

Good Example of Bad Reasoning

(Professor Medhane)

Part 2

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Meles's appreciation of power

Medhane has another factor that he thought would explain Meles's rise to power; and that is "his appreciation of power." Let us see what he said in this regard:

Far more interesting, and potentially more consequential, was his sense of appreciation of power. Meles and his thoughts on the nature of political power is a story that has received only intermittent attention in the mainstream narrative of the TPLF/EPRDF. Though his theoretical excursions were extremely relevant and highly considered by the top leadership and Meles provided ideological perspectives to save the organization, of equal significance were a contest over power. There is an element there that is extraordinary creativity, but I can't say it is divorced from a sense of ambition.

According to Medhane, the second factor that would explain Meles's rise to political supremacy "is his appreciation of power." For Medhane, "Meles's rise to political supremacy has always been an object of fascination." It was a thing that has been "shrouded with mystery." Hence, Medhane tried to "demystify" that mystery. When he "demystifies" it, he found it to be - "Meles's appreciation of power."

"Meles and his thoughts on the nature of political power is a story that has received only intermittent attention in the mainstream narrative of the

TPLF/EPRDF” Medhane said, and Meles’s position in the struggle brought by inter-party crisis is free from a contest over power. “I can’t say it is divorced from a sense of ambition”, he said.

According to Medhane, Meles is always a favorite child of fate and it regularly rewarded him with generosity. Hence, after the split 2001, Meles got the chance to fulfill his long awaited dream of assuming unchallenged political supremacy. And he added:

“Meles’s project of modernizing Ethiopia through the prism of a developmental state had a bearing on the kind of political order that evolved over the last seven years. This is closely related to his view towards state power, how he exercised it and the style of his leadership. This informs his personality, his place in Ethiopian history and the nature of the problem his successors face.

What Medhane is trying to tell us is, Meles always think about securing the suprem political power in his hand and alleged this long awaited dream becomes true after 2001 split. After that split “Almost instantously, probably the last major obstacle in his path to political supremacy was removed. This marked the beginning of a long process of the personification of the state.”

According to Medhane, Meles’s preference to the philosophy Developmental State “is not accidental, as he had a philosophy in favor of a strong state with a strong leader.” Hence, he added:

“Having attained the height of power, Meles stood poised to start his ambitious experiment. This was not accidental as he had a philosophy in favor of a strong state with a strong leader as a prerequisite for the successful running of a developmental state. This was the life that he decided to live, and the mission he wanted to pursue. Consolidating his power

and increasing the developmental mission of the Ethiopian state were Meles's consuming focus. Both were inseparable."

In Medhane's opinion, Meles is always using every turn of events and situations ("default or designed") to his advantage. And his dream become realized after the political intermission in 2001. Then, in Medhane's opinion, Meles got the chance to assume an unchallenged leadership position in both the party and government.

Medhane's analysis of the second factor revolves around an instance in the 2001, that is, the split of TPLF. And Medhane said:

Right after the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and the split within his core political party the TPLF, Meles had concentrated power in his own hands and a tiny group of advisors. The irony of the whole matter appeared in the fact that the leader who stood to lose from the blowback effect of the war quickly turned the situation to his advantage and emerged victorious. Thanks to his extraordinary talent aided by the generosity of fate, Meles did not only withered away the threat to his power but he had slowly but steadily worked his way to a supreme position in the Ethiopian state."

As far as Medhane and his article go, I do not think we need to look any further than the above statements. However, for the sake of excursion let us look into other characteristics the fallacies in his article.

The fallacies

Medhane is dismissing Meles's merit as a leader, judging him rather as somebody who primarily focuses on fulfilling his ambition for power. He makes this point in such an implicit manner rather than explicit. Of course, his reasoning is weak and his conclusion is not supported by factual evidences. Medhane has identifiable strategy of argument that must be

judged as fallacious. On a range of considerations, I found his article fallacious.

You know fallacious argument is one that seems to be valid but is not so. Hence, at first glance, the reader may assume that the writer had followed the right argumentation processes and his conclusion appears to be a real one. However, a little investigation would reveal it that it is not so.

Various scholars starting from Aristotle have recognized that there could be refutations that appeared real but were not so. Aristotle called these kinds of argumentative practices 'sophistical' – Amphiboly. The fallacy of Amphiboly or "double arrangement" generally involves an ambiguity arising from the way the argument is structured. To illustrate the case, scholars take the following example:

A sign in a shop window reads like "Watch repairs here." This notice would seem to qualify as an amphiboly since it is unclear whether the reader is being invited to leave a watch to be repaired, or to observe repairs taking place; hence, the double arrangement.

Some scholars say that there is difficulty in finding examples of this fallacy that arise in arguments. I think Medhane's article would alleviate this problem. The problem aroused from his attempt to represent the accidental as essential and dropping essential points by the wayside, taking single instance as certain evidence, involve a false cause, omit mention of time and circumstance; confuse the absolute with the particular etc.

The position Medhane promoting, and the point he is making is devoid of any credence. Medhane's article is as I said fallacious. Fallacy seriously undermines the power of reason in an argument; by diverting it or screening it in some way. Hence, it is a "double arrangement." Medhane's article is infested with a "double arrangement" fallacy. Those who happen to read his

article can safely consider it as a valid admonition on Meles on one hand; and it may seem to be an honest scholarly praise, on the other. No one can tell for sure whether it is inviting the reader to the praise or admonition.

Medhane first mention was the undeniable qualities of the great leader. That was designed to be instrumental in selling the ensuing arguments and his botched conclusion. That was not a sincere appreciation of Meles's qualities; but a poisoned meat to attract the attention and trap the uncritical minds of his readers.

Medhane seems to have a knack to understand what kind of reasoning, under what circumstances would be fruitful. There is sufficient reason why we need review the bad elements in his scheme of reasoning.

If only I encountered such fallacies as Medhane's; in an article written by someone outside the academic setting; I would simply leave it to its fate and go my way. But coming from an instructor who teach at a prestigious academic institution like AAU makes it all the more difficult to leave it to its fate. An ill-disposed stance of a lecturer will contaminate his students and they will tend to follow his mistakes in their own reasoning. A student who failed to raise important questions will then become a victim to a bad mode of reasoning. This factor would reinforce the bad impact of Medhane's fallacies.

Argumentative situation

Arguments arise in different contexts where we have different intentions. And the contexts are part of the argumentative situation. In many instances, argument involves details of a dialogue between participants in an argumentative exchange. Hence, we must sift through what is available of

the background of the arguer, such as the history of exchanges between the participants or the beliefs of the audience etc.

This brings into consideration dialectical and rhetorical features crucial to understanding and evaluating fallacies. The appraisal of an article therefore involves more than a traditional logical assessment of the propositions.

Medhane's kind of fallacies becomes so commonplace in our discourse that we fail to notice the gravity of the problem they involve. Fallacy is a breakdown of the norm of reasoning. And as we have seen, Medhane's fallacies are a breakdown of ordinary reasoning. Medhane's argument is based on a misrepresentation of Meles's position.

However, we can be sure that it is a deliberate not accidental misrepresentation. Based on that deliberate misrepresentation he subsequently attacked him. And conclude that from start to finish Meles's aim in political engagements had been assuming the suprem power in the party and the government.

The fallacy appraisal in Medhane's argument must begin by asking whether his statement about Meles is relevant to his appraisal or claim. Whether there are grounds for believing the material is factually correct. And also will be raising the question of where the burden of proof lies. This is an important feature of fallacy analysis.

Medhane argue without giving us sufficient reasons to make us believe that Meles was all the time trying to ascend to the suprem position. Hence, he is in no position to dismiss the appropriate presumption and understanding that "Meles had been selflessly working without respite, up until his last gasp for the benefit of his people. And he work hard being loyal to the principles of his party." And this is a logical presumption until sufficient reasons have been stated against it.

Then “where there is such a presumption in favor of such premises, then the onus or burden of proof lies with anyone who would dispute it.” As we will see, one way in which a fallacious move in argument occurs when someone tries to shift the burden of proof onto the other person. Medhane shifted the burden of proof onto Meles and his party when he simply allege without even worried about furnishing supportive evidences to his claim.

But the burden of proof should lay in the arguer (Medhane), who introduced a proposition that “Meles rose to suprem position by selfishly exploiting every opportunity to his personal ambition.” Hence, Medhane must come up with valid points that will establish his claim and have acceptable rational argument.

One obvious occasion when the possibility of fallacious reasoning arises is that when we are closely attached to an issue that is being argued. Of course, full detachment from issues or complete objectivity may not be possible. Therefore, that is not what is being suggested here. But we should try to monitor our attachments so that we may avoid falling into error.

This is the basic problem with Medhane. When one feels strongly about a topic, he may rush hastily to defend a position. Draw a conclusion that is not fully warranted; or we may not listen carefully to what another person is saying and assume that his position is something it is not; or we may be inclined to engage in personal attacks on the one who holds a contrary view to our own.

In fact, Medhane’s a logical error is not an error that any one may fall in to. I say this with confidence; because I found his error to be intentional rather than accidental. It is rather a premeditated one, which clearly shows the intent of the arguer.

Medhane has statements in his article that indicate his high consideration for Meles. In my opinion, that is an attempt to deceive us. What he tried to tell us is that, "Meles is a person who always focuses on ensuring his ascendancy to power. He succeeded in this because he had time to study much that greatly helped him in attaining his goal. Because his party leaders were deceived by his knowledge and not considering his little involvement in war; they assigned him on the top position."

For Medhane, the most important thing in Meles's rise to supreme position is not his excellence, but the generosity of his comrades in assigning him as instructor in TPLF cadre school. That gave him chance to increase his knowledge considerably, which deceived them not to look his little involvement in war and elected him. Hence, we have fallacies that are deliberate rather than accidental.

As the rhetorical nature of the text clearly exhibit, Meles is simply a power-monger. As arguers, Medhane is expected and morally obligated to treat his subject (his opponent) fairly, and that fairness includes treating him with some respect. One may surprise that why our honorable Prof brought such an argument. The reason is simple.

Medhane's Pitfalls

According Medhane, "the event that transformed Meles into an undisputed leader in the organization and the country as a whole was the 2001 split within the TPLF." That was an event, which he considered as "a serious blow to democratic centralism and collective leadership." This at the same time had given Meles, "a major tactical advantage [to] wither away the threat to his power." He added, "The first to suffer personally from the [Ethiopia-Eritrea] war and its outcome was Meles. However, as usual "he made the best out of it and emerged much stronger...[therefore], had slowly but steadily worked his way to a supreme position in the Ethiopian state."

“Almost instantaneously, probably the last major obstacle in his path to political supremacy was removed. **This marked the beginning of a long process of the personification of the state.**” The purge out was “a serious blow to democratic centralism and collective leadership; and once these most formidable leaders of the TPLF, who made collective leadership both possible and attractive, were pushed from the scene.” Thence the dictatorship of Meles began.

“This weakened the rest of the political forces within and outside the ruling party, decimated other centers of power and influence and immobilized the TPLF, the most organized political force in the post-1991 Ethiopian landscape.”

The toxic issue here is even Medhane believe that there were no real political forces outside TPLF. Because he has clearly indicated, the split in TPLF “resulted in a shift in power from Tigray to the central government in Addis Ababa, from the instruments of the party to the state, and from a group among the TPLF Central Committee to Meles.” This is how he interprets and concludes about the outcome that TPLF split.

He continued, “There is no doubt that the removal of the rather well-entrenched and adamant party leaders would give him the opportunity to seize the full reins of power and make a clean start in the affairs of the state.” But what dose Medhane mean by *a clean start in the affairs of the state?*

I cannot say; but in his opinion following “the removal of the rather well-entrenched and adamant party leaders”, Meles had “tried hard to relocate his power base from Tigray and the TPLF, to the Center and the EPRDF.”

According to Medhane, the democratic nature of the party had gone with the wind that had blown the “most formidable leaders of the TPLF who made

collective leadership both possible and attractive." After they are "pushed from the scene", said Medhane, "Meles become unchallenged leader of the country." Hence, Medhane's view is that after Siye's group is purged out of the party, the democratic profile of the country has relegated. He indicated, "Few prophetic views, which drew attention to this trend, pass unheeded both within and outside the party."

According Medhane, "everything that happened after the split in TPLF in 2001 was the direct consequence of this fateful political intermission" which he deemed as rebuttal of democratic progress. Hence, he is promoting the "purged out" group interest; as he is embedded with a kind of interpretation owned by those groups.

Based on the analysis he made on Ethiopian political economy he made a projection. His projection is that the future destination of the country is worrying and danger is hidden down the road; unless his recommendations are accepted and done.

His Recommendation

Medhane said, "There is a need for political reforms to meet the democratic aspiration of the Ethiopian people and achieve political stability as well as revitalize the much needed developmental state model."

He ends up recommending revision on policy and constitutional provision; the often-demanded agenda of the Ethiopia opposition parties. And to encourage a reform measure he brought precedence.

To make things more appealing, Medhan told us that Mele's had his model from South Korea. He depicted Meles to be "the brainchild" of General Park of South Korea. Therefore, by association, he urged the new leaders of Ethiopia to do what Park's successors had done. He indicated in the last endnote, "It is important to note that the sudden death of General Park of

South Korea led to a comprehensive review process which in turn resulted in the fast development of South Korea.”

The writer made an association between General Park and Meles , Ethiopia and South Korea; of course, without providing case to support his argument. At any rate, Medhane urged Ethiopian leaders to follow to the South Korea precedent.

In any case, the Appeal to precedent must meet strict conditions in order to be legitimate. Where such conditions are not met, we would judge the argument again to have the kind of serious weakness that warrants the label ‘fallacy’. A precedent is set only if the cases are sufficiently analogous in relevant respects such that what holds for one will hold for the other. One weakness in this argument is that Medhane fails to meet a burden of proof to provide the grounds for such analogical reasoning. More specifically, relevant *dissimilarities* between the two countries must be underpinned. Appeal to Precedent should involve an analogous relationship between the two cases under consideration.

Then, Medhane concluded his opinion. “The life that Meles wanted to live, and the mission he wanted to pursue is consolidating his power.” According Medhane, the philosophy of Developmental State has all the necessary tools to fulfill this dream of Meles.

“This is closely related to his view towards state power, how he exercised it and the style of his leadership. This informs his personality, his place in Ethiopian history and the nature of the problem his successors face.”

Medhane for same reason seem to be cordial with developmental state. And he admire Meles’s ability in grasping its basic tents. In this regard he said,“ Upon meeting the Korean president Lee Myung-bak in 2010 Meles is said to

have greatly impressed him on his knowledge about the process of industrialization in that country.”

“Needless to say Meles had a rigorously empirical understanding of the way it operated. It is against this background that his absence and its far-reaching implications need to be understood. Meles seem to have decided to delay democratization for the sake of the developmental state”, Medhane said, and this decision was helped by political culture.

Meles aimed to focus on speedy- economic delivery that could fundamentally change the political market place. History and political culture would allow him to do this for some time to come.”

He finally concludes “the fundamentals of the developmental state in Ethiopian.... needs to be revisited.” Medhane seem to support the developmental state theory. However, he had accused Meles taking Developmental State philosophy for it serves his ambition for power. Medhane underlined this point by his word, “the preference to developmental state regime is not accidental.” However, concerning this, the only difference Medhane claimed to have with Meles is, while he thought development state and politic liberalizations are complementary Meles do not.

According to Medhane the view championed by Meles as is that “the two are utterly distinct and thus incapable interfering with each other is overly simplistic, toxic and dangerous. It is equally possible to isolate Meles’s preoccupation with duality of authoritarianism and economic development. It is possible to have both a strong and well-governed state. No decent analyst can fail to be repulsed by the sins committed in the name of the developmental state. So we all agree: mingling development with authoritarianism can be bad.”

Finally, he calls up on all Ethiopian people and the emerging leaders to discuss the issue.

His conclusion is:

"At his best, Meles inserted the rudiments of the developmental state in Ethiopia, but at his worst he made it intimidating and suffocating. It is the latter that should draw the attention of Ethiopia's emerging leaders as the most urgent problem that need to be fixed. It is time for the country to move beyond its authoritarian past and build a democracy that matches the democratic aspirations of its people and supports its development."

What Prof. Medhane is saying? I do not know, and I am sure he does not know what he wanted to say. Prof. Confusion.