

OCCIDENTAL COSMOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTALISM  
A Prolegomenon to Development studies

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May 1983

Author: In this paper I am trying to explore the rise, decline and fall of Developmentalism as a Universal Creed, successor to Christianity, constructed in such a way as to conform to the basic aspects of Western social cosmology -- More particularly, I am trying to show that what has been touted as "development" is nothing but one more effort to enact Occidental social cosmology, a new form of missionary activity sustained by neo-colonial rather than colonial forces. In addition "developmentalism" served to create, in UN, some kind of consensus among West and East, among market and centrally planned economies, as both liberalism and marxism are occidentalisms, with faith in progress, etc.

Reader: I object already here. This exercise is dishonest intellectually. First you design six "cosmology" dimensions so as to express something essential about the Occident where "development", often called "progress", is so basic, and now you are going to use your construct to see if you can derive "development" from it: is that not building the conclusion into the premisses?

Author: Yes, it is, to some extent. But those premisses are so general, it is actually the specifics I am trying to explore. So, listen, get the story, see if it hangs together - then shoot!

Reader: I am not so sure I want to hear this story, I am convinced it is going to be one more of those caricatures of the West.

Author: There is something to that. But, honestly, I think this is important. There is that big civilization, programmed in a certain way. God is slowly dying. He has created Europeans, they start exploring ideas of progress instead. God was for the whole world, and the only one. If Progress has to take over it also has to be for the whole world and be seen as the only one. Development is the latter day version of Progress.

Reader: Yes, but these Europeans are subtle, they are not programmed the simplistic way you describe them.

Author: Well, depends on which one, where. But one of the last things God did before he started dying some time around the French revolution was to create Americans, who substitute unconscious programming for subtlety. Homo americanus is for me some kind of homo occidentalis simplicissimus. I agree that developmentalism is absurdly unsubtle, far below Christianity. It needed unsubtle carriers with powers. The Second world war gave that to the Americans - it was too late for God to repent. He was out. Development was in.

Reader: Ok, ok, you are in that mood, because you have probably just seen Reagan on the tv. Why don't you go ahead, and I shall have a look at it!

Once upon a time there was a man (certainly not a woman) called Homo Occidentalis. In the deeper recesses of his brain, down in the sub-conscious and certainly not on the right hand side, he was programmed, his brain was wired. He could only think and express thoughts that were compatible with six very basic assumptions, about

SPACE: that the Occident, and particularly Western Europe and North America constitute the Center of the world, the rest being the Periphery, with the Center as the prime mover.

TIME: that social processes are uni-directional, with progress - from low to high etc.

KNOWLEDGE: that the world can be understood in terms of a very low number of dimensions, ultimately that the world can be seen as uni-dimensional.

MAN-NATURE: that Man is over Nature

MAN-MAN: that Man is over Man, as individuals and as classes and nations; that some are more equal than others.

MAN-GOD: that God, or some Principle, is over Man

The thesis is that we do not have to know more about HO than just that - except that he is concerned about the world, both in space and time. He needs some order in that perplexing complexity, both for conceptual and for highly practical reasons: how to come to grips with it in theory and practise. He wants a Law, something like the Law of gravity, to have some order in the universe. And he wants it badly because God is for all practical uprposes dead. A Law, steering the universe has to come in its place. The name of the law is Progress, later renamed Development.

So HO starts working, and it is not very hard work: all he has to do is to construct a map of social time and space, of history and geography, according to the six basic assumptions. He knows what they mean. Development has to be both unidimensional and unidirectional; the West has to be in the Center and the Rest in the Periphery. Development has to be something that embodies clearly Man's mastery over Nature, the mastery of Man over Woman, of some Men over other Men - and it all has to be subservient to the Law of Development. History and geography have to be an enactment of the great drama of Development as the successor story to the first Great Drama, that of Creation, and as successful.

I think one can discern, relatively clearly, a limited number of phases in this exercise in what might perhaps be called "geo-epistemology", or, more euphemistically, the development of development thinking.

Phase 1: The world is divided into two parts: a Center with History, and an a-historical Periphery, condemned to a static existence, from eternity to eternity. Christianity gives historicity to individuals when they take on the faith, Islam also to peoples, even when they are colored. A civilizing process from top to bottom is not totally impossible. But correlation with color and creed remain crucial to the scheme. It is Europe and Europeans on top; the others at the bottom. Slavery for individuals and colonialism for peoples are nothing but expressions of a natural order.

Phase 2: The Center is now equipped not only with dynamics, History, but also with unidimensionality (wealth) and unidirectionality (accumulation). Liberal theory emerges, with economic growth through entrepreneurial activity on the market, capital accumulation and corporation-building; in addition to Spencerism and Hegelianism.

Phase 3: Marxist theory emerges. It is also uni-dimensional and unidirectional, but has discontinuities, "Stufen", stages, rather than

continuous progress. What liberal theory sees as normal human society becomes "capitalist" society with two successor stages, "socialism" and "communism". Liberalism refers to its own creation as "modern" society, preceded by "traditional" and "primitive" societies, the latter being ahistorical, the former possibly evolving into "modern". Marxism refers to traditional societies as "feudal", preceded by "slavery". A "primitive communist" society is also introduced, a mythical past, like the "Asian mode of production" is doubtful whether by itself it can enter History. A socialist society emerges with economic growth through planning activity, state power accumulation and bureaucracy-building.

Phase 4: Post second world war: the world finds a representation in the United Nations, with former colonies ("primitive") and countries run according to liberal and according to marxist principles having to discuss within a shared paradigm. A term has to be found that covers modern, capitalist and socialist: the term is "developed", or "more developed", or "industrialized". Within these categories capitalist countries can still see themselves as above socialist countries because they are higher in the new unidimensional variable for wealth, GNP/capita; socialist countries can regard themselves as above capitalist countries on that other discontinuous variable, "Stufe", "stage". The other countries are first referred to as "undeveloped" in line with the old idea of ahistoricity; the appellation "developed" or "less developed" changes that dramatically by giving them historicity. Hooking them on to the same single dimension as the white, Western countries is a major geo-epistemological revolution making out of developmentalism a universal church. Of course, the conceptual preparation was of long standing: to refer to them as "poor" already places them on the same dimension, possibly even a continuum, where others are "rich". Liberalism sees their hope in guidance investment and institution-building (after colonialism and Christianity are out); Marxism sees their hope in investment guidance and institution building, and revolution after colonialism was needed to "bring them into history".

A common term has to be found for these exercises under developmentalism: it is development assistance. Unidimensionality and unidirectionality have been restored in a new world.

Phase 5: Crisis I - over unidirectionality - enters the picture, in three different ways:

(a) Liberal uni-directionality breaks down; there are cases of negative economic growth. Massive investment is used to conceal the fact called "development loans/grants"

(b) Marxist uni-directionality breaks down: there are cases of negative stage growth; efforts to make socialism reversible. Massive invasions are used to conceal the fact, called "fraternal assistance".

(c) Consensus unidirectionality breaks down: there are traditional countries that want to demodernize, searching for "alternatives". There is consensus in seeing all three as aberrations, even mentally, historically atypical and non-permanent. However, the phenomena remain even if the countries characterized by them change (as in the changing role of China). There is no alternative to progress, to "development", within the paradigm - hence the crisis.

Phase 6: Crisis II - over unidimensionality - enters the picture, also in three different ways:

(a) Consensus unidimensionality breaks down: market vs. centrally planned divides more than "developed", "industrialized" or "North" unites. Not only is this to many countries a more basic aspect than level of development, among other reasons because it shows geopolitical belongingness. But countries also show increasing interest in mixing the two forms, as in the social democratic and Japanese constitutions. Japan is misunderstood by both camps.

(b) There is a massive criticism of economic growth and focus on other aspects of economic development, such as distribution, and level of self-reliance.

(c) There is a massive criticism of economism in general, in development theory and practise, and efforts to introduce other dimensions, particularly with reference to the nature, human and social spaces (the world space is usually not brought in that connection).

Phase 7: Crisis III enters the picture: both unidirectionality and unidimensionality are challenged at the same time. Under crisis I the hypothesis of unidimensionality may still be retained, under Crisis II the hypothesis of unidirectionality may be retained. We are now in the middle of that crisis, and when it matures it is probably the end of developmentalism.

Thus, developmentalism is regarded here as a creed with a great past. The myth was perfect in the sense of being an embodiment of all six aspects of Western, or generally Occidental, social cosmology. The countries in the Occident, particularly those in the "inner West", Western Europe and North America, not only retain their position as a Center under this myth, but gets it enhanced as "models of development", to be imitated because they are better at it. That this was to a large extent due to the exploitation of the Periphery by the Center was exactly what the myth of developmentalism was there to conceal. The past and the recent past looked to many like a clear confirmation of the myth: the individual trajectories of so many countries in the Center, and now also in the Periphery, was that of unidirectional progress once they accepted development as their goal. And it looked so simple: all they had to do was to accept economic growth, not economic level as the key dimension. For only growth gives progress, development; the level attained would give a stable-state society. That would be anti-development. It would also mean that the poor might catch up and throw doubts about the whole dimension as a ranking order; hence all have to grow, but so as to keep a respectful distance to the Center countries.

At the same time the other three aspects of social cosmology were satisfied. The key to economic growth was industrialism; to subject Nature to Man, to ever higher levels of exploitation hidden by the myth of development. But for this sustained exercise to take place Man also had to be on top of Man. Only some could lead in this exercise, others would have to follow. This is hard on those at the bottom, but that is a "historical necessity". Ultimately everybody actually has to suffer the consequences of the developmental effort: people exploit themselves, acquire society-generated diseases, etc. - but that is also hidden under the carpet, as something not to be talked about.

And then, to top it all: Development as the Law, the new God. It had to satisfy the old formula to be universal: "Here are no Jews and no Greeks, for we are all one in Development". Just like Christianity distributed sinners as well as the saved all over the world with no special guarantee for the Europeans (they were given the power over the churches, though, still visible in Rome and Geneva), the Center had to see itself also as being in development although they were already developed, or at least "more developed". Economic growth - easily one of the most devastating myths ever perpetrated on human-kind - had to be shared. The Center accepted this with pleasure as it legitimized doing what they intended to do anyhow; they very quickly found the ways in which "development assistance" could be used for this purpose.

Homo Occidentalis had done a good job. He could rest. Out of the chaos left by a dying white man's God, colonialism in shambles, and the peoples all over the world laying claims to their own historicity came the cosmos of Developmentalism, an updated interpretation of millennia old Western cosmology (interrupted by the "Middle Ages", though). The world was working, again.

But a myth about the whole world is not so easily maintained, for the whole world is somewhat complex. Either one has to control the



world to make it conform to the myth, - or one has to disregard the world and limit the applicability of any myth to territory under one's control. Homo Occidentalis had, perhaps, forgotten that he was no longer in control of the world, he was not omnipotent, only omnipresent, and that had not made him omniscient either because of the smugness deriving from living too much in the mental cocoon of one's own myths.

In retrospect we may perhaps come to the conclusion that the myth exploded for two reasons. One was that economic growth everywhere was more than the world system could possibly absorb. Nature could not sustain it, the everlasting Periphery could not take on more burdens, the inner proletariat everywhere could not absorb the pressure and had to be kept under control through police and military that were also used to keep the Periphery under control. Individuals started folding under the burden. Of course, the countries responsible for the major share of the production volume also had the major share of the responsibility for all these calamities, but instead of taking on the responsibility they saw these as unavoidable (or avoidable after some more studies) side-effects, sinking deeper and deeper into a quagmire of their own making. But the myth of Development had to be saved, it was more important than saving the world from the consequences of the myth.

However, the myth was even more shaken by another highly predictable consequence of the myth itself. If the Center is no longer in control, then it stands to reason that there is no longer any built-in guarantee that the Center will always be the best at its own game, its own way of playing "development". I am of course thinking of the rise of the world Southeast, of East and Southeast Asia - certainly not only Japan. They relished the myth, knowing they could outdo the world Northwest at their own game.

So the Center is no longer the center, space is not what it used to be. Time is no longer unidirectional, it goes up and down

in this world, growth may even be "negative" - a wonderful way of concealing the crisis and preserving the myth by retaining the word "growth", adding the technical and euphemistic epithet "negative". And development that once looked so unidimensional and simple tends to split into all kinds of "sub"-dimensions. There is this and that kind of development, some are high on this and low on that. The whole simplicity, the clear white light of economic growth is broken into all kinds of colors, some of them rather murky. The only thing that remains and can be counted upon are the exploitations of nature, other countries, other classes and of self. Does this mean that God has betrayed us? No, it means that we have betrayed the God of Development by not acting according to the commands, believing that they are impossible. So the blessings are not there for us to enjoy, only the bitter fruits, the vengeance rightly inflicted upon us by wrathful God. An old sequence in Occidental history that one, both under Yahve, God and Allah when the chosen people lose faith. (Incidentally, how many development economists are Jews? - not very few). Faith is easy unless it is absurd; for the true believer only credo quia absurdum counts. Developmentalism meets also this bill.

Just like Christianity split in a Western and an Eastern church as the Roman Empire divided, (and the Western later on in the Catholic and the Protestant varieties), so Developmentalism has a Western and Eastern branch - Liberalism and Marxism (within Liberalism the Protestant countries became developmental models for the Catholic ones, by and large). And the Eastern church is not doing much better since they have two testaments to defend: the Old testament of economic growth taken over from capitalism and the New Testament of socialism, that of revolution and beyond. The old faith was already fraught with problems, so was the new faith, in addition there was the problem of making them compatible. Economic growth comes very close to capital accumulation so it could smack of heresy, particularly if the four exploitations of nature, Periphery, inner proletariat and self are still present, although in a different mix. The solution was to say that economic growth is not only permissible but prescribed after the revolution - a doctrine propounded from the early foundation

of the Eastern development church by Lenin himself, later elaborated by Preobzhansky into a doctrine compatible with exploitation of inner proletariat (the peasants, particularly).

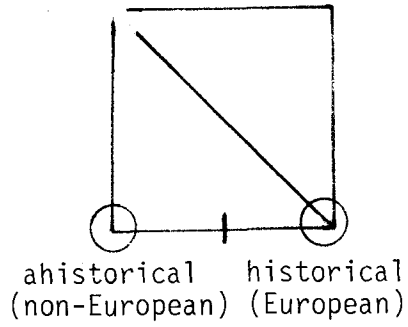
But there were other problems. To mention only one: how to reward those who had suffered the biggest sacrifices during the revolution, except by giving them major tasks in connection with economic growth? Is it obvious that they are the best managers, in other words that the tasks are easily combined in the same person? Or are they better in the police? Progress somehow fails to show up at the promised speed after the initial distributive successes, growth is there, and it may also be that the slowness and the sluggishness serves as a protection against major economic crises in some cases. The Promised Land, however, seems to recede the closer ones comes.

What then about the Universal Church, the United Nations? In that setting developmentalism served another function, not only of giving faith and solid goal-setting to the members but of giving them a common, a shared faith. Countries West, East and South in the UN could come together in the name of Developmentalism, and even be playing cooperative games, displaying their virtues (the "success stories") and confess their sins (the "failures"). Bragging and sinning are both permitted provided the main guideline is followed: "I succeeded because I followed the line innovatively" and "I failed because I stupidly deviated from the line or did not put sufficient faith into what I did". Developmentalism became the cement of the UN; if it did not exist it had to be invented. However, there is a limit to how many failures even the most commanding faith can accommodate. The minimum consensus on basic material needs and on institution-building for capital and state starts breaking down when the goods and services promised do not materialize, and in addition the "side-effects" seem to outdo the effects. Can the universal church survive the decline and ultimate fall of developmentalism?

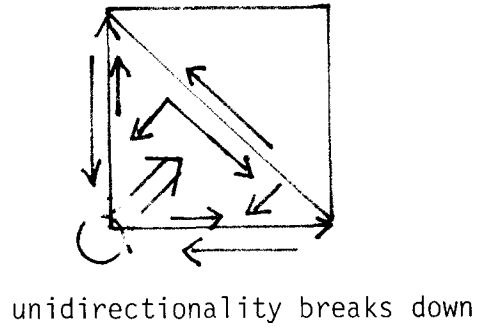
And, can the Center countries survive the decline and fall of developmentalism as their geo-epistemology? Nothing new seems to be on the horizon that could still secure for them the room on the top that they relish so much. Except one, that is: the ultimate weapons of destruction, the nuclear arms, possessed by both churches - and one counter-church. The ultimo ratio?

Appendix: The phases of developmentalism and the space of social development

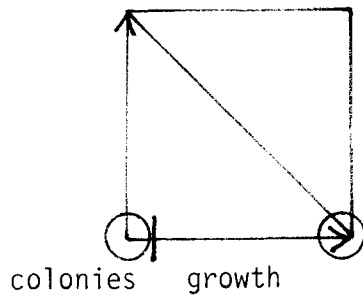
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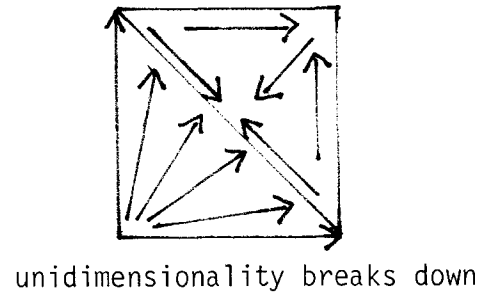
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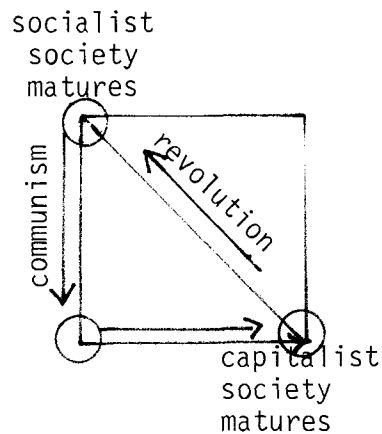
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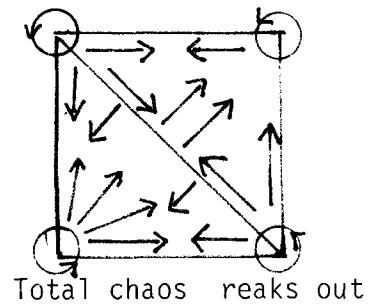
Phase 6:



Phase 3:



Phase 7:



Phase 4:

