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Moral and Practical Sustainability Gaps: Implications for the Current Morality Based Liberal Development Model

By

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Abstract

The traditional utilitarian vrs liberal model discourse is long dead as liberal policies only are the driving forces of globalization now. Today, the relevant development discourse is that of morality centered vrs practicality based liberal policies, a discourse that appears to be at the heart of recent and current political dynamics in the USA.

It is pointed out in this paper: i) that moral and practical sustainability gaps are at the center of the unsustainability under which liberal models appear to operate; ii) that the only way the current morality based liberal model can reach the liberal policy sustainability state is when closing its practicality sustainability gap; and iii) that the only way practicality based liberal models can approach a liberal sustainability policy state is by addressing their morality sustainability gaps.

Introduction

Not long ago, the most common way of looking at development discourse all over the world was that of contrasting utilitarian and liberal policy options and their impacts on markets and societies; and then promoting one of those views. Utilitarian programs advocate for the maximization of universal wellbeing(Hinman 2010) and liberal policies champion the maximization of individual wellbeing(Grasso 2001).

The way recent globalization processes have gone appears to show that liberal policies have left utilitarian policies very far behind. Globalization processes are being driven by liberal dynamics(Kotz 2000), not utilitarian drivers.

And now the development process in most countries, especially developed countries, appears to be defined by alternating periods ruled by morally based liberal policies or practically based liberal programs. For example, the USA was ruled by practical liberal policies from 1981 to 1989 (President Reagan's period) and from 1989 to 1993(President Bush/Father's period); then by morally based liberal policies from 1993 to 2001(President Clinton's period); next by practical liberal policies from 2000 to 2009(President Bush/Son's period); and currently by the morally based liberal policy from 2010 to now(President Obama's period) as president Obama

won reelection(Lemire 2012). Putting the poor and the middle class first is the main message of morally based liberal policies; and placing the job creators and the rich first is the aim of the practically based liberal model.

So now, a new sort of development discourse has gained more relevance in most countries, the one the author calls “the internal liberal policy development discourse”. Hence, identifying all possible liberal model variability, which can be used to contrast available development options; and to determine from that the most likely path that each type of liberal model can take to move to a more sustainable state appear to be a very relevant exercise.

Goals of this paper

The main goal of this paper is to point out, using liberal development sustainability gaps, that if the current liberal development model based on morality principles is to achieve a more sustainable path it will have to deal sooner or later with its practicality sustainability gaps.

Methodology

A simple liberal development model is introduced to derive all possible liberal model variability. Then, specific types of liberal models are merged to point out the morality and practicality sustainability gaps affecting them. And finally, it is shown that the current liberal model based on morality should be expected to address its practicality sustainability gaps if it wants to remain being the dominant model.

Terminology

The terminology used in this paper is listed below:

M = Morality is relevant

m = Morality is not relevant

P = Practicality is relevant

p = Practicality is absent

LPSS = Liberal policy sustainability state MG = Merging gap

MSG = Morality sustainability gap

PSG = Practicality sustainability gap

Operational concepts

i) Dominant systems merging rules

When dominant systems of similar nature interact, they are expected to merge as follows:

A.A ----->A

$$AB.AB \dashrightarrow (AA)(BB) = AB$$

ii) Dominated systems merging rules

When dominated systems of similar nature interact, they are expected to merge as indicated:

$$a.a \dashrightarrow a$$

$$ab.ab \dashrightarrow (aa)(bb) = ab$$

iii) Mixed systems merging rules

When mixed systems interact under antagonistic conditions, they are expected to merge as indicated:

$$a.A \dashrightarrow aA$$

$$aB.AB \dashrightarrow (aA)(BB) = (aA)BB = (aA)B$$

$$ab.AB \dashrightarrow (aA)(bB)$$

iv) Merging gaps(MG)

When systems of opposite nature interact, as long as there are not win-win situations, there will be merging gaps(MG). For example, the interactions above (aA) and (bB) are examples of merging gaps as under antagonistic conditions merging cannot take place.

v) Merging under win-win conditions

When we go over antagonistic behavior and there are win-win situations, then irrelevant elements become relevant; and then merging is expected to take place as shown:

$$a.A \dashrightarrow A$$

$$aB.AB = (aA)(BB) = (aA)B \dashrightarrow AB$$

$$ab.AB = (aA)(bB) \dashrightarrow AB$$

Types of liberal development models

There can be different types of liberal policies depending on whether or not morality(M) or practicality(P) or both are relevant to the decision-making process, which can be expressed as follows:

$$L = M + P$$

The structure of the different liberal models consistent with the formula above is listed below:

a) The pure self-interest option(L1 = mp).

The first possibility appears when liberal policies(L1) are pursuing self-interest in the absence of morality(m) and in the absence of practicality(p) at the same time. In other words, this is a chaotic environment where no clear moral and practical boundaries exist supporting liberal policies. In this model then, pure self-interest is the driving force promoting individualism and accumulation.

b) The morality based self-interest option(L2 = Mp).

The second option is when the liberal policies(L2) guiding individualism and accumulation are based on morality(M) grounds only. For example, in this morality based model trade between nations is usually subjected, totally or at least partially, to social or/and environmental or/and human rights constraints; and here the formulation of internationally binding programs and monitoring frameworks are supported and promoted. Multilateral action, inclusion, and openness, especially international, are considered important morality elements.

Moreover, under morality based liberalism, the flow of corporate power such as the movement of production and skilled labor from developed to developing countries is minimal or very controlled affecting developed country's labor markets little or in almost unnoticeable forms.

Hence, the positive aspects of avoiding unilateral action, exclusion, and isolation on the wellbeing of the local systems are important for the morality based liberal model. Also in this model there is need to place limits on the powers of corporations to sustain it and to promote its growth. See that this morally based liberal model appears to contain the main aspects usually associated with the moral sustainable development model promoted by the Democratic Party in the USA.

c) The practicality based self-interest option(L3 = mP)

The third possibility comes when the liberal policies(L3) guiding individualism and accumulation are justified on practicality(P) grounds only. For example, in this practicality based model trade goals are usually as separated as possible from social, environmental, and human rights constraints directly or indirectly; and here the creation of internationally binding frameworks or monitoring programs are avoided or discouraged. In the practicality based liberal model, unilateral action, exclusion, and isolation, especially on the international front, are the main practicality guiding principles.

Under practicality based development, the flow of corporate power such as the movement of production and skilled jobs from developed to developing countries is maximized or extremely uncontrolled affecting through time the developed country's labor markets in very noticeable ways. Therefore, fears to the consequences of multilateral action, inclusion, and openness on local system's security are pointed out or repeated continuously to maintain the relevance of this practically based liberal model. Moreover, there is a need in this model to provide unlimited support and freedom to corporate power expansion to promote its growth.

Notice that this practically based liberal model appears to reflect the main characteristics usually associated with the practical sustainable development model being championed by the Liberal Party in the USA.

d) The practicality-morality based self-interest option(L4 = MP)

The last option is found when the liberal policies(L4) guiding self-interest are based on balancing morality(M) and practicality(P) constraints at the same time. In other words, liberal policies must be practical and morally acceptable at the same time locally and internationally to be efficient. When these conditions are present, moral and practical individualism and accumulation can take place; and under these conditions liberal policy sustainability is possible.

Equitable/fair local and international cooperation could then take place under a liberal model balancing practicality and morality. In other words, the above discussion suggests that when policy sustainability gaps are closed we can reach a liberal policy sustainability state(LPSS).

Identifying liberal policy sustainability gaps

There are two types of liberal sustainability gaps that can be found when merging the moral liberal model(L2) and the practical liberal models(L3) with the liberal sustainability model(L4), the practicality sustainability gap(PSG) and the morality sustainability gap(MSG), which are described below:

a) The practicality sustainability gap(PSG)

If we merge the moral liberal model L2 and liberal sustainability model L4 and combine terms, we can isolate the practicality sustainability gap(PSG = pP) associated with the current morality based liberal model as shown:

$$L2.L4 = (Mp)(MP) = (MM)(pP) = M(pP)$$

The formula above indicates that a move from the morality based liberal model(L2) to the liberal policy sustainability model(L4) requires clearly the elimination of its practicality sustainability gap(PSG = pP → P).

In other words, if practicality is incorporated in the moral liberal model by making it relevant, then pP → P closing this way the practical sustainability gap(PSG), and then the following would hold true:

$$L2.L4 = MP$$

The above implies that L2 = L4 = MP since (MP)(MP) = MP when we close the practical sustainability gap(PSG) as we are now in the liberal policy sustainability state(LPSS).

b) The morality sustainability gap(MSG)

If we merge the practical liberal model L3 and liberal sustainability model L4 and combine terms, we can point out the morality sustainability gap(MSG = mM) associated with the practicality based liberal model as highlighted below:

$$L3.L4 = (mP)(MP) = (mM)(PP)$$

The expression above indicates that to go from a practicality based liberal model(L3) to the liberal policy sustainability model(L4) we need to address its morality sustainability gap(MSG = $mM \rightarrow M$).

In other words, if morality is incorporated in the practical liberal model by making it relevant, then $mM \rightarrow M$ closing the moral sustainability gap(MSG); and then, the following would hold true:

L3.L4 = MP

The above implies that $L3 = L4 = MP$ since $(MP)(MP) = MP$ when we close the moral sustainability gap(MSG); and reach the liberal policy sustainability state(LPSS).

The roots of the internal liberal policy discourse

When contrasting the moral liberal model(L2) with the practical liberal model(L3) we can appreciate the heart of the internal liberal policy discourse as indicated below:

L2.L3 = (Mp)(mP) = (Mm)(pP) = MSG.PSG

The expression above indicates that the sources of the internal liberal policy discourse come from the interactions of or conflict between the moral sustainability gap(MSG) of the moral liberal model and the practical sustainability gap of the practical liberal model(PSG).

Implications for liberal development models

The discussion above highlights the nature of the internal liberal policy development discourse determining whether morality or practicality rules should prevail; and underlying the specific source of unsustainability when either of them prevails.

a) Implications for the current morally based liberal model

As indicated above, the current liberal development model promoted by the Democratic Party in the USA appears to have the characteristics displayed by model L2 as it is known to be based on morality principles only. This means that the sustainability of the current moral liberal development model is affected by its practical sustainability gap.

Since it is unlikely to expect that the current moral liberal model will go backwards and abandon its morality views and take over practicality rules only instead, we should expect it to go forward in a way that tries to incorporate practicality principles aimed at closing its practicality sustainability gap; and reach this way a more sustainable liberal policy state. A move towards practicality based moral action should be expected. Otherwise, this model will continue to remain by its nature unsustainable in the long-term.

b) Implications for practicality based liberal models

As stressed in the introduction, the liberal development model promoted by the Liberal Party in the USA seems to have the same characteristics displayed by model L3 as it is known to be based on practicality principles only. This means that the sustainability of the practicality based liberal development model is affected by its moral sustainability gap.

Since it is unlikely to expect that the practicality based liberal model will go backwards and abandon its practicality views and take over morality rules only instead, we should expect it to go forward in a way that tries to incorporate moral principles to close its moral sustainability gap; and reach this way a more sustainable liberal policy state. A move towards morality based practical action should be expected. Otherwise, this model will continue to remain by its nature unsustainable in the long-term.

Conclusions

The simple liberal development model introduced above is useful to determine all possible liberal model variability; and to point out liberal policy sustainability gaps. It was also shown that if the current liberal model based on morality in the USA wants to move forward towards a more sustainable state it must address and if possible, eliminate, its practicality sustainability gaps.

It was also stressed too that if liberal models based on practicality want to move forward towards a more sustainable state they must address and if possible, eliminate, their morality sustainability gaps. And finally, it was highlighted that if sustainability gaps are not addressed, those liberal policies, be it morally based or practicality based, will continue to be ruled by unsustainability.

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