Post-Development:

Rethinking emancipation

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Content

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Abstract

The model of emancipation at the heart of most Western modes of liberation is based on overcoming the realm of necessity and of nature, rather than of finding a way to live within limits, argued Mies and Shiva (1995). In our contemporary era of catastrophic over-extension of planetary boundaries, this has profound implications. This paper argues that post-development critiques enable a reimagination of concepts and practices of emancipation. Part of this work of rethinking involves reconsideration of how critical politics has largely been constructed as a developmental overcoming of dimensions of the religious and the spiritual. Reclaiming dimensions of the non-material need not require rejection of reason and rationality when a relational spirituality beyond the death of god is utilized as a resource. The paper thus lays the ground for an emancipatory politics rooted in creative acceptance of limits.

Keywords: Post-Development, Degrowth, Eco-Feminism, Spirituality

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1 Introduction

In a crucial intervention in both ecofeminist and post-development thought, Mies and Shiva (1995) observe that the model of emancipation at the heart of most Western modes of liberation is based on overcoming the realm of necessity and of nature, rather than of finding a way to live within limits. This observation has profound implications.

First, the global scale of energy and resource use, and their consequences in terms of breakdown and waste products, imperils the very basis on which our ideas and practices of a technologically dependent society are based (Richardson et al., 2023). Access and use of resources are profoundly maldistributed, so any changes need to address differences in consumption and in the production of waste. Nevertheless, equating liberation with a social capacity to ignore these system limits or capacities continues to place social and ecological interests in apparent opposition.

Second, when we consider those parts of human activity that have been cast as the realm of necessity under patriarchal and/or capitalist society, we see how the realm of social reproduction has been systematically devalued. Consequently, in much of the search for a critical politics of liberation, the dimensions of care and relationality have, until relatively recently, been sidelined or ignored. Instead, even much emancipatory theory and concepts of autonomy continue implicitly to operate on the assumption of a (neo-)liberal individuated subject, disconnected from social and familial relations.

Third, posing the process of liberation as a separation and overcoming requires us to examine more carefully what exactly has been overcome and cast aside. A not inconsequential part of this process has resulted in the obscuring or occluding of dimensions of life that are not, as is often made out, surplus to basic human existence or historically obsolete, but are integral to it. Their absence from emancipatory visions both weakens and undermines the work of liberation.

This paper argues that the post-development critique of development processes and intervention provides a unique possibility to reimagine concepts and practices of emancipatory politics. It does this through its deconstruction of the narratives of linear social change embedded in the relationships between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ and the implicit assumptions of directionality they contain. Vitally, as a strand of critical thought postdevelopment provides a framework for a politics of liberation not only for the self-determination of those who have been subject to development interventions but also - and this forms the main focus of the paper - for rethinking emancipation within those historically and currently posed as the benefactors, the ‘already developed’.

By deposing ‘development’ from its position as an “organising principle of change” (Demaria and Kothari, 2022, Demaria et al., 2023), post-development as a political project allows us to reimagine emancipation. Emancipation need no longer be constructed as part of sequential developments in which liberation and freedom are necessarily products of a particular form of modernity, defined in terms of its opposition to prior ways of being in the world. They do not require a break with the past, nor demand a return to it (compare Latour, 1993). Breaking the link between emancipation and modernity allows us to further unbundle sets of ideas that are often subsumed under a more generalised label. We can distinguish separate elements of discourse and the practices in which they are embedded to rediscover lost or rejected ways of comprehension that allow us to find ways of being in the world with each other, human and other-than-human, in less destructive and potentially more fulfilling ways. Embracing a critique of modernity as an essential route to emancipation opens novel perspectives, or at least restores vistas that have previously been lost or obscured.

In particular, this paper argues that the dimension of human experience usually aligned with the idea of the spiritual is important in forming a more rounded concept of emancipation, and that its erasure has had problematic consequences for emancipatory politics. Central to the argument is the recovery of the idea that a spiritual dimension of life is not something to be overcome by rational politics but a constituent part of being human. When we look at the lives of key contributors to the post-development perspective, we see their spirituality as a core contributor to that critical perspective, not incidental to it. A place for spirituality in emancipatory politics has largely been lost in critical theory’s emphasis on rational scientific claims to knowledge. The paper argues that a sensitivity and receptiveness to the realm of knowledge and experience, usually referred to as the spiritual, not only provides resources for a politics of emancipation but is a necessary means to ground values, values being at the centre of an analysis of transformation (Kothari, 2023). Following the approach of Martin Buber (1997), the argument proceeds on the basis that religious sensibility and politics have different functions. A politics that consigns the dimension of the religious or the spiritual to a past that has to be overcome by rationality and reasoning lays claim to a totality that conflates two different operations. Likewise, totalitarian religion emerges as a counternarrative, asserting its own exclusive knowledge claims. Failing to recognise their parallel, separate existence almost inevitably leads to oppressive forms of both religion and politics.

To make the argument, the paper first briefly summarises current understandings of post-development and its theorization. It then revisits a number of academic and practical controversies that formed the intellectual background to its emergence in the 1990s to see how

these discussions inform its critique of modernity, and how revisiting them is useful in order to unpack a series of parallel strands of discourse often conflated. Finally, by using Martin Buber's (1997) distinction between religion and politics to understand the two as parallel not sequential ways of thinking about power relations pertaining to our human place in the world, it becomes possible to reimagine emancipation not as an escape from limits but as a way of finding our place in a complex web of relationships of difference and obligation.

2. Post-development

2.1 Definitions and debates

While theorization of post-development remains contested, a succinct definition of its usage and scope is possible. In the explanation of authors who have been working collaboratively on the theme since the appellation first emerged, "The term post-development can be used to refer either to an era or an approach in which development is no longer the central organizing principle of social life" (Demaria, Kothari, Salleh, Escobar and Acosta, 2023: 61). Post-development is related to other imaginaries including post-capitalism; post- or de-growth; post- patriarchy; anti-racism and de-coloniality. Its task, as the same authors note, is the deconstruction of development. To challenge the concept of development as an organizing principle of social life and of the constructions of values that underpin it is also to challenge the legitimacy and question the impact of historical interventions made in its name. This latter consequently invokes a deep challenge to political and philosophical assumptions concerning social change and mechanisms of transition.

To break with development as an organizing principle challenges the logics of change based on linear frameworks that assume a specific relationship between the 'developed' and 'developing'. Put differently, post-development challenges linear historiographies. Further, in terms of narratives of the development of political economy, it undermines the allied assumption that incorporation within global capital flows is a necessary corollary of development; hence, its relation to both anticapitalist and degrowth analytics. To take such a stand is to take a stance of being otherwise in the world when considered in relation to the dominant narratives that shape norms, expectations, and values. Post-development in this sense poses an ontological challenge.

Ziai (2023) provides a further perspective in his examination of post-development theory's existence as a body of critical thought within the social sciences. He describes it as both a sociology of knowledge within development theory and a simultaneous critique of its foundation. This emphasises the epistemological dimensions of post-development, linked to,

but not identical with its historiographical impact. The epistemological dimension of post-development looks beyond the actualities of the development project to constitute a novel political theory, connecting, as Ziai notes, elements and approaches within postcolonialism, Marxism, ecofeminism, and anarchism, taking in perspectives that accept cultural relativism and a role for spirituality. Post-development looks towards emancipation not as an achievement for the formerly colonised in which they attain equality with former colonisers, but as a process of transformation in which both partners are radically challenged. This double transformation is similar to that within Gandhian thought and action (Cox, 2010). The challenges are not the same for all but differentiated according to different histories of nation-states and their participant subjects, in terms of the location of different experiences of class, gender, and ethnicity within those nations. The relationship between 'developer' and 'underdeveloped' is transformed by dismantling both statuses. Post-development stands as a radical emancipatory challenge to not only to recipients of 'development' but to those initiating development processes, intra-nationally as well as internationally. As well as providing a means for the articulation of alternatives to development for actors in the global south – those who have historically been the recipients of developmentalist interventions planned from the global North – post-development also provides an epistemological challenge to emancipatory narratives addressed to and located within the global north and those seeking social change within it.

Two further observations can be made from these definitions. First, that identified as a school of thought, post-development is an object constructed by its observers. There is no organisation or membership group to define boundaries, though authors engaging in this critical stance have boldly set out a series of manifesto-style publications that set out agendas and areas of interest reflecting their own specific circumstances (Sachs 1992, Kothari et al., 2019). Yet even within these position papers, the emphasis has consistently been on the plurality of actions and ideas, refuting the concept of a single universal narrative. Development, as an object of critique, is exposed as precisely this, implicitly framing social change as unidirectional and consistently aimed at incorporation within a global framework of capital accumulation. Second, post-development is constituted as a discursive construction, and so engagement with it also requires recognition of at least some degree of social construction. In their book, Grassroots Postmodernism, Esteva and Prakash (1998) made explicit the location of their particular critique as part of the poststructuralist turn in development studies whilst invoking current debates in post-modernist social theory as parallel to the deconstructions of development narratives that they observed among the grassroots communities in which they worked. Similarly, Salleh (1997/2017) directly addresses the impact of postmodern critique for the

construction of critical theory. This concurrence of post-development and broader debates in critical postmodernist social theory allows us to comprehend post-development's implicit confrontation with conventional constructions of emancipation that are beholden to a developmentalist narrative of the enlightenment triumph of reason and of liberation as the product of an epochal break with a pre-modern past.

2.2 Origination and Context

These discussions highlight that post-development had a very specific moment of historical emergence in the 1990s. It was concurrent with, on the one hand, a wider set of questions concerning on the one hand the status of knowledge (the postmodernity debates) and on the other, a questioning of the future of left political thought after the collapse of actually existing communist projects and the apparent triumph of capitalist liberal democracy as global destiny (the end of history debates).

In discussions on post-modernity in the social sciences, debates fractured around its potential promise to contribute to critical politics (or not) along a number of very different lines, not necessarily those predictable according to conventional conservative/progressive, or right/left debates (Nicholson and Seidman, 1995). In common with radical ecological critiques that posed a fundamental distinction between grey and green politics, in other words, those that remained wedded to increased growth and those searching for alternative solutions compatible with the finite resources on a single planet (Richardson and Rootes, 1994). Post-development not only challenged forms of relationship between nations of the North and the South. It also posed fundamental challenges to the economic and social norms and practices of the minority world that produce and depend upon developmentalism and the continuation of extractive relationships with 'developing' states.

The ecological dimension to these debates is vital. The high-carbon, high-energy energy and resource-consuming lifestyles and practices of those in the global north cannot be extended to all without a global environmental catastrophe. They require ever more exploitation and utilisation of resources and energy production, within a limited resource base. This is the fundamental ecological contradiction of an economy of infinite growth on a finite planet (Kovel, 2007). Resolution of this contradiction requires significant retraction of the resource and energy use by citizens of the global north: the argument for not only post-growth economics but also degrowth in respect of current levels of production and consumption. Activist networks from the 1980s onwards clearly understood the problem posed by the impact of carbon emissions, which has today become the most visible and widespread illustration of this problem.

The problem can be restated in terms of the more familiar language of sustainability. Put simply, if the so-called developed nations are not sustainable, then what processes of change can and need to be mobilised within them to break their reproduction of imperialist modes of being? We can then ask how critical approaches generated under the flags of post-development provide resources to develop indigenous critique in the Global North. Sustainable development is once more revealed as a 'political fudge' (Richardson, 1997: 43).

Whereas emancipation is usually considered in relation to bound labour, we need also to consider the bondage of those in the position of masters of global labour whose energy consumption and carbon footprints must be reduced for ecological justice and plain survivability. In this, thinking seriously about alienation enables a direction for a politics of transformation and challenges the imperial mode of living around which hyper-consumption is arranged (Rosa, 2015; Brand and Wissen, 2021).

"Conceiving of the end of development threatens the modern ethos profoundly, because the idea of progress is the last bastion of the centuries-old hope of Progress", wrote Andrew McLaughlin (1998: 20) in an article explaining the implications of post-development for a general public. When it was published, less than 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, even fewer since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were many who celebrated the triumph of capitalism and its intimate bedfellow, liberal democracy. Left politics, however far distanced from the states that formally declared their politics as communist or state socialist, searched for new roles and meanings, questioning on what basis 'progressive' politics might be recast. At such a pivotal time, the narratives emerging from discussions of post-modern theory that questioned the West's reliance on grand narratives, of which progress was the grandest, claimable by both left and right politics as co-heirs of enlightenment, were often vehemently rejected. Postmodernism, as a rejection of totality (the grand narrative), has been held by critics such as Jameson (1991) as the ultimate betrayal of Marxist thought. Yet if we are to hold to the post-development challenges that identify the problem not as the formal arrangement of practices of development but of development as a basic organisational principle and an epistemological presumption, we are necessarily engaged in this rejection.

While drawing on a legacy of critical theory in its desire to create an emancipatory (rather than a liberal, distributive) justice, post-development presented a problem for the Marxist legacy on which it drew. Though subject to modification and adaptation over the years, the fundamental conception of history as a sequence of unfoldings, structured changing alignments of relationship to the ownership of the means of production, as originally outlined in the Communist Manifesto, is undoubtedly developmentalist. Postdevelopment emerges not

from an outright rejection of Marxism but from a sensitivity to the weakness of Marxism's analysis of change. Refuting universal mechanisms, postdevelopment steps into the specifics of local conditions, social-economic and political relationships, and the available resources for change within given socio-political cultures and practices. Economics is understood not as an independent realm but as inseparable from discourse and culture. Here, post-Marxist writers such as Mouffe (1995) or Nicholson and Seidman (1995) could be seen to move Marxist analysis on from a defensive, rejectionist mode of response to the postmodern challenge and to understand how the transition can adapt to new realities.

However, simply criticizing a generalized modernity and replacing it with an equally shapeless proposal for a post-development era is an inadequate basis for emancipatory theory. Rather, we need to be more precise about the qualities and comprehensions of modernity that are problematic, as well as addressing some of the implications of framing liberation as a move to the modern. To do so, it is valuable to disentangle some of the multiple strands and narratives that are often braided together to create this singular notion of modernity that is under examination and to explore the implications of some specific elements of it. In particular, this next section of the paper focuses on the epistemological challenge of post-development in relation to some specific narratives in order that we might begin to see how one of the consequences of the deconstruction of development is the creation of a space in which to rehabilitate a sense of the spiritual as a core element in emancipatory thought, rather than it being something that needs to be overcome.

3. Reframing emancipation

As noted, much of the core analysis that brought post-development perspectives into being started with an acute awareness of the negative impacts of what development as theory and practise enabled. Most notably, activists highlighted the erasure of ways of living and being deemed incompatible with a spreading of colonial modernities. Development, as a post-war project (Rist, 2019), is a specific historical structuring of international relations toward a productivist end. It builds on naturalised discourses of enclosure and improvement that drove colonial powers' internal and external self-aggrandisement and the entrenching of social divisions into rulers and ruled, master and subject.

Yet these actions were undertaken as the delivery of promises of liberation and emancipation, the overcoming of tradition defined as backward and limitation. From the Enlightenment onwards, the banishment of religion by reason promised a rational polity. The

Development project of the mid-20th century wedded a narrative of progress to a political economy of growth within a greater promise of liberation through modernisation.

Post-development looks at social relations to another, more predictable one, incorporated within a global market economy. Post-development looks to transcend such a developmentalist mode constructed around linear histories of transition: from an existing mode of social relations to another, more predictable one, incorporated within a global market economy. Modernity depends for its coherence on the capacity to define, as contrast, the premodern, that which has been overcome and relegated to a 'primitive' past. Undermining the certainties of modernity and dethroning development as an organising principle need not entail a return to the 'pre-modern' (If anything can be defined as such, since the category only arises in the creation of the idea of a modern. The 'pre-modern is a category that only makes sense in sequential relation to a modern). Post-development recognises that the complexities of social structures, relations, and change cannot be reduced to such simple linearities. Moreover, adopting more complex perspectives behoves us to reassess what has been left behind in the reimagining of human destiny as 'the modern'. Post-development offers a profound critique of social change, seeking to deconstruct the entangling of these multiple narratives and by doing so to question the ways in which the creation of a particular form of subjectivity (confirming to the developing subject) narrows our conception of what it means to be human.

A significant component of linear development's history of western modernity depicts emancipation as a corollary of the Enlightenment triumph of reason over religion. Within this, spirituality has too often been falsely equated as synonymous with institutional religion (compare Abram, 1997). A more nuanced reading might differentiate between the institutions of religion and the spiritual traditions that accompany them. Spiritual traditions exist in a symbiotic relationship to those sources, often in dynamic tension, sometimes even in direct opposition. Modernity as a rational epistemology casts out a place for the role of the spiritual in its desire for a rupture with the past. This is implied in the identification of the modern as an overcoming of what it terms as primitive (pre-enlightenment). Challenging the binary division of the religious and the political as successive epistemological realms and recognising instead their simultaneous continued co-existence confronts us with the observation that parts of human being in the world cannot be reduced to the material and calculable. Some form of spirituality, even when entirely defined in secular form, is therefore an intrinsic part of being human. Therefore, without a spiritual dimension, emancipatory visions will be necessarily incomplete.

To understand my desire to incorporate a spiritual dimension into the discussion of emancipation in post-development and degrowth, I want to draw on this background and the

complexity of a number of debates. But before I start, I also want to insist that this is also not to embrace a simplistic theistic model of belief in a god or gods. It is not a desire for a return to some imaginary premodern values and conceptions. If critical thought in the political realm cannot afford to ignore the impact of Nietzsche, then neither can it when considering the realms of thinking about religion or spirituality. Thus, the discussion proceeds from a recognition that any conversation about the spiritual necessarily has to contend with doing religious study after the death of god. It is one that builds on insights of twentieth-century Western philosophy rather than diving into a regressive restatement of ideas that previous generations have already concluded as untenable.

3.1 Unbundling narratives of development

To comprehend the potential of post-development as an emancipatory politics, it helps to recognise how political concepts of emancipation have become thoroughly entangled with ideas of modernity itself. To recap, there is a developmentalist thread in many constructions of emancipation that grounds ideas of freedom in the (necessary) supplanting of reason over religion. Rather than reasserting the continued value of any particular political tradition or narrative, the task is to deconstruct the problem by seeking to untangle some of the many threads that become woven or braided together in formulating the problems of political freedom. Acknowledging the potential of the spiritual to be part of the narratives, ambiguously sited as potentially both positive and negative, we can identify what has been lost.

The pluriverse (Kothari et al., 2019; Escobar, 2020), as the language used as the contemporary articulation of what was originally explored in Sachs' (1992) development dictionary, explicitly highlights the multistranded approach to thinking through both problems and appropriate responses generated when moving away from development as a central organising principle. In the pluriverse, we now have a language to acknowledge the polyvocal constellation of ideas that weave together visions of liberation and emancipation, individually rooted in local realities and histories. To understand why spirituality is central to this vision, I want to apply the same logic to the object of critique.

Close reading of some of the (almost) interminable debates on postmodernity and anticapitalism, and particularly left critiques of postmodernity (now interestingly being revivified in rejections of posthumanism) suggests to me that the identification – and the desire for the identification – of a singular point force of disruption obscures an entangled multiplicity of discourses that serve to oppress. There are many forms and configurations of oppression that cannot be reduced to one singular cause: as we recognise when we forge alliances to engage in

struggle, sensitivity to and dedication to tackling one form of oppression does not necessarily mean sensitivity to others. A universal critique seeks a universal object of critique, and pluriversal responses recognise the contribution of multiple dimensions of resistance.

Instead, I want to suggest that we might begin to untangle some specific strands of discourse; to differentiate a series of problematiques. It is too easy to think of emancipation by slipping into a series of negations: if capitalism is the problem, then we must be anticapitalist and therefore must pose the question as what would be the shape of a post-capitalism? If modernity is the problem, then we must be postmodern: How does that relate to anti-modernism, and is anti-modernism the same as a return to premodernism (quite clearly not: post-modernism does not require a return to the pre-modern)? Centrally, if development is the problem, what are some of the key components that make up the development project, and how do these look when subject to scrutiny? What are their distinctions, and how are they interconnected? Additionally, it is valuable to consider how, as these discourses are bundled together, they generate corollaries. In their interactions, they engender further assumptions about the nature of change; how it must appear and what it comprises. For the first step in the argument, we can unbundle what Demaria et al (2023: 66) identify as "the core assumptions of the development discourse: growth, material progress, instrumental rationality, the centrality of markets and economy, universality, modernity and its binaries." Not all of these are equally pertinent to my argument in this paper, but an overview will elucidate the argument of the final section of the paper.

Growth. Perhaps the closest linguistic synonym of development. Everything needs to grow, to mature, not to be stunted. Yet there is a fundamental contradiction in the pursuit of infinite growth on a finite planet. The ecological problem arises when growth breaches its systemic limits (Richardson, 2023). An infinite expansion of needs with finite resources with which to fulfil them portends catastrophe and deepening inequalities. A core aspect of economic growth in development terms relies on incorporation into a globalising capitalist economy involving ever-greater flows of resources, goods, and labour. The counter-narratives of degrowth and post-growth explicitly target the growth paradigm from within the locations whose endorsement of growth benefited them most.

Material progress. Both technological development and the range and volume of material goods available are held up as indicators of progress and as the means to define the good life. Both are problematic not only from the perspective of ecological contradiction as noted above, but also from the implicit obsolescence implied by this narrative of acquisition. What is old must necessarily be inferior according to this assumption – a perspective that

rapidly and problematically also bleeds over into the consideration of immaterial goods in the form of ideas and sensitivities. Emphasis on material progress obscures the vital nurture of non-material goods, values, and sensitivities that cannot be assessed through metrics of material progress: love, joy, care, the qualities that make life bearable.

Instrumental rationality. The intellectual dimension of a utilitarian ethic, dividing the world into that which can be identified as useful for the attainment of a pre-identified task, toward a pre-determined goal, thereby determining that which is valuable and that which is not, and therefore can and must be discarded as useless. Instrumental rationality reproduces a subject-object relationship with both people and ideas; the value of something or someone lies only in their utility to advance the wielder of that rationality and the ends of the project undertaken. It is the antithesis of care and of relationality that appreciates others, human and more than human, for their own intrinsic value.

The centrality of markets and the economy. More than simply a critique of capitalism as the arrangement of the economy for the accumulation of capital, based on property ownership and the increasing distinction of classes defined by the relationship to the ownership of the means of production, to challenge the centrality of markets and the economy questions their very use as bases of value. It opens the door to the re-evaluation of subsistence and a re-imagination of what is currently called the reproductive economy: the inequalities of paid and unpaid (valued and undervalued) labour are not solved by increasing the scope of monetised activity. This is why other forms of value assessment as alternatives to GDP, the economic value of life satisfaction, for example, can have no more than limited use as transitional measures.

Universality. Challenged explicitly in the naming of the pluriverse, to question universality is to question the teleological tendencies of development that assume and presume knowledge of the ultimate goal of change. It confronts head-on the idea that the end of history has already been decided - the end-state can be imagined - and that the rest of history is a matter of getting to that singular state. Note that this is as much a problem of many conventional socialist imaginaries as it is a critique of capital.

Modernity and its binaries. The idea of development as a process of modernisation and of emancipatory politics as bound inseparably to the process of modernisation encourages the formation of a worldview based on the juxtaposition of binary pairings, old/new, relevant/not-relevant. As Bruno Latour remarked, modernity borrows its reference points from the relation between subject and object, the past and the future (Latour, 1999: 188ff). Only by making a conceptual break to render others as pre-modern and implicitly obsolete can modernity gain legitimacy as a concept. The formation of such fundamental binaries, pervasively characterising

how we see the world in thesis and antithesis, the latter defined by it being 'not the former', denies two things. First, that both parts of a pairing having their own intrinsic qualities, and second, that there are other possibilities outside of the binary. For Latour, the juxtaposition of ways of knowing as historical products, defining scientific knowledge as a modern perspective unconnected with the position and interests of the knower, has become a fundamental tenet of the processes of modernisation. Without a "science extracted from the social world... [there can be] …no discernible movement, no progress" (Latour, 1999: 189).

It is particularly this last point that brings the argument of this paper to the heart of my concerns about the framing of emancipatory thinking. To rethink emancipation along the lines of post-development, I argue, requires us to include a spiritual element. And it is at this point that the final section of this paper addresses.

4. Emancipation and spirituality

A primary binary of modernity concerns the contrast between science and religion as ways of knowing. The triumph of reason marks, it is said, the definitive overthrow of religious myth and superstition, with its implications of stasis, by the dynamic of scientific rationality. Modern political science is an essential part of this modernity, a way of ordering knowledges of power, organisation and administration. Synonymous with and inseparable from the rise of the modern nation state, it is an archetypal form of post-enlightenment thought. While religions themselves continue to exist, their ultimate redundancy and demise are predicted through the growth of secularisation. Science overcomes superstition and myth, politics overcomes religion.

Creating a simple binary between religion and politics in which the former is superseded by the latter is itself an implicitly developmentalist narrative. In such an image, those elements of knowledge that might be associated with what has been called the religious or spiritual dimensions of life are necessarily relegated to an historical past from which we have by necessity to be freed. Yet such an idea is a relatively recent one. Even the great champion of The Age of Reason, Tom Paine (1794), sought not the abolition of religion but a revolution of it, just as he called for a revolution in politics. The aim of both may have been the abolition of former corrupting and oppressive regimes, but their future lay in their transformation, not abolition. In dismissing the religious impulse as a dimension of human life, politics becomes a totalising regime, taking to itself all capacity to define value. The domination of economics as the defining realm of value is concomitant with the refusal of any other possibilities of sources of value beyond the purely material.

To break from this image of two successive analyses of power, Sharma's (2021: 31) summary of Martin Buber's reflections on the contrasting aims of religion and politics provides a useful way to move forward. Religion implies a goal and a way, a means to live and to be in the world. Politics demands ends and means; its goals are marked by success and can be historically recorded. Religious goals indicate a way, but never enter into historical consummation.

The struggles of religion are part of being human, not something to be overcome. Nor do they only have a legitimate existence in some historic past. Religious sensibilities and institutions have not died away, and the secularisation process has not erased the religious impulse. Mythos and Logos co-exist as two different ways of knowing and experiencing.

If we concede that part of being human involves recognising dimensions of being and sensing that are beyond the purely material (that which I refer to as the spiritual for a shorthand), then any emancipatory vision that does not attend to this dimension is incomplete. The tragedy of much Left politics in its proclamation of emancipatory promise is that its inheritance of modernity, the value systems outlined above, explicitly relegates the non-material to a world of historical redundancy. In speaking only to the head, not the heart, such a politics leaves a void readily exploited today by far-right populism, which side-steps reason and occupies that ground of emotion and non-reason.

Yet the appeal and a sense of incompleteness remain, as witnessed by the appeal of works that retrace a sense of materiality being more than inert 'stuff'. For example, Jane Bennet's Vital Matter sits along a wealth of voices urging the need to rediscover something lost in the way that Western modernity sees and understands the material world. But appeal to the heart, to the realm of the spiritual, is rightly something of which to be suspicious. In discussing the grounding of Gandhi's politics of ahimsa (nonviolence) in his metaphysical view of the world and in spiritual discipline, Sharma (2021: 8) notes that "bereft of their metaphysical anchor", such ideas "play into the hands of forces, political and social, that repress." A free-form spirituality that has no grounding in anything other than its own self-justification is open to abuse. Anchoring does not require adherence to a traditional form of religion; after all, Gandhi's own syncretic approach was far from orthodox, but it does require acknowledgement of the resources and practices that religious approaches have made possible, and the disciplines that they require, especially in the understanding of freedom.

One of the functions of spiritual disciplines grounded in religious traditions was to provide an anchor for metaphysics. Desire and passion, the non-rational emotional dimensions of life, need grounding in a lived and living community to prevent them from playing into the

hands of repressive politics. A politics that acknowledges no religion subsumes all capacity for power/knowledge to itself and inevitably becomes corrupt, recognising nothing outside itself, it has no boundaries, no system of checks and balances. Conversely, religious traditions become corrupt when they absorb the political into themselves. Identifying with historical goals and means, religion becomes an oppressive force of division, separating and segregating those within its bounds and those defined as outsiders. Political power wedded to religious justification is doubly dangerous. Both are needed and need to be understood as different so that there is knowledge of the limits of action and of the will to power of each realm. The line between extremes is fragile and requires attentiveness and work to maintain balance. Incorporating spirituality into emancipatory politics is necessary, but not an easy or simple solution. What it can look like is dealt with in the final section

4.1 Reimagining and acting on spirituality beyond the death of god

Does metaphysics or religion require a belief in a transcendental realm? The dilemma of contemporary understanding of spirituality in light of the death of god was actually neatly summed up by Thomas Paine in his *Age of Reason* in the late eighteenth century ([1794] 1974: 50): "Infidelity does not consists in believing or disbelieving. It consists in professing to believe what he does not believe." In a post-Nietzschean era, theistic imagery and language are rightly dispensed with, and vitalism likewise. In Britain, the debates over the death of god in the early 1960s were neatly summed by the title of John Robinson's book *Honest to God*, in which he sought to think how contemporary spirituality needed to go beyond recitation of non-credible statements and impermeable rules to embrace the realities and contingencies of life. Being faithful to the resources of one's own intellectual tradition requires us to reach honestly and carefully into the intellectual resources and debates at play.

To more fully comprehend the place of the spiritual in post-development thought, and why it was the grounding for so many of the pioneering voices of post-development, we can take a further step to consider the spiritual not simply as a realm of intellectual enquiry, but as discipline, as a way of doing. In Aristotelian thought, as Flyvberg (2001) explains, there are three forms of knowledge. The first two are familiar: *episteme*, expressed as analytic, scientific knowledge, and *techne*, technical knowledge, the skilled know-how acquired by the practitioner. The third form of knowledge is *phronesis*. Without a direct English translation, it is prudence, the practical wisdom arising from action, in which instrumental rationality is balanced by value rationality. The spirituality I am exploring and valuing here is a dimension of life that is not comprehended by intellectual exercise, nor formed from the mastery of

technique and skilled exercises, but from the everyday expression of concern and awareness that there are values that cannot be expressed in instrumental terms, that cannot be garnered from material progress or growth. Nor can they be commodified. Rather, they are the human responses to the specificities of the situation, the expression of what today is being called an ethics of care (Puig de al Bellacasa, 2017; Lynch, 2022). Care is not simply an attitude; it demands relationship, it requires doing, and it articulates a politics of love.

Most of those who write today about the ethics of care and its importance do so in a fully secularised manner, yet there is also a constant struggle visible in the discussions of ethics of care to ensure that it cannot be a matter of calculation, of rationalised action. For those unused to, and uncomfortable with, the language of spirituality, it is entirely feasible and acceptable to strip it out. However, such a move should not ignore or disregard the resources that spiritual traditions make available for the practice of care.

A generation earlier, Raimon Panikkar (1983) described such critical positionality in terms of the contemplative mood. Modernity contained its own incentives for fulfilment: the Heaven above for the religious, the history ahead for the progressives, Work to be done for the realists, the conquest of the Big Idea for the intelligent, and the ambition of success for everyone. Against these ambitions Panikkar juxtaposed the contemplative mood as a counternarrative for freedom; in which attentiveness to the here should replace concern with the elsewhere, attentiveness to the now not the elsewhere, to the act not the product, to the intimate and interior not to the exterior and visible, to contentment not to triumph. The contemplative mood is a disciplined address to a radical reinterpretation of values. One that serves the idea of finding a way to live within limits, personal and ecological.

In the Vikalp Sangam framework for transformation, value sits at the central intersection of all the elements of the ‘flower of transformation’ (Kothari, 2023: 15). To talk seriously about values is not only to move away from instrumentality, but it also requires frameworks on which values can be grounded, rather than their remaining arbitrary selections. This is the historic role of spiritual traditions in relation to ethics.

5. Conclusions

To summarise the argument, the issue for the role of spirituality in a rethinking of emancipation is not to find a place in which it can be added. It is rather that an emancipatory politics not engaged with the dimensions of what has been conventionally defined in terms of the spiritual, fails to address all human living and relating. Equally, a focus on the spiritual

without due concern for the physical and material is a failure. Only with a full set of resources can we find ways to develop properly emancipatory visions.

In this way, engaging a spirituality equated with care enables us to begin reconstruction of an idea of emancipation that relies not on overcoming the realm of necessity but on finding our place within the limits and capacities of our inter-relationships with each other and with the more-than-human. I the introduction to his book *The World Beyond Your Head,* Matthew Crawford makes the following observation, which forms a neat summary of this broader discussion of emancipation, rethought beyond its construction as an escape from the realm of necessity. "Genuine agency arises not in the context of mere choices freely made (as in shopping), but rather, somewhat paradoxically, in the context of submission to things that have their intractable ways, whether the thing be a musical instrument, a garden or the building of a bridge… when we become competent in some particular fields of practice, our perception is disciplined by that practice; we become attuned to the pertinent features of a situation that would be invisible to a bystander. Through the exercise of a skill, the self that acts takes on a different shape. It comes to be in a relation of *fit*, to a world it has grasped" (Crawford, 2015: 24).

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