QUERIES ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

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ISSUES OF A PHILOSOPHY OF DEVELOPMENT

As Håkan Törnebohm mentioned, I have been engaged in a project on development and research in the Sudan, together with Håkan and Ibrahim Ahmed Omer. When thinking about development in this context, my first view was that the creation 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 paradigm 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 distinction is not very sharp, as both conceptions can be seen in a great number of different shapes. Furthermore, the distinction is not exclusive, i.e., it is possible for these conceptions 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 processes or the people engaged therein. There is an obvious difference 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 distinctions which I would like to mention. The first of these is the distinction between technocratic and humanistic conceptions 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 inform 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 tradition of Western thinking the existence of rule-governed behaviour 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 stated 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. People 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 understanding 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 conform with when we reach adulthood or come into contact with
foreign cultures. An open rule is based on a series of examples or paradigm-cases. It is the normal way of acquiring the competence needed to be able to use the language or behave 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 assumption 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 articulate the assumptions and rules that lie behind different practices. It is in the nature of the case that this enterprise can seldom be carried out in a complete way, but it may nevertheless be a very useful activity. By distinguishing between technocratic and humanistic conceptions; between different ways of understanding the concept of practice and between different types of rules, we hope to have contributed somewhat to such a philosophy of development.