

Chapter 2

Some Philosophical Reflections on Foundations of Sustainable Social Development

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable social development cannot be fully understood apart from its cultural, moral, political, and educational foundations; and philosophy helps us to see it as a whole and to clearly comprehend its foundations. The main assumption behind that claim is that we can know what to do for realizing sustainable development if we actually know about specific or internal reasons for the fall of the societies and civilizations. This chapter begins with such an assumption and asserts that there must be four integrated foundations for any sustainable social development by benefiting from the views of Max Weber, Ibn Khaldun, Aristotle, John Dewey and some Ottoman Turkish philosophers: among those foundations are (1) effective working mentality grounded on culture, (2) strong ethical perspective including the virtues of moderation, friendship and sympathy, (3) flexible but stable social stratification which is based on middle class and positive competition, (4) effective state composed of solidarity, democracy and education of critical thinking. All those can, the author thinks, can be seen as parts of a sort of social liberalism rather than classical or neo-liberalism.

INTRODUCTION

As the title shows clearly, special concern in this chapter is not only social development; but “sustainable social development”. Put differently, the most and foremost question is, not about how we can start a social development, but how we can have a “sus-

tainable” social development. For, it may be easy to start a socio-economic development and obtain some achievements within particular conditions of any given society. But what will happen after those available conditions disappear due to external -or internal- reasons? Such a point of view, of course, does not mean that I am not interested in social development. Rather, this just means that I regard it merely a step for sustainable social development.

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The former can neither have a real sense nor any serious use without the latter. In absence of the latter, any society, state or civilization will certainly fall down sooner or later. The former is logically a necessary condition for the latter; but is not the sufficient condition of it. It can be therefore asserted that sustainable social development is a whole, and hence its realization needs a holistic approach which appreciates its all necessary components or foundations. Accordingly in this paper I argue that there are four necessary foundations for a sustainable social development, and that its sufficient condition emerges only when they can keep together within a holistic social policy. My position here is, as will be seen further, much more closer to a sort of social liberalism than a classical or neo-liberalism since social liberalism includes such notions like solidarity, common good, positive individual competence, flexible social stratification and effective state.

However, before proceeding to my basic and subsidiary claims on the foundations, first, I should, being a person studying philosophy, briefly say some things about the relation between philosophy and socio-economic development. Why is a philosopher interested with it? Is this a good job for a philosopher? And if it is, why is it so? First of all, this is a good and even necessary job for the philosopher: Many philosophers as J. Bentham, J. S. Mill, John Dewey and Ziya Gokalp always consider the social philosophy and/or philosophy of economy as one of the most important issues of philosophy (Bentham, 1843, p. 117; Mill, 1967, p. 312; Heyd, 1950, p. 43-44). Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that we sometimes have experienced the socio-economic crises as is happening today. People always suffer from great social crises leading to the collapse of economic order. In that case, if we really care happiness of people and survival of our societies, we cannot but think upon social order required for sustainable social development.

While one way for finding necessary foundations of the sustainable social development is to

look at Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history and civilization in his *Mukaddimah*, another way is to benefit from Max Weber's thesis in *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The reason why I care Khaldun's ideas for the purposes mentioned above is that Khaldun's philosophy gives us the reasons for the rise and fall of societies and civilizations. If we know the reasons for the rise and fall of societies, we can promote our society in favour of a sustainable social development. And Weber helps us in understanding cultural and ethical reasons or -more clearly speaking- working and ethical mentality behind the social development in opposition to Marx's view that the economic base of society *fully* determines all other aspects of it. For that reason, my main claim in this paper is similar to those of Weber and Gokalp rather than that of Marx: Social development is exerted by ideals (Heyd, 1950, p. 51). Notwithstanding, more things about this similarity should be said for further clarity. Weber's thesis has, as far as I understand, two parts being general and special: Its first and general part suggests that culture and religion may have a strong operational force upon the social, economic, and political structure. Its second and special part puts forward that only the protestant culture has a motivating force on social development and that other cultures have no actual or potential force on it. My point is that I agree with the first part, but disagree with the second.

I agree with its first part; because socio-economic activities are, I think, not totally value-free, but more or less a part of the cultural and ethical life. The fact that all economic actors hold values which shape their behaviors constitutes an empirical evidence for my judgment. If it is the case, then every theory of socio-economic development focusing on only the "rigid self-interest" and "profit motive", has ignored that the preferences of sellers, consumers, and policy makers are formed by their mentalities stemming from their values while also by other needs. I disagree with second part of Weber's thesis; because it is

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