

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE IMPACT OF WORLDVIEWS ON DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature and mechanism of the impact of world views (ideologies, broadly speaking) on the development of society generally, with particular reference to Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria. It has been recognized long ago that the materialistic interpretation of society (that sees the value-base of a society – that is, its philosophical value system - as a creation of the material base of society) is erroneous¹. Today, many scholars will agree that the relationship between the value base and the material base of society is dialectical. Francis Fukuyama writes that:

For Hegel, all human behaviour in the material world, and hence all human history, is rooted in a prior state of consciousness – an idea similar to the one expressed by John Maynard Keynes when he said that the views of men of affairs were usually derived from defunct economists and academic scribblers of earlier generations. This consciousness may not be explicit and self-aware, as are modern political doctrines, but may rather take the form of religion or simple cultural or moral habits. Yet this realm of consciousness, in the long run, necessarily becomes manifest in the material world, indeed creates the material world in its own image. Consciousness is cause and not effect, and can develop autonomously from the material world; hence, the real subtext underlying the apparent jumble of current events is the history

of ideology.

Hegel's idealism has fared poorly at the hands of later thinkers. Marx reversed the priority of the real and the ideal completely, relegating the entire realm of consciousness – religion, art, culture, philosophy itself – to a “superstructure” that was determined entirely by the prevailing material mode of production. Yet another unfortunate legacy of Marxism is our tendency to retreat into materialist or utilitarian explanations of political or historical phenomena, and our disinclination to believe in the autonomous power of ideas. A recent example of this is Paul Kennedy's hugely successful *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, which ascribes the decline of great powers to simple economic overextension. Obviously; this is true on some level: an empire whose economy is barely above the level of subsistence cannot bankrupt its treasury indefinitely. Nevertheless, whether a highly productive modern industrial society chooses to spend 3 or 7 percent of its GNP on defence rather than consumption is entirely a matter of that society's political priorities, which are in turn determined in the realm of consciousness...

As we look around the contemporary world, the poverty of materialist theories of economic development is all too apparent. *The Wall Street Journal* school of deterministic materialism habitually points to the stunning economic success of Asia in the past few decades as evidence of the viability of free market economics, with the implication that all societies would see similar development were they simply to allow their populations to pursue their material self-interest freely. Surely free markets and stable political systems are a necessary precondition to capitalist economic growth. But just as surely the cultural heritage of those Far Eastern societies, the ethic of work and saving and family, a religious heritage that does not, like Islam, place restrictions on certain

forms of economic behaviour, and other deeply ingrained moral qualities, are equally important in explaining their economic performance. Yet the intellectual weight of materialism is such that not a single respectable contemporary theory of economic development addresses consciousness and culture seriously as the matrix within which economic behaviour is formed.²

Jared Diamond, who in his *Guns, Germs and Steel* wrote of the supremacy of material conditions (environmental conditions) in the rate of development of societies, has made something of a U-turn in his most recent book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail Or Succeed*. He emphasises in this book the place of values and choice by autonomous human consciousness. He writes for instance:

Other failures to attempt to solve perceived problems involve what social scientists consider “irrational behaviour”: I.e., behaviour that is harmful for everybody. Such irrational behaviour often arises when each of us individually is torn by clashes of values; we may ignore a bad status quo because it is favoured by some deeply held value to which we cling. “Persistence in error,” “wooden-headedness,” “refusal to draw inference from negative signs,” and “mental standstill or stagnation” is among the phrases that Barbara Tuchman applies to be especially deeply held and hence frequent causes of disastrous behaviour. For example, much of the deforestation of Easter Island had a religious motivation: to obtain logs to transport and erect the giant stone statues that were the object of veneration. At the same time, but 9,000 miles away and in the opposite hemisphere, the Greenland Norse were pursuing their own religious values as Christians. Those values, their European identity, their conservative lifestyle in a harsh environment where most innovations would in fact fail, and their tightly communal and mutually

supportive society allowed them to survive for centuries. But those admirable (and, for a long time, successful) traits also prevented them from making the drastic lifestyle changes and elective adoptions of Inuit technology that might have helped them survive for longer.³

However, the mechanism(s) by which the value-base impact on the evolution and development of society is not fully understood and appreciated. There is as yet no acceptable general theory dealing with the nature and mechanism of impact of the value-base on the dynamics of society. We shall therefore, in this paper address this lacuna.

Conceptual/Theoretical Questions on Development

The theoretical questions appropriate for our purpose in this paper will seek to answer are why, how and in what direction a given society(s) evolves. In this regard, we should examine the nature and structure of a development theory in order to address how they have and should account for worldviews in the development process. We should therefore begin with the *structure of development theories*.

A development theory establishes the basis and model of human aspiration based on human nature. This is commensurate with the goals of development. The goals include the notion of justice, security, basic needs – food clothing, shelter – employment, psychological needs such as self-esteem, and other elements of self-realization. The factor that one can see underlying these aspirations is the principle of consistency taken as both transcendental and immanent. When we think that there is injustice, for instance, we are really thinking that a thing or a number of things have gone to where they ought not to go; i.e. a pattern of distribution that should consistently be in place has been breached. This is in turn based on the principle of reciprocity, fairness, etc. That is, principles that are ultimately founded, when we speak of reality as a whole, on the

principle of things persisting in their own nature – shirking off any subtraction or addition, every tendency towards a stasis in which things do not maintain their natural (essential) integrity. This is captured in the natural sciences by the principle that states that action and reaction are equal and opposite and the first Law of Thermodynamics; in the moral sciences by the principles of reciprocity and homogeneity, (birds of the same feather flock together, water will always find its level, etc). Underlying this notion of things seeking persistence in their own being is the principle of consistency.

The effort to meet basic and other needs is pursued on grounds of knowledge, application of knowledge (technology) and organisation. All these are based ultimately on the principle of consistency.⁴ The three sources of knowledge – reason, the senses and intuition – are ultimately based on the principle of consistency. There can be no perception whatsoever by way of reason, the senses or intuition, without the object of perception persisting in its nature long enough to be perceived. This is the basis of the Aristotelian Law of Identity. Thus efficiency and organisation, social and otherwise, depend on the level of rationality infused into them, and rationality is an expression of consistency. Therefore, we can say that Kant and Hegel were right in thinking that rationality is at the bottom of the human aspiration. Hegel was of course wrong in his restricted conception of this rationality as the absolute spirit with the particularism of the racist elements that went with his views. Kant although more universalistic in his views than Hegel, did not fully explore the nature, dimensions, and manifestation of universal transcendental reason. His “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Standpoint” is very insightful but sketchy.

If what we have said above is correct, then it is possible and we can judge conceptions and beliefs about human nature, the purposes of existence and the end of human beings – worldviews/ideologies, in other words - on grounds of conformity to and deviation from the principle of universal consistency. A development

theory should generate the theoretical framework with which we can understand the necessary and sufficient factors in the evolution of a society and their interplay - including the nature, dimensions and dynamics of their impact. With respect to this, I have already mentioned that there is a dialectical relationship between the material base of society and its value base. Broadly speaking, the material base of society encompasses the concrete and physical elements in the possession of society and the basic imperatives of social existence, which these elements should satisfy or meet. These, more or less, constitute the objective conditions of the development of a society. We may here mention two of the most important ones: the political and economic. The political imperatives of a society at the minimum include: the provision of security (both external and internal) of life and property, order and justice (a just order), and general welfare services – including such things as infrastructure, social security – as much as possible; all within the context of a given population, geographical size (territory and terrain. In order to meet their imperatives communal power must be exercised (that is power exercised for and on behalf of a community) by those competent and authorized to do so. Power, the principle of organisation, here may be defined as the ability to make other person(s) or things conform to ones purpose.⁵

The specific goals within this broad outline and the manner by which power is acquired, maintained and exercised – in other words, the specific nature of the interactions and organisations in place depend on the choice of a given community. This is to say that there are alternative ways by which the political imperative of a society and the exercise of power that goes with it can be achieved. There is room for variation, innovation, etc. here; the specific choice of a society and the pattern of its political practices, institutions, etc. depends largely on its value base. The value-base influences the political process via operating as a motivator for individuals and groups; and by providing the goals, justifications and convictions to various degrees of intensity and “extensivity”. This is the most

important basis for commitment to a course of action and mobilization: both of which issue principally in:

- the decision and commitment to go (or not to go to war)
- Struggle for the control of state power (in revolutionary times, election times, etc.)
- The struggle to influence the exercise of state power by way of preventing the abuse of power; gaining justice for individuals and groups; pushing a given political agenda (lobbying etc.)
- The level of oppositional tenacity: willingness to stand up for a given notion of society and human relations (or its converse acquiescence) in the followership of a society
- The nature and style of leadership and exercise of political responsibility at all levels of society relating to politics, including the judiciary, legislature, executive, commissions, ministries, etc. The principle element here is the nature of the systemic auto-correction mechanism – that is, for instance, whether a system relies on the excellence and personal integrity of leaders and cadres (the notion of Philosopher-Kings) or whether it relies on overt checks and balances, such as the separation of powers.

The economic imperatives of a society at the minimum is the provision of goods and services for the satisfaction of basic needs and secondary needs – luxury items, etc. as much as possible, within the context of a given population, territory, terrain, capital, natural resources, human resources, etc. All these have to be organised and harnessed, leading to certain forms of productive and social relations. The value-base affects the economic system in a variety of ways including:

- (1) The nature of knowledge that is sought created and promoted and how such knowledge is utilized for economic purposes.

- (2) Following on the above the level and type of technical creativity/innovation in a society.
- (3) The level of enthusiasm for enterprise and entrepreneurship.
- (4) Labour relations; the nature of the relationship between the people involved in an economic enterprise. This includes intangible things like loyalty, staff welfare, responsibility and commitment of staff – work ethic, etc. – the nature and types of voluntary economic associations in a society. Here such values as the level of prevalent trustworthiness are important. The examples one could give are cooperatives associations and mutual trustfulness.

The dominant values in the above areas affect economic rationalization cost of production, productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, availability of resources including capital, etc. These values constitute the motivators that shape the basic desires and attitudes and develop/shape the internal control mechanisms of individuals, providing individuals a given sort of interactive abilities or skills – that is, particular forms of responses/reactions and initiatives in given social situations. The value base of a society thus shapes its development because of its impact as motivator; principal determinant of source(s), types of knowledge and research activities; principal constituent of the interactive skills of people; principal element of the creative, innovative and entrepreneurial abilities and expressions of a people. The value base being a creation of human beings can be said to be the subjective dimension in the dynamics of societal evolution and development. Nevertheless, it is founded on an imperative in its own right: the imperative of choice between alternative ways of looking at and/or doing things; of signifying and attaining meaning and importance; it may be regarded as the imperative of choice or preference or value which humanity has to face; and as existentialists emphasize necessarily goes with commitment and responsibility. Let us set out the kernel of what

we have said clearly.

The Value Resource Interface Factor and the Coalescent Theory

One, there are objective conditions of existence for every society and they include natural resources, geography, population as well as the basic services a society must render in order to exist. These services include among others provision of security and means of livelihood - the political and economic imperatives of societal existence. The objective conditions of society are its resources and needs. Resources are inert, lifeless potentialities. Human beings with their cognitive power and organisational/interactive skills recognise these potentials and transform them into something useful, something that can satisfy a need. The cognitive power of human beings and their organisational/interactive skill are largely a function of the fundamental ontological, epistemological and ethical choices they have made in the past and are making in the present and for this reason they are the subjective dimensions of a society's evolution.

A society can be sitting on coal or oil without possessing any knowledge of their value whatsoever, or how to mine them as was the case, and still is to some extent, at least in respect of mining or drilling in Nigeria. This is partly due to previous epistemological values and the lack of a free flow of information due to the isolation of Africa – so we neither developed indigenous technology to a high degree nor were able to borrow technology. A society may lack the proper motivational goals and organisational/interactive skills to harness their vast resources, as Nigeria seems to lack. In this regard, one may cite an example of a microcosm of Nigeria, certain respects, with Onitsha town. Each year, some 50 or so men spend in some estimation about the sum of N1.8m to take the Ozo title. Part of this money is shared among the titleholders, according to proximity in kinship relations with the prospective titleholder. The rest is spent almost entirely on merriment, eating and drinking.

This is huge capital going down the drains annually, yet there are many unemployed youths. When I suggested to an elder that this money should be used in starting a business, say a transport business for the youth of the town; he reflected, crestfallen and said, “They will not agree to this and again how will the business be managed”? In other words, the town at the moment cannot find a better way of utilizing this capital on account of the previous values and interactive skills of the majority of its people, which perforce of habit they do not wish or even think of dropping.

It follows from this that a given state and/or a society’s development, underdevelopment or counter development is a function of a given value– resource interface. Values here represent both core philosophical values – ontological, epistemological, ethical values – the derivative values from these and the cognitive/organizational possibilities (faces) they represent; while resources represent the objective conditions and the totality of possible ways of organizing them (the knowledge/organisational faces they are amenable to). Every cognitive/organisational possibility interfaces with a possible way of organizing/harnessing resources in a given context to produce a definite quantity and quality of goods and services in the various spheres of society. Given this, it is possible to produce the value-resource interface index of a society in order to compare the actual value-resource interface with the desirable value-resource interface. By so doing to determine the degree of alignment between the actual and the desirable and thus what it will take in terms of values, cognitive/organisational/interactive skills to achieve a desirable state of development. However, we cannot go into doing this in respect of any society here, much as I desire to do in respect of Nigeria and other African countries. If we can produce such an index, we would be able to eliminate a great deal of self-deception and ignorance about the way our society works and where it is going.

The imperatives of values, and the value base that arises out of them, shape and direct the response to the economic and political

imperatives to give a society (culture) its specific characteristics, evolutionary tendencies and development potentials. Of course, the development of a society is a holistic process. It should be conceived as such. However, depending on the context in which a society finds itself some factors or cluster of factors may serve as a catalyst or a coalescent. It is not easy to locate such factors. However, the purpose of the application of theory and research in development studies should be the search and location of such factor(s). It does appear in any case that we can formulate a guiding principle thus: it is the less available a factor is, the more it is likely to be the coalescent factor. The least available then will be the coalescent factor(s). Applying this principle to Sub-Saharan African societies, the value base will readily appear as the coalescent factor. Take Nigeria, for example there is abundance of natural resources, a large population, sovereignty and territorial integrity with no hostile neighbours as such that could lead to authoritarianism on account of military and security needs. Yet the country is under-developing or counter-developing in virtually all spheres, showing that the sort of motivation, interactive skills and creative abilities of its citizens is at the root of her under-performance.

Reference and Notes

¹ Max Weber was one of the first to notice the error in the materialist view; he developed an alternative emphasizing the role of World-views in his *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*

² Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" In *Foreign Affairs* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002) pp 6-8

³ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Group, USA, Inc., 2005) p 432

⁴ I have discussed these ideas in "Logical Quantification of Values, Religio-Ethical Systems and Globalization: A Preliminary Evaluation of the European Scene" in Maria Marczevska-Rytko (ed) *Religion in Changing Europe: Between Fundamentalism and Pluralism* (Lublin, Poland: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press, 2003) pp.43-67; and in "Philosophy and Development: Metatheoretical and Methodological Considerations" in *Uche* Vol. 11, 2005, pp 25 – 43

⁵ This is a modification of the definition of power by Bertrand Russell; see his *Power* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1975) p25