

OVERALL AND PROSPECTIVE HISTORY OF THE THIRD WORLD

Our capacity to foresee the lengthy life and the prospective techniques which are available to us has not essentially altered in the last 25 years, at a time when the *field of possibles* has been considerably widened by the exponential growth of our material and intellectual out-puts. Furthermore, as scientific revolutions, in the sense in which T. Kuhn intends this term,¹ are becoming increasingly frequent and are affecting very different areas, one has leave to count upon the continuation of this widening process in the field of possibles, despite the constraint imposed by the finite quantity of identified and identifiable resources, at least on the scale of our planet. In other words, we do not think that this accelerated destruction of the environment (which is the main feature of our industrial

Translated by Simon Pleasance.

¹ T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962.

civilisation) is beyond control, and that one should consequently preach—as various Jeremiah prophets are doing—a planetary Neo-Malthusianism extending to all the resources and expressed by the thinly veiled rejection of the right to industrialise for those countries still waiting to join the ‘rich man’s club.’² But suddenly our ascendancy over the ever more diversified future grows slighter and slighter, because the prospective is stamping its feet; and this is a paradoxical and troubling consequence of the acceleration of the history in which we have to live. The widening of the field of possibles implies, moreover, an increase of *choices*. These choices are being made constantly, sometimes explicitly, but mostly implicitly: large options are sliced up by decisions of a minor order, and this obscures but does not lessen their significance.

In these conditions the prospective acquires an importance with which it is not always credited, in spite of the current fashion which recognises certain futurological studies.

Shall we, one day, reach a scientific prospective based on the reasonably exhaustive exploration of the field of probable possibles, on the explicit expression of the choices, and on the criteria for choices? In a recent article which appeared in *Diogenes*,³ Robert L. Heilbroner cast some doubt on the very possibility of the long-term economic forecast in the face of the impossibility of forecasting the evolution of science and technology and their impact on the economy. We do not share this author’s prospective agnosticism, which is, incidentally moderated in the course of the article by the appeal to build, nonetheless, all-encompassing hypotheses. Most of all we do not think that the rhythm of technological development is a definitive determining factor for the social and economic evolution of mankind. The heuristic value of the Marxist paradigm results from the emphasis placed on the feedbacks between base and superstructure; it is this which favourably distinguishes Marx’s theory from other attempts to explain history in a nomothetic and materialist way—such as Rostow’s—, attempts based on a

² See, for example, the symptomatic essay by Paul R. Ehrlich, called “Famine 1975: Fact or Fallacy?,” which appeared in *The Environmental Crisis*, ed. by H. W. Helfrich Jr., New Haven, 1970.

³ Robert L. Heilbroner, “On the Limits of Economic Prediction,” *Diogenes*, No. 70, Summer 1970.

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mechanistic model whereby development is essentially the function of the growth of productive forces and where, by implication, there is only one "normal" path of industrialisation, which gives the historical process a strictly unilinear aspect.

Apart from a few exceptions, however, the prospective has, at the present time, committed itself to two paths which in our opinion are equally sterile, and in this sense we subscribe to Heilbroner's pessimism—for the time being in any case. The first step is to parcel up social reality and construct scenarios starting from hypotheses on scientific and technological progress and from projections on the level of the national income *per capita*. We shall say, simply, that it suffers from an irreparable lack of sociological and historical imagination. It is not, in fact, possible to apply scientific reflection to the future—as A. Schonfield recently stressed—if society is not analysed with a view to its totality and to its evolution.⁴

The other step, on the other hand, projects the industrial consumer society, as we know it today in the United States, in Western Europe, and, more and more, in the Soviet Union, as a universal model, and as the only possible one. It is strange to see that public opinion in the Third World has fallen in to this trap by taking the concept of *deviation* to be the basis of discussion for its claims and demands. In the first instance it is a question of a quantitative index which measures the distance separating the established countries from the countries of the Third World in terms of national income *per capita*—a yardstick which is doubly imperfect as a comparison of standards of living because it does not take into account either the huge disparities in the social allotment of the income, or of the fact that the level of the standard of living depends on the ebb and flow of the income as well as of the previously accumulated stock of company and private capital. Then one slides towards an acceptance of the design of civilisation of the established countries as the model to be copied, and one starts calculating the number of years necessary to achieve this. Calculations such as these can only create a state of frustration, not to mention the fact that they completely overlook the real problem, which consists in working out an original design for civilisation and applying its

⁴ A. Schonfield, "Thinking about the Future," *Dialogue*, Vol. II, 1969, No. 4.

realisation as quickly as possible without paying too much homage to the deviation.

To our way of thinking, then, the essential task for any research in to the prospective of the Third World is to construct a sufficiently general and all-encompassing typology (but still firmly anchored in reality) of the *paths of development*, on a level of generality which is below that of the *methods of production*—in the sense given to this term by the Marxists, and taking into account the concrete and composite forms of the economic systems.⁵ At the same time, these studies should exceed the far too narrow frame of other such studies, and they should not founder in total empiricism. In other words, we are postulating an application of the analysis of the systems to the historical material.

Of course, the analysis of the systems appears here only as a very general methodological direction and as a desire to tackle the description of the structures as well as the explanation of their functioning and the process of development, expressed at various turning-points in history by structural mutations. Incidentally, various eminent specialists such as von Bertalanffy or Rapoport are of this opinion: they were the first to guard against the temptation of a direct and immediate application of the analysis of systems to man's knowledge.⁶ The general problematic of development can be fairly well translated into cybernetic language, as Lange⁷ has shown, but here again we do not think that one should count on the direct applications of cybernetics for an analysis of the paths of development, as considered on a concrete and historical level. In a word, we withhold from the analysis of systems a paradigm (in the sense in which T. Kuhn intends this term, in the work already quoted) in order to orientate the course of our thought.

Considering the study of development (and thus of under-

⁵ Here we are simply adopting the extremely relevant suggestions formulated by the Polish sociologist Julian Hochfeld in his book *Studia o Marksowskiej Teorii Społeczeństwa* [Studies on the Marxist Theory of Society], Warsaw 1963.

⁶ See, especially, L. von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, New York 1963 and A. Rapoport, *Mathematical Aspects of General Systems Analysis in the Social Sciences Problems and Orientations*, UNESCO 1968.

⁷ O. Lange, *Całosc i Rozwoj w Świetle Cybernetyki* [The Whole and Development in the Light of Cybernetics], Warsaw. (There is an English translation of this work.)

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development) on a practical level, this implies three attitudes:

(a) The accent on the worldwide nature of the process of development and, similarly, on the systematic aspect of underdevelopment;

(b) The need to prepare the action by way of elaborating a worldwide strategy of long term structural transformations. It is in this context that we meet the problem of the already mentioned mutations, or if one prefers, the passages from one socio-economic system to another.

Marx's great merit lies in the fact that he gave this problem an explicit formulation, if not a solution; because to talk of the irreducible character of the dialectical transformation—as Sartre does for example⁸—is to recognise our (anyway present) impotence in the face of this crucial problem. In our opinion, the historical study of these mutations (and in particular of the passages from the *dissipatory* model to the *accumulative model*, then to the *dissipatory-accumulative model* and eventually to the *accumulative-distributive model* of the generation and appropriation of the surplus) is the only one possible, because it is a matter of a small series of events to which it is impossible to apply directly any tendential laws which rely on the law of large numbers; all the more so because there is cause to consider, for each national sub-system considered, the incidences of the whole world system at each moment integrated by fairly different sub-systems. In addition, the models of the generation and appropriation of the surplus should make a very wide space for the variables which are traditionally called non-economic, and this brings us to the very tricky problem which has been badly studied of the different rhythms of development of the different levels of human activity.

(c) The recourse to the inter-disciplinary made legitimate by the worldwide nature of social progress and very different from what is generally done in its name and which consists in simply juxtaposing the fragmentary views of each discipline.

These attitudes begin tapping the study of development and they take the form of a triple surpassing of the starting-points, such as sketched on the morrow of the second world war, that

⁸ See, for example, J.-P. Sartre, *Questions de Méthode*, Paris 1960.

is to say at the time when the Third World was discovered (and baptised) by the social sciences:

a) Progressive widening of the very concept of development, originally assimilated to economic growth;⁹

b) Progressive abandonment of attitudes radiating from Europe which, nevertheless, still dominate a large part of contemporary social thinking and the technical sciences;

c) Lessening of the partitioning between the different disciplines, sanctioned by the 19th century university tradition and still very tenacious.

If, then, there are some positive signs in the evolution of the contemporary social sciences, there is still an awfully long way to go before one can entice the construction of the typologies mentioned above. In the meantime, the task which is most urgent seems to us to be that of profiting from the theoreticians and practitioners of development, and of acquiring historical knowledge (or rather a certain historical knowledge which will be defined later). There are two reasons for this.

On the one hand, the analysis of socio-economic structures does not have much meaning, from the operational viewpoint at least, outside a diachronic perspective; in this sense we are partisans of a genetic structuralism which extends to the sphere of the social sciences where the problems are nonetheless posed in a more complex manner than in psychology or biology.¹⁰ As the action should provoke, the "development" (whatever the definition of this may be) consists either in inflecting any progress under way or in enticing new progress—the temporal dimension being essential; one strategy of development is, essentially, the *written order* of the steps anticipated in view of the modification of the state or of the structure of the system in accordance with a worldwide objective and considered as realisable in the light of the analysis of the initial state and of the processes under way within the system.

⁹ With regard to this, it is worth stressing the new works of the United Nations Institute for Social Development in Geneva.

¹⁰ With regard to the synthesis imposed between the structure and the genesis, see J. Piaget, *Le Structuralisme*, Paris 1968. One could reach the same conclusions by starting from an "open" Marxism, as one could with the attainments of the structural method.

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On the other hand, historians who are faithful to the conception of a "world" history centred on the lengthy duration and the functioning of the socio-economic mechanisms and not on the 'events' of history, postulating, to the limit, as does Fernand Braudel, an "operational history,"¹¹ these historians have to offer the theoreticians and practitioners of development a very rich methodological experience, a *paradigm* capable of being transposed to the current problematic of development, a manner of parting from the universal for the detailed and then recomposing the universal as a process.

This step and the sense of duration are two essential elements for the formation of the specialist in development. But the relation between world history and the theory of development do not stop here. We think that there is good cause to talk of a real symbiosis—on three different levels.

First and foremost, the study of certain actual situations strikingly clarifies certain problems of the past. Thus, Minas Velhas, a small dormant town in the interior of Bahia, and written about some fifteen years ago by an anthropologist, enables the historian to refine his knowledge of the "petty" capitalism of mediaeval shopkeepers.¹² At the same time, the field of possible journeys through time and space is considerably widened. And if one should here mention the usual incantations on the danger of ill-conceived comparisons, we nevertheless think that the comparative method, when well used, constitutes the essential measure used by the researcher in social sciences, who is interested by operational problems: the only substitute available to him is the laboratory experiment. If therefore one proscribes hasty imitations and the projection of particular historical experiences to models of universal importance, it is at the same time necessary to insist on the capital importance of reconciliations through time and space, if only to enrich the researcher's imagination. Let us also say, in passing, how regrettable we find the fact that the United Nations have not set up a really efficient apparatus in the field of the exchange of information between those countries which are, so-called, on the path of development.

¹¹ Lecture given at the Warsaw University on April 23rd, 1967, and published in Polish in *Historyka, Studia Metodologiczne*, Warsaw 1969.

¹² See the article by F. Braudel on the book by M. Harris, "Town and Country in Brazil," in F. Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'Histoire*, Paris 1969, pp. 239-254.

The setting-up of some such South-South communication network and the elaboration of a vast programme of comparative studies on the concrete level seem to us to be two of the main priorities of the second decade of development.

Then, in certain works by contemporary historians, one comes across a more or less explicit preoccupation about the actual problematic of development. Their thought is impregnated with knowledge of the literature on the Third World and the interest which they take in its future by the assimilation of the economic theories of growth. The model of the functioning of feudal Polish economy taken by Kula¹³ owes its originality to the fact that the author asked himself questions which were inspired by the theory of growth, and the same spirit pervades the study of the Peasants of Languedoc by Le Roy Ladurie.¹⁴ One is tempted to say that historians, in their turn, assimilate certain paradigms of the economy of development. Starting from an historical study of the English case, Hobsbawm broaches the capital question of the constellation of the factors for the emergence of the industrial revolution; it is in this way that his chapter on the origin of the industrial revolution becomes compulsory reading for anyone studying the economy of development.¹⁵ To close this list of examples (which could easily have been made longer), we shall say that beyond an historical essay on Chinese time-pieces, Cipolla, in reality, poses a capital question for the Third World of today: that of the conditions which should be assembled to produce a scientific revolution.¹⁶

Lastly, on a plane which is more directly linked to the operational problematic of development, we are witnessing a real flourish of works, the distinctive feature of which is that the authors are development economists who are re-questioning history. The prototype of these books is the one by Celso Furtado, a Professor of Economy and for a time Minister of

¹³ W. Kula, *Teoria Ekonomiczna Ustroju Feudalnego* [Economic Theory of the Feudal System], Warsaw 1962; French transl., Paris 1970.

¹⁴ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Paysans de Languedoc*, Paris 1969.

¹⁵ We refer to chap. 2 of the work by E. Hobsbawm, called *Industry and Empire* (Vol. 3 of the Pelican Economic History of Britain, London 1969).

¹⁶ C. M. Cipolla, "Clocks and Culture," an essay published in the volume, *European Culture and Overseas Expansion*, London 1970.

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Planning; it deals with the Economic Formation of Brazil.¹⁷ This book follows on the heels of the serialisation allowed by other authors and which consists in dividing up the economic history of Brazil into successive "cycles" of mono-production,¹⁸ and the interest it holds does not lie in such and such a contribution to already acquired knowledge of the facts, but in the manner in which the historical material is dealt with. In fact, Furtado makes every effort to build for each "cycle" a true model of economic functioning. Strictly speaking a purist could accuse him of being invertedly anachronistic, because the models answer the questions of a specialist in contemporary development, but the whole interest of the book is precisely in this innovating effort of conceptualisation and in the implicit acceptance of the need to anchor all development policies in a firmly established historical perspective. Furthermore, the author insists on the fact that his book tries hard to analyse the economic processes and not to reconstruct the historical facts which subtend them. Furtado's work has been the basis of a school in Latin America, judging from the writings of authors such as Annibal Pinto, Oswaldo Sunkel, Aldo Ferrer, and many others.

The same tendency towards a constantly renewed questioning of history by non-historians is illustrated by the work of a Japanese economist, Ishikawa; it is boldly entitled: *Economic Development in Asian Perspective*.¹⁹ This is a very serious and well documented attempt to show, in opposition to fairly widespread theses, that Japan could not be held as an example for the development of the countries of South-East Asia. The illustration is made by a double step. Ishikawa shows that the present-day problems of South-East Asia are similar to those facing Japan after the Meiji Restoration. Then he tried to give evidence of the existence in Japan of a complex of factors which are not present in the contemporary Asiatic situation. It would be quite another problem to know if the Japanese model is desirable, but this problem goes beyond the scope of the work

¹⁷ C. Furtado, *Formação Económica do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 5th Edition, 1963.

¹⁸ See, especially, Caio Prado Jr., *Historia Económica do Brasil*, Sao Paulo 1954.

¹⁹ S. Ishikawa, *Economic Development in Asian Perspective*, Tokyo 1967.

in question. Whatever the case, books like that by Ishikawa constitute contribution to typological analysis, in as far as Japan functions today, on the ideological level, like a model—the model of accelerated growth capitalism, speeded up by an unparalleled disaster to the environment, and subtended by a very unfair distribution of the social income.

The few examples mentioned above make up, in our opinion, a sufficiently coherent picture for specialists in development and historians to decide to make a common cause and thus clear the way towards a prospective, which is at once more scientific and more imaginative, of the future of the Third World. This work should be pursued on two interdependent planes: the plane of comparative analysis of the development experiments, and the plane of theoretical discussion about the place fixed for an interdisciplinary theory of development in the whole complex of man's knowledge, and the methods likely to lead us there.