

# On the Relationship between the Spiritual and the Material: The Lessons of Underdevelopment

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The purpose of this essay is to show that the issue of “underdevelopment” not only raises one of the most basic and oldest problems of philosophy, namely the relationship between the spiritual and the material, but also helps positively to reformulate it. For, on closer examination, it will appear that the striking aspect of underdevelopment is that it constitutes a glaring symptom of a characteristic disturbance or maladjustment. By its strangeness and distortion, it displays a unique and unexpected tension between the spiritual and the material. Indeed, we cannot discard the possibility that the link between the spiritual and the material is likely to be better exposed in a situation of maladjustment than in one of fusion. Besides, this method of studying tension in order to observe the connection between the mental and the physical is not something new in philosophy. Bergson, Freud, and James, to mention but a few, had recourse to it.

It is no wonder that this strangeness of underdevelopment entails a theoretical split – the very one, indeed, that opposes the neo-Marxist school to modernization theory. For neo-Marxists, the decisive factor – that from which all the symptoms of underdevelopment spring – is economic dependency. Modernization theory, on the other hand, is particularly prone to emphasize cultural and institutional maladjustments, which bolster its analysis of underdevelopment in terms of backwardness. The surprising thing is, however, that the less one school insists on the importance of the one factor, the more it underlines, in a contradictory manner, the decisive role of the neglected factor, thus generating a circular process of interrogation which strongly cries out for a change of perspec-

tive, for a new way of positing the elements of the problem. Such is, I would assert, the contribution that the phenomenon of underdevelopment has made in the reformulation of the old problem of the connection between the mental and the material. I believe that this reformulation is all the more interesting as it is pregnant with the possibility of finding a research direction that would lead to the understanding of underdevelopment.

### **The Philosophical Issue in the Phenomenon of Underdevelopment**

Insofar as modernization theory analyzes development as being dependent on changes in attitudes and values, as Goldthorpe has said, it conceives it as a phenomenon that must basically be explained "by the mind."<sup>1</sup> The same author adds: "economists themselves find development an elusive concept, and . . . tend to refer it to conditions or processes which lie in the realms of psychology or sociology rather than economics."<sup>2</sup>

The main inspiration, if not the founder, of this school is Max Weber, who attempted to explain the origin of capitalism by a cultural change – namely, the adoption of the puritan ethic. Even if all scholars do not agree with the universal necessity of such an ethic to promote development, nevertheless they do accept the general principle: the necessity of cultural change. The understanding that cultural change and causation are necessary for economic development implies that underdevelopment must be the product of cultural maladjustment. The underlying assumption is also obvious: for development to take place it is essential to acquire those values, attitudes and institutions that reflect and favor rationality. Saving and productive investment, by which alone economic growth is possible, require such a rational attitude.

This is to say that the real cause of underdevelopment is the persistence of traditional society, which, as Hagen says, "tends to be custom-bound, hierarchical, ascriptive, and unproductive."<sup>3</sup> Above all, traditionalism is the real cause of poverty, in that it hampers technological innovation and improvement of production methods. Because innovation is discouraged, the other factors (low income, lack of capital, unfavorable geographical conditions, social inequality and instability, etc.) can act as brakes. The prevailing tendency in the modernization school is therefore to equate underdevelopment with backwardness, assuming that "existing institu-

tions and values, the content of tradition, are impediments to changes and are obstacles to modernizations."<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, modernity is achieved when the mental change in the peoples in question is such that innovation has become a need, something desired for its own sake. Sustained growth through continuous innovations is unthinkable short of some such mental transmutation. The desire for mere material gain would require neither the negation of traditional society nor the necessity constantly to innovate; it would be perfectly satisfied within the traditional framework. If, then, innovation becomes a tendency, one should conclude that achievement has become a spiritual need. As Hoselitz stated it: "In order to have economic development, the practice of assigning economic role by ascription, or according to status, must be replaced by the standard of achievement."<sup>5</sup>

However, the more we probe into the premises of the theory of modernization, the less able we are to obviate a growing feeling of malaise. For although the school insists on the determining role of culture, at the same time it presents culture as the main obstacle in overcoming underdevelopment. Since underdevelopment is due to the persistence of traditional values, the mental is conceived as the resisting factor; as such it is unable to produce initiative. Yet it must change for underdevelopment to be overcome. It follows that the change must be externally induced. It can only originate from the advanced countries.

This premise is inherent in modernization theory – indeed, it is a strategy designed to make functional the "catching-up" theory. The advanced countries, it is believed, point the way to progress for the less developed countries. The former are the models that the latter must imitate in order to catch up with them. But the determining factor in the development of the advanced societies and therefore for developing ones comes from without – it is none other than the techno-economic basis of Western societies. So long as cultural change, in which the phenomenon of the innovative entrepreneurial mind is said to arise, is said to be caused by Western technological superiority, as McClelland points out, we are willy-nilly defending the cause of "social Darwinism,"<sup>6</sup> the belief that material environment is the cause of mental change. Let us admit, then, that the school of modernization, which initially had forwarded a spiritualist position by insisting on mental causation, openly contradicts itself by advocating the "catching-up" strategy, which is saturated with materialist assumptions.

A similar inversion awaits us in the neo-Marxist theory of development. From the very failure of modernization theory, the neo-Marxist school draws its main argument. All attempts at modernization become a tragic caricature because they are carried out on a material foundation that itself has not been transformed in advance – particularly in the case of the subordination of poor countries to imperialist powers. Failure is inevitable because of the discrepancy between the externally controlled material basis and the expected internal mental change. All efforts to introduce Western values and institutions into poor countries will not yield the expected results for the simple reason that the economic basis must first be liberated. Therefore the idea of equating underdevelopment with backwardness is wrong. The former is a product of exploitation, the “economic surplus” being “expropriated” by “the metropolitan centers,”<sup>7</sup> whereas backwardness is simply “nondevelopment.”<sup>8</sup>

Philosophically expressed, the analysis of underdevelopment by the neo-Marxist school assumes the derivative nature of the spiritual. The failure of modernization supports this assumption by unveiling the incapacity of the spiritual to condition the material. Such a vision of the connection between the spiritual and the material carries with it the conviction that underdevelopment will be weeded out only if its economic basis is first changed, an idea that leads neo-Marxist thinkers to propose socialism as the only remedy for underdevelopment. As Frank says, “underdevelopment cannot and will not be eliminated by still further capitalist development.”<sup>9</sup>

In this conclusion lies the contradiction. While the economic basis remains underdeveloped, the neo-Marxist school still envisages a transition to socialism, with the aid of some kind of force. Short of being material, this force can only be cultural or spiritual. It is often said that a bypassing of capitalism is possible by means of “the old-age collectivist tradition” of the peasantry.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, to the profound identity between traditional collectivist or egalitarian values and socialism we owe the much-acclaimed reception of socialist ideology by poor countries. Yet such an appeal to a force that is only spiritual hardly conforms, to say the least, to a materialist standpoint.

Moreover, in contradiction to Marx’s prediction that “the cheap prices of . . . commodities are the heavy artillery with which it [the bourgeoisie] batters down all Chinese walls,”<sup>11</sup> capitalism seems unable to penetrate and dissolve precapitalist relations – a fact challenging the decisive nature of economic determinism. As stated by Brewer, “if anything, the super-exploitation of underdevel-

oped countries should mean more rapid development there. . . ."<sup>12</sup> If this fails to occur, does it not mean that capitalism is singularly inefficient in the face of traditional values?

One is forced to conclude from this that the spiritual is surfacing in the neo-Marxist school. Indeed, a trend known as "the mode of production approach" has emerged. This trend analyzes underdevelopment through the concept of articulation rather than dependency. "Peripheral social formations are constituted by the articulated combination of the dominant capitalist mode of production and subordinate, noncapitalist modes of production. The persistence of these modes in articulation with capitalism 'blocks' the expansion of capitalist production relations. . . ."<sup>13</sup> If instead of dissolving themselves, traditional relations thus survive by appropriating capitalist methods, we have lost all grounds for expressing the mental as the mere reflection of material forces. Furthermore, when we see that the school places salvation in socialist ideology, which is esteemed operational even though the material basis is admittedly nonconformable, we are asked simply to acclaim the triumph of ideology. In place of the original materialism, here is unalloyed idealism.

### **The Apriority and Creativity of the Mental**

Let us recall our purpose: it is to see what lessons philosophy can hope to learn from the debate surrounding the notion of underdevelopment in order to clarify the old problem of the relationship between the spiritual and the material. Modernization theory, although it cites as the main factor of economic growth the mental change by which people become entrepreneurial and innovative, at the same time, as we saw, contradicts itself by making cultural change dependent on external factors. The opposition between tradition and modernity can have only one meaning for this school.

Yet it is clear that owing to this opposition modernization theory was deflected from thinking in terms of self-creation. Had modernization theorists suspected that tradition provided the soil in which the modern thrives, that instead of being simply weeded out, "it is rather plucked, created, and shaped to present needs and aspirations in a given historical situation,"<sup>14</sup> then the external causation on account of which it has negated its spiritualist premises would not be necessary. Instead of being opposed to tradition, modernity would be its product.

The same opposition is preventing modernization theory from thinking man as a universal being. How can one present that which is rational as so alien to the traditional without challenging at the same time the generic unity of humanity? If the indigenous cultures, to be modernized, must go out of themselves, one is not explaining mental change by inner mental requirement. The very idea that there can be change toward modernity without this change being imposed from outside implies that it is an inner product of the cultures themselves. The existence of a primitive and common mental impetus inherent in mankind thereby becomes an unavoidable conclusion. Only through such a conclusion can one shun the causal explanation of cultural change, and with it, materialism.

Similar conclusions arise when we attempt to give consistency to neo-Marxist approaches. Though economic determinism is conceived as decisive, it does not account for changed minds; therefore it must be that the mind acts independently. Otherwise how could culture, which is after all considered a mere reflection, develop the force to resist capitalist incursion? Must we not admit the autonomy of the mental and thereby the existence of inner requirements controlling its responses?

And when neo-Marxist thinkers suggest socialism as an effective solution to underdevelopment even though the relevant material basis is lacking, it is because they surreptitiously conceive the mind as capable of self-determination. What poor countries are unable to achieve by means of material forces, it is believed, they can accomplish by the power of ideology. The mind is thought by neo-Marxists in an *a priori* fashion to be sensitive to ideas whose material expressions are not yet realized. It is also invested with the power of self-determination; to make socialism real it will have to move reality instead of being moved by it.

In other words, if causal explanation, be it that of modernization theory or the Marxist notion of economic determinism, proves to be inadequate to account for underdevelopment even though the occurrence of a *sui generis* cultural change remains undeniable, what explanation is left other than that of apriority and self-creation?

The above attributes of the mind become more tangible the more we reflect on a characteristic and peculiar facet of cultural behavior in underdeveloped countries. According to some theoreticians, the penetration of capitalism, far from eliminating traditional values,

rather gives them renewed vigor. Thus Malinowski noted that although colonialism had disrupted the old kinship solidarity, segregation and economic insecurity "throw back sections of the indigenous population on the resources of their own culture."<sup>15</sup> As a result, a new kind of tribal solidarity appeared. For his part, Balandier has shown how nepotism springs from the conflict between the personalized character of traditional relations and the less personalized relations introduced by bureaucracy. He accordingly remarks that "what is regarded as loyalty in the first becomes, because of the break in personal relations and old solidarities, nepotism in the second."<sup>16</sup> These studies suggest that the mind can compensate for material deficiencies by recourse to its own resources. What most theoreticians perceived as a persistence of old values is actually a revaluation by which the mind tries to respond to a new situation by relying on its store of values. The application of past values is therefore an assessment, an inventory whereby a culture evaluates its own resources. Thus the mental acts creatively, and not in a determined fashion; if only because there is nothing to reflect, compensating for a lack makes it into a supplier.

Another illustration is provided by Japanese modernization. Scholars have noted that the Samurai ethic is different from the Protestant ethic, in that it does not favor the individualistic and liberal values of the latter. That so different a spirit could show comparable economic performance must mean that an equivalent to individualism and liberalism was provided by the transmutation of traditional Samurai devotion and fidelity. As Hirshmeier says: "a new element appeared that resembled, in its function, the mentality of the Puritans. It was nothing religious, not a calling by God; it was rather a calling by the nation, by the emperor."<sup>17</sup> The contact between Japanese culture and Western values did not lead to the latter being imposed on the former, but to a revaluation that made possible the application of substitute values.

That modernity can thus show many faces is an indication that we are dealing with a phenomenon endowed with self-creativity. Only an original creative force can take on this or that quality according as the transmutation occurs while remaining intrinsically dynamic; since this adopted state is only a momentary crystallization. Such a phenomenon is never satisfied by what it has accomplished; it seems to be creation for the sake of creation, and thus perfectly corresponds to what Bergson has called vital impe-

tus, or to Nietzsche's will to power. As the impetus "consists in a need of creations,"<sup>18</sup> modernization theory, in order to account for the appearance of the innovative mind without the help of materialist assumptions, must accept such an ontological premise as its own.

The more frankly one accepts the above proposal, the more the various faces of modernity become explicable. As an original and creative impetus always preserves the same elements, the same reservoir of cultural germs, it is more than plausible to assume that equivalent possibilities can evolve in divergent ways. Differences will appear in this case as diverse combinations of the same elements. Speaking of the existence of a vital impetus common to all living species, Bergson wrote that "something of the whole, therefore, must abide in the parts; and this common element will be evident to us in some way, perhaps by the presence of identical organs in very different organisms."<sup>19</sup> A similar logic must be applied to account for the presence of equivalent functions in divergent cultural trends. If cultures can develop equivalent values without going out of themselves, the causal explanation of cultural change must be replaced by an inquiry into the possibility of a "creative evolution."

The task, after all, is not so much to imitate a model as to respond to a challenge. The response is the more effective the more original it is. Were traditional cultures, as modernization theory assumes, merely caused externally, as an effect, their modernity would only be the pale resemblance, the simulacra of their models. For the change to be genuine and effective, it must succeed in being original, that is, self-motivated. To be sure, if underdevelopment seems a caricature of modernity, it is because cultural change is never simply doing what others have done. The force of culture lies solely in its being original, or, to express the same thought in another way: only the self-supporting mind is capable of achievement, and thus of development. And a culture that can rely on and supply itself with its own resources need not imitate.

This truth is empirically verified by the fact that countries that have developed have done so by devising unique and original methods, a fact that led Gerschenkron to write: "No past experience, however rich, and no historical research, however thorough, can save the living generation the creative task of finding their own answers and shaping their own future."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in the same way that imitating Mozart will not make a genius out of a musician, the



road to development seems to be closed for all those nations failing to be original. Hence my belief that the theory of the apriority and creativity of the cultural provides the subjective preconditions for the adoption of behavior conducive to development.

With the theory of mental change by external causation, whether it is through acculturation or economic determinism, one rather defends the idea that it is possible to incite the desire and the will to development through external stimulus. But this amounts to saying that the attitude to development can simply be fabricated. If such were the case, underdevelopment would have been done away with long ago. What the theory overlooks – other than the empirical evidence – is the whole issue of freedom or self-determination. Unless change is internally elaborated, that is, unless it is the product of creativity, no external impulse, however enduring and stringent, can arouse the will to modernity. For change to be a spontaneous outcome, for it to express self-determination, it must of necessity originate from a revaluation of inherent or existing cultural resources. Only then can change express the process of becoming oneself.

There remains, of course, the question of what makes possible changing one's self without losing one's soul. Our answer should be direct: the nature of time, specifically the presence of the past, renders this self-determination possible. Outside the temporal dimension the "creation of self by self"<sup>21</sup> is unthinkable: therefore a correct analysis of the nature of time is essential for our study. Indeed, self-determination or freedom requires that the past be present. Under this condition alone can the future be created instead of being a mere continuation or unfolding of the past. The future should therefore be an alteration of the past. But how can the past be altered unless it is present? In granting this, we conceive of a present that endures, or time as a "perpetual present."<sup>22</sup> This means that time does not unfold but recurs or returns upon itself. Through this return the past is altered, that is, delivered as future. In other words, change is a constant renewal, a sameness within otherness. And this renewal of the past turns the future into indetermination. The latter does not unfold; instead, it implies a moment of elaboration, of creativity whereby it is invested with novelty as a result of the alteration of the past. In short, we owe the novelty of the future to the alteration of the past, and not, as is usually believed, to the unrolling nature of time.

Need we stress that time as perpetual present or recurrence, or

to use Bergson's preferred expression, as "duration," turns the process of change into self-determination? To be sure, in duration change is never induced from outside. Above all, duration indicates how past resources are made into forces of self-creation since the future is reproduced in its indetermination by the renewal of the past. This definitely shows that in mental matters change is but a renaissance. As recorded by history, the now developed countries have all known their own period of renaissance. For instance, Puritanism was espoused as a return to the purity of the original Christian faith. The resurgence of past values in the underdeveloped world are also, I would hold, the palpable sign of an attempt at self-transmutation, even if success is yet to come.

We are thus getting to the heart of the matter: the *a priori* nature and self-motivated creativity of mind alone explain the nature of underdevelopment. That is why the introduction of capitalism did not entail the dissolution of traditional relations and values; nor did it generate a capitalist mind. Cultural change has indeed taken place, but it is more a resurgence than a reflective phenomenon. Past values and relations acquire new significance. This transvaluation or new language indicates how existing material conditions, far from determining, are changed into possible actions. Culture renews itself so as to draw on existing conditions the lines of its possible action. Such is its manner of relying on its own resources. Rather than merely reflecting its environment, it changes in such a way as to take advantage of it.

So underdevelopment is neither backwardness nor the effect of dependency; it is a product of the subsumption of a modern material setting by an untimely mind. On an externally induced material change, through a process of self-creation, culture reads its own possible action: such seems to be the essence of underdevelopment. The error of the modernization school is to assume that the traditional and the modern simply coexist – and therefore to expect the progressive replacement of the one by the other. The error of the neo-Marxists lies in their belief that the problem merely stems from the contradiction between centers and peripheries, thus overlooking the *a priori* function of culture, the subsumption of the economy by a preemptive cultural texture. In reality, both approaches neglect the preexisting mental framework to which, precisely, the economic is made conformable. Just as Kant said that the "object conforms to the nature of our faculty of intuition,"<sup>23</sup> so is underdevelopment, this *sui generis* syncretism of the traditional and the

modern, accountable only through the hypothesis of the *a priori* function of culture. That culture follows its own logic instead of being an effect gives birth to the discrepancy that has struck scholars. Yet this discrepancy finds its natural explanation in the apriority of mind itself.

Though contrary to the neo-Marxist view, my analysis of underdevelopment takes into consideration one of its suggestions: the notion of articulation developed by the mode of production approach. For insofar as the material basis remains deficient, the mind is prone to compensate for this deficiency by supplying traditional devices. In so doing culture is but fulfilling its function: the preservation and protection of collective life. The error lies in the attempt to explain such a phenomenon by means of economic determinism. Obviously, the supply as well as the initiative come from the mind itself. It is nonetheless true that the more the material basis is deficient, the greater is the inclination of the mind to compensate by recourse to traditional values and relations. The "persistence" of tribalism in African societies is a pertinent illustration: the less people can rely on material opportunity, the greater is their attachment to traditional relations. The so-called "persistence" of traditional relations and values in poor countries refers to an act of compensation, that is to say of salvation, rather than to resistance. Underdevelopment is therefore a natural product of the intrusion of capitalism: confronted by capitalism's character, the least a culture can do is mobilize its own resources. Just as a hungry living body tries to survive by secreting the substances that it needs, so are traditional values revitalized by culture whenever the material environment is deficient.

Now what does this analysis promise concerning the means to combat underdevelopment? This is of course a difficult question. However, it is already possible to state that neither acculturation nor revolutionizing material bases will work. Nonetheless, this study suggests not only the possibility of internally inspired mental change, but that this change will become genuine and operational through the revaluation of inherited values. This revaluation is the manner in which substitute modernizing values are elaborated. Only a process of this kind can maintain the free and original mind.

This finding definitely warns us of the vanity of advocating the imitation of external models. We are all the more inclined to propose the latter solution as it corresponds to our habitual course of

thinking, pervaded by the "logic of retrospection."<sup>24</sup> In saying that the advanced countries show the road to progress for the less developed ones, modernization theory as well as the neo-Marxist school both surmise that countries at lower stages, by following the path through which advanced countries have passed, can arrive at the same level. Thus thanks to retrospective logic time is conceived as simply unfolding that which it potentially contains. The advanced nations represent the future of the less developed ones.

But this logic simply forsakes the elements of the problem. The history of the advanced nations is not the future of poor nations for the simple reason that it has excluded them from the outset. Nor can nations pass successively through the same stages, for a path once utilized is exhausted. From this, the necessity of divergent trends is apparent. But what is the divergence? It is not the pursuit of creativity and the search for originality? If so, it demands that we recognize the reality of creation, that we admit that "time is efficacious."<sup>25</sup> Thinking in terms of creation means therefore conceiving development as a product of a breakthrough, and not as an imitation of given models. It cannot be otherwise so long as we are serious about cultural change: we surely mean actual and alternating change and not the repetition of what others have already achieved.

Indeed, were we to mean repetition, we would be putting forth the thesis that there is only one type of cultural change – the Western kind. The change of indigenous cultures would be perceived as a mere standardization. In fact, there would be no more change, but merely process by means of which individual cultures are made to conform to a fixed type. Such a standardization of world culture would certainly point to the demise of all mental *élan*, for as Levi-Strauss said, we would have "to imagine mankind pursuing a single way of life." And in such a case, he adds, "mankind would be ossified."<sup>26</sup>

Should we decide to have a dynamic conception of cultural change, there is but one way: we will have to accept change as a product of divergence, as a process infusing a maximum amount of differences into the sameness of humanity. Nothing other than the act of culture relying on its own resources can explain such a diversity, since its invasion by technological uniformity is already a matter of fact.

To sum up, then, diversity must be the outcome of an act of creation, itself emanating from the recurring nature of temporal exist-

tence. Recurrence ensures the introduction of indetermination into the world. In other words, life will be prevented from giving birth to one type of culture only if its cultural potential is subjected to a recurring process: in this process it alters itself and thus generates new possibilities out of existing resources. This amounts to saying that the apriority and creativity of mind alone can prevent modernization from turning into a slow cultural death of humanity. To the objection that modernization is unthinkable outside the Western type of cultural configuration, in proposing the possibility of substitute modernizing values, this study suggests the potential of modernity for evolving diverse faces. In this way tradition and modernity can indeed be reconciled.

## Notes

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18. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1975, p. 274.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

20. Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*. Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p. 6.

21. Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

22. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*. Philosophical Library, New York, 1946, p. 180.

23. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Everyman's Library, London, New York, 1969, p. 12.

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25. *Ibid.*

26. Claude Levi-Strauss, "Cultural Dynamics and Values," *Approaches to the Science of Socio-Economic Development*. Unesco, Paris, 1971, p. 263.