

Globethics Repository



Development and Fundamentalism

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Dower, Nigel
Publisher	Globethics.net
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-09-16 20:04:10
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/173571

1

DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDAMENTALISM

Nigel Dower, United Kingdom

1. Introduction

It is often thought that there is some kind of conflict between development and fundamentalism. Fundamentalists may be opposed to what they see as development – particularly commitment to economic growth and the materialism associated with it, to liberty and to democracy which are central to a common paradigm of development. Advocates of development may regard fundamentalists as impeding development in practice and rejecting it in principle.

And yet, I shall argue, there is nothing about fundamentalism that rules out support for some form of development and certainly not development as economic growth. How far fundamentalist conceptions of development are compatible with a typical Western view of development depends on a number of factors, whether for instance the commitment to fundamentalism involves rejection of materialist growth, or goes along with active intolerance of others, aggressive proselytising or the use of violence as a means. But I want to stress that there is nothing in the general idea of fundamentalism that involves these stances.

2. Development: Concept and Conceptions

We need to distinguish between a basic concept of development and various conceptions of it. A basic concept of development is something like a process of change – social, economic, political – in a society which ought to be pursued by public agents such as a government. By contrast a conception of development is a particular interpretation of what “ought” to happen. This will be based on certain normative views about what constitutes a change from a worse state to a better state – involving conceptions of human well being, appropriate moral and political norms and so on, coupled with a broad empirical understanding of how best to realise these norms.

There are, it hardly needs stressing, many different conceptions of development – from libertarian conceptions, liberal conceptions such as Sen’s approach in *Development as Freedom*¹, to conceptions in which redistributive justice are central, socialist or Marxist conceptions that emphasise state regulation of the economy. A common contrast is between conceptions that make economic growth central as providing the conditions of more choice, and conceptions that for a variety of reasons (e.g. spiritual, environmental) question the centrality of growth in the conception of progress.

For someone in favour of the way development is pursued in a country, what is pursued by the government is broadly what ought to happen – the government’s values and the ways of implementing them are broadly right. But others may be critical of what is done in the name of development – perhaps less radically because they think the proposed means are inadequate or inappropriate to the stated and acceptable goals, or more radically because they think the goals and values are themselves inadequate or wrong.

¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Development ethics, which is the intellectual stable from which I come and orient my approach on these issues, arose as a self-conscious area of intellectual enquiry about twenty years ago, partly in connection with the setting up of a new organisation called the International Development Ethics Association². It started out as critical enquiry into what was done in the name of development, particularly the commitment to economic growth, and into the failures nationally and internationally to tackle extreme poverty, at a time when those involved in government and business did not really think there were ethical issues involved in development itself. But of course once the issues are raised, those who defend development as it is usually pursued cannot just rest on established practice, but also have to give an account of why development as conventionally understood is the justified way to go. It is clear that the debates have become more sophisticated all round. Defenders of the main paradigm are rarely content to rest on economic growth, and have much more to say about values like democracy, human rights, fair distribution, transparency, good governance and so on, whilst being divided in opinion on the extent and nature of economic liberty. That is, some claim it should be as unrestricted as possible either because it is a fundamental value (I use this word *fundamental* deliberately since libertarianism can sometimes take a fundamentalist character) or because it will, it is believed, by trickle-down lead to prosperity for all eventually. Others hold that we must have some commitment to redistributive taxation as required by their understanding of social justice³.

Given this general framework we can ask two questions of fundamentalism. First, can a fundamentalist have a conception of develop-

² See www.development-ethics.org.

³ For further information about development ethics see e.g. D. Goulet, *Development Ethics: Theory and Practice* (Apex Books, 1995); D. Crocker, "Towards a Development Ethic", *World Development*, 1991; and Gasper, Des, *The Ethics of Development* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003). See also N. Dower, "The Nature and Scope of Development Ethics," *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol 4, Issue 3, 2008, 183-193.

20 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

ment? Second, given as I shall argue that they can, are such conceptions of development compatible with liberal conceptions of development?

3. Fundamentalism

I had a quick look on the web using Google to see what definitions came up on fundamentalism. To take the first four: “Movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles”⁴; “A usually religious movement or point of view characterised by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism”⁵; “Fundamentalism is a religious position typically characterised by a rigid adherence to what are perceived to be the most basic and traditional principles and beliefs of that religion”⁶; “1. Movement with strict view of doctrine: a religious or political movement based on a literal interpretation of and strict adherence to doctrine, especially as a return to former principles and 2. Support for literal explanation: the belief that religious or political doctrine should be implemented literally, not interpreted or adapted”⁷.

There are of course some differences in these definitions: some limit it to religious fundamentalism others allow for other principles, of a political nature for example; some emphasise appeal to tradition others do not. What is striking about these (and I think they are typical) is that they stress literal and rigid adherence to their principles. What is also striking is that none of them make any direct reference to how someone

⁴ See <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/netdict?Fundamentalist> (accessed August 2006)

⁵ See <http://www.answers.com/topic/fundamentalism> (accessed August 2006)

⁶ http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/western/bldef_fundamentalism.html (accessed August 2006)

⁷ See http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861613888/fundamentalism.html (accessed August 2006)

who adopts a fundamentalist position defines himself or herself over and against others who do not accept it. They do not say (except for one where the point is not seen as defining the position) that a fundamentalist must be intolerant or hostile towards people of other beliefs; they do not say that one must strive to get others to accept one's beliefs; they certainly do not say that fundamentalists must use extreme means such as terrorism or violence to destroy or convert others.

I rather like the first definition I gave and will proceed using this: "Movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles". One advantage of it is that it allows for forms of fundamentalism other than religious fundamentalism. It could include rigid adherence to Marxism or for that matter rigid adherence to libertarianism. It could include ethical positions, such as the position of the animal liberationist (though a clear belief in the moral status of animals need not lead to violent actions) and indeed to environmental radicalism. It could also include someone who was committed to any clearly worked out ethical position such as Kantianism (though most people adhering to Kant's approach would not regard it in this way). I like it too because it does not build in reference to tradition. No doubt the fundamentalist motive is often a wish to return to earlier certainties (and it reflects the historical origin of the terminology in American religious history), but it need not be. It is also likely to have some reference to an authority whether Marx, Locke, the Bible, the Koran or a religious tradition.

It is important at this stage to note that although it is often convenient to distinguish between fundamentalism and non-fundamentalism and also to regard liberalism as a form of non-fundamentalism, there are two respects in which this is highly misleading. First there is in fact a continuum between positions that are fully fundamentalist and positions which are its opposite, with many positions in the middle having different degrees or mixtures of relevant features. Second, setting liberalism against fundamentalism in simple opposition is also misleading, since

22 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

some forms of commitment to liberalism can take a fundamentalist form. No doubt typically those who see themselves as liberal would describe themselves as not fundamentalist and vice versa, but this is only typical, not part of the logic of the concept.

This continuum is in fact not a smooth continuum either but a somewhat jagged spectrum in which different criteria will apply in different ways.⁸ Indeed, one can see a number of key elements for each of which if there are more of the elements present then the position tends more to being fundamentalist and if there are fewer then the position tends more to being non-fundamentalist. For instance, in regard to the way the basic beliefs are held: (a) how rigidly is the belief held? (a psychological question); (b) how certain is the belief (an epistemological question about the nature of the knowledge claim, in contrast to fallibilism which accepts fallibility as scientific principle, epistemological humility, or adopting an attitude of critical loyalty to the object of one's beliefs); and in regard to the nature and extent of the basic beliefs; (a) how large a body of such beliefs are held as non-negotiable (a large complex system of knowledge versus a very broadly defined simple set of core values and beliefs); (b) how far what is believed is a set of literal truths generally grounded in sacred texts and seen as important to the definition of who one is, versus the importance of interpreting such texts or not seeing texts as so important to defining who one is, and regarding such texts as only outward vehicles for something that lies beyond (and accessible via many different texts), or simply regarding texts as unimportant to one's core values (as in mysticism).

A paradigm of fundamentalism is going to be a set of beliefs which are rigidly held, certain, extensive in scope and grounded in literal truth. A paradigm of non-fundamentalism is going to be a set of beliefs that are flexibly held, open to question, basic and non-extensive, and either

⁸ The distinctions outlined in this paragraph are based on reflections on discussions at the globethics.net conference in August 2006.

based on interpretation of sacred texts or not grounded in sacred texts at all but in experience, secular or spiritual, or life and/or rational reflection. But many positions may be fundamentalist or more fundamentalist in some respects and less so or not so in other respects.

For the purpose of the rest of this article I will however fall in with a common assumption that we can talk of fundamentalism as one position defined in terms of all these features clearly exhibited, and liberalism as characteristically a position in which all the opposite features are clearly exhibited. I shall be considering religious fundamentalism (as most clearly exhibiting these features in varying degrees), and have in mind North American Christian fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism (although other religions of course have their forms of fundamentalism and much of what I say will apply to them equally).

My general strategy is to look at possible differences between what a fundamentalist might say about development and what a liberal might say about it, and then show that these differences are not as clear as might seem at first sight. Some – even most – but not all fundamentalists clearly want the rest of society and even the world to come to accept their beliefs. Does that make them different from liberals? Arguably not, at least for most liberals. Some fundamentalists may act in democratic society in a democratic way to pursue their goals but have a non-democratic vision they are aiming at. Does that make their position different from that of the liberal? Again, arguably not, at least for most liberals. Some – a few – fundamentalists are prepared to use violence in pursuit of their ends. Does that make them different from liberals? Here there is of course a real difference about the types of violence regarded as justified, but for any liberal who is not a pacifist, the use of violence as such is not ruled out either. Some fundamentalists may present a vision of development not based on economic growth as central or a necessary condition of other goals. Does that make them different from liberals? Not necessarily since there may be plenty of other reasons why

24 Overcoming Fundamentalism

some liberals and certainly many others who are not fundamentalists also reject the development as growth paradigm.

4. Fundamentalism and Development

How might a fundamentalist think of development? Minimally he will want any changes in the society in which he lives to allow him and those who share his beliefs to continue to live as they want. If they are a minority, they may want a social order that tolerates their existence, provides support for their cultural ways with for example provision of separate schools, maybe economic support where needed and generally a peaceful and orderly social environment in which to live. Some groups of fundamentalists may focus primarily on this. Here the idea is of a fundamentalist minding his own business. He might ideally like a wider society or world which expressed his values, but that is not a basis of action. Maybe the Amish in the USA fit this model; they certainly seem to fit our definition well, and though they may in the abstract wish the world to conform to their values, their main concern is to preserve their way of life and relate to the wider world respectfully and non-violently. Some forms of monastic vocation may be like this too.

However most fundamentalists will want the society they live in (and indeed the world as a whole) to be one in which more people come to accept their beliefs and they see it as appropriate if not a duty to promote their values among others. Perhaps a fundamentalist has a vision of a society in the future in which everyone accepts his beliefs. How are these features – wanting others to accept their values and having a vision of the future – different from how many of us who do not see ourselves as fundamentalists think of development? First, if we have firm values for instance about fairness, integrity, human rights, social justice, punishment, or the environment, we may not hold these beliefs rigidly or literally, but if they matter to us, we also want other people to accept

these beliefs and in various ways (dialogue, public writing, democratic engagement and so on) seek to influence people, since if more in our society think our way, then there will be change in positive directions towards the kind of society we want to develop. Second, we also might have a vision of a future state of development in which these values are fully realised. That is, we all have differing views as to the desirable directions socio-economic development should take and the way it will go will depend on which views prevail.

Furthermore, unless the fundamentalism in question involves a firm commitment to the view that material poverty is not a problem and that having more than minimal amounts of wealth is unimportant, then the fundamentalist no less than the liberal can be committed to development as a process of economic growth and to making poverty reduction central within that. So there may be no differences on that score. There may be further differences in what else we want development to achieve, but on this point – economic improvement especially for the poor, often seen as the central feature of development anyway – there need not be.

Again it is perfectly possible for a fundamentalist (given our definition) to accept democratic process either in principle or pragmatically. She might accept this in principle if her fundamentalist beliefs included democratic values or at least she accepted that democratic processes were consistent with these beliefs as a means to advancing her beliefs. She might accept it pragmatically if, despite her vision of a future or ideally perfect society run on say theocratic or otherwise authoritarian lines (like the idea of benevolent dictator or philosopher king), she realised that in the world today she needed to work with the system we have got.

Above I have been talking about fundamentalist minorities in a pluralist democratic society. Somewhat different things need to be said about the position of a fundamentalist living in a fundamentalist society, and I do not really go into this. I would just remark that her view might

26 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

be different depending on whether her form of fundamentalism was the same as that dominant in her society or somewhat different – think of a Muslim in a fundamentalist Christian society or vice versa or indeed historically of the perceived incompatibilities between Protestants and Catholics not that long ago in Europe. If then the fundamentalisms are different *and* if her values and those dominant in her society both included some form of democratic procedure, she has and can welcome the chance for democratic change. If her values include democratic values but she lives in an undemocratic society, then she has the same set of problems as a liberal faces in such a society. But conversely if her own values are non-democratic but she lives in a society that, though fundamentalist, allows democratic expression, she has, as in a liberal society, the opportunity to engage in democracy pragmatically to advance her ideas.

5. Is There Incoherence between Current Process and Future Vision?

But you may say, surely the real problem is that if the fundamentalist is really not a democrat, and only goes along with it out of convenience, then his vision of development – the perfect realisation of his values – is deeply inconsistent with our conventional view. He may even reject development discourse altogether anyway.

Our conventional view, it may be said, is about commitment to greater human well being through, amongst other things, commitment to human rights, democracy, freedoms, respect for diversity and so on. These incidentally are not just the means to human betterment, they are also *constitutive* of that betterment. Briefly, the increasing and strengthening of institutions and practices that reinforce democracy, liberties, respect for diversity and rights not only provide direct indices as instruments of development, but also enable more people to be actively de-

mocratic, live lives enriched by welcoming diversity, exercise their rights and freedoms – all of which contribute to their lives going well (in addition to their being healthy, well fed and housed, equipped with resources and abilities for a wide range of interesting activities).

Now it may be said that this view of development is, if you like, internally coherent over time. If we pursue these values now in the hope that they will be more instantiated in the future, this is consistent with, and indeed hopefully conducive to this continuing into the future in the same way, and so on until maybe – just maybe – there will be a society in the future which is fully democratic, free, respectful of diversity and so on. (Incidentally the trouble with many conceptions of sustainable development is that they fail this test.) But the kind of fundamentalist we are considering now is someone who goes along with these values now as a way of getting on with others and at the same time more effectively advancing his values, but has a vision of a socio-political order in the future in which these values would no longer hold sway. So his rationale for engaging in society now is different and somehow disingenuous. Here we have an echo of the Weimar Republic phenomenon where the National Socialists with a non-democratic agenda used the democratic process to get into power to destroy it.

This is I grant a significant problem, but maybe one we can contain if we recognise that, as minorities in a pluralist society, their vision is hardly a realistic threat if democratically pursued, and if we recognise the following points. Indeed here we encounter a more general problem within the so-called Western paradigm: granted that we pursue development as creating the enabling conditions for people to develop and exercise their capabilities and this leads to fully rounded human lives (a justification like this must surely lie behind a commitment to economic growth – it is not an end in itself), why are we committed to democracy, human rights, freedom and so on? These values are largely procedural values about the way we pursue goals and accommodate other people's

28 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

pursuit of goals. As such they can be seen as intrinsically important or they can be seen as instrumentally important.

If they are the former, that is intrinsically important, they could be but are unlikely to be the only public values we are really committed to promoting since there are likely to be others – about education, defence or the environment for example. (Of course I may also have privately many values and goals – music, bird watching, my religious life – but my interest in these is not such that I think a society would be better for generally accepting these values.) If they are the latter, then in being instrumental they must be based on some other values thought to be important. Either way we must recognise that it is usual for people to have further substantive public concerns and agendas.

For instance I may want euthanasia to be accepted, or cannabis legalised, or an area of nature preserved, or an increase of aid to other countries accepted, or restorative justice used in the penal system, or animal farming stopped. Engagement in civil society generally and in political life in particular is premised on wanting things to change. If we want to imagine a future society in which the values we think important are fully realised, it will be different for each person, both in respect to the particular substantive values each person accepts, but also in respect to how far a future society could *both* be democratic and fully respectful of liberty and diversity *and* realise these substantive values.

Imagine a society for instance which conformed to one's preferred values in which say there was serious environmental protection based on the intrinsic value of nature, but if that society was democratic or respectful of diversity, what if people wanted to act in ways that did not protect that environment? There is also a potential tension between democracy, liberty and respect for diversity, such that they cannot all be maximally observed. These tensions are going to be more acute the more we try and focus on what a perfectly developed society would look like. Clearly there are also tensions on the journey of development –

what we are doing now – but they are not so acute, and certainly not such as to separate out what the fundamentalist is doing and what many other groups of activists are trying to do.

Perhaps it does not matter that we each have a different vision of a distant future (probably never realisable) or of how our current society might look like if all our values were fully realised. Such visions are not goals but orientations. What matters is how we pursue development here and now. But if this the case, then the fact that the fundamentalist may have an ideal which is not the same as yours or mine, does not prevent his view and its advancement from being a legitimate part of the current development process.

6. The Ethics of the Means

Where the real tension appears between our normal understanding of development in liberal societies and many fundamentalist views is when the fundamentalist adopts certain views about others who are not of her faith. If here and now a fundamentalist is actively intolerant of others, or proselytises in a way that is inconsistent with the spirit of open dialogue, or engages in violence including terrorism, then in various degrees we have serious problems.

Incidentally it is interesting to note that these tensions are not, or at least need not be, about the standard conception of development as economic growth. A fundamentalist could well be committed to economic growth including a distributive principle that requires a significant part of that growth to be directed to the poor, but reject democracy, liberties, many human rights or the whole rights discourse in favour of undemocratic and illiberal socio-political regimes. This may be because these values are simply to be rejected in themselves or are seen as inappropriate to the promotion of development economically. (Consider an analogous case: the so-called Lee thesis that development in Asian countries

30 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

was better promoted in an authoritarian way than via democracy and human rights⁹). Such an advocate may in a liberal state promote these views or he may approve of them in an illiberal state (as some Marxists might have approved of the USSR, certainly committed to some forms of socio-economic development).

Active intolerance of others is of course deeply antithetical to a liberal society which not merely tolerates other views but welcomes diversity, both of individual life-styles and of cultures. Aggressive proselytising conflicts with the key values of dialogue and rational discourse. This needs of course to be distinguished from the reasonable promotion of views, which seems to be a requirement of any seriously held view about what it is important to believe. The commitment to violence as a method is deeply inconsistent both with a commitment to democracy as a method of resolving differences and also with a basic acceptance of the ethics of the means, namely that there are certain non-violent ways by which we need to relate to fellow human beings, whatever ends we are pursuing.

How does one handle people who take these approaches in a liberal democracy? One has to be tolerant of the intolerant and willing to be reasonable with those who use unreasonable methods. With violence there are two response: first, where at all humanly possible, one needs to be willing to have dialogue with those who reject dialogue and to use the ethics of the means against those who reject the ethics of the means; but second at another level, the perpetrators of violence and their supporters put themselves at odds with the society they are in but in a sense are not part of. How far and in what ways violence is justified against terrorist attack either from within or from outside one's society is a vexed and topical issue. I shall not pursue it here since my concern in this lecture is with development, but I note in passing that the discourse on the "war against terror" is not helpful.

⁹ Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

In regard to development we should note that even the terrorist may have a conception of development, one involving economic growth even, coupled with a belief about the means that one may take to create such a future social order. The model of development whether including economic growth or not, may be based on social and political principles quite at odds with those we assume in Western society (as seems to be the case with current Islamic terrorism), but it could also include familiar concepts. Consider the IRA or the militant wing of the ANC: their goal was the overthrow of the political order, but they might want the new political order to pursue broadly the same conception of development. Terrorism, whether committed by fundamentalists or committed by others who have goals not seen as fundamentalist in character, is essentially about means – an extreme version of the view that the end justifies the means.¹⁰

The challenge of the terrorist is not with his goals, but with his means. We may or may not be sympathetic to the kind of socio-political order a terrorist hopes will emerge from his acts, but what is deeply offensive is his view about means. So the challenge of the fundamentalist terrorist is not primarily about what he is after in the long run (generally unattractive as this is for most of us in the current Middle East con-

¹⁰ We can generalise a point about the difference between a freedom-fighter and a terrorist. Rather than saying as many want to say that a freedom-fighter is a terrorist of which one approves, it is better to say that terrorism is defined by the immediate goal of creating terror, whereas a freedom-fighter is defined by a long-term goal of attaining political freedom such as independence (Cf. Graham, G., *Ethics and International Relations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 115-118). So a freedom-fighter may be a terrorist if he pursues his goal by creating terror. So likewise a terrorist may also be a democracy-fighter or a rights-fighter. Terrorists then could be committed to creating a new political order (and their leaders later become respected political leaders) in which democratic and liberal values are instantiated; they could be about creating socio-political orders in which these values are not instantiated. They could be committed to development as economic growth, or they could be wanting a socio-political order based on other principles.

32 *Overcoming Fundamentalism*

text), but what characterises terrorism generally – a blatant disregard for the lives of ordinary people, etc.

7. Economic Growth versus Other Paradigms, Fundamental-ist or Otherwise

The paradoxical consequence of all this is that *if* development is seen as primarily economic growth, then there may not be as much difference in the ways of thinking about development between liberals and fundamentalists of a non-liberal kind as may be at first thought. What divides them is a view about what else development involves or at least needs to be combined with in terms of public commitment. Things like democracy, liberty, rights, protection of the environment as well as the establishment of the kinds of values fundamentalists think important in a society (or the world as a whole), are not things we simply have completely or do not have at all. They exist in degrees, so it makes sense to think of the progressive realisation of any of these kinds of values as a process over time which is the object of human endeavour. So it makes sense, as I implied at the beginning, to talk of rival conceptions of development as desiring social change.

However, if we resist the widening of the concept and prefer to think of development as essentially economic change, then there may be fewer differences over development itself, at the same time as increasing disagreements about the other social and political values that go along with the pursuit of development. I say “there may be fewer differences over development itself”, but there are still even on a more limited view of the subject matter of development, significant differences of view about how it should be pursued (liberty versus regulation; trickle-down versus state taxation for redistribution), though these differences do not divide fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists as such.

Of course many fundamentalists may be opposed to development as economic growth and even reject the discourse of development altogether. This may be because of the materialist assumptions behind it being seen as inconsistent with fostering the spiritual nature of human well being properly understood. But then opposition to development as economic growth may come from other quarters too, such as radical environmentalists or supporters of the sort of position advocated by Eric Fromm that true human well being comes from being more not having more¹¹. These views may also be deeply opposed to the development as growth paradigm and I am personally sympathetic to them. Such positions may well be held rigidly and in a way that makes them fundamentalist, but there is no reason to suppose that they need be held in such a way. Again it is an open question whether these positions on development and economic growth are seen as rejections of development discourse altogether, as writers like Sachs have done¹², or whether they lead to their advocates putting forward rival conceptions of development not so centrally linked either conceptually or empirically with economic growth - as do many in the organisation I belong to, namely IDEA the International Development Ethics Association).

8. Concluding Remarks

So a number of points emerge from this discussion. There is no inherent contradiction between development and fundamentalism. Fundamentalists could accept development as economic growth but combine commitment to this with values inconsistent with common assumptions in standard thinking about development such as liberty and democracy. How far there are tensions between different conceptions of development depends upon the approaches towards means which fundamental-

¹¹ E. Fromm, *To be or to have?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978).

¹² W. Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

34 Overcoming Fundamentalism

ists take to others. Fundamentalists could reject development as economic growth but nevertheless present an alternative model of development in terms of the progressive realisations of their primary values. They could reject the discourse altogether as inconsistent with their vision. Rejection of development as economic growth or development discourse altogether is not something that makes a person a fundamentalist either. Deeply held views on for instance the real nature of human well being or about ecological value may also lead to radical critiques of the dominant growth paradigm, without advocates of these views claiming to be or being described by others as fundamentalist. So conceptually the field is wide open.

Conclusions are not meant to bring in new material, but they can reassert what was indicated near the beginning and has been implicit in the rest of the text. I have used the neat distinction between liberals and fundamentalists as a heuristic device for showing how few things can be said about the one that cannot be said about the other. There are just too many combinations of positions, so generalisation is not very useful. But perhaps the main message is that the distinction is a dangerous one: the world does not fall into two camps – liberal and fundamentalist – rather there is a continuum of positions. Perhaps “a spectrum of positions” would be a better phrase since a continuum implies a smooth transition from more liberal to less liberal and from more fundamentalist to less fundamentalist. And this is not quite right either since the two ideas criss-cross each other in interesting ways as I indicated earlier. Since the polarisation of the world into binary groupings such as liberal and fundamentalist is actually one of the most dangerous processes occurring in the world today, we need to resist it. I hope that my discussion of development has helped to show why such polarisations are in the end not terribly helpful.