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# Meaning and Development

Messay Kebede

University of Dayton, mkebede1@udayton.edu

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# INTRODUCTION

Viewed from the angle of its aspirations and desires, the world exhibits two interrelated discrepancies. On the one hand, wealth contrasts with an aspiration for happiness, which is gratified neither as spontaneously nor even as derivatively as the developed world had forecasted. On the other hand, poverty conflicts with an aspiration to partake in wealth, which is satisfied neither as fast nor even as partly as the underdeveloped world would like it to be. However, let there be no misunderstanding: the highly debated antithesis between the rich and poor nations does not intervene here in the way it is usually set. Instead, the failure of the two worlds is put in perspective: the one fails to achieve happiness, the other wealth.

Such a perspective, I believe, offers a better opportunity for the understanding of development and underdevelopment than would the emphasis on their contrast. In this respect, nothing could be more revealing than the belief, shared by many scholars, and exemplified by the proliferation of critical, revolutionary, and utopian theories, that the world, developed and underdeveloped included, is on the wrong track. Even the concept of progress, held in veneration not long ago, is less and less apt to support positive interpretations. Destructive wars, environmental degradations, the persistence of poverty, the prevalence of individualism and competition over communal values, the remoteness of the very significance of life, all have contributed in infusing the sound of the world with a decidedly troubled, if not pessimistic tone. Seeing the accomplishments of development, one wonders whether a desired goal was really achieved, but even more so whether the realizations of development did not require this straying from the way to happiness. In short, properly understood, the failure may indicate the kind of motivation requisite to achieving development. Conversely, the espousal of the aspiration for happiness may appear as the root cause of underdevelopment.

We thus arrive at this equivocal portrait of the world: what the one part of the world possesses, namely wealth, can never provide the happiness that it desires; what the other part of the world desires, namely wealth, can never stem from the actuated drive for happiness. The developed world mistook wealth for



happiness; the underdeveloped world mistook the desire for happiness for a way to wealth. In both cases, disjunction between means and ends occurs: what each pursues is not attainable by the means it has chosen.

Rarely is disjunction so instructive if no attempt at synthesis is made. For what if instead of being on the wrong track, the developed world got what it really wanted, even if now and then it shows some reluctance? Then nothing would be more analytic than the interference in the pursuit of wealth of a motivation other than happiness. No less evident would be the cause explaining the failure of the underdeveloped world: the proper motivation is, as yet, most wanting. Since this motivation is not as natural as the desire for happiness, the need to foster it is more than likely.

What is this motivation? Why and how was it developed? What are the circumstances favoring or hindering its occurrence? These are the important questions to which this book addresses itself. It explores the major theories of development, analyzes their strengths and weaknesses, and evaluates their conformity with facts. It comes up with a proposal: conjectures would converge toward each other as well as on facts, were they to agree on the motivation as being worthiness through worldly success. Nothing except this type of worthiness can demand even the sacrifice of happiness. Some such merit alone can indulge in individualism and competition to the detriment of communal values; it alone can convert social mobility, economic success, and the power of money into indispensable nutriments. In a word, all those aspects by which modernity is usually defined make sense only if they are implanted in the drive toward worthiness.

Though scholars have rightly insisted on the events pertaining to the Renaissance and Reformation in the generation of modernity, they have paid little attention to the influence of scientific method on human motivation. Yet the standard of science is to worthiness what ordeal is to bravery: an irresistible test. However, the impact of science is dependent on cultural frames, for worthiness transpires in the service of transcendence, whatever that transcendence may be. It takes form in the accomplishment of duty involving transcendent commitments. This knot determines the



order of investigation of the book.

The first chapter establishes a connection between economic pursuit and the human quest for meaning. It does so by bringing into relief the role of culture in development, and by giving its philosophical interpretation. The why of the pursuit of wealth appears in conjunction with the pressure exerted on traditional values and beliefs by the normativeness of science. Already the path leading to the understanding of culture change or modernity, or as modernization theorists say, of the need for achievement, as nothing but the thrust of traditional beliefs for validation through worldly success, seems quite negotiable.

The second chapter analyzes the mental process that sets in motion the thrust for modernity. Taking note of the ethical character of the process, it shows how the association of the pursuit of wealth with belief curbs the desire for happiness in favor of ascetic practices. Economic success is explained by ascetic norms, which confirm its being less of a gratification, and more of an offering. A concentrated thought is thus gathered: modernity lies in the transition from the ethics of happiness to the ethics of duty.

The third chapter discusses more particularly the impact of science. Only such a discussion could explain the importance taken by economic interest. As the latter operates by means of impersonal and competitive market relations yielding palpable results, its congruence with scientific validation commands attention. Belief, it appears, is unwilling to dispense with validation. On the other hand, the objectivity and impartiality of such a validation come in support of ethical norms. Worthiness could not have found a better opportunity to assert itself than to undergo the test of worldly success.

The last chapter explains the process of cultural change through the interaction of ethical and scientific norms. A framework is thus established: the need to validate through worldly success leads to transgression resulting in the enhancement of commitments. Modernity emerges as a revival of traditional commitments through the screening action of scientific criteria. Pursuant to the needs of worthiness, both ethical and scientific rules contribute to the triumph of the standard of achievement over



ascriptive values.

Such a definition of modernity is far from implying that in the developed world the standard of achievement rules everywhere and always. Frequent though the falsification of such a standard may be, as evinced by the reappearances of monopolies, associations, and methods of domination, on the whole the developed countries show the trend of maintaining the standard of achievement. Witness, as soon as ascriptive methods start gaining ground, decline follows as a matter of course. The wealth of nations depends less on resources than on the degree to which the distribution of roles and status according to impersonal criteria is carried through. The more distinctly the balance tilts to the side of impersonal norms, the stronger are the forces sustaining modernity. Conversely, the greater the power of ascription, the less significant are the modernizing forces. This last case pertains to underdevelopment.

Evidently, the question of designing a means, a technique to shift the balance in favor of achievement is put aside: in matters of worthiness, no such technique exists. All that can be done is to shake the spiritual tie linking the sense of transcendence with the manner it is actually served. If underdevelopment is assimilated to a betrayal of commitment, then worthiness may thrust its way through worldly success. However, such a solution poses the whole problem of reviving metaphysical anxiety. By raising some metaphysical issues, the conclusion of the book outlines a research direction. Not only do these metaphysical questions display to what extent issues related to wealth acquisition dig themselves into the quest for meaning, but they also indicate that, given sacrifices, it is possible to suffuse with life the frozen, arrested cultures of the poor world.

To conclude, I make a petition to the reader: the intention and the spirit which fashioned the book would gain much in clarity if they were brought under the auspices of the Nietzschean approach to philosophy, which says:

We philosophers are not free to divide body from soul as the people do; we are even less free to divide soul from spirit. We are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards

removed: constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe . . . I doubt that such pain makes us 'better'; but I know that it makes us more *profound*.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty, I dare say, will be defeated the day the poor world will convert the desire for material betterment into the thrust for profundity. That is what culture change is all about.