**Title:** The Human Soul: The Missing Link in Our Understanding of Economic Development

**Authors:** John E. Stapleford (Eastern University) and Paul N. Wilson (University of Arizona)

**Abstract:**

Transformational development responds to the agriculture, health, education and governance needs of the poor, not unlike mainstream government-to-government foreign aid programs and major secular development NGOs. However, the recognition of the sinful nature of man sets TD programs apart from most mainstream development strategies.

Men and women know good from evil (Gen 3: 5; Rom 1: 19-20), yet without the transforming power of Christ and the Holy Spirit they cannot overcome sin (Rom 3:23). Regardless of a society’s level of material well-being, “the acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions; and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” (Gal 5: 19-21) Research shows that beyond the lowest levels of poverty, increased material well-being does not increase individual happiness.

The Biblical concept of the soul integrates a person’s spirit (heart), mind (thoughts), body (actions) and social affairs (relationships). As an alternative formulation for the world- and life-view paradigm, the soul serves as the operating system for the person, constantly receiving input, processing information, and directing output (Psalm 42:5). The soul can be transformed or updated by the means of grace or by the world and our flesh. This battle for human souls should not be ignored but should inform our understanding of economic development in our world today.

Our paper discusses the Biblical and integrative role of the soul as a critical variable in economic development. Whereas the economic development industry focuses on increased GDP per capita and a lower Gini coefficient as necessary and sufficient measures of economic progress, TD presents the argument that only transformation of souls, both in developed and developing countries, will produce significant, sustainable improvements in wellbeing throughout the world. In addition, this soul transformation process produces happiness, an objective that we argue should be the ultimate goal of development. Economic progress becomes a subset of overall wellbeing: peace in the soul, families, communities and society. In our paper we integrate our understanding of soul transformation with the growing happiness literature.

With this understanding of the implications of the development role of the soul and its implications for wellbeing as defined above, we explore major required economic development textbooks (both undergraduate and graduate) for material that presents culture, values and beliefs, and worldview as important determinants of wellbeing, including economic progress. Using the frequency of citation and a numerical scoring system for pages devoted to transformation, we test the hypothesis that students in most secular, and even Christian, academic settings may receive very limited exposure to the development role of the human soul. By ignoring wholistic development ideas, practices, and results, mainstream economic education restricts and truncates our understanding of the development process.