QUERIES ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

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ISSUES OF A PHILOSOPHY OF DEVELOPMENT

As Håkan Törnebohm mentioned, I have been engaged in a pro-
ject on development and research in the Sudan, together
with Håkan and Ibrahim Ahmed Omer. When thinking about de-
velopment in this context, my first view was that the cre-
ation of theories on different types of development was our
primary task. But as our project progressed I experienced a
need for a somewhat different orientation. Instead of merely
depicting matters as they are, our task should be to take a
critical attitude and attempt to place the now dominant para-
digm of development into perspective as well as helping to
formulate alternatives.

The main yield of our project is the distinction between this
dominant paradigm, which we call a technocratic conception,
and its alternative - a humanistic conception. This distinc-
tion is not very sharp, as both conceptions can be seen in a
great number of different shapes. Furthermore, the distinc-
tion is not exclusive, i.e., it is possible for these concep-
tions to share elements with each other.

This does not mean, however, that the difference between
technocratic or humanistic in one's outlook on matters of
development is of minor importance for the developmental pro-
cesses or the people engaged therein. There is an obvious dif-
ference in what sort of things or what sort of values are
being emphasized by the different conceptions. That this dif-

ference in emphasis can have far-reaching and destructive consequences can be shown by the following example, where a technocratic conception is followed to its extreme.

In his book "Victims of Development" John Bodley has given a vivid picture of the fate of the Azande people of the Sudan. The Azande lived as herdsmen in scattered locations. But the state authority wished to integrate them with the growing cash-economy. This was to be done by forcing the Azande to settle in villages and grow cotton. The cotton was then to be marketed and the profit used to satisfy the needs of the Azande. This development from self-sufficiency to market economy and consumerism was called "An experiment in the social emergence of indigenous races" - the title of a memorandum written by the man responsible for the planning of the scheme.

The ambition of the authorities was to lead the Azande out of their "primitive" way of life and into a more developed stage. They felt they were doing the Azande great service - or, at least, they tried to make it look that way. But the Azande themselves were not very pleased by these plans. From their point of view, what actually happened was that they were forced away from their natural environment and into villages which were created by manipulations on a map. They were forced into a kind of work that had no place in their own tradition.

So there was resistance resulting in personal and cultural tragedy. The authorities countered with punishment and a

blind refusal to acknowledge the right of the Azande to make their own choices regarding their future.

This is a clear-cut example of "social-engineering". The targets of development, as well as the means of reaching them, are decided by a central authority, who are guided by experts on economy, technology etc., but not by the wishes of the people concerned. The assumption is that the people are too backward to understand what's best for them. This can only be decided by the experts - the technocracy. Hence the term "technocratic conception".

The reduction of the individual integrity of the Azande people to a number in a column, as well as the need for the police to force them into the developmental scheme is, admittedly, not the general rule for a technocratic conception. But though the means may be less severe, the general ideal is the same in almost every case of conscious development today. The targets are defined in technical and economical terms and the developmental processes are thought of as being steered from an authoritative centre.

In contrast to this, a humanistic conception defines its targets of development in terms of satisfying the needs of the people as these needs are conceived by the people themselves. This means that while economical and technical factors may be very relevant for the decisions being made, the main emphasis is on the question of what the people actually want. In the words of Dr. Joseph Awad, a Sudanese director of education "This is my motto - I found it in the

library, it is from an ancient poet: 'Go in search of your people,
love them, learn from them, learn with them, begin with what
they know and build on what they have'". This is of course a
kind of ideology which is very easy to identify with but very
hard to put into practice. It does, however, sum up the main
idea behind the many different types of alternatives to the
dominant technocratic conception.

In our work we have found it useful to make certain distinc-
tions which I would like to mention. The first of these is
the distinction between technocratic and humanistic concep-
tions which I have already explained. This distinction can
be given more depth by connecting it to different ways of
understanding the concept of practice.

When we act we are usually following a set of rules that in-
form us of the proper way of doing things. These rules are
the core of different practices and may apply to behaviour or
language or art or whatever. The problem is that in the tra-
dition of Western thinking the existence of rule-governed be-
haviour implies the existence of explicit rules. To follow
rules is to know the rules, and to know is to be aware of, to
be conscious of. So if a practice is based on rules then these
rules are explicit, since knowledge is always explicitly sta-
ted in the mind of the beholder. What is not explicit - because
it cannot be formulated as a proposition - must be ignorance.

In recent decades this view has been challenged. It is felt
that besides explicit knowledge there exists a vast amount of
implicit or tacit knowledge. There are a number of actions

that may be performed perfectly, even though you are unable
to express the rules you are following. Know-how and good
judgement are not rooted in explicit rules or theories but
in familiarity and experience. Knowledge is not just the sum
total of what you can verbalize. Rather it is comparable to
an iceberg, the tip of which is visible while the major part
lies below the surface.

I think that a technocratic conception is very often coupled
to a disability to see the existence of tacit knowledge. Peo-
ple are regarded as ignorant when they cannot formulate what
is essential for their lives. Their way of life is seen as
being based on primitive instincts when the underlying rules
of their culture are hard to articulate. And by reducing the
knowledge of the people in this way, the technocrats provide
themselves with another argument for the legitimation of their
own efforts.

In this way, the distinction between rules being implicit or
explicit turns out to be important as an element of under-
standing actual cultural practice in the world, including the
practice of technocratic development. But rules can also be
distinguished in terms of whether they are open or closed. A
closed rule is a mechanical rule where the logic can easily
be stated explicitly. The continuation of 2, 4, 6, 8 with 10,
12, 14 etc., is an instance of following a closed rule. Open
rules on the contrary, are not reducible to a simple logic in
this way. They are the kind of rules which we learn to con-
form with when we reach adulthood or come into contact with

foreign cultures. An open rule is based on a series of exam-
ples or paradigm-cases. It is the normal way of acquiring
the competence needed to be able to use the language or be-
have properly. As should be clear, closed rules are easily
stated as explicit knowledge, while the essence of an open
rule is more likely to belong to our tacit knowledge.

When talking about philosophy and development, one should
distinguish between philosophy in development and philosophy
of development. The former is related to the tacit knowledge
of those who take part in developmental practices. The assump-
tion here is that those practitioners have acquired a certain
way of doing things while being socialized into a community
of people doing this kind of work. They have, in other words,
learned a set of open rules which forms their tacit knowledge
which, in turn, constitutes their practice.

A philosophy of development is now the result of trying to ar-
ticulate the assumptions and rules that lie behind different
practices. It is in the nature of the case that this enter-
prise can seldom be carried out in a complete way, but it may
nevertheless be a very useful activity. By distinguishing bet-
ween technocratic and humanistic conceptions; between different
ways of understanding the concept of practice and between dif-
ferent types of rules, we hope to have contributed somewhat to
such a philosophy of development.