

**AN ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNICATION: MISSIONARIES, MAX-NEEF AND THE UNIVERSAL
NEED FOR TRANSCENDENCE**

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to isolate a “sufficient condition” for development communication to succeed. It juxtaposes two case studies - the 19th Century Christian missionaries as a developmental success story, and the malign influence of Soviet ideology as a developmental failure - and analyses these case studies in the light of a variety of so-called “alternative theories” of development. Human Scale Development, as articulated by Manfred Max-Neef, emerges as being the most instructive of these paradigms. Max-Neef sought to identify the key “satisfiers” which would enable true development to occur. It is argued that many of the processes and activities that typically accompanied the communication of the message of Christianity to southern African answer to the “satisfiers” that Max-Neef’s schema calls for. The enquiry further argues that humankind’s fundamental need for transcendence is the only need which, if satisfied, will of necessity culminate in true individual and, by extension, community development. This line of thinking ultimately draws its inspiration from the Ancient Greek concept of eros which is seen to have informed the early missionary movement’s message of hope and faith.

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the late 1970s, a so-called “alternative” cluster of development approaches came to the fore in reaction against the then dominant paradigm of economic growth. Prominent amongst these new approaches were Human Scale Development, Participatory Development, and Populism.

This article will use these different approaches as lenses to try and solve a conceptual development puzzle that has far-reaching practical implications. This conundrum is that so much well-funded modern development effort has failed to achieve lasting results, whereas less materialistic social interventions have had major developmental impacts.

The article examines this puzzle from the perspective of two historical case studies. The first of these is the 19th Century missionary effort in southern Africa which qualifies as a development miracle spanning 150 years. The second is the Soviet economy. This was a human catastrophe that imploded after some 70 years but that still exerts a malign influence on many African states, Angola being a case in point.

These two scenarios will be explored in an effort to extract some common denominator that might serve to account for the success of the “miracle” and the failure of the “catastrophe”. The emphasis will however be on the positive case study, and on the Human Scale Development approach.

As the argument unfolds, it should become clearer that what is being sought for are the “satisfiers” that will help complete Manfred Max-Neef’s “Needs and Satisfiers Matrix” in respect of the crucial (and almost overlooked) fundamental need of “transcendence” (Max-Neef 1991: 32-33). The notion of “transcendence” is therefore pivotal to what follows.

During the course of the argument it will become evident that the rubric, “alternative theories of development”, is a misnomer, and that these more human-centred approaches to development in fact pre-dated the so-called mainstream approaches. It will also become clear that the Human Scale Development paradigm *must* inform the core of developmental community communications and work if one is not to substitute mere mass-modernisation for genuine development.

Before proceeding however, it is necessary to fight a preliminary rearguard action against the most alternative approach of them all – post- or anti-development. For it is only by arguing the case for moral imperatives to action that we can salvage the argument for any kind of development at all. This will highlight the central argument of the paper: That “development” is an intrinsically moral endeavour, which depends fundamentally on the concept of transcendence of the human condition.

“ANTI-DEVELOPMENT” COUNTERED

There is no shortage of scholars calling for development to be abandoned. De Rivero (2001: 1-10) for instance says that, for many Third World countries, development has not worked, and it never will, because they are inherently “non-viable national

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economies". Instead, he advocates a retreat into bare survival. Munck (1999: 200) approvingly quotes Esteva that "development stinks!", while Sardar (1999: 46,57) professes to find in development nothing less than the "Eurocentric colonisation of time" against which he proposes the "Islamization of knowledge" (and much else besides). Nustad (2001: 480) cites Sachs and Escobar as seeing the "past 40 years of development as a direct continuation of the colonial project". According to Tucker (1999: 2) "development is not a natural process although it has been accorded such a status in the mythology of Western beliefs". Santos (1999: 35), echoing Escobar (1995: 215), argues that instead of "looking for models of alternative development the time has come to create alternatives to development". Escobar (1995: 213) also claims that development is "an all-powerful mechanism for the production and management of the Third World in the post-1945 period". And so on.

Pieterse (1999: 73,79) perhaps gets to the heart of the problem though when he asks, rhetorically, "Who are we to intervene in other people's lives?", and speaks of "the insurmountable arrogance of intervening". This is a valid question. Who indeed do those who advocate development think they are?

Interestingly enough it was Pieterse himself (in Haines 2000: 57) who pointed out, apropos of the "anti-development" lobby, that "despite a stringent critique of developmental discourse, no coherent and viable alternatives to development are offered". This sentiment is echoed by other commentators and, while no doubt valid, has a defeatist ring about it. It seems to imply that one might as well muddle along with development, until something better crops up. But the anti-development movement's arguments can be countered in any number of ways. The following outlines but one approach.

Cooper (2002: 91-92) makes the point that "the idea that human populations could evolve and progress was a very old one – that states should intervene to shape such a process much less so". Development as a self-consciously state-driven socio-economic activity (a "project"?) only really came to the fore in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. At that time it was essentially a matter of stimulating national economic growth. Modern day development thus had its secular genesis in macro-economics.

Economics postulates a conceptual entity called "Economic Man". Economic Man is concerned with "maximising pools of net utility" which is to say that he always acts in his own enlightened, rational self-interest. All things being equal, economists' models can predict to a fair degree of accuracy what Economic Man will do in any set of circumstances. Economic Man may not, superficially, appear to be a selfish being though. This is because he is quite capable of short-term self-sacrifice with a view to maximising his long-term gains. Economics could not function without Economic Man but needless to say Economic Man, like "The Average Person", does not exist in actuality. He is no more than a useful notional construct but some scholars forget this. Economic Man answers to what is known in moral philosophy as an egoist (not to be

confused with an egotist) and is in fact a moral zombie – he would sell his own family into slavery if it furthered his ultimate purposes.

Nation states often have an unfortunate tendency to act a bit like Economic Man. This is to say that nation states, answerable to their taxpayers, tend to operate on a *quid pro quo* basis. The same holds true of commercial undertakings, answerable to their shareholders, who calculate the success of their “corporate responsibility” programmes in terms of Return on Investment (ROI). These entities cannot “give” in the true sense of the word because they are institutions who administer the assets of others in whose interests they act. Their aim is to *exact leverage*, to make strategic trade-offs, to maximise market share and power. But ultimately, at the coal face so to speak, it is human beings who “deliver” development to communities, human beings who talk to communities – not states and not economies.

Given development’s strong economic underpinnings, too many critics make the mistake of conflating Economic Man with Social Man. By so doing they discount the possibility of disinterested human goodness, of doing “the right thing” for no other reason than that it is the right thing. Munck, Sardar and their ilk function within a hermeneutic (to use their jargon) of constant suspicion. “What’s in it for them?” is the stock response to acts of genuine philanthropy. Regrettably, this may say more about them than it does about the benefactors’ motivations.

We cannot speak of truly liberating development unless we allow for the possibility of disinterested altruism, of unconditional giving – “duties undertaken...not for power or profit but under moral and religious impulses” (Johnson 2003: 22). That we are therefore speaking of a *moral* imperative to develop is central to what follows and this will be elaborated on in the context of Max-Neef’s Human Scale Development.

CASE STUDY 1: THE CHRISTIANISATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The spread of Christianity among the indigenous peoples of southern Africa began in earnest with the establishment of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the Cape in 1799. Arguably one of the most important phenomena to have occurred in South African history, its runaway success has been “almost totally ignored by scholars” (Elphick 1997: 7). What concerns us here however is not the number of souls the missionaries might claim to have been instrumental in saving. It is rather the extraordinary zeal with which Africans embraced Christianity (Elphick 1997: 4; Sanneh 2003) and the massive development which this enthusiasm brought in its wake. As will become apparent during the course of this discussion, we are looking at communication precipitating what could be deemed a developmental miracle which has, astonishingly enough, been all but swept under the carpet of history.

If development attracts the ire of scholars of an anti-Western persuasion, then it is cold distaste with which they castigate the missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa. Never can a group of persons who honestly believed they were doing good, and who achieved so much, have been subjected to such a studied campaign of vilification and

abuse by so many (cf. Prozesky 1995: 265-274). The following may serve to illustrate the point.

In 1994 the eminent expatriate South African professor, Dan Jacobson, published an article touching on the mission at Kuruman in the Northern Cape province. After presenting his credentials to express himself on the subject, he wrote of the missionaries' interest in African languages: "They barely discuss the matter... generally they write as if the linguistic problem simply did not exist" (Jacobson 1994a: 3). The insinuation is that they were too haughty and arrogant to descend to communicating via the indigenous languages. Anyone with even a shallow acquaintance with the missionary literature will know, however, that this is a gross error, if not a calculated perversion of the truth meant to cast aspersions on the integrity of the missionaries, and to belittle their labours.

The missionaries' concern with acquiring the ability to communicate in indigenous languages bordered on the obsessive, so eager were they to produce translations of the Bible and to preach in the local vernacular. Their correspondence and their journals bear ample testimony to this. Couzens (2003: 117,127) reveals that it was Paris Evangelical Society policy "that preaching was never to be done through an interpreter" and that the missionary Mabile was sufficiently fluent on his first arrival at Morija in 1861 to deliver a sermon in Sesotho. Couzens, himself an erstwhile professor of African literature, goes on to record that, were it not for the missionaries, it is doubtful whether an indigenous African literature would ever have emerged. In Natal, Harriette Colenso "achieved a marked command of the Zulu language without which she would have been much handicapped in the work she chose to do" (Nicholls 1995: 173). Such refutations of Jacobson could be multiplied *ad infinitum* (Opland 1997; Prozesky 1995: 93,114,168,184; Schoeman 1991: 39,98).

The missionaries entered into a terrain that was in the process of being devastated by the *Mfecane* (holocaust). Far from their setting out to destroy African customs, as has been alleged by a black Methodist bishop (*Mail and Guardian* 4 July 2003: 5), the missionaries' intention was frequently to assimilate with African societies as much as they could without doing violence to their Christian values (Hodgson 1997: 70; Japha, Japha, Le Grange & Todeschini 1993: 30; Prozesky 1995: 276). Those practices that they *did* condemn (many but by no means all – cf. De Kock 1996: 102; Giliomee 2003: 454) were on the grounds of them being incompatible with Christianity, and *not* because they were African *per se*.

Chief amongst the practices which elicited their displeasure were inter-tribal slavery, and the trafficking in children and "black ivory", i.e. adult human beings (Eldredge 1995: 148; Kilby 2001: 243; Prozesky 1995: 18); cannibalism (Cope 1977: 184; Prozesky 1995: 22); the feeding of human corpses to domestic dogs (Cope 1977: 306; Hodgson 1997: 76); the sometimes appalling treatment of women (Brain 1997: 198; Hodgson 1997: 74; Prozesky 1995: 20-1,26 n.23); infanticide (Prozesky 1995: 23 n.7); the ravages of the trade in firearms and Cape brandy; and so forth. In plain language

this amounted to what they considered “barbarism” and the missionaries opposed it in the face of fierce resistance from tribal chiefs, white settlers and slavers, and sometimes the colonial authorities themselves (see for example Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 274-5). This catalogue of horrors is intended to throw into sharp relief the positive good that came to be accomplished.

It must be clearly understood that the missionaries’ overriding concern was the communication of the Gospel and the salvation of the indigenous people’s souls (Prozesky 1995: 92,263,274) and *not* their personal development. They measured their performance by the number of converts they made. They did not come primarily to build educational complexes such as the Lovedale Institute (Shepherd 1941); to establish orphanages, and world-class hospitals such as those of Mariannahill (Brain 1997: 199); to establish extensive small scale farming, and agricultural schools (Brain 1997: 199; Simon 1959); to introduce pigs, ducks, geese, turkeys, and cats for the control of domestic vermin (Couzens 2003: 85); to establish burial societies and *stokvels* (Simon 1959: 220); to send promising black students to study at European universities (Hodgson 1997: 84); to formulate the orthographies for several indigenous languages (Opland 1997); to establish numerous newspapers and printing presses and to write the histories of the indigenous peoples, as well as to publish indigenous historians writing in their mother tongues (Opland 1997); to establish viable self-sustaining settlements that grew into towns; to advance the political rights of black people (Hodgson 1997: 84); to be instrumental in the founding of the African National Congress (Hodgson 1997: 87); to introduce the market system for produce and arts and crafts (Hodgson 1997: 80); to pioneer women’s groups (Gaitskell 1997); to instil literacy (Prozesky 1995: 307-10,332), and so forth. But all this they did anyway, as an incidental extra to spreading the Gospel. And they suffered grievous hardship in the process (Kilby 2001; Schoeman 1994).

It was a remarkable achievement which reached its apex over a period of about 150 years in 1948 when the Nationalist government came to power. This government then unfortunately set out to work against what the missionaries had achieved (Japha *et al.* 1993). While the government of the day attacked the institutions, a new breed of radical historians and theologians (Cochrane 1987; Lewis 1988; Villa-Vicencio 1988) arose which set about systematically undermining the missionaries’ reputation (Prozesky 1995: 265-74). In Jacobson’s words the missionaries “remain guilty as charged” (1994b: 117). Guilty of *what exactly* one might ask. Guilty of helping people realise their potentials? Guilty of precipitating beneficial change? (See Prozesky 1995 for a spirited rebuttal of some of the missionaries’ more hostile critics). Here lies the key to the reactionary undertone that characterises so much of the radical left’s theological discourse. At heart it still harbours a romantic yearning for the feudal and the “traditional” (cf. Cochrane 1987; Lewis 1988; Sardar 1999).

What should be of especial interest to students of development communication though is how incredibly successful most of the missionary “projects” were, and how effectively they communicated their message. How did they manage this on a financial

shoestring, and in the face of state and societal hostility? What approaches to communication and development were unwittingly being given expression to in the process of the Christianisation of southern Africa?

CASE STUDY 2: THE CALAMITOUS DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET RUSSIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AFRICA

After widespread acclamation by Western intellectuals of Stalinism (Lilla 2001: ix-xiii) it is only since the end of the Cold War in 1990, and the opening up of the Russian archives, that the true extent of the depravity of Communist Russia is beginning to come to light (see for example Werth 2007).

Communism's total suppression of religion brought in its wake parallels to all of the "barbarisms" mentioned in the foregoing section. For the *Mfecane* there were Stalin's purges. The Soviet's industrial development was grounded in forced (i.e. slave) labour. Thousands of Gulag labour camp inmates were reduced to cannibalism. Bodies were cast out to the wolves. Instead of the sniffing out of witches, Stalin's police, working on quota systems, would arbitrarily arrest citizens to stock the labour camps (Applebaum 2004; Werth 2007). As Minogue (2003: 9) puts it: "Far from forging ahead into the modern world [the Soviets] lost much of their moral and social capital and ended up with an obsolete rusting industry built over a pile of corpses." Part One of the voluminous *Black Book of Communism* (Courtois, Werth, Panné, Paczkowski, Bartosek & Margolin 1999) itemises the crimes of the Soviet regime in exhaustive detail for those who have the stomach to read it.

In a discussion of the environmental and human devastation wrought by Communist development in the Ukraine, Vovk and Prugh (2003: 14) come directly to the point: "Soviet development philosophy was suicidal." The legacy of Stalinism still disfigures virtually all aspects of everyday life in present-day Russia. For purposes of this study, there is little need to belabour the matter any further, other than perhaps to flag the calamitous impact of the Soviet's "developmental" ideology on Africa. A brief examination of the fate of Angola may suffice to illustrate just how pernicious an influence this was.

In 1950 Angola was described as being "the largest, richest and most important portion of the Portuguese Colonial Empire" (Cardoso 1950: 14). Its chief exports by value were coffee, maize, sisal and diamonds, in that order (Cardoso 1950: 130-1). The Angola Development Fund's major projects included hydro-electric installations, and the survey and construction of transport infrastructure (Cardoso 1950: 87). Angola was recognised as being a country of "immense" natural resource-based wealth and "developmental potential" but in the early 1960s the country descended into war against the colonial authorities, and by the turn of the century, 25 years after independence, "much of the infrastructure had been destroyed or had been left to decay and most sectors of the economy" were producing less than they had before independence with the signal exception of the oil industry (Hodges 2001:7).

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Immediately following the withdrawal of the Portuguese army in July 1974 “the Soviet Union significantly increased its financial and military support to the MPLA faction” – many of whose cadres “had been trained in the USSR in the 1960s and were well versed in the prevailing Marxist-Leninist theories... of scientific socialism” (Santamaria 1999: 696-7).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to chronicle the brutality and chaos that Angola descended into after the MPLA came to power in 1975 and simultaneously declared a one-party state. Suffice it to say that Soviet-inspired scientific socialism “proved disastrous... causing the collapse of both industrial and agricultural production” (Meredith 2005: 602) and the effective “pauperisation of the population” (Hodges 2001: 52) all within a period of 15 years. Certainly the colonial power had left Angola ill-prepared for independence, and the destabilising effects of the war in neighbouring South West Africa (Namibia) hardly helped matters, but the new country could not have chosen a worse role model to emulate than the Soviet Union, by way of fashioning what Hodges (2001) has termed the “Afro-Stalinist” state.

STATEMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM

The preceding two scenarios give rise to many questions, some of which will be addressed in the course of the upcoming discussion. There is however an extraordinary dichotomy between the two case studies which suggests the central problem that will be dealt with here. It is this:

Why do some development projects that appear to have nothing going for them, succeed, whereas others that may even have a world power backing them, fail?

How is it that a band of indifferently educated working class people managed, during an age when “development” as we understand it had not even been conceived of yet, to achieve so much under the most unfavourable of circumstances? What did they have that we today are blind to?

From a cursory overview of the case studies, it appears that there are three key dimensions to effective development: participation, paternalism and populism. As the ensuing sections will show, participation enables empowerment; paternalism implies a sense of duty; and populism enables people to transcend the crass materialism of their surroundings. The act, and indeed the art, of communication is immanent within all three of these developmental dimensions.

One reads in the development literature of such-and-such a factor being a “necessary but not sufficient” condition for development to succeed. Could it be that development has its own “Holy Grail” – an elusive *sufficient* condition such that it – *and it alone* – might guarantee success? This study will attempt to show that there may well be a sufficient condition for development and will now proceed to try and identify that condition.

The participatory approach

That development miscarried in the Soviet Union partially due to a lack of participation by the unfortunate “beneficiaries” seems obvious. The denial of participation would readily explain what Vovk and Prugh (2003: 2) identify as “a widespread sense of powerlessness, distrust of institutions, and apathy” – and this 13 years after the end of the Cold War. Similarly in Angola “a continuing climate of fear” resulting from the “overtly totalitarian one-party system... unencumbered by any form of electoral accountability” (Hodges 2001:168) effectively annulled any nascent participatory ethos that the fact of independence might have kindled. But the example of China should prevent one jumping to conclusions. China has seen phenomenal development during the selfsame period and is hardly less of an authoritarian society (Kitching 1989: 104; Yatsko 2001).

The discrepancy between the performances of Russia and China is a complex subject that cannot be attempted here but Yatsko (2001: 128) makes an interesting observation. She comments on the complete sea-change in student attitudes since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Invidious as recourse to cultural traits may be, it seems that China’s embrace of capitalism has struck an answering chord in the Chinese psyche, especially the young. Yatsko finds that Chinese youth are now so intensely ambitious, so industrious, and so full of great expectations for their future, that they have lost interest in clamouring for any form of participatory role in society. It would appear that the very real prospect of transcending their current condition is such that Chinese youth have somehow sublimated what Max-Neef (1991: 32) would term their “fundamental need for participation”. Could this be explained in terms of a “satisfier” of the need for transcendence synergistically subsuming, and thereby neutralising, the need for participation? Whatever the case, it is very apparent that China has given its young people hope (visions, dreams) in a way that both Russia and Angola have failed to do. This is important for what follows.

In the context of the missionaries, Henkel and Stirrat (2001) advance the fascinating thesis that participatory practices are religious in their very essence. Hence: “[P]articipation’ has... far reaching connotations involving a specific vision of society as ‘*communitas*’ and, at times, of evangelical promises of salvation” (2001: 172). Communication constitutes the very essence of participatory practice and it goes without saying that the missions were intensely participatory institutions.

Botes (1999: 138) points out that, “Participatory development... is about processes whereby people empower *themselves* to participate continuously in improving *their own* destiny” (emphasis added). This is crucial in the current context. Central to the Christian message was that the pastors or missionaries could only help (facilitate) people to save *their own* souls. This required skilled leadership (cf. Botes 1999: 132-139) which had to transcend mere technique to the point of becoming an art form. The essence of the pastor’s task was to equip people to *take responsibility for their own salvation*. The missionaries never claimed to be able to save anyone, all they could do, at best, was to activate the thirst for redemption which was assumed to be innate in

every sentient human being. And because, in the Christian universe, this salvation could only finally take place in the next world, the need for transcendence in this life was *infinite*.

The egalitarianism of the ideal participatory environment finds its echo in the Christian teaching that before Christ all are equal. The impact of this on the African psyche, which had been conditioned to a collective subordination (Prozesky 1995: 16-22), can only have been seismic. It was this realisation which gave the emergent “schools” elite amongst the Xhosa (the “schools” were the missionary-aligned Xhosa while the “reds” were those who preferred to avoid the missionary influence) the confidence to demand participation in the running of their own affairs and to organise themselves politically. It is in effect the “schools” who now run South Africa whereas the “reds” are still mired in poverty in the Transkei. According to Nelson Mandela (Kessler 1999: 228), on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the World Council of Churches: “...my generation is the product of church education. Without the missionaries and other religious organisations I would not have been here today... when I say we are the product of missionary education, I recognize that I will never have sufficient words to thank the missionaries for what they did for us.”

Thus we clearly see the potency of participatory communication to effect personal change, but most especially when conducted in a context where the possibility of transcendence is being held out. If we take the transformation exemplified by the Xhosa in conjunction with the Chinese students’ example, we can see the animating power of awakening the need for transcendence. It is this that participation must strive for.

In defence of paternalism

Christianity is nothing if not paternalistic. Botes (1999: 44,69) in eschewing all forms of paternalism writes that “the real experts... are community members themselves”. There is some scepticism about this (cf. Henkel & Stirrat 2001: 171). Is it really so? How should we reconcile Christian paternalism with development?

It can be argued that many of the social failings one sees in South Africa today are due to a *lack* of paternalism and that, far from paternalism being undesirable, what is needed is more of it. Paternalism (as with participatory development) can be used for good or ill (Atkinson 2007: 91-6). “Good” paternalism is a responsible form of oversight that knows when it is time to “let go”. It is a lack of paternalism that has cynically exposed the very poor to the pernicious effects of the state lottery. It was a lack of paternalism that allowed the extortionate micro cash loans business to flourish. The present South African government is currently (with often deleterious consequences) destroying the fabric of the paternalistic relationship that hitherto obtained between farmer and farm worker by making their relationship a purely mercenary one (Atkinson 2007: 96-9). Where paternalism is benign can there be any real objection to it? Is it not perhaps irresponsible prematurely to break down paternalistic patterns of development?

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The United Nations has enthusiastically propagated the notion of a “right to development”. Although one must exercise some circumspection with the rights that emanate from this body (*Economist* 24 March 2007: 12,64) let us for the sake of argument grant a right to development, seeing that it enjoys such wide acceptance.

Rights entail duties and obligations, just as much as “up” presupposes “down”. It must be noted that a “right to development” is not the same as a “right to develop”. The former right is expressed in the passive voice. It is a right to be a recipient of something. This instantly posits an implicit duality. We thus have a *developer* and a *developee* (for want of a better word) – an agent and a beneficiary, namely the rights bearer. The developee has a right (with associated duties); the developer has duties and obligations. These latter are intrinsically *moral* obligations because they arise out of *rights*. These moral obligations, in execution, are *essentially* paternalistic and there is simply no escaping from this, discomfiting as it might be. Thus: either we abandon “the right to development”, or we allow for enlightened paternalism.

We have now returned, via an indirect route, to the “moral imperative” argument advanced against the anti-development cohort earlier and, given the right to development, the way is clear for the missionaries’ Christian paternalism. The parallels with the Christian cosmology of Christ descending to earth to redeem a fallen mankind loom very large indeed. On reflection then, we should be able to grant that *enlightened* paternalism (as opposed to a totalitarian subjugating or suffocating variety) is not necessarily incompatible with the participatory approach when understood as a *process* with an end point (i.e. an exit strategy from the familial nest).

The (neo)populist approach

There is something deeply appealing to human nature in the cluster of ruggedly self-reliant values that attaches itself to the populist vision. Populism, broadly speaking, arose in reaction to depersonalising industrialisation and holds out for “an alternative of small scale individual enterprise” (Kitching 1989: 19). It focuses on “the retention of a peasant agriculture and of non-agricultural petty commodity production, and on a world of villages and small towns rather than large industrial cities” (Kitching in Hulme & Truter 1990: 58). This vision is underpinned by notions of simplicity, self-reliance and self-sufficiency. It is in fact precisely what De Rivero (2001) recommends for most of the undeveloped world, and what climate change activists are increasingly urging upon the developed world.

The missionaries were fundamentally populist, and their settlements would have served admirably as prototypes for the kinds of utopian community envisaged by the early French social theorists (Prozesky 1995; Wilson 1991: 119-130). As Cooper (2002: 16) says, “mission lobbies favoured a form of empire that gave space to Christian conversion and to encouraging Africans to become self-reliant small-scale producers”.

Hundreds of small utopian village communities sprang up in America from the 1830s on. These arose out of a direct rejection of industrialisation and urbanisation and “were formed according to various idealistic blueprints for social and economic harmony”

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(Kolodny 1983: xii). Although none of these communities lasted more than a few decades it is an ideal that lives on and is periodically revived (most notably in the 1960s and then again in the 1990s).

In the 19th century, populist-inspired settlements were much more of a viable proposition than might be the case today in our highly integrated and specialised world. Although the populist vision is hopelessly romantic and unrealistic, as an economic proposition *at scale* for today's world, that is not to say that its ideals and values should be cast aside. There is no reason why individuals should not cultivate a populist mindset of intelligent self-reliance even if they never opt for a rural plot or for small town living. Populism as an aspiration will endure for as long as there exist dehumanising cities and institutions, in contradistinction to which it can define itself. This is as it should be, for such ideals may be the very stuff of transcendence.

HUMAN SCALE DEVELOPMENT

Manfred Max-Neef (1991: 15) in advancing the desirability of a “*transdisciplinary*”, over against an “*interdisciplinary*”, approach to development, lays the foundations for his stress upon the need for “personal involvement” in development. This is an important preliminary to rescuing development from sterile academia and situating it squarely within the ambit of communication with warm, flesh and blood human beings. He goes on (1991: 16-19) to establish three “postulates” underpinning Human Scale Development, namely:

- Development is about people and not about objects;
- Fundamental human needs are finite, few and classifiable; and
- These needs are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. What changes are the means by which the needs are satisfied.

Are these postulates valid? Are they an adequate reflection of an objective reality?

The first point amounts to the assertion that development is *for* people. This is virtually axiomatic and enjoys wide acceptance. It would be an odd definition of development that left people out of the equation, thus the first postulate is as good as true by definition.

It has been a commonplace of moral philosophy ever since Aristotle that human wants are many, whereas human needs are few. Max-Neef (1991: 16), perhaps unwittingly, reveals his origins as an economist by claiming that “it is traditionally believed that human needs tend to be infinite”. That may hold true for the discipline of economics but certainly not for other disciplines that have focussed on human needs. He appears to be confounding “needs” with the economists’ conception of “demand” which incorporates both needs and wants. The second postulate is therefore unremarkable and can be taken as given.

It is in the third postulate that the real interest of Max-Neef’s philosophy lies. If he is right that fundamental human needs are not culturally determined, but apply across the

board so to speak, this is not *trivially* true – it is *critically* true. The implications are enormous. For one thing it would give the lie to arguments that development is essentially a Western undertaking with no legitimacy outside of that context (cf. Tucker’s assertion cited earlier that development “is not a natural process”).

The needs Max-Neef (1991: 32-3) advances as being universal are: Subsistence; Protection; Affection; Understanding; Participation; Idleness; Creation; Identity; and Freedom.

The importance of Max-Neef’s schema of fundamental human needs, and their “satisfiers”, for an understanding of development is profound. It owes much to Aristotle’s conceptual distinction between *instrumental* worth and *intrinsic* worth and it goes to the core of any development project. Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics* argues that what all human beings ultimately *want* is happiness, but what they *need* is a life of *arete*, i.e. virtue or excellence. The saying that “virtue is its own reward” derives from this.

The distinction between the instrumental and the intrinsic is well illustrated by the fact that people will often, when asked what they need, unreflectingly reply, “More money”. But people cannot eat banknotes. The response, “Money for what?” sets in motion a chain of enquiry of great value – one which makes manifest those assumptions and motivations which are unconscious or latent in people’s lives.

The real value of Max-Neef’s schema lies in its *suggestiveness* (using its *form* as a point of departure) much more than in its more prescriptive particularities, the details of which could be argued into perpetuity. One could for example object that the fundamental need for struggle and challenge, or the need for hope, has been overlooked. One might quibble with “participation” being expressed as a “fundamental” need. Is participation really sought as an end in itself, or is it more usually instrumental (i.e. a satisfier) in the meeting of some yet more fundamental need? But these finer details are not ultimately that important, in and of themselves. It is the instrumental *process* in the course of which individuals and communities uncover their own intrinsic *meanings* that is so vital.

Max-Neef’s third postulate also suggests that the fundamental needs apply in all historical periods, although he does say that this cannot be claimed with “absolute certainty” (1991: 27). To cater for this uncertainty he goes on to suggest that fundamental human needs develop as the species evolves. Given that the species evolves so slowly, perhaps he should have substituted this with “as society evolves”. Whatever the case, there is a second crucial distinction that any analysis of needs must take into account (and which Max-Neef does not appear to). This is the difference between *felt* needs and *ascribed* needs. As Ignatieff (1984: 11) says:

It is also notorious how self-deceiving we are about our needs. By definition, a person must know that he desires something. It is quite possible, on the other hand, to be in need of something and not know that one is. Just as we often desire what we do not need, so we often need what we do not consciously desire.

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There is a certain utilitarian sterility to Max-Neef's nine fundamental needs considered *in toto*. Let us imagine a fully self-realised individual who has attained to a situation of perfect satisfaction and equipoise as regards all nine needs – a happy medium of neither too much nor too little. What then? Where to next, if not sublime boredom? Is there not something missing? Indeed there is. Ironically it is Max-Neef's (1991: 27) tenth "afterthought" need of transcendence which is the "glue" which holds his entire edifice together.

TRANSCENDENCE – THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEED

It is strange that Max-Neef (1991: 27) does not consider the need for transcendence to be universally applicable when one considers that the pyramids of Egypt, built by what was arguably one of the most mythopoeic societies ever to have existed, still stand for all to see. Max-Neef says, "... it is likely that in the future the need for Transcendence, which is not included in our proposal as we do not consider it universal, will become as universal as the other needs". Max-Neef (1991: 17) posits "subsistence, that is, to remain alive" as being *the* fundamental need in what is (*pace* Maslow's hierarchy of needs) an otherwise non-hierarchical structure. But is it?

If subsistence were primary how might we account for self-sacrifice? How to explain the millions who have given their lives in wars for what they believed to be a just cause? The parents who consciously lay down their lives that their children might live? The current Islamist suicide bombers? The Christian martyrs? One can think of endless such examples and in fact there must be very few people who, in extremity, would not sacrifice their lives for some or other transcendent reason. Max-Neef has *Economic Man* in mind when he says subsistence is our most deeply rooted need. Many scholars coming from other disciplines (theology, philosophy or psychology to name but three) might unhesitatingly opt for the need for transcendence as being yet more basic than the need for brute survival.

It was the *ascribed* need for transcendence in southern Africa's indigenous peoples that the missionaries, after having first activated it, then satisfied so successfully. The extraordinary thing about transcendence, and what makes it the most potent of all the needs, is that it is the one need that is indeed *infinite* – it can *never* be fully satisfied in this life. Thus there is never any question of "is this all there is to life?" in the supposedly fully developed individual because the infinite need for transcendence dictates that no state of affairs whatsoever can possibly exhaust its potential for being met.

By pitching their labours at satisfying transcendence over against subsistence, the missionaries were unwittingly employing the most supremely synergistic satisfier imaginable. In one fell swoop they met, by default, all of Max-Neef's original nine needs *including* subsistence. This is because they communicated to their communities *a reason to live* – not houses, clothing, food, health, work or transport (although these came naturally in due course), but *meaning and hope* (Prozesky 1995: 308-10). They helped them, greatly assisted by literacy it must be added, to envisage themselves as people with potential, they gave them a vision of *what they could become*.

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It takes a real effort of imagination for Westerners, raised with a solid sense of identity and in a society in which the primacy of the “I” is taken as given, to appreciate the transformative impact on the aboriginal mind of the missionary message. This message was, “To God *you* are unique. *You* are special. *You* are central. *You* are loved. *You* are wanted. *You* can be immortal.” This is the beginning of development with a heart. If this approach is not human-centred and human-scale then it is hard to conceive of what is. It is also hard to think of anything *less* like the Soviet communist model which treated people as dispensable and irrelevant units or ciphers in its brutal collective machinations. The missionaries by contrast might die satisfied if they had saved just *one* soul for God (Prozesky 1995: 92).

What then was the miraculously synergistic satisfier that the missionaries applied to meet the fundamental need for transcendence? Surely if we could harness the intensely human, hands-on energy of this elusive satisfier, this sufficient condition, in development work we could even leave the state and the macro-economy to go their own ways? For, as Korten (1990: 124) points out, “The surest way to kill a [developmental] movement is to smother it with money.” How did a handful of people (there were never more than 2000 missionaries in the field in South Africa at any one time) manage to inculcate an exotic system of values that is now, implicitly at least, subscribed to by at least 36 million South Africans if one includes the so-called Zionist or Independent African churches (Hexham 1994; Kritzinger 1986)?

EROS – THE ULTIMATE SATISFIER

It is not too radical a conceptual leap to equate development with transcendence. This is to say that development *is* transcendence insofar as we engage in it not for some greater good but as an end worth pursuing in its own right. If we look at the empirical case study offered by the missionary effort we could say that development is the actualisation of the *universal* (i.e. *not* Eurocentric) human urge towards transcendence – it is transcendence in action, transcendence as process, transcendence as actualised by inter-personal communication.

Ul Haq (1999: 16) and Van Zyl (1995: 1) are correct in not denying the efficacy of economic growth. There is no need to “throw the baby out with the bathwater”. Development studies as a discipline should itself develop and outgrow the simplistic adversarial “either/or” approach that wants to jettison everything that has gone before in favour of the latest trend. As Dichter (2003: 63) points out, development practice is, in effect, always incrementalist. It is about what is found to work, and there is no place for a rejection of the role of the state, or the economy, on the grounds of ideological prejudice. Pragmatism dictates that one adopts what is good and discards what is bad. The macro-economy is however essentially *amoral* while state interventions are invariably *immoral*, in the strict sense outlined in the earlier discussion of egoism. This is because the state generally looks for some kind of short-term payback. In advancing development the state does so for instrumental considerations, not for its intrinsic good. It would be a rare government that would countenance development if this might result

in its losing power, and conversely, governments are often committed to development only insofar as *not* “delivering” might get them voted out of power. This is not cynicism – it is how politics functions.

Human Scale Development, however, provides for a *moral* imperative to develop. What characterises it? From the missionaries’ example can we infer that the synergistic satisfier we are seeking is the Christianisation of the world? Or can we broaden that to say some or other form of religiosity must be present? In this secular world we would not get very far with such an approach, and in any event there are too many exceptions (China, Japan) which disprove it one way or the other. It must be admitted that the panacea is hard to pinpoint.

But perhaps if we look at what the missionary movement amounted to (i.e. what range of transcendence satisfiers it delivered) we can detect some underlying factor. For a start, the missionaries, in the very act of facilitating the spiritual transcendence of others, were giving living expression to, and communicating, their *own* personal need for transcendence. Thus we see the extraordinarily productive, synergistic power of their work – the need and that need in turn actuating its own fulfilment. That they were committed to their task goes without saying (they frequently gave their lives for the cause). They were “in it for the long haul” – they had no illusions about quick fixes. They identified themselves absolutely with the poor and the oppressed, and they had an unwavering faith in activating the essential goodness of humanity. Theirs was an overriding *concern*. They harboured no doubts about the rightness of their cause. They persevered in the face of sometimes impossible obstacles. And they “embedded” themselves within the communities. They prayed together, they worked together, and they sang hymns together. Most importantly they gave the indigenous people a voice that went beyond the merely audible, and a means to commit their cultures and their histories to print.

If an individual were to embody all of these qualities we might say they were “Christ-like” or saintly and if we turn to history for the impact such individuals can make, without the resources of state or economy, we would uncover names such as Henrietta Stockdale, Emily Hobhouse, Mother Theresa, Florence Nightingale (not to mention Jesus Christ) all of whom made a *positive difference* often in excess of anything any state has achieved. What was it that set them apart?

Following Beukes (1992: 3) “development cannot be delivered or provided to people. It is *something positive* that happens...” (own emphasis). But what *makes* it happen? What is the catalyst? Perhaps Lilla (2001: 208) gets closest:

That force is love, eros. For Plato, to be human is to be a striving creature, one who does not live simply to meet his most basic needs but is somehow driven to expand and sometimes elevate those needs, which then become new objects of striving. Why do humans ‘stretch’ themselves in this way? For Plato this is a deep psychological question, one to which the characters in his dialogues offer many

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different answers. Perhaps the loveliest is that given by Diotima... that ‘all men are pregnant in respect to both body and soul’.

CONCLUSION

What are the practical implications of the foregoing argument for community development practitioners in South Africa? For the development problem posed earlier? Can we seriously advocate *eros* (the productive capacity of love to effect transformation) as part of an alternative approach to practical development problems in South Africa? Aristotle thought we could. As per Veatch (1974: 120):

Most of us nowadays are inclined to assume that the purpose and function of the state is to make available to us various so-called external goods, hopefully in ever increasing amounts, and so to provide us with an ever higher standard of living. But not so Aristotle, for his constant message is that the aim of the state is not so much to provide men with goods, as to make them good men. And by ‘good’ Aristotle means ‘morally good’.

If that is the task of the state then how much more so must it apply to individual moral agents (such as ourselves) actually to be good, to do good, and to communicate that good? As Veatch remarks, “this is a theme that may sound strange to modern ears”. But Aristotle is quite correct. The universally synergistic satisfier, the sufficient condition, we have been trying to find, such that development projects will not fail, *cannot* fail, boils down in the end to those who give expression to *eros*, in other words “good people.” It is that simple and that difficult. As Ul Haq (1999: 3) says, “The most difficult thing in life is to discover the obvious.”

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