

## Twenty-Five Theses on Development Theory and Practice

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In the present world capitalist system, the word "development" has become more ambiguous than ever. The article discusses the concept of development in the context of the prevailing world order. In defining development, the cultural diversity of nations should be taken into consideration, as development for one may not be so for the other. This diversity in development cultures makes it imperative for more developed countries (MDCs) not to impose their own models of development on less developed countries (LDCs). Conversely, LDCs should design their own development strategies and work for their realization on their own.

As the imposition of development models is discouraged, so is adherence to one economic system. To achieve development, an eclectic use of several economic systems is necessary. Several economic systems can be formulated if market and plan are seen not as opposites, but typologies that can be combined to form other economic systems. Moreover, another necessary condition for development is the decentralized distribution of production forces to all, making everybody a potential part in production. The basic point about decentralization from the economic point of view is the mobilization of resources, not only human, but also nature, social, time and culture, thus maximizing the number of sites of creation and production.

Finally, as a supplement to the thesis on self-development, LDCs should be able to reciprocate the assistance they receive from MDCs, practically in the form of non-material help such as development advice. Only by reciprocity in this sense can development assistance be a true dialogue, as it should be, between the two parties and not as a means, as it is now, for reproducing Western culture.

### Introduction

In the present world capitalist system, the word 'development' has become more ambiguous than ever. To discuss the concept of development in the context of the prevailing world order, I have formulated the 25 theses on development theory and practice. With the short discussion allotted to each thesis, you will not expect depth at any point, but maybe, a useful overview, that is also a check against your own theses on development.

The 25 theses are divided into three parts. The first 10 are somewhat critical and are mainly reflections on the past. The next 10 are very

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■ The noun "development" can only be understood in plural as developments, not in singular. This follows from the first definition: several cultures, several developments. [T]hus, if the development of one culture is imposed upon another culture, it will sooner or later be experienced as a straitjacket, even if it is liberating, providing some degree of freedom in some new directions.

constructive and positive and are intended to summarize my own views on what development could be and should be, accumulated over 30 years, from my first experience with the ill-fated, Indo-Norwegian fisheries project in Kerala in 1961. And the last five theses are about technical or development assistance — the first three, rather critical, the last two, intended to be positive and constructive. In short, I have tried to build the ambiguity of the entire development problematique in my presentation.

Thesis No. 1: First definition of development: *Development is the unfolding of a culture, realizing the code or cosmology of that culture.* As there

are many cultures, including civilizations or macro-cultures, spanning vast regions in space and time, there are many developments.

Thesis No. 2: Second definition of development: *Development is the progressive satisfaction of the needs of human and non-human nature starting with those most in need.* Nature also has needs. The needs concept extends to all forms of sentient life, deeper than just ecological balance. The concept of sustainability or reproduction is contained in this definition, for human and non-human nature alike.

Thesis No. 3: Third definition of development: *Development is economic growth at nobody's expense.* This definition brings us closer to development as commonly conceived of, but with the important condition of the but-clause. The costs would appear in **nature** space as depletion and pollution, in **human** space as insults to human needs, in **social** space as deficits in diversity and symbiosis in individual interaction systems, in **world** space as deficits in diversity and symbiosis in collective interaction systems, in **time** or **future** as failing sustainability (reproduction), and in **culture** space as **inadequatio** relative to all these problems.

Obviously, these three definitions of development are contradictory; what is development according to one may not be so to the other(s). A culture may have neither needs nor growth on its hidden agenda, or one but not the other. Question: Which cultures are true development cultures?

Thesis No. 4: First grammatical thesis: *The noun "development" can only be understood in plural as developments, not in singular.* This follows from the first definition: several cultures, several developments. The thesis is fundamental and provides a background for a number of negative phenomena in our world. Thus, if the development of one culture is imposed upon another culture, it will sooner or later be experienced as a straitjacket, even if it is liberating, providing some degree of freedom in some new directions. For elites, who already have internalized that there will be no problem with foreign even alien culture, except with their "backward masses". But the people will react, partly by passive subconscious sabotage or at least, inefficiency within a socio-cultural matrix not experienced as theirs, partly as active resistance, including violence, in other words, what the dominant culture calls "terrorism". Another term much favored by the dominant culture today is "fundamentalism", referring to people who believe enough in their own culture to stand up for it, not giving in to a dominant culture coming in from the outside. Of course, that belief may also inspire passive and active resistance.

Thesis No. 5: Second grammatical thesis: *The verb "develop" can only be understood as an intransitive or reflexive verb, not as a transitive verb.* Development is essentially Self-development. Self cannot be the cause of development as an effect in Other without harming the autonomy of Other, itself a part of "development" according to all definitions. I develop. I develop myself.

Try to raise your own children by never giving them the experience of self-causation. Perhaps, the formula works for the first 10 years or so. But after that, the parents will have on their hands a richly deserved puberty revolt. What then happens can also be formulated grammatically: to become oneSelf, one's (own) Self, is to be the S in a standard Indo-European SPO-sentence, subject-predicate-object, not the perennial O. Try to raise a child with almost no challenges. The child masters nothing on his/her own, only doing some housework according to preset rules, like



emptying garbage cans, making beds, some cleaning. Do this for 70 years, adding a little pocket money as the former child goes through what could have been a life cycle. The result would be tragic. Do this with countries, and you have exactly what development assistance is about, an effort to develop somebody else. Development assistance becomes a covenant whereby the receiver gets some pocket money for basic services and the sender gets the inner growth deriving from all the challenges. Development means taking on the challenges; you yourself.

*Thesis No. 6: Western civilization understands itself as the universal civilization and universalizes its history as Development = Modernization = Growth = Economic growth = GNP growth.*

Doing so, trivialization is brought to a convenient and highly operational *reductio ad absurdum* point where a lot of projects can be undertaken in the name of development. All three can be undertaken in the name of development. All three definitions, and the semantic theses presented above can be disregarded, with Western civilization as dominant, and even within that culture building on a very limited spectrum.

*Thesis No. 7: For economic growth, there are three main conditions: hard work, saving/investment and inconsiderateness.* The road to economic growth, in my experience, passes through three simple formulas: Q/P (highest possible quality at lowest possible price), Q/N (highest amount of culture on the lowest amount of nature; in other words **processing**) and F/R (balance between finance economy and real economy). For all three, hard work is necessary, especially, of course, in a competitive economy. But saving/investment, meaning not using all net income for consumption, is also necessary. In other words, there has to be some contradiction present in the culture: work hard, enjoy later. From this follows the pattern of vacations and retirement, presumably hard work/no joy most of the year/life, and no work/much joy for some of the year/life. In all of this, the focus has to be self-centered. Paying much attention to negative consequences of this growth-oriented activity for others (and self) would deflect energy away from the major pursuit. After all, the key theme is simple: greed.

*Thesis No. 8: The major carriers of inconsiderateness are Protestants, men and economists, particularly combined.* To explore this fully would

bring us deep into theology, biology/culture/structure, and economics as a science. Only some points will be touched upon here.

First, **Protestants**. Much has been said about their reasons for working hard and for saving, or postponement of gratification in general, in the Weberian (himself a Protestant) tradition. Why should they also be less considerate? Two factors seem particularly important.

One of the basic features of the Lutheran theoscape was the construction of Paradise as a scarce good. Access should not be seen as guaranteed by any formula controlled by human beings themselves. To the contrary, with God being His own cause, humans have little or no leverage. This means uncertainty, but also standing in line in front of Paradise. Given the super-individualization of the Protestant soul, standing in line would mean competition, to get into Paradise.

And then comes the second feature: Protestantism as de-Maria-ized Christianity; a truncation of the usual Christian quadrangle with God-the-Father, Mary-the-Mother, the Holy Spirit and Christ-the-Son, with Maria excised. With Maria goes the compassion and mercy, more profound than the divine grace bestowed upon humans by God, generally virtues held to be feminine. Left is a triangle with two males and one of rather dubious gender.

Second, **men**. With 95 percent to 98 percent of the direct violence in the world committed by males, for whatever reason, there is already a solid basis for inconsiderateness. But possibly, even more important are the violent ways in which males try to come to grips with their violence: by trying to substitute for direct violence, structural and cultural violence. Men build themselves into hierarchies to control the exercise of direct violence, in the sense of limiting it to violence from high to low and from inside to outside; not against the high. The army is the archetype. And then, they make deductive systems like the Christian and Islamic systems of just war and peace, rather than spontaneous acts of human compassion.

An example. In 1974, I was an observer in the Norwegian delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in Caracas, Venezuela. There were about 150 states and about 150 issues, meaning, that the total agenda had a very high level of complexity. Merely to come to grips intellectually with the issues, leaving alone finding

solutions, went far above the capacity of most participants or even delegations. So there were many sessions devoted essentially to the reduction of complexity.

One day, I was invited to a session of secretaries. They had been typing the whole thing; almost all made by men, and typed by women. One basic problem was the minerals on and below the ocean floor. The men discussed how to exploit them, these secretaries wanted to discuss who should benefit from them. And their answers went in the direction of the women and the children suffering in the Third World, in Latin America, in Africa, in South Asia. Compassion for the needy.

But the men, meaning almost all the delegates, had other perspectives. Their first problem was how one could fit these possible ocean floor resources, such as the famous nodules, seamlessly into the edifice of international law. For that, much research would be needed, in other words, new institutes, possibly, new degrees, at least, more people trained in adequate intellectual constructions. In addition, there was the problem of how national interests, those of their own nations, not other nations, and not human beings in any direct sense, could be served. In other words, verbal and social hierarchies of law and interest, as mentioned above, not compassion.

Third, **economists**. I see economics, like any science, as an effort to make certain aspects of reality visible and amenable to processing by the human mind in general, and the faculties for abstraction and generalization in particular, but at the cost of making some other aspects of reality invisible. Peculiar to economics is that the aspects made invisible are within the very field of economics themselves, the direct, but non-monetized, not accounted for positive and negative consequences of economic activity. In other words, the externalities, so named because they are not brought into the focus of intellectual scrutiny, but kept in the shadows or beyond, in the sub- or unconscious of the economic mind.

These are the holes in the economic mind, and I identify seven using the logic of spaces indicated in Thesis No. 3:

- 1 Nature space, not seen in its own right, but only as a resource and possible dumping place for pollutants;



- 2 Human space, seen mainly as production factors at various levels and as consumers;
- 3 Social space, seen mainly as a locus for production-distribution-consumption cycles and as a market place;
- 4 World space, seen as an international social space;
- 5 Time, only visible for the shorter run;
- 6 Culture, made to serve economics as constructed by economists rather than vice versa, e.g., by relativizing all values and making them comparable through monetization so as to permit interpersonal and inter-value, cost-benefit analyses;
- 7 Philosophy, the missing capacity to develop awareness of the loopholes in one's own reasoning, e.g., the other six holes.

Thesis No. 9: *There are two major economic growth regions in the world, the Judeo-Christian (JC) Northwest and the Buddhist-Confucian (BC) Southeast.* If the conditions are hard work, saving/investment and inconsiderateness, there can be no doubt that the world Northwest qualifies, with the Protestant part at its center, somewhat softer in the Judaic and Muslim parts with their focus on social justice, and in the Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, with the female goddess intact.

But the world Southeast, meaning, Japan-China-Korea-Vietnam, also qualifies. Hard work and a certain frugality are deeply embedded in the Confucian ethic, considerateness and solidarity in the Buddhist ethic, particularly, the mahayana Buddhist ethnic with its strong emphasis on the greater context. However, this greater context is not universal. Only the Occidental projects, particularly Christianity and Islam, claim to be universally valid. One consequence of this is cultural imperialism, another is exploitation all over, of nature, humans, classes and other social groups, other countries, their future and their own cultural resources. The world Southeast might focus the exploitation on the rest of the world, the world outside their own, treating their own part better. The net result may be about the same: economic growth, and not development in the sense of Theses No. 3, at nobody's expense, but with more equality in the BC-region.

The major country in the JC region is Germany with the European Community/Union, and Eastern Europe/ex-Soviet Union as Hinterland; and in the BC region, Japan, with East/Southeast Asia as Hinterland.

Question: Germany-Japan, an axis for peace or war? And how will they behave towards the United States?

Thesis No. 10: *The rest of the world is, for the time being, condemned to periphery status in the world capitalist system.* It is not impossible to get out of this, the major of all structural impediments. But it certainly takes hard work, much saving and investment and possibly also, some "countervailing inconsiderateness", even when done completely non-violently. Gandhi organized boycott of British goods, particularly textiles, in order to pave the way for economic self-reliance, and even collected money not to hurt British merchants. But there was no escape from the fact that they were hurt just in having their expansionism checked.

In today's world, the two Cold War superpowers are remarkably similar. Inconsiderateness is no problem; they have excellent credentials in that field. But hard work and saving are problematic for both, under the present circumstances. It is hard to tell the future, however, both Americans and Russians have hidden strengths that may come out when they are tested under conditions of real hardship.

While this profile also applies to other areas of the world system periphery, there are also regions with the opposite profile: hard work, saving as a hedge against harder times and consideration to Nature, Self and Other. Most indigenous peoples are like that, that is the reason why they have survived for so long. Slowly, they are eliminated.

Exacerbating the situation: the general homogenization of world elites around the theme of economic growth, at which they are more or less successful, but never managed to come to terms with their own inconsiderateness and collision courses.

Thesis No 11: *With market (capital) and plan (state) as basic dimensions, we get five, not only two economic systems: market, not plan (Blue, capitalist); plan, not market (Red, socialist); half-half (Pink, social democrat); both-and (Yellow-Golden, Japanese) and neither-nor (Green, traditional, local).*

Only when market and plan are seen as opposites and the typology becomes one-dimensional does it make sense to talk about only two systems (or three if the pink social democrat compromise is located in



the middle). If one is excluded, then there is very little left, making some people believe that the residual, the Blue system, is the "natural" system. But, as shown above, the condition for arriving at that conclusion is one-dimensional thinking. Of course, much more complex typologies than the one given in advantage of accommodating relatively well the systems existing in the present world. The Blue system, the market system, comes in two versions, Center (high on degree of processing of raw materials, but not always on quality and stability; high on communication-transportation centrality; not too high on equality; and not so high on misery at the bottom of society), and a periphery version with the opposite profile.

*Thesis No. 12: Rather than an ideological dedication to one system, only an eclectic use of all five in time, space and functional space could release positive development synergies.* The basic point is the transition from a monotheistic faith in one economic god to a more polytheistic betting on several. The systems may be activated one after the other, in different places or for different functions; or any combination of the three.

*Thesis No. 13: A necessary condition for development is decentralized distribution of production factors to all, making everybody a potential participant in production.* The basic point is decentralization, meaningful within all systems, also the Red system. The basic point about decentralization from an economic point of view is the mobilization of resources, not only human, but also, the other four by maximizing the number of sites of creation and production. Everybody should produce something! More concretely, this used to mean access to land and water, and to communal forests and lakes, seas, oceans (the "commons"). Today, equal or more emphasis would be on improving the quality of labor through hearth and education (particularly by labor doing this themselves); easy access to credit; creation of technologies appropriate to the people using them and to the consumers; and management structures compatible with local culture and social structure.

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■ To remain developed, internalize externalities in the nature, person, social, world, culture spaces, making all spaces reproducible (sustainable) over time. Concretely, this means keeping and building as many local cycles as possible so that the link between cause and consequence can be clearly seen and acted upon when something goes wrong.

with less penalty. In practice, this means decentralized production of food, clothing, housing, and health.

Thesis No. 15: *Second production priority is for simple production and consumption tools related to basic needs (pink)*. These would be the pots and pans for food consumption, and the basic tools for the production of food (picks and shovels, walking tractors, stoves); for clothing, spinning and weaving tools; and, for housing, manufacture of bricks and other building materials. Basic medicines certainly also enter the picture. This may go beyond what the local level can manage in many cases, and yet, is so close to basic needs that exposure to the cycles and pressures operating in international trade would be counter-productive.

Thesis No. 16: *Third production priority is for export; at ever-higher C/N (processing) levels (golden economics)*. The basic rule is, of course, never to export raw materials, but always to imprint on nature (n) some form, in other words, culture (C), always aiming at higher C/N ratios. Export integrated circuits and silicon chips, not to mention computers, etc., never raw metals, not to mention ores. But this requires cooperation between researchers and technicians for high C/N and workers for good quality of the products at reasonable prices (high Q/P). Management-worker relations have to be good within the companies, and state-capital

Thesis No. 14: *First production priority is for the basic needs for those most in need; best done in a green economy*. What is the purpose of the whole economic exercise, as argued above, if not to satisfy basic needs? But the point about local production is important. Even if centralized production can solve the task better with higher quantity at lower prices (higher quality might be more difficult), local production in very many places, where there is less supply and distribution, is more vulnerable and also more sensitive to local traditions.

The more such externalities become important, the more basic the needs; for non-basic needs, risks can be incurred

cooperation would bring in all the resources of the society for the export drive, not for all possible products, but for niches of pride and proven quality. This reasoning also holds for non-material processing, where the end product would be highly-educated professionals (processing of raw brains) and highly sophisticated culture (literature, art, science, etc.) Trade in C, not in N; N is limited, C is not. Keep high-saving ratios and invest in better production factors.

Thesis No. 17: *To get rich, increase Q/P (quality over price) levels maintaining or increasing C/N, watching the finance-real economies balance, F/R (blue, red, pink, golden).*

This is a never-ending endeavor, a slip at one point only for a short time can have detrimental consequences. Essentially, this is a question of how workers are treated since they are closest to the actual job of finishing the products. Treat workers like junk and they will do junk work, turning out junk products. Do that and the punishment will come and fairly quickly, as the U.S. economy is now experiencing (although this is only one of many factors behind the decline into a state of depression of that particular economic system).

Thesis No. 18: *To remain rich, improve production factor quality: nature, labor, capital, technology, management (golden).* Help nature with eco-balance; work for ever higher levels of health and education to achieve higher C/N and Q/P, never forgetting that the level of education and health of the bottom 50 percent is as important as the level of the top 5 percent; watch the finance economy/real economy synchrony; invest in technical creativity and capability of everybody and strive for management structures where everybody is at home, perhaps, by accommodating people in smaller groups, horizontal beta-structures, inside larger, more hierarchical alpha-structures. All of this is actually very Japanese, some of it from Kaname Akamatsu, perhaps the best development economist of the century (and for that reason unknown in the West). But why not learn from Japan? Why could not others do some of the same, reducing the disproportionate weight carried in the world economy today by that one country?

Thesis No. 19: *To remain developed, internalize externalities in the nature, person, social, world, culture spaces, making all spaces reproducible (sustainable) over time.* Concretely, this means keeping and building as



many local cycles as possible so that the link between cause and consequence can be clearly seen and acted upon when something goes wrong. Also, give some challenge to everybody. This has been the strength of Western entrepreneurialism as long as it was sufficiently decentralized.

In the First World, the world Northwest, the tendency was for the individual to keep the challenge as private property the individual could carry as enrichment, experience into a new job.

In the former Second World of socialist countries, challenges were vested in maybe as few as 400 planners for 400 million in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, who were then obviously overchallenged people in an ocean of the underchallenged.

In the Fourth World of development, Japan and similar countries, the challenge remains in the company because the challenged person remains in the company. Moreover, because of the countless discussions, the challenge is better distributed.

And in the Third World of (non-) development, the challenge is given to the expert from the First or Fourth Worlds who return fully enriched, leaving some recipes behind.

Then: Watch social and world structures for new conflicts!

Thesis No. 20: *And when/if it fails, never give up but start again where it went wrong, even from the beginning. And if it succeeds, also, start again, e.g., with non-material products. Or simply say, this is it, let us enjoy, watching that the economy does not degenerate but remains dynamic and sustainable.*

Thesis No. 21: *Development assistance is the legitimate child of a Western Imperialist father and a Christian missionary mother, and the child carries the code of both.* Basically, development assistance is a way of ensuring the reproduction all over the world of Western culture with accompanying structure, by planting the socio-cultural seeds of that particular culture all over, making use of poverty, even misery for legitimation. This does not lead to reduction of misery, but rather, to its reproduction, giving more occasion to continue the development assistance.

exercise. The "father" seizes the opportunity and the "mother" feels reasonably good dispensing so much charity in all directions. The recipients are blamed for poor results.

Thesis No. 22: *Development assistance is very competitive among donor nations and is done under any slogan (pre-investment infrastructure, community development, participation, import substitution, export substitution, basic needs, for women, for the environment, sustainable development); presence in the development assistance market is what matters.* So there they are, the development agencies, one on each hill-top, one on each valley, sometimes, cooperating and "coordinating", sometimes competing, overbidding each other, making deals with local elites to make the projects "succeed", the local elites, very aware of their power in this regard and of the importance for the agencies of having something to show. Then, one of them senses, often through UN bodies, a new slogan that may open for new projects. But competing agencies will sense the danger and immediately, adopt the same slogan, even "decade", to be run by the same people, who, the year before, had the opposite slogan.

Thesis No. 23: *The road to development assistance will have to pass through the removal of the major structural impediment, center-periphery structures; and through challenging demands.* This follows from what has been said above. If the road to a minimum of material wealth passes through C/N, then, the LDCs will have to do exactly that, processing, and not remain content with the roles of producing semi- or unprocessed products, at high levels of Q/P, assigned to them by the devastating doctrine of "comparative advantages". The MDCs will probably not remove that impediment, knowing that it holds the key to so much of their dominant role in the world economy. The LDCs will have to do this themselves, and the best approach is probably indicated by the South Commission (chaired by Julius Nyerere) — by means of

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South-South cooperation. But if the MDCs, nevertheless, would like to be really helpful, then, they should follow up by placing orders with the LDCs, singly or combined, for sophisticated products, with much built-in challenge (as argued above).

Thesis No. 24: *A necessary condition for development assistance is reciprocity: I help you, you help me; for instance by asking LDCs to become donors of development advice to MDCs.* The usual question in this connection is how LDCs can help at all, being, by definition, so poor. The answer, often reflected in the MDCs, is non-material help. And the best help could be what the MDCs dispense with so willingly, solicited and unsolicited expert advice. The LDCs have become objects to be studied and helped. The moment this is also done the other way, a dialogue between two subjects can emerge, e.g., over the relation to children, the aged and the sick, and alienated in modern society.

Thesis No. 25: *The best providers of development assistance are probably voluntary people's organizations engaging in people-people, rather than expert-expert dialogues, providing assistance closer to basic needs and being more ready to accept reciprocity. Particularly helpful are probably women's voluntary organizations.* A reflection based on observations by many, including this author. One reason is very simple: People's organizations (by governments, dubbed "non-governmental" as if people exist only as negations of governments; like calling governments "non-people") may promote own interest in a development assistance setting. But these interests are likely to be relatively innocuous, even positive for the receiver. When governments "give" aid, national interest, as seen by the governments, will generally be involved, and they can be heavy: trade promotion for national products, political reciprocity in the form of support, even votes in intergovernmental organizations, military rights to bases, joint defense arrangements, etc. All of this will color, even transform basically the development aspect in the sense of the basic needs of humans and nature alike; even the economic growth aspect.

Added to this comes the difference between governmental experts and the expertise harbored by a voluntary organization. The former are experts on something high up in their own country and as a consequence, the production of this something in an LDC will usually be for export. **The road from expert to export is very short.** Voluntary organizations can transmit human level experiences from MDCs to LDCs and back again, even in direct cooperation with LDC volunteers. And they can better remain faithful to the primacy of basic needs, out of human solidarity. ●