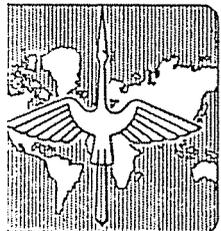# ISS OCCASIONAL PAPERS

The Study of Development and the Alleged Need for an Interdisciplinary Approach

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THE STUDY OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE ALLEGED NEED
FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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One of the first items on the agenda for development studies, as perceived from the vantage point of The Institute of Social Studies, deals with disciplines and interdisciplinarity. The customary reading of this problem is basically simple. Inasmuch as development is total or comprehensive, affecting entire societies and groups of societies, there is no reason to expect that any particular discipline, any particular specialization of the social sciences or of science, is likely to succeed in mastering it. It is said to follow, then, that the proper answer should be a concerted effort of disciplines as a minimum requirement. The next question is how to do it. This question has been with us as long as this Institute has existed. Our stated goal in this respect is quite clear, namely, that as an institution, we are all in favour of multi-disciplinarity and indeed inter-disciplinarity. This does not mean, however, that we are ahead of universities and other development studies centres where the same truth is recognized. Do not expect me, then, to recite a neat and simple answer to the problem. My effort will be to try and give some bearings. In so doing I shall take a few steps backwards in order to find an appropriate foothold. My argument will consist of three parts.

First, some historical background to the problem of development, not just Third World development as it is currently perceived.

Second, a quick look at some of the confusion inherent in the very notion of development. These two sections merely serve to prepare the ground for the main one.

The third section, then, will properly address the matter of disciplines and multidisciplinarity.

TWO READINGS OF WORLD HISTORY

The first part of my presentation is given up to making one main point, which is in fact not very new. There is more than one way to read more or less recent world history, as it culminates in the matter of development. I shall distinguish a current or usual way as against a rather less usual one, and advocate the latter.

The standard reading perceives world history as roughly a matter of two phases, an early phase of Western domination over what Linton has called 'most of the world', and a more recent phase, indeed in terms of

world history a very recent one, of independence and de-
colonization, marked by key terms such as 'development'.
What sets off the one phase from the other is normally
described as the decisive moment, the critical turning
point, of liberation; formal liberation first and then,
gradually, substantive liberation. This sequence pre-
supposes that the moment or act of liberation is some-
how prepared: not merely by Western domination but also
by the response it somehow elicits, a protest movement.

According to this same reading the more recent
phase, of independence, is known as the developmental
phase. In it, certain crucial problems are encountered.
These are occasionally identified as a matter of dis-
cord between the internal and external dimensions of
development. On the internal side stands the culmina-
tion and aftermath of the nationalist independence move-
ment: the effort, in other words, to achieve cultural
identity, social justice, economic advancement and all
the rest. On the external side features the somewhat
awkward awareness that independence goes only so far;
by achieving formal national statehood the newly inde-
pendent entity is not disconnected either from the for-
mer metropolitan country or, for that matter, from any
other part of the world; on the contrary, remaining and
new linkages become more important as development pro-
ceeds.

As it is, even internal problems will occasionally
be attributed to the adverse effect of external forces.
In the pertinent discussion, two key notions come up
repeatedly. The one is aid, as an ongoing rather than
a terminal relationship. The other is dependency, again
as a self-protracting rather than terminating proposi-
tion. The two are closely linked. These discussions go
through fashions, each focussing on particular issues.
The recent fashion has brought up the demands for self-
reliance, as a desirable state of affairs on the part
of those 'developing', and on the other hand, for a new
international order (some say, new international econom-
ic order), as a precondition to such things as self-
reliance, and to Third World development in general.
These debates often are more or less heated, but they
are never conclusive.

Now here is a point that deserves attention. The
standard reading of history, which underpins these and
similar views, is unable to provide the means to devel-
op an onward perspective. In the unresolved contrast
between unhampered self-realization, as partially pur-
sued internally, and ineluctable dependence, as persist-
ing externally, it fails to provide a properly creative
understanding; thus leaving the field to ideologues and
other protagonists of pre-established truths.

In presenting next a less usual reading, it is my hope
to point to ways of seeing somewhat further and of a-
voiding idle dispute.

This unusual reading follows from adding, to the
two phases of the usual picture, something like a pre-
liminary one, preceding the phase of Western domination.
(See chart 1). That phase I like to call by a name in-
vented by the Dutch historian J. Romein, namely, the
Common Human Pattern. The way he uses this term, it is
mostly a bench-mark. In other words, he does not really
bother to expound, as a Toynbee would have, the various
characteristics and variants of this Common Human Pat-
tern. Rather he contra-distinguishes it from subsequent
Western specificity, which thus appears as something one
might rather daringly call the Western deviation from
the Common Human Pattern.

The next question is, how does the West deviate?
One salient feature is that Western man, rather than
being satisfied to spot opportunity and exploit it to
his advantage, has achieved a stance whereby he will go
out and create opportunities, in such a way as to achieve
maximum returns upon systematic effort. It is no longer
occasionalistic; if no opportunity is in sight, you cre-
ate one. This stance is exemplified both in the devel-
opment of science and technology and in such things as
colonial expansion. In each regard, collective Western
man, behaving as a subject, is out to master his con-
text, both natural and human, as his object; and he
makes every effort to maximize his control.

Therefore, colonial expansion is by no means a sin-
gular phenomenon, as it features in the usual reading of
history. Rather it is one out of quite a few symptoms,
each and every one attesting to the particular Western
stance in life, as different at critical points from the
Common Human Pattern stance. By contra-distinction, the
latter will appear in a new light. Think of colonizab-
ility, to use Bennabi's term, as the feature counter-
vailing to developments in the West.

Pursuing the analysis along these lines, the phase
of Western ascendancy can be further articulated. Chess
terms, analogically used, come in handy there. One can
speak of an opening game, a middle game and an end game;
by distinguishing their features one begins to see the
colonial venture as a process with a beginning and an
end. To do this in appropriate detail would carry us
too far here.

For the moment, what needs to be understood is that
from the second to the third phase in this sequence, that
is, from the phase of Western domination to that of de-
colonization, liberation will not feature as the one
crucial factor, but rather as one out of a number of
symptoms of culture change affecting both the West and
most of the world. Such problems as the Club of Rome
have pointed out in their first report, are equally

CHART I   TWO READINGS OF WORLD HISTORY

I

Western domination   independence

......➤ protest

development { internal
              external

liberation as crucial turning point

II

Common Human Pattern   Western ascendancy   Emergent One World

(as bench mark)

Western deviation from CHP

optimalize identity under interdependency

early: middle: late:

exchange domin.-   involve-
          exploit.   ment

decolonization one out of various symptoms

Planet of Worlds:
- polycentric
- low communication
- no interdependency

(late:) Proto One World:
- oligocentric
- optimal communication
- budding interdependency

Emergent One World:
- polycentric
- high communic.:irreversible
- growing interdep.:
                irreversible

symptomatic and equally significant for what is happen-
ing, not just to the West but to most or all of the
world. A proper view of history should bear this out
and indeed account for the way in which these matters
are related. This is what, to my mind, this unusual
reading of world history will do.

The immediate consequence - and a very practical
one for development studies - is that those who plead
in favour of including the West within the proper orbit
of development studies need not limit themselves, as
has been done, to salient matters such as adjustment
policy problems. Indeed, they should not. They have
in fact, to cover the much broader range of what some
now call culture crisis phenomena.

For another matter, the reading of world history I
am here advocating helps to clarify what is, by the
customary reading, a problematic togetherness of the
internal and external sides of development. It now ap-
pears to be yet another matter shared in common between
the decolonized parts of the world and the former col-
onial powers. In the emerging One World pattern, the
need is for each and everyone to optimalize their col-
lective identities, including their self-interests or
ethnocentrisms; yet never to the point that these would
turn out to be destructive. Let me quote a small-scale
precursor example for this, namely, the problem about
property rights. At issue was how to domesticate the
exertion of property rights, so that, even though there
is no inherent compelling reason why somebody should
not maximize his property rights at the expense of his
neighbour, he would in fact have to observe provisions,
added safeguards if you like, whereby his exertion of
his property rights would not be unduly detrimental to
his neighbours. The example falls short in that the
overriding authority it presumes does not exist in the
case of One World organization, and could hardly do so.
But it does bring home the need for built-in restraint.

The matter of interacting identities can be further
demonstrated by describing the three phases as three
kinds of world condition. The Common Human Pattern
phase, the preliminary bench-mark phase in other words,
shows a planet of worlds. There have existed so many
worlds: the Chinese, the Indian, the Arab, the budding
European world, each leading its more or less separate,
insular existence on this planet. Contacts were occas-
ional and rare. Thus one planet, but a plurality of
worlds on it. The Western ascendancy phase is a very
different proposition. Considered with special regard
to its end game variant, it appears as a proto-One World.
The colonial empires, in a competition which effectively
coordinated them, did form a budding One World pattern
of control and communications. But the structures could
not keep pace with the developments, and it could not

survive.[1] Next came the third phase, the emergent One
World.

     The three phases make a rather interesting seesaw.
The planet of worlds model is polycentric; there are a
number of separate worlds, each its own centre. The
colonial proto-One World is oligocentric, there is one
combination of forces acting as the centre. The emer-
gent One World is once again a polycentric proposition.
Does this mean that the clock has been put back? Not
really. Consider further issues, such as communication,
including interaction, and interdependency. From one
phase to the next, one proceeds from low communication
and practically zero interdependency; through optimal
communication, technology allowing, and budding inter-
dependency in the colonial situation; all the way to
high communication and growing interdependency, both -
and this is important - as irreversible tendencies.

     Out of this unusual historical view I retain the
realization that decolonization is misread if presented
as a mere reversal, a mere backswing of the pendulum.
Underlying the swinging movement there is a secular
trend, almost hidden, yet rather more important. Its
key feature is interaction and interdependency as be-
tween components of the emergent One World. Translated
into terms of an agenda, as well for scholarly intel-
lection as for various kinds of action, this raises the
key issue of how to domesticate natural ethnocentrism.
The new need for each and every human unit fighting for
a place under the sun, is to do so in a manner that shall
not unduly curb the possibilities of the next unit. The
question is easily phrased; the answers are not immed-
iately available.

     Considered from a scholarly angle, this is a tricky
problem. The obvious temptation is to slip into a mode
of discourse where 'should' is the key notion. Unfor-
tunately, the scholar who becomes trapped into this mode
stands to lose his integrity and credibility *ipso facto*.
Not that he has to. A shift of focus, as to salient
issues studied, is all that is really required; but as
it means breaking-out of the rut of established para-
digms (Kuhn) and accepted problematics, it may prove
painful and indeed risky. Besides - and here is, fin-
ally, the link with our present topic - it would seem to
affect any disciplines and, perhaps, all social sciences
jointly.

CONFUSIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

The subject matter of this second part is somewhat com-
plex; yet the temptation to elaborate too much must be
resisted.

The preceding section brings out emphatically that
our present understanding of development differs sig-
nificantly from that of, say, ten or even five years
ago. For a long while it has been thought that devel-
opment, or rather the need for it, was an ailment of
newly independent countries, like growing spasms. Then,
some began to wonder whether it could be a birth defect,
and they made innuendos about where to put the blame.
This was rather too easy, but it had the advantage of
broadening the perception so as to include the rich
countries. Subsequently, the insight has emerged that
development is one out of a major cluster of literally
worldwide problems - the birth pains, if you can bear
with more bad metaphor, of the emergent One World.

This widening of the frame of reference cannot mean
that henceforth development studies shall be subsumed
under a universalistic effort to deal with all that
changes or that has to change, in the world of today.
Rather it constitutes a call for renewed focussing and
delimitation - in the perspective of a distribution of
tasks; and the outcry for 'alternative development' does
no more than pose the problem. Certainly, the 'Third
World', as a hypothetically homogeneous category, is no
longer serviceable as the self-evident frame of refer-
ence for development studies and action.

First, now, a matter of historical background. When it
was first introduced around World War II, the term 'dev-
elopment' was not a brand-new concept. It had precur-
sors, such as 'backwardness', 'primitiveness' and the
like. 'Under-development' was new in that it represen-
ted the recognized need for a rather more decent phrase
to substitute for the terms used in the past. Now what
was the use of those terms? An ambiguous one. On the
one hand, they enabled Westerners to tell themselves, in
healthy ethnocentric fashion, that they were better than
those others. This is nothing special: the classical
Greeks spoke of barbarians, stammerers, when referring
to non-Greeks; parallel dismissals of 'the other' exist
all over the world. The primary use of such descriptors
is to categorize the other, the unknown, in such a man-
ner as to take the sting, the threat, out of its other-
ness. Self-ness, conscious identity, will then readily
feature as superiority, this being a convenient way of
reasserting it. Thus, superiority feelings towards out-
siders are at root part and parcel of an identity aware-
ness. What matters in the case of the West is that its
particular development, just described, enabled it to
assert, indeed to effectuate, this ethnocentric feeling
in ever more effective dealings with any others. The
West went out to vindicate itself in the contrived en-
counter with others: commercially, religiously, cultur-
ally.

Note, next, that if the term 'underdeveloped' marks
a difference, it also marks a relationship. There is a
mutual engagement between those 'advanced' and those
'less advanced'. The relationship, as induced and fos-
tered by Westerners, is such that this engagement stands
to increase and intensify all the time. During East In-
dia Company days, company servants went out on business
for profit; church ministers or priests went with them
to bring the gospel. Nor was the latter presence a
cover-up. It was an integral part of the effort, equal-
ly ethnocentric in its turn.
    This, then, is the budding and growing relationship
that eventually culminates in what I have called the
proto-One World. We know now that this has collapsed,
under the combined weight of its own institutionaliza-
tion and the effects thereof, such as the liberation
movements. Yet we must from time to time remind our-
selves that any leftovers are significant as residues
only. At the same time, we must realize that this col-
lapse can never be a reason for writing off the need
for one-world interaction and interdependency. It is
indeed in the light of this lasting need that residues
from colonial days will turn out to be either positive-
ly functional, or obnoxious, or perhaps a bit of both.
This, then, is the perspective in which to envisage the
development effort that is so eminently characteristic
of the post-colonial period.
    Development assistance, since restyled development
cooperation, is symptomatic of its nature. This effort
has by now lasted almost thirty years, and the big con-
cern is that it seems not to result in decisive better-
ment as quickly as hoped.

The second difficulty about development is semantic.
The word 'to develop' and its derivative 'development'
have two different meanings. The verb is transitive,
but it is also intransitive. An entrepreneur will dev-
elop an area, bringing in the bulldozers and ending up
with houses for sale; a plant or a group of people or
an enterprise will develop. To make things worse there
is a second ambiguity, also semantic, and readily com-
prehensible to those familiar with Slavic or Semitic
languages, namely, the difference between the perfec-
tive and imperfective modes of a verb. Development is
either achieved or consummated, a state of affairs re-
sulting from the process of development; or it is this
process itself, including the action constituting it.
For most practical purposes, the intransitive and im-
perfective modes will be near indistinguishable. Thus
one ends up with a sequence of three meanings reflect-
ing semantic subtleties, not just in English but in many
languages. Development may be an act, or a process, or
an achieved condition. There is in this a risk of con-

fusion, indeed quite some temptation. As soon as one ignores these distinctions, the ultimate temptation is for the development agent to start playing God. Too often people will think that by designing and maybe implementing a certain development plan, one has full control over any actual developments needed to realize the goals.

The third difficulty about development resides in its integrality or, with a customary but not very adequate term, comprehensiveness. Development is a matter of entire societies or other human collectivities. Such all-embracingness poses problems of manageability. How to deal with it, whether intellectually or for action? There are two schools of thought. The one is holistic; the other says this totality is too much to handle, one has to somehow nibble off parts or bits to chew. In the history of development studies these two schools of thought co-exist, with some competition, but to my mind, with insufficient mutual complementarity and support.
     The holistic style, nowadays mostly known as the unified approach, has made some name in UN circles. The other approaches do not have one collective label. They are fairly fragmented, perhaps because they differ as to ways and means. There is a basic choice involved, and a number of secondary ones. One basic option is to select one part or fragment or aspect, and treat it as if it were the whole: the *pars pro toto* approach. The other is a more serial or sequential approach: select one part or aspect, try to deal with it sufficiently, then turn to the next one as the occasion arises, until a number of aspects have been attended to, jointly approximating the totality from which they were taken.
     Any listing of eligible aspects that one can offer for adstruction is bound to be subjective. I have sometimes compared notes with others and we all came up with different listings, simply as our own experiences were different. I do not think that these differences are in themselves worth much attention. What I consider rather interesting is a listing beginning with a term that was current in the early 1950s, namely, 'technical assistance'. Development was then seen as being mainly a problem of technology transfer. (If this sounds very modern, it is not because this trend has persisted all the time, but rather because it has been resuscitated in modified form.) When this proved not to be a miracle-working device, other interests emerged: the administrative one, the political one, and, soon predominant, the economic one. Each and everyone of these approaches has an inherent tendency to feature as a *pars pro toto* approach; or at least as an approach that, by incorporating additional approaches, will optimalize its coverage and thus its control over the development problem.

The resulting overlap is further confounded by the circumstance that in the temporal consecution of fads and fashions, no interpretation of development is ever fully superseded by its successor. Part of its institutional-ization will keep it going to an extent, if need be as a largely ineffective residue. This is not all bad, as it facilitates modified resuscitations when the occasion demands them.

As against all this, the unified approach keeps the curious function of being, so to say, the bad conscience of those who have segmented the problem to the point where they risk losing sight of important aspects. There is some reason for this bad conscience to be effective, as those aspects ignored tend to pop up at the wrong moment as residual issues of an unpleasantly problematic nature. On the other hand, its chances of effectiveness as an alterna-tive approach should not be overrated. The unified approach can but beg the question as to its own inherent principle of unification.[2]

I will be very brief on a fourth problem relating to development. There exists a ubiquitous and by no means merely tacit assumption that the modern state, one of the more successful export products of the West, is crucial to development. No doubt adopted uncritically because it happened to suit the mood of revitalization nationalism (regardless whether assimilationist or rejectionist), it has attracted overwhelming interest and effort. It takes little imagination, and scarcely any searching for facts, to realize that the state – regardless whether it be in fact a nation-state or a mere state-nation – is at once the main or sole frame of reference, the major means, the main or sole agent, and virtually the monopolist of development with regard to its citizenry. The evidence is simply over-whelming. It takes rather more insight, and indeed some critical sense, to realize furthermore that, precisely because it is all these things, the state risks proving counter-productive, in terms of development, insofar as, internally, it begs the question as to the developmental role and prospects of any entities pre-existent or emergent within the field of tension between it (the state) as the ultimate, *a fortiori* the sole collectivity and the indivi-dual as its ultimate, not to say sole, component, and again insofar as, externally, the lack of built-in checks upon its urge towards self-maximization renders it unfit, to an extent, to play the One World game honestly.

A red thread runs through all the problems about develop-ment reviewed in this section. Indeed this is what links this second section to the first. Each and everyone of these problems can be traced back to Western ways of conceiving of, and dealing with, development. If the out-cry for self-reliance is to have any firm meaning, this

can only be the result of people re-thinking, in an opti-
mally independent and creative way, these and other pro-
blems. This is easier said than done, especially since
those with a calling to do this job are by and large
Western-trained.

DISCIPLINES

In listing the problems relating to development I have
reserved the one about disciplines. In order to do this
I had to make it sound as if the dilemma between partial
and holistic approaches had everything to do with substance
and nothing with procedure. This is of course not the case.
Therefore, retracing my steps to that point, I will now
resume by recalling three basic considerations.
    First, the comprehensiveness of the developmental
problem wherever it occurs.
    Secondly, the circumstance that development problems
occur in highly variegated parts of the world. Contrary to
much myth-making, the Third World is not one homogenous
category. Of the ever so many areas that are together
called the Third World, for want of a better term, each
and every one is characterized by its own specific cultural,
social and further features. All this variety demands
somehow to be taken into account.
    The third consideration is that the decolonization
syndrome is not a phenomenon, or for that matter, a pro-
blem cluster, all by itself, but in fact correlates close-
ly to some of the other salient problems of the emergent
One World that are perhaps experienced primarily in the
West but whose significance is global.
    Against the background of these three issues it could
appear natural to think that the proper scholarly response
to the challenge of development should be a body of theory
that should be pre-eminently general, and this at least
in two ways. First in terms of scope: it should have very
broad relevancy, namely, at least to all of the Third
World, however defined. Then again in terms of validity:
a capability to account for the great variety of specific
situations where the problems occur as a precondition to
applicability.
    This apparent demand for a body of highly general,
immediately applicable theory, has been a preoccupation in
development studies for as long as they have been pursued.
In the early days nobody really knew what development was
all about. One had a premonition, as of a big cloud; only
very gradually did its contours become more or less distinct.
Now, after a quarter of a century, one feels reasonably
confident that in discussing development one does more
than skim a surface; at the same time, the dissatisfaction
with what one has achieved is increasingly acute.
    The upshot is that the original questions seem to
resurge in ever new ways. Has the demand for a body of

general yet relevant theory been met? Can it be met,
as a matter of principle?

In order to deal with this type of question one has to
consider the present situation in scholarship, notably
in the social sciences. The pedigree of Western scholar-
ship can be retraced, of course, to the Common Human
Pattern already mentioned; its development runs parallel
to, indeed is symptomatic of, the specificity of the West.
In this connection the preliminary phases numbered 1 and
2a and 2b in Chart 2 deserve rather more attention than
they normally receive. What also needs underscoring is
that the 'modern' West - second half nineteenth century,
perhaps up to World War I - shows, in social science, a
double-barrelled proposition, whether ambiguity or
complementarity. On the one hand, there is a clear attempt
to build a positive social science, a science that deals
with questions of 'how come', or simply of 'how'. In
this connection, the key words are 'understanding',
'explanation', and the like. At the same time, and as a
countervailing aspect, there is a strong corrective or me-
liorative social concern. It is not *l'art pour l'art*
or a pastime: people occupy themselves with positive social
science in a stated attempt to do something with it. This
means that theory, the insight resulting from investigation,
is taken to be something like an independent variable, po-
tentially operative in its own right. This ushers in key-
words like 'application of theory': towards policy making,
planning and the rest. Where the orientation towards
understanding meets halfway with the urge towards application,
one hears key terms like prognostication being used.
        Rephrased somewhat, one distinguishes, in the typically
Western way in which theory, notably social science theory,
contributes to the 'social construction of reality', two
different yet mutually supporting trends. One is the virtual
reification of theory, as something *sui generis*. The other
is serviceability of theory: its instrumental role, towards
man's mastery over reality-as-object - whether for purposes
of intellection or for purposes of action.
        Thus double-faced, and perhaps because they became thus
double-faced, the social sciences have developed along two
quite different, though never entirely separate tracks,
mostly in response to the accepted need to be at once gene-
ral and applicable. The one track is the further elaboration
of a broad comprehensive style of pursuing social science,
as instigated by such founding fathers as Smith, Comte and
Marx. Alongside this track, as a lasting effort, there has
occurred the gradual proliferation of distinct disciplines.
Most of these began their careers as specializations, at-
tempts to narrow the focus in order to work more effectively.
The way this plurality of disciplines is often presented,
one might believe that each and everyone corresponds to one

CHART 2   BACKDROP TO THE PRESENT DIVERSITY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

1 Common Human Pattern as bench-mark:	Myth as attribution of sense; ritual as enactment of cosmic order
2a Variant of CHP introduced by Platonic secularization:	Theory as metaphysical/abstracting ideal type of normative significance
2b Monotheistic variant, Christian sub-variant (i) original:	Moral theology: how to live in accordance with injunctions of metaphysical truth-norm
(ii) secularized derivative:	Social philosophy - the 'should' approach
3 The 'modern' secularized West:	Ambiguity/complementarity as between (a) positive social science: the 'how come' or, simply the 'how' approach, and (b) corrective-meliorative social concern: the 'whereto' and 'how to' approach, jointly postulating insight (theory) to be significant in its own right, by being relevant, a *fortiori* applicable towards either prediction or manipulation (immediate or remote, i.e. planning)
4 The contemporary West:	Under continuing impact of ambivalence (a)/(b) above, a further ambiguity/complementarity/competition between comprehensive (proto-) social science and its off-shoots resulting from focussing for effectiveness, namely the several disciplines.(Any specialization is implicitly a *pars pro 'toto* vision; fragmentation is a mere by-product of institutionalization of specialisms.)

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neatly distinct aspect or segment of total reality, the
aggregate totality of which is, for the purpose, assessed
as multifacetedness or, alternatively, as complexity. This
myth is charming, but it lacks support in the facts of
life. Specializations are by nature incidental concen-
tration of *ad hoc* effort in response to a conspicuous
issue popping up. They thus belong to different moments
in time and different places and *a fortiori* to different
constellations of facts eliciting theoretical reflection
and response. There is, then, no reason on earth why one
emergent specialization, even when fully institutionalized
into a discipline, should be a fair match, one way or
another, to the next.

All this means that in practice nowadays, the compre-
hensive approach of what once was proto-social science, and
what has persisted as a crossbreed between science and
ideology, stands side by side with a plurality of discipli-
nes, in an uneasy relationship. One could not even claim
that there exists a countervailance or complementarity.
There surely is an amount of competition; its expression
again is highly variable. Chart 3 suggests, in overly syste-
matic and thereby inevitably somewhat distorting fashion,
some of the differences between the two styles.

Indeed what separates them is often more conspicuous than
what they share in common. This is for no good reason.
There is a common element that deserves careful attention
precisely because of its crucial significance. In the
course of Western scholarly developments theory has become
to an extent reified as something in its own right, some-
thing that can be made to work. It has increasingly be-
come a matter of mastering reality, both for intellectual
and for action purposes. The conjunction of generality
and applicability is crucial to this development. What
stands behind it?

I believe one cannot discuss this matter without
probing into the nature of generalization. How does one
achieve generalization? At this point the argument re-
sumes the red thread that links the three parts of this
paper - the problem of the emergent need to domesticate
ethnocentrism.

In the last resort, theory building relies on re-
flection upon observation. Observation in its turn, however
systematic, is fundamentally incidental, in that it is con-
tingent on the observer's 'here and now'. Generalization,
then, turns out to be a matter first of accounting for the
incidental nature of observation and then of overcoming it.
There are two ways to attempt this, both being efforts to
optimalize the systematic quality of observation. One
refers to the number of observations: this is the *forte*
of science and the weakness of the social sciences, where
statistically significant runs of repeated observation are
barely feasible. The other, to which social scientists

CHART 3 COMPREHENSIVE OR PROTO-SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AS DISCIPLINES: FEATURES COMPARED

	Comprehensive or proto-social science	Social sciences as separate disciplines
Claimed scope	holistic	part *(pars pro toto)* or (main) aspect
Relevancy	general (supposing appropriate inter-pretation of facts)	either culture-specific (e.g. anthropology) or allegedly culture-neutral (e.g. economics)
Verification (an emergent need of secularism)	insight as conviction of truth	testability or verifiability/ falsifiability of *ad hoc* verities
Link between intel-lection and action	historical process as vindica-tion, whether deterministically or by dint of controlled process (e.g. revolution)	applicability (e.g., plan-ning, policy making); more recently (and significantly different), interaction (e.g. experimental approach.)

Note that for example in sociology roughly the same distinction repeats itself between (older) grand theory and (allegedly more recent) middle range theory and *ad hoc* research hypotheses

will tend to have recourse, is comparison; in turn, it
begs the question of comparability in terms of the
number of relevant respects.

Is there an escape from this double catch? Fundament-
ally speaking, the prospect is dim. In practice, we live
with the problem rather than that we solve it. As befits
the circumstances, we even have a standard procedure
that will presumably absolve us from the need to address
the basic problem. According to this procedure, general-
ization is not so much the accumulated outcome of the
constructive procedure just mentioned, but rather the
result of a stripping act. In the act of observing, the
'here and now' is what bars us from generality. Under
the pressing need to achieve it at any cost, the two-
step operation of first accounting for it and then over-
coming it, will be telescoped into one: *bruler les étapes*.
This is done, with apparently striking but indeed reckless
simplicity, by discounting, from the object observed,[3]
its specificity: which is, for the given purpose, assumed
to accrue to it from very 'here and now'. The procedure
is old and hallowed. From Weber's 'ideal types' a straight
and clear line runs all the way back to Plato's 'idea'. Nor
need it, as a procedure, seem all that different from in-
definitely repeated observations or from comparison: but
in this regard appearances are deceptive.

What is the outcome of this substitute procedure, this
pis-aller towards generalization? The resulting conceptual
apparatus is by and large a matter of qualitative, descriptor
concepts. Being purely abstract, these pose grave problems
if it comes to their manageability, their operational-
izability later on. In other words, if the reification of
theory be well served by this procedure, its applicability
certainly is not.

This is an intriguing issue, on which a few words in
parenthesis are in order. The question is basically simple:
how does one reconstruct a conceptual, theoretical equiv-
alent to live reality out of an assembly of timeless, place-
less, qualitative or descriptor concepts? More pointedly,
how does one retrieve the action or process dimension? The
sad answer is that at the conceptual or theoretical level
one cannot. The possibility to try it has been pre-empted
in the very act of generalizing abstraction that is at the
root of the entire procedure described and of its ensuing
problems. Why then has this not been the end of Western
intellectual effort? Because of a particular interpret-
ation given to applicability: namely, as that which is
achieved and then vindicated through application, rather
than as the necessary condition rendering application con-
ceivable. For 'conceivable' one has substituted 'feasible',
and in so doing the entire problem has been thrown from
the realm of intellection into that of action, short-
circuiting the two in the act - regardless of whether
this be warranted or not. The reconstitution of reality

out of theory features, then, as a matter of organization. Organization in turn is a very Western ability, regardless of - or should one say, thanks to - the shaky conceptual basis on which it is founded. Close parenthesis.

There is yet another problem that remains, namely generality. More often than not it will be obfuscated in the very action surrounding the application of theory; but that could not render it less important. This problem of generality has two rather different manifestations. One is, again, the matter of hidden ethnocentrism. The 'here and now' of observation, in being bracketed out, has not vanished and is likely to pop up, problematically, when least remembered. The other is the question how the several disciplines can be made to work in tandem. Can they be reconstituted into one coherent picture, that then would bring back the original comprehensive reality from which one had set out?

Part of the standard answer to this second manifestation of the problem has just been reviewed, namely, the urge to operationalize through action: deemed, in its turn, to be application. Another part refers to the way in which to manage the multiplicity of disciplines as partial approaches to an encompassing totality. We shall address this presently, but we need to preface the argument by some brief remarks about the first-mentioned manifestation of the generality problem, namely, hidden ethnocentrism.

The point is this. The quasi-generalization procedure just described plays into the cards of Western specificity and self-assertion precisely in that, by hiding its fundamental ethnocentrism, it eliminates any restraint that might otherwise affect the attempt at its maximization. The postulated generality of a good deal of Western social science theory is, at root, a fiction. Not everybody was unaware of it being so; but it worked well enough. Today it seems to be our fate to find that it need not always and everywhere work well - indeed we realize that it may not work at all. At issue, then, is a double need: first, to identify disguised ethnocentrism for the optical illusion it is, and then to purposely redesign the *optique*, rather than losing ourselves in easy critique of what is no longer so serviceable. As regards generality, then, the need to return to the drawing boards is to an extent the need to invent or identify the limit beyond which ethnocentrism will prove counter-productive, given an emergent One World framework.

We are now ready, at long last, to address the matter of the multiplicity of social sciences as disciplines, existing side by side with certain forms of universal social science, as schools of philosophy or ideology. The wellknown myth of disciplines as neatly delimitated aspect-wise or segment-wise approaches to one total reality, is usually supplemented by that according to which the plurality of disciplines is waiting to be reconstituted into the one global, comprehensive approach, styled multi-disciplinarity or, even better, interdisciplinarity. This

myth in turn does not hold water. It tacitly presumes
the plurality of disciplines to be a matter of fragment-
ation, perhaps even purposive fragmentation, in the sense
that if I look at this aspect and you look at that aspect,
I look at this segment and you look at that segment,we
shall jointly cover the whole matter. This is simply not
the way in which things have happened. Each and every
specialization was started in response to incidental
historical events or circumstances. Problematic issues
were taken up, and when the going was good the effort
expanded, regardless of others who would come sooner or
later. Thus, for all practical purposes, it is not as
if the economist looks at the economics of the matter
and the sociologist at its social side. Thus again,
reconstitution of a comprehensive picture through multi-
disciplinarity or interdisciplinarity is a pipedream.
The *virtuoso*, the encyclopedic scholar, is beyond
resuscitation.

With interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity an
unfulfilled and largely unfulfillable promise, is one
then thrown back upon the competing vision of the one
universal social science, vindicated both for its
intellection and its action aspects by its power to con-
vince? A frightening prospect. This is the view that proves
to imply grave temptations for, indeed threats to, the
integrity of scholarship, whenever and wherever it turns
out dominant.

What about a middle road? Can one hope for a solution
of the problem through expansive disciplines? There is no
shortage of evidence, in more than one discipline, of
an expansive urge, a more or less self-propelling effort
to broaden the scope, namely, by reducing ever more
phenomena to such of their features as can be accommo-
dated within the given discipline's conceptual and the-
oretical framework. The most noted example is the way
economics has come close to monopolizing development studies
(as well as public affairs in the rich countries), no doubt
under the aegis of a Western life style, or *philosophie
vécue*, for which the term economism is probably the best,
if rarely used, description. The same example nowadays
serves ample warning as to the ultimate outcomes of such
expansiveness of one discipline. Indeed, the taming of
the empire-building *Pachidiot* is as necessary as the
domestication of ethnocentrism - nor are the two issues
unrelated.

Three roads, and each of them apparently a dead alley.
We seem to be back at square one. Is there no way at all to
solve this problem? At one time, in this Institute, we had
hoped to lick it. What we have in fact done, like every-
one else, is to live with it. Still, we have learned a
thing or two. One is that the narrow-gauge, one-discipline
specialist has a very hard time being truly effective in
development studies. Another is that it is not really

dangerous to look across the fence between my discipline
and yours; although it is admittedly rather scary, certain-
ly in terms of academic careers. Having carefully avoided
departmentalization by discipline we are, in this respect,
in somewhat better shape than most universities. We can
at least afford to say aloud that each discipline, as it
functions, can do only so much: even where it considers
itself as a *pars pro toto* approach and acts as expansive-
ly as it possibly could.

In upholding our claim to interdisciplinarity, which
to us remains a virtue, we in fact lay claim to no more
than the systematic attempt to give second thoughts,
perhaps a bad conscience, to the person who trusts that
his own discipline is all he needs to be a student of
development. On the contrary, if you think that just by
being a specialized economist, or sociologist, or public
administrator, you have the tools in hand to manage the
development problem, there is cause to think again.

Then, what? Then it is time to realize the need
to look across the fence, to see what colleagues in the
other disciplines are trying to do, how they look at the
problem. In doing so, one will find that they have a
very different way of considering the matter, a different
style of dealing with it. This has to be learned. You
need to take time out to learn it, patience to listen.
They speak a different language; but in their own way,
they talk just as much sense.

Now this is where we stand. Having lived with a
problem like this for 25 years one does not talk about
it every day: that could become somewhat cumbersome.
An occasional request to produce a paper on the matter
is therefore a healthy challenge. A person, an institution,
needs to be reminded, from time to time, of the road that
remains to be followed.

1. Successful colonial management requires increasing in-
   volvement of those colonized. This can but sharpen the
   ambiguity inherent in the colonial attitude: the natives
   are different (the reason for the relationship), yet
   potentially if not actually equal. Thus sharpened, the
   ambiguity carries over into the natives' response to
   increased demand for their involvement. Initially
   assimilationist, but barely accommodated as such by the
   other side, it can but become increasingly rejectionist.
   As such, it has been a major determinant of the usual
   reading of history. But this reading renders no justice
   to its basic and lasting ambiguity.

2. This is so because human perception of total, integral
   reality is in fact a form of scanning: it is neither
   effectively diffractive (as tacitly presumed in the
   segmentary approach, whose *raison d'être* would be this
   very diffractiveness), nor effectively comprehensive
   (evoking a comprehensive approach as the proper res-
   ponse). The scanning, in its turn, will be construed
   as perceptual – and then conceptual – delimitation or,
   what basically amounts to the same thing, reduplication
   (S. Langer). (The difference between the two resembles
   that between imperfective and perfective modes: es-
   sentially they are the same.) Unfortunately, answers
   to the question as to the unifying principle will
   rarely amount to more than paying lipservice to these
   profound underlying issues; namely, in that those
   providing them will resort to *a priori* philosophical
   or ideological stances. In this respect, there exists
   an inevitable affinity between the unified approach
   and such persisting variants of proto-social science
   as Marxism. Both require, for their survival, conviction,
   the *a, ha Erlebnis*, rather than evidence.

3. Which of course needs very much to be an object, in the
   strictest sense, for the purpose.

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