

HD 2

ON THE THEORY OF HUMAN-CENTERED THEORIES

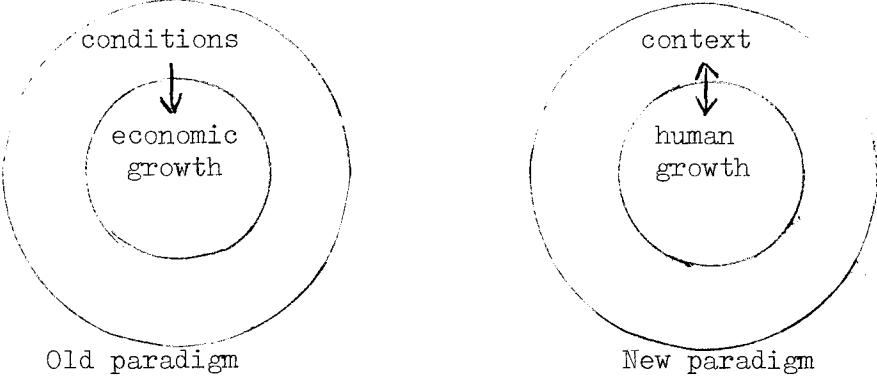
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Concepts and Theories of Development Workshop,
Geneva, 3-5 June 1980

1. By "development" we mean, very roughly speaking, the type of guided processes that facilitate, or at least do not impede, human growth, in the sense of human realization, both of the individual self, and of the collective self - the relative weight of these will be defined by the culture. It is assumed that there is a minimum level of human growth that can be referred to as health,⁽¹⁾ of the body, of the mind and of the spirit. Instrumentally/operationally "development" means as a minimum, satisfaction of human needs. But, it is further assumed that beyond that "only the heaven is the limit", in other words that we know no limit to human growth.⁽²⁾ We do not even know whether there is any limit to human body growth in the sense of longevity,⁽³⁾ and certainly not to the human mind⁽⁴⁾ in the sense of the richness of cognitions and emotions, not to mention to the human spirit in the sense of capacity to reflect on all this,⁽⁵⁾ and even to communicate those reflections.

2. Thus, by "development" we mean human-centered development. The problem to be discussed in this connection is not so much how to make more refined and more precise definitions - an intuition is sufficient for the present purpose. The problem is rather how to conceive of "concepts" and "theories" of development, given that we mean by "development" something that has human growth at the center. We do not mean economic growth, structural change, etc. In short, it is the external form of a theory of development thus conceived rather than, or in addition to, its precise content that is of interest here.

3. At the very minimum of reflection we shall assume that this change in paradigm implies at least the changes indicated below:



There are three differences between the old and the new:

- (1) a new focus, or "center-piece"
- (2) an explicit emphasis on the two-way causality or interaction
- (3) the word "context" preferred for "conditions"; less means-ends oriented, more totality oriented.

More difficult to illustrate (except by the age-old yin-yang symbol⁽⁶⁾) but underlying much of this would be a fourth point, a dialectic rather than a mechanistic dichotomy: there is "that of the context" in the phenomenon of human growth, there is "that of human growth" in the context. The two are not separated from each other.

4. The old theory of development was an exercise in weaving necessary and sufficient conditions of economic growth together into a theory⁽⁷⁾. It can safely be said that the very nucleus of this construction was the classical production-function, and that the theory of economic growth was, essentially, a production function made much more complex, but with the essential features retained. Examples of embroidering on the production function base:

- (1) Whereas capital and "land" (raw materials, including soil and energy) entered more or less as in any production factor, there was more elaboration of "the human factor" ie not only as labor, which only leads to discussions of demographic and education factors. Psychological and cultural factors were included.
- (2) Organization, in marxist terms the mode of production, was taken more seriously, and including the society at large, not only the firm. Social and structural factors were included.
- (3) Whereas the production function was located within the paradigm of economics as a discipline (or rather, economics was woven around that function which, in turn, was a way of spelling out the organization of an enterprise) the new approaches called on multi-disciplinary studies, and a number of institutes of development studies were built around this concept.

5. The dependent variable was still economic, and essentially related to the output of goods and services; but the range of independent variables was not only broadened [(1) and (2) above] but

economic and non-economic variables were on an equal footing. Of course, the economic theory had cyclical aspects because the economic system is not merely a translation of factors into products (goods and services) but an economic cycle.⁽⁸⁾ For the system to be sustained products have somehow to be converted, wholly or partly, into factors, eg through the intermediary of the market, through individual and public goods, etc. In classical theory this is mainly seen in terms of whether the quantity of factors generated was higher, equal to or lower than the original level, leading to positive, zero or negative growth respectively (assuming constant output/input ratios). Like any economic theory the theory of development took this into account.⁽⁹⁾

6. The economic theory, also in its multi-disciplinary form, broke down for the following general reason: the failure to consider that what was produced was not only goods and services but also bads and disservices, at least in some regards. Some of this had for a long time been evident to the critics within the tradition of political economy in general and marxist theory in particular.⁽¹⁰⁾ Thus, the entire production process had negative impacts on

- nature, in the form of depletion and pollution
- capital, eg by starting inflationary processes and generally making the system less predictable
- labor, in the form of increasing levels of alienation with higher levels of productivity, and of "unrest"
- organization, in the sense of creating top-heavy, exploitative, dependency-creating structures, intra-firm, intra-nation and internationally.
- human beings, as threats both to body, mind and spirit in the form of "civilization diseases".

Right now we are living through all these "crises", by no means unpredictable or unpredicted, but not covered in a sufficiently central manner by conventional development theory. There are efforts to introduce strategic changes in the paradigm so as to save the basic form,⁽¹¹⁾ trying to account for these phenomena and to correct for the more deleterious consequences, yet preserving key elements by yield-

ing at some other points.⁽¹²⁾ These manoeuvres are currently underway.⁽¹³⁾ They should be watched; but we are engaged in another exercise.

7. A shift in paradigm is only progressive if there is some willingness to learn from the mistakes of the preceding paradigm, and at a deeper level than re-arranging the concepts. Among the mistakes we would list the following:

(1) The choice of some kind of non-human rather than human growth as the center-piece ("dependent variable"); insufficient sensitivity to the possibility that non-human development could even be anti-human.

(2) The failure to see that the growth could even be self-defeating, or counter-productive in a much broader sense than just being anti-human, by counteracting any condition of growth.

(3) The failure to adapt a holistic and dialectical attitude to the totality, assuming that a part or aspect can grow indefinitely without harmful consequences to the rest.

In a sense the first two points are contained in the third. The problem is how to avoid such mistakes, and others, in a theory of human-centered development - if that is the type of theory we want.

8. Let us say that the first mistake is avoided simply by making human growth a dependent variable in a conventional production function, this time for human growth. Thus, one might postulate that anything that happens in society should be evaluated in terms of what it does to human survival, welfare, identity, freedom⁽¹⁴⁾ - or some such concepts. But the moment one does that the second problem arises immediately: in the effort to reconcile welfare for all with freedom for all (eg the freedom to exploit others), or survival for all with identity for all (eg identity derived from hurting others) one may overstep limits defined by nature, culture, society, one way or the other.⁽¹⁵⁾ And this leads straight to the third problem: we humans are part of a totality, can we arrogate to ourselves a right to "grow" without either assuming that everything else has to grow in a synchronized (not the same as "synchronic", which would merely point to the same velocity) manner or that there will be ruptures⁽¹⁶⁾ and that

these can be manager? At the simplest level, which nevertheless is rather important: one may disagree as to where the limit is but at some point there is an upper limit to sheer demographic human growth, to our numbers, at any given time.⁽¹⁷⁾ Development merely defined as production of more human beings would quickly run against all three problems mentioned above - so would development as increasing longevity, not to mention development as increasing size of human beings.

9. To this it could be objected that we are not thinking so much in terms of body and number of bodies development - except for care for the normal human body as we know it, and in keeping numbers "not too much" beyond what we have and know - but in terms of non-material human growth, of the mind and spirit. Can there be anything wrong with that?⁽¹⁸⁾ That depends on what is meant. Imagine that human growth is identified with the buddhist concept of enlightenment⁽¹⁹⁾ (Sanskrit: bodhi, Japanese: satori) and that the approach would be through celibatary, even solitary monasticism.⁽²⁰⁾ There is no hard pressure on nature involved, but it would evidently, nonetheless, spell the end of the human species. Of course, one could keep enlightenment as a dimension of human growth but search for a less dramatic/extreme context for its attainment, or one could say (as is usually done) that this is only for the few, the others are a context, eg by giving alms to the meditating few so that they are not distracted.⁽²¹⁾ But is this not to propagata a theory of human growth at the expense of non-growth of others, very much like economic growth: it was for the few, countries and people, at the expense of the others?

10. The third problem, indicated through the catch-words of holism and dialectics, has a concrete interpretation also well known from the theory of economic growth. Imagine that human growth is given an interpretation as narrow as that given to economic growth through its operationalization in terms of GNP/capita, for instance as IQ/capita.⁽²²⁾ Imagine that it is taken seriously, that all societies are transforming themselves into producers of human growth in that sense. The result would be just as for economic growth: a reduction in

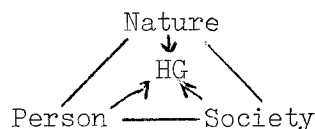
diversity, hence of the maturity⁽²³⁾ of the total system, hence an increase in vulnerability. From this we draw one consequence: to leave a considerable range of human growth patterns, and to focus deliberate development (a tautology, development is deliberate - but just to emphasize that part): on the satisfaction of minimum conditions, in other words on needs. Anything beyond that will decrease diversity and increase vulnerability even if the "context" also developed so as to follow suit, and delivered the necessary inputs. It should then be noted that one basic need seems to be, precisely, the need for development - beyond the other basic needs.⁽²⁴⁾

11. Some requirements of a theory of human-centered development have now been identified, focussing on "human-centered development". What happens if we focus on the term "theory" and try to explore what it would mean to have not only a theory of something human-centered, but a human-centered theory? The answer depends on how we understand "theory". We assume the term to refer to a verbal construct that makes it possible to see relations between the parts and the whole (of something), and - by implication - between the parts. Two ways of doing this stand out: to conceive of the parts as something contained in the axioms of the theory and to be revealed through deduction (logical implication), and to conceive of the parts as parts of a scheme of things, a family of things at a deeper level, revealed through implementation.⁽²⁵⁾ Maybe the former is more rational, the latter more intuitive, reflecting the twin approaches of occidental/oriental, male/female, left hand/right hand of the brain, etc.⁽²⁶⁾ However that may be, a human-centered theory obviously has to be accessible to everybody, not only in the sense of being understandable ex post, but of being something that people create themselves. This means, concretely, that theories and theory-formation have to be a part of human patrimony, common property, not private property of theoreticians, "scientists" or "seers".⁽²⁷⁾

12. However, theories relating to development are not only tools of reflection, but tools guiding action, praxis. It is not obvious

that theories can do this, so let us start with the idea of a "guide for action", meaning a guide for action so as to obtain human growth. No doubt there is something instrumental, a means-ends relation at work here; that is as true for the noble eight-fold path as for dialysis of blood.⁽²⁸⁾ Also, there is a process involved: the consequences of the action are more or less immediate, and in addition there is at least an intention, a volition preceding the action - otherwise it is doubtful whether it should be referred to as action. Whether this means-ends relation fulfills the rules for a causal relationship is another matter, so let us rather talk in terms of conditions and consequences.⁽²⁹⁾ In a human-centered theory of development the net consequences are supposed to be human growth. But what about the conditions? A human-centered theory has to operate with conditions accessible to everybody,⁽³⁰⁾ not only in the sense of being comprehensible, but in the sense of being available as something people can relate to, operate.

13. The consequences of this are far-reaching, possibly impossible to obtain, but worth considering as an ideal. At the extreme end is a society where everybody is autonomous, his/her own master, controlled by oneself and with sufficient control over nature and isolated from the effects of the actions of others - eg because they are living as hermits in a benign nature, with some kind of trans-personal medium of communication that, nevertheless, makes it possible to refer to this as a society. At the other extreme is the zoological garden, all aspects or conditions of human growth being controlled by others, by society, by the management.⁽³¹⁾ And there is also the third corner, if we see this as a triangle where nature dictates, imposing all conditions:



By "society" we actually mean social forces beyond personal

control. All kinds of combinations are possible: the person controls it all, society does it, or nature, or the three in more or less balanced combinations. A human-centered theory of development would be one located in the vicinity of the lower left corner, seeing the person more as its own condition and consequence.⁽³²⁾

14. Concretely, then, a human-centered theory of development would presuppose or include:

- a benign nature, not a cruel one, and a relation to nature so that problems of "scarcity" diminish in significance, not necessarily because nature is more abundant and renewable, but because the demands put on nature are more modest,

- a benign society, meaning a society where persons not only participate in decisions affecting themselves but can decide in matters affecting themselves. Assuming a set of persons with compatible wishes, as to conditions affecting the human growth of each one of them, constitute a community: they could then make that decision, or they could command ruling elites (who then would no longer be ruling elites) to enact that decision. This probably presupposes:⁽³³⁾

- (a) that communities are small
- (b) that they have complementarily-minded inhabitants
- (c) diversity and mobility among such units to accommodate wishes
- (d) a high level of autonomy for the communities so that their decisions are not too much affected by decisions by others

- autonomous persons, meaning people who are conscious enough to know what to want, to make a choice and to act accordingly. To do this what above is called theory is by definition indispensable.

This, then, leads to an interesting problem: under the conditions of benign nature and benign society just stipulated, is it likely that we get autonomous persons? Or is it more likely that they become complacent for lack of challenge, in a sense conditioned precisely by not being conditioned? Is the point possibly that this entire vision is not dialectic enough, does not sufficiently take into account how the corners of the triangle constitute a whole, with the parts working on each other?⁽³⁴⁾

15. However that may be, let us try to list the tentative conclu-

sions arrived at about human-centered theories of human-centered development:

- (1) the goal of human growth - body, mind, spirit - has to be made explicit and put in the center of the theory.
- (2) if the totality is lost, hold of this goal can easily become self-defeating through erosion of the context; hence, context development has to be a part of the theory
- (3) this can only be done with a vision of the totality, holistic and dialectic
- (4) a deliberate theory of development should only aim at stipulating basic human needs of the body/mind/spirit and beyond that open for the wildest possible spectrum of visions of human growth possibilities, among other reasons to facilitate maximum diversity.
- (5) a human-centered theory should be not only accessible, but be a part of human patrimony to be modified, changed, recreated
- (6) a human-centered theory has to operate with conditions accessible to everybody

16. Clearly, the general human-center approach, given all of this will lead to an emphasis on that which the people, persons, even the individual can best control, and to an effort to condition nature and society so that this becomes practicable. In terms of spaces⁽³⁵⁾ this would lead to an emphasis on the individual inner space and on the micro space of immediate social relations - the family, peer group, the commune. It might also extend to the meso space, to local communities in general, to districts and municipalities - to all those settings that are a l'hauteur de l'homme. In doing so there is undoubtedly the danger of neglecting the other spaces, macro (national), regional, global, and outer space also for that matter. But the theory should not be understood in that sense. Rather, it should be required of a theory of this type that it is fully conscious of all spaces but stipulates the conditions other spaces have to satisfy in order for human growth to take place where it can meaningfully take place - probably in the spaces drawn closer to the individual.⁽³⁶⁾ Which, certainly, opens for the possibility that those with quite different approaches will occupy those spaces, relegating people con-

cerned with human growth to their small niches in a structure not theirs, conditioning them in ways that interfere with their autonomy - in short making a travesty of the whole idea.⁽³⁷⁾ And that is precisely the dilemma of any human-centered theory: by being too concerned with those other spaces one gains control but loses hold of the goal of the whole exercise; by being too little concerned one may cling on to the goal but easily lose control. Where is the theory that makes us strike a good balance here?