maximal material consumption — but the status of these objects is quite ambiguous. For as socia objects destined for consumption, the accumulation of physical product: lacking any practical use has very limited meaning beyond a certain point. (Thr accumulation of equipment to be used for the production of other goods or course does have a meaning which consumer goods lack). The standard o: living measures itself by the level of consumption, including the amount of waste produced. Our gadget-ridden civilization is the natural result of this process. Abundance carries with it the loss of its proper meaning. In this deluge of objects, it has become almost impossible to desire something for itself, if it is not already the envied possession or object of desire of others. Advertising plays at the heart of this mimesis of desire. And ultimately, the anguish of having nothing more to desire adds to the distress of desire unsatisfied.

The basis for evaluating both physiological and psychological need is *utility*. The triumph of utilitarianism is thus the condition that has to be met to make ambitions like maximization and equalization of living standards conceivable. The reduction of the multiple dimensions of life to what is quantifiable finds its purest mode of expression in money and its locus of realization in the market economy. The generalization of the market accelerates its motion, which in turn facilitates its extension. Utilitarian reductionism and the obsession with consumption push forward the growth of the market, and the commoditization of increasingly large sectors of social life reinforces the calculating and utilitarian perspective. The market reveals the 'preferences' of buyers and sellers and thus provides the otherwise impossible measure of what is useful. It achieves, according to the economists, the 'well' and the 'good', the best usage that can be made of available factors of production. The citizens, having become agents of the economic machine, end up believing in it. Thus the great myth of modernity is able to gain ground, holding out the promise that each and all will be enriched through the advance of economic organization, science and technology, and that, over and above all of this, the accumulation of riches will be infinite.

`The American amassment of riches,' writes Bertrand de Jouvenel, becoming, as it were, the fairy tale of the modern age.'" He calculates that, with the near doubling of the standard of living every ten years, a goal generally proposed, the result amounts to an 867-fold increase in a single century!

Blind Spots

The Westernization of the world has by no means created a universal equalization of living standards. Instead, it has imposed the concept of standard of living as the dominant category for perceiving social reality (and

tr rrre underdevelopment), and made the increase of living standards a - obligationn for the leaders of emerging nations.

rr s often been demonstrated how the transfer of statistical measurements tr :r: Third World leads one astray. 'The unemployed worker in the slums of Crr - s,' writes Jean Chesneaux, 'discovers with amazement that he enjoys a s rd of living defined in terms of GDP which is worthy of envy. No less ittrgasted, the fisherman in Samoa who lives quite at ease in relative s fficiency, learns that, *in* terms of GNP, he is one of the poorest irr rta nts of the planet:12

rr: first case illustrates how an unequal distribution of wealth removes all ✓ ng from the figure of an average, while the second example reveals the a dity of international comparison of indices when lifestyles are very c ent and in fact non-comparable. Political economy has not been able to c ruct a satisfactory theory of the objective value of all things, thus making "'Impossible to proceed to an evaluation and a summation of objective *utilities.* ire are subjective and by nature mutually incommunicable (the no-bridge hem). Constant reminders about the limits of national accounting do not a rar to have had any impact. Furthermore, arbitrary as the divisions are, e r in industrialized societies, which lie at the root of social accounting, it t riers on the absurd to apply them outside these developed societies to the Trrd World.

ompetent statisticians have always emphasized the limits of their rr roachr : but in practice these words of caution have served no purpose. For rrr ntitative reductionism has become entrenched in the logic of modernity, r:11 the spirit of the times cannot be held back by precautionary admonitions. rvertheless we must remind ourselves of some of the absurdities involved.

'he standard of living is measured by the volume of goods and services *cxcinsumed* by the inhabitants. However, only the goods and services regularly er hanged on the market enter into this calculation, and they do so even if they :e not the object of a genuine exchange. As a result, important aspects of the frr ality of life are not taken into account. Inversely, those things we `consume' rr ich imply a degradation in the quality of life are valued and counted as rr sitive contributions.

`The measure of consumption,' writes Bertrand de Jouvenel, `is none other an a measure of goods and services which are obtained from enterprises by rrivate individuals and which are subject to payment. It is apparent that this easure omits: (1) services rendered by public authorities; (2) free goods and ▪rrvices; (3) external costs inflicted by transformations in the economy."[14] ervices; (3) external costs inflicted by transformations in the economy. rndered by mothers to their children, without which, of course, there would be ▪ o economy at all! Unpaid domestic work in the home, which in the developed ountries remains hidden from the official national accounts, constitutes a urge part of the informal economy. For Great Britain, Colin Clark in 1968 :alculated the value of free house work (calculated in terms of 1871 GNP values) as amounting to 50 per cent of the GNP of 1956.15

On the other hand, and equally subversive of the national accounts as an *accurate* mirror of economic reality, an increased consumption of fuel due to

traffic congestion and increased travel distances between home and work translates into an increase in our consumption of transportation and, therefore, into a rise in the standard of living! As de Jouvenel put it:

> In the United States the food consumption per head measured in constant prices increased by 75% from 1909 to 1957. However, according to the calculations of the Department of Agriculture, the increase in physiological consumption was at most 12 to 15%. Thus, according to the analysis of Kuznets, at least four-fifths of the apparent growth in food consumption is due, in fact, to an increase in transport costs and the distribution of foodstuffs to the urban centres."

The exclusion of the value of material goods when consumed in small quantities, and the inverse practice of taking into account the enormous expenses needed to restore degradation, or to compensate for it, introduces other considerable distortions. 'According to our way of counting', de Jouvenel remarks with humour, 'we would enrich ourselves by making the Tuileries into a parking lot and the Cathedral of Notre Dame into an office building.'"

If, as a result of this particular notion of national accounts, which represents a particular Western interpretation of reality, the underdeveloped countries appear to be poor in terms of those things we judge as rendering us rich, they are (and were) infinitely richer in those things in which we are now poor. They have at their disposal goods and services which are non-measurable or undervalued, fragile as they are now becoming — the open space, the warmth of the tropics, leisure, solidarity, and so on. By the prevalent standards of the world system, their purchasing power, which is representative of their power in general terms, is infinitely smaller. But, then, only the Westernized portions of their socio-economic reality are being measured.

At the root of the paternalism of the international agencies dealing with the Third World lies a terrifying ethnocentrism. If we pursued a true and genuine internationalism, or universalism, it would be necessary to invite 'experts' from the last remaining 'primitive' regions of the world to draw up a list of the deficiencies from which we, the people of the *developed* countries, suffer — loneliness, depression, stress, neuroses, insecurity, violence, and so on.

Such considerations, however cogent, do not nevertheless fundamentally challenge the solid foundations of economic reductionism. But they do serve to advocate the wisdom of a certain prudence — something which has been largely ignored today.

Yet the early economists, searching to determine the essence of the economic act behind the appearances of the market, did struggle at length with the paradoxical nature of economic categories. Thomas Malthus spoke of his perplexity:

> If the exertion which produces a song, whether paid for or not, be productive labour, why should the exertion which produces the more valuable result of instructive and agreeable conversation be excluded? Why

ould we exclude the efforts necessary to discipline our passions, and .come obedient to all the laws of God and man, the most valuable of all .bours? Why, indeed, should we exclude any exertion, the object of which is obtain happiness or avoid pain, either present or future? And yet under Ais description may be comprehended the exertions of every human being llwring every moment of his existence."

eed, why shouldn't the dance which is staged to ask the spirits for a rich /est be considered as work? Why shouldn't the tom-tom played next to the ▪ pfire be considered as the production of leisure services, or the caresses of a as part of national consumption? Is not the use of a personal vehicle the duction of a transport service? Its purchase an investment? Isn't the work ▪ ended by the labourer at a factory the consumption of accumulated energy .e. capital?

All conceptual distinctions break down, and easy assumptions and • tainties fade away, as soon as one frees oneself from the taboos which /ern the tribe of economists and statisticians. Malthus and the economists o succeeded him and who feel confused, have no choice but to take refuge in ▪ mmon sense. This common sense interprets the practices of the European trketplace on the basis of well-established prejudice. It is simply the Western .iiagination which has invented this system of classification. Hence the ir.rticularistic notions, specific to Western cultural perceptions, of no work (in e modern sense) without the Protestant ethic; no production without the tAyths of nature, need, scarcity, and a conception of matter borrowed from th century physics; no consumption without the generalized market. Out of e infinite variety of human activity, the distinction made between playful and oductive gestures on the one hand, and between the object produced and that ▪)nsumed on the other, is entirely based upon particular cultural values. earing an animal, a dog or a cow for example, could be considered as)vestment, production, or consumption, depending on the animal's habitat ▪ nd whether it is meant to hunt, plough, provide meat, parade, or show ▪ ffect ion.

The currently dominant accounting categories represent a radical form of ultural imperialism. It is not only that happiness and the joy of living in ▪ ountries of the Third World are reduced to the paltry level of GNP per head by his globally imposed statistical butchery, but the very reality of diverse other arts of living is flouted and misunderstood in their richness and potentialities.

As Ivan Illich noted: 'Until the present, all efforts to substitute a universal ommodity for a local value have resulted not in equality but in a hierarchical modernization of poverty.' in other words, misery and dereliction.

Paradoxically, the fascination with a rising standard of living is often greater among the populations of the Third World than in the West. The reason for this is easy to understand. Neophytes to the cult of the gods of modernity as they are, the uprooted social strata of these societies strive to reach the modern life. They see in the increase of their monetary income their only means of gaining social status. Westerners, or at least some amongst us, have already had a chance to acquire a certain distance, which allows for second thoughts and

some new wisdom. We have become more aware of the limitations of grow We are beginning to learn to appreciate certain traditional values, or to inveit for ourselves an anti-utilitarian 'post-modernism'.

Many Faces of Wealth

With all the well-intentioned efforts to measure the standard of living in tlt Third World and to push it to higher levels, a tragic farce has been staged. T bring about well-being has contributed increasingly to the very negation it being. The wealth of the 'other' has not only been denigrated (even in tl other's eye), but its very foundations have been torn apart. Wealth and povert are clearly relative concepts. What they mean varies according to what culture defines as its reference points and how it models reality.

According to the ethno-geographer Joel Bonnemaison, one of the islands the New Hebrides named Tanna 'is thus rich and poor at one and the same time, according to the interpretation which is adopted. Its people live in a certain abundance if seen in the context of their traditional milieu, but they look "proletarian" if seen from an imported socio-economic perspective:[2°] All the values which fail to pass through the filter of quantifiable utility, which are foreign to a `dollarized' life, are downgraded. Their practices, excluded from the definition of standard of living, tend as a result to disappear. This happens to the ideal of heroism which in warrior societies is more highly cherished than any riches. It is also true of communal solidarity, that veritable social treasure trove by which much of the Third World continues to live against all economic logic. For example, practices like ostentatious display, colourful parades, ritual challenges, and the various forms of sensual enjoyment which enrich social life are now in the process of losing their meaning. What sense does a rise in the standard of living have for a nomad society in the desert which aspires to lightness and frugality?

In fact, the obsession with the standard of living and its increase has caused an unprecedented impoverishment of life by neglecting some of its principal dimensions. Death, for one, is struck dead. Instead it has become simply a failure of human enterprise, an inevitable loss entered on the balance sheet.

In many previous societies, wealth was considered a gift left behind by the deceased. Material wealth was not regarded as a means of accumulation, but as a proof that the living recognize their debt to the dead. Now, however, the dead are merely seen as having been expelled from the realm of economics and deleted from the commercial register of the living. The loss of the meaning of death is perhaps the greatest source of impoverishment of modern man. There is no longer a price to buy peace. The Westerner is condemned to live his death as a failure and to deaden his life in order to ease the pain and forget the final absurdity.

Likewise, illness and ageing are also seen as partial failures in the West. It is part of the hidden treasures of societies in the Third World, however, that they still conserve different attitudes towards the old and the sick. Illness and ageing are not considered as natural curses that separate the individual from the world of the living and which must be treated in isolation, shame and guilt. They may

be a source of tragic conflict if the cause is attributed to witchcraft, but they are also sources of personal and social enrichment. Suffering has only become unbearable and intolerable in the West because it no longer has meaning. The fact that pain is inherent to the human condition, and perhaps necessary, highlights to what extent its refusal and trivialization contribute to our impoverishment.

This impoverishment culminates in the Western contempt for poverty. Most cultures honour their poor. The much admired ancient Greeks took enjoyment in both their leisure and their meagre resources; it was in these conditions that their culture flourished. Even in the West until the 18th century, poverty was not necessarily seen as a disgrace. 'The poor,' writes Alain Caille, 'were not all poor people, at least in terms of rights.' And he adds: 'Who could be made to believe today in a happy man without a shirt? Nobody. And with good reason, because someone without a shirt can have no other status than that of a failure.'[2']

Frugality and austerity are neither defects nor misfortunes. They are even at times the signs of divine choice. The vow of poverty testifies to the desire for holiness. According to the Stoics, true richness consists in limiting desires. Most schools of wisdom, and in particular Buddhism that still prospers, define the acquisition of self-awareness as the goal of existence, and regard moderation in pleasure and attention to an equilibrium between different values, and never the unlimited accumulation of a single value, as the secrets for a happy life. Material deprivation, which we take as the sole criterion making for a dishonourable poverty, is often no more than a minor aspect alongside other sorts of deprivation in traditional societies. For the Serere, as for many others, it is loneliness that makes for true misery. 'Poverty is not a matter of lacking clothes, but the one who is truly poor is he who has no one,' states a Serere proverb.

All societies have a concept of wealth and this concept is reflected most often by tangible indicators. It includes all the natural or man-made objects and all the cultural gestures and creations (names, dances, chants) accessible to individual or collective appropriation. The possession of these values confers a status, a prestige and a power. If these 'riches' are able to translate themselves into monetary terms through contact with the West, it is because the people realize that money in our world takes the place of their riches. Their riches, however, do not engender a dishonourable poverty and destitution. The failure that is so evident today of development, of modernity and of Westernization opens up the opportunity to view with great scepticism the phantasmal aspects of this fetishistic object, standard of living, and to rediscover the multidimensionality of life. For the concept of the standard of living has imposed itself with the force of a certainty beyond all criticism and has become inscribed in the logic of modernity. The universalism of this concept is as fallacious as that of the West, and its promises are as illusory as those of development.

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