

Philosophy and the Development of the Third World: Exploring the Power of Ideology

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Abstract

How to help Third World countries wriggle themselves out of excruciating underdevelopment problem is still a critical issue confronting every academic discipline as far as Africa is concerned. It seems that while other countries are accelerating in development African countries are rather retarding to the abyss of underdevelopment. This text examined the issues of underdevelopment in the Third World vis-à-vis philosophers' claim to esoteric knowledge. It found that the problem is routed in poor and primitive ideology and concluded that proper application of philosophy as critique of ideology is highly fundamental to solving developmental predicament of the third world countries.

Keywords: Philosophy, Development, Third World and Ideology

Introduction

Right from its inception philosophy has laid claim to special insight into the nature of thing as well as vicissitude of the human situation. Philosophers claim to have esoteric knowledge, far beyond the reach of ordinary man, thus presenting philosophy as the panacea to every intractable conundrum man finds himself in his existential adventure. This claim was quite understandable when every branch of knowledge was under the canopy of philosophy. However, the honorific undertone of philosophy has survived the balkanization of compendium of knowledge hitherto labeled philosophy into various autonomous disciplines. Hence philosophers still portray philosophy as having solution to every problem man encounters in the world.

Whether to remain relevant in the scheme of thing or for genuine reasons, philosophers still shower praise on their engagement as the most sublime of all human activities which gives the participants intellectual advantage over others. For instance, Plato submits that the socio-political quagmire in which Athens of his day was wrangling was as result of divergence between political power and philosophical knowledge and argues that until the two are converged in one person, the society would know no peace. In summary Plato avows:

Hence I was forced to say in praise of the correct philosophy that it affords a vantage point from which we can discern in all cases what is just for communities and for individuals, and accordingly the human race will not see better days until either the stock of those who rightly and genuinely follow philosophy acquire political authority, or else the class who have political control be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers (Republic 6,507).

Aristotle was not less optimistic about the utility of philosophy. Hence he holds that:

In spite of the utility of practical experience, the man with the knowledge of universal, i.e. the philosophers must assume position of command, since among other justifications he possesses by his knowledge of universal, an almost uncanny knowledge of reality as such, knowledge so profound that it even suits the gods (Oguejiofor, 2005:84).

Aristotle therefore concludes that “[...] we ought either to pursue philosophy or bid farewell to life and depart from this world, because all other things seem to be utter nonsense and folly” (Oguejiofor, 2005:89).

In the same vein, Russell (1967:89), after all his castigation of earlier philosophers as system builders and his failed attempt to establish a scientific philosophy, still accentuates that the place of philosophy in human endeavor is giving a deeper perception of reality and opening the mind to the numerous opportunities that are very enlightening. For Russell, although philosophy may be said not to have any direct or practical utility, the cash value of philosophy lies in that fact that if “[...] men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society”. This implies that for Russell philosophy is not solely for trouble shooting but also for the advancement of good already achieved.

Oguejiofor (2005:85) supplies the logic behind philosophers’ view of their undertaking. For him, the unexpressed logic of this chauvinism comes from the definition or understanding of man as a rational animal, a thinking being. Philosophy, being the only discipline whose only instrument of work is taken to be human reason, becomes at the same time the highest expression and the measure of the humanity of the human as such.

Be that as it may, faced with the problem of development confronting the third world countries the philosopher is once again tasked to prove the practical relevance of his engagement to the existential man of the contemporary world. The basic question here is, has philosophy any contribution to make to development? If yes, what can philosophy offer to help eradicate or at least ameliorate the development problems bedeviling most of the Third World countries? In fact, what is philosophy doing to speed up the snail movement of development in the Third world?

Oraegbunam (2005:1-4) groups responses to the question of the practical utility of philosophy especially as it pertains to development into three, namely: those who hold that philosophy is of no practical use to man but merely a matter for mental and cerebral acrobatics; those convinced that philosophy is the bedrock of any human development since it is inherent in every discipline adjudged vital to human wellbeing; and, those who hold only some branches of philosophy as being practically useful to man.

This write-up lends support to the second group and argues vehemently that philosophy, whether in the form of worldview, ideology or the academic sense, is a major factor in determining the trend of development in any society. It further argues that philosophy not only has much to contribute but is already contributing much to solve the developmental predicaments of the Third World.

This we shall present in sub-headings. Firstly, attempt will be made to give operational definition of the basic terms of this work. This will be followed by the exposition of the developmental predicament of the Third World vis-à-vis the causes.

An attempt will be made to critically investigate the possibility of philosophy contributing to development. The insight therein will give ground to the presentation of the actual contributions of philosophy to the amelioration of the underdevelopment of the Third World.

Clarification of Concepts

The term ‘Third World’ is very dynamic in definition. However an item has remained fundamentally static in this dynamism of its definition, namely, that it has to do with underdeveloped countries.

For Chaliand (2009) the third world denotes the economically underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America, considered as an entity with common characteristics such as poverty, high birthrates, and economic dependence on the advanced countries. This definition is corroborated by *Wikipedia* (2009) with a slight difference. It holds that the term ‘Third World’ arose during the cold war to define countries that remained

non-aligned or neutral to either capitalism or NATO, which represented the 1st world and the second world with their allies respectively. It further maintains that this definition provided a way of broad stratification of the nations of the earth into three groups based on social, political, and economic divisions.

Etymologically, the term third world has origin in the French “*tiers monde*”. It was the French demographer and economist Alfred Sauvy that coined the expression in 1952 by analogy with the “third estate”, the commoners of France before and during the French Revolution as opposed to priests and nobles, representing the first and second estates respectively. For Sauvy (1952), the Third World like the third estate is nothing and wants to be something. The implication of Sauvy’s submission is that the Third World is exploited much like the third estate; hence its destiny is a revolutionary one.

Chaliand (2009) enumerates the common attributes of the countries of the Third World as: distorted and highly dependent economies devoted to producing primary products for the developed world and to provide markets for their finished goods; traditional rural social structures; high population growth; and widespread poverty. Nevertheless, he quickly adds that the third World is sharply differentiated, for it includes countries on various levels of economic development. Hence the quests to change the term to something like “Global South; “Developing countries” etc. Regrettably, the third world linked with underdevelopment is gradually becoming synonymous with Africa as many countries of Asia and Latin America hitherto classified under the same canopy are fast joining the first world of economically advanced nations (Oguejiofor, 2001. 23-24).

A simple definition of development is that it involves change. This change may be in any sector of life such as economy, culture, politics, science and technology or in the human person. Change may be positive or negative. However, since only positive changes are always the desiderata, development has come to be associated with positive changes. Thus development is all about bringing positive changes in various sectors of a society so as to improve the living condition and promote self-realization of the people involved. However, “[...] development involves not only a change in time but also a change which has direction. Development frequently implies advancement or improvement over some primitive status” (J.C. Ekei, 2007:157). What is implied here is that developmental changes are goal oriented. In fact development is teleological in nature, involving both end and process.

Development as a sequence of continuous change ends in series of outcome and not just one outcome. Hence developmental change cannot proceed in isolation but takes into consideration other dimensions of people’s lives. Consequently, meaningful development should aim at refining and promoting the already existing values of the people within a given environment. Therefore, development does not imply total rejection of the existing structure that has sustained the people but is an improvement on what people have been used to. Goulet (1971:62) has this in mind when he opines that:

Development has been portrayed as a complex and multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structure, popular attitudes, and national institutions as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of abject poverty. In its essence, it must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, turned to the diverse social needs, and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually “bitter”.

The salient aspect of this definition is its insistence that all developmental efforts are geared towards the benefit of the human person. This implies that development is man-centered. It is a process or a set of processes aimed at developing man himself and creating for him an enabling environment to actualize his inherent potentials. Hence Agbakoba (2003:1) defines development as “[...] self-realization within the context of society”.

The broadest way of defining philosophy is etymological by which it means love of wisdom. There are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers, each basing his definition of the subject on his background and ideology. In the ordinary usage, philosophy covers a multitude of meanings which could be classified into three, namely, a principle, a collection of world-view or outlook and an attitude to life. Today, philosophy is defined based on its two senses which include philosophy in the loose or popular senses and academic philosophy (Okolo, 1995:111).

In its loose or popular sense, philosophy is synonymous with the people's ideology or world-view which Nwala (1985:24) delineates as:

“[...] the complex of beliefs, habits, laws, customs and tradition of a people. It includes the overall picture they have about reality, the universe, life and existence, their attitude to life and to things in general, what they do and think of what life is, what things are worth striving to attain; what is man's place in the scheme of things; whether or not life has a meaning and purpose.

Suffice it to say that philosophy as ideology or world-view embraces the people's ontological, epistemological and ethical outlooks resulting in attitude-choice director mechanism.

Conversely, philosophy, in its academic sense, is a rational and reflective activity. Agbanusi (2007:135) holds that philosophy is a discipline which has to do with a critical and unprejudiced investigation into the basic issues about man and the universe, a discipline that not only equips man with a high intellectual ability but also enriches his moral capacity.

Diagnosing the Developmental Predicament of the Third World

The term, Third World, is now synonymous with underdevelopment. As already hinted, countries of the Third World have catalogue of problems ranging from economic crisis, endemic corruption, inter-ethnic conflict, political instability, to high population with low life expectancy. Strictly speaking, these are more or less symptoms than the disease itself. The question that is yet unanswered is whether these problems are coeval with the Third World and destined to last with it or are they temporal? If they are temporal then they have solutions. Anjov (2005:175) is optimistic that the problems of the Third World are temporal. For him, the factors responsible for these problems include: the colonial legacy, social pluralism and its centrifugal tendencies, the corruption of leaders, poor labour discipline, lack of entrepreneurial skills, poor planning and incompetent management, inappropriate policies, the stifling of market mechanisms, low level of technical assistance, the limited inflow of foreign capital, falling commodity prices and unfavourable terms of trade, and low level of savings and investment. He further maintains that among these factors leadership corruption, which has resulted in both moral and developmental corruption, gives development the most stifling disposition. All these are blamed on slavery, colonialism and loop-sided globalization.

In as much as many are wont to inculcate the entire predicament of the Third World on slavery and colonialism, the question remains what made these possible in the first place?

Diamond (1998) argues that the bane of the Third World, especially as far as Africa is concerned, is its bio-geographical disadvantage which gave the First World an edge over the former in terms of industrialization; and which gave birth to an ugly history of slavery, colonization and neo-colonization of the Third World. For Diamond, the developmental problems of the Third World seem destined to last forever because the First World having got an edge over it is not only ensuring that the developmental gap between them is maintained but continues to device means to ensure perpetuity of exploitation and pauperization of the Third World. Chaliand (2009) partially supports the idea of Diamond. For him,

Combination of the conditions in Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America is linked to the absorption of the Third World into the international capitalist economy, by way of conquest or indirect domination. The main economic consequence of Western domination was the creation, for the first time in history, of a world market. By setting up throughout the Third World sub-economies linked to the West, and by introducing other modern institutions, industrial capitalism disrupted traditional economies and, indeed, societies. This disruption led to underdevelopment.

As true as these submissions may be, it is the conviction of this write-up that the basic root of the problem is located within the Third World itself, without doubting the fact that the above conditions have exacerbated the situation. That is why Oguejiofor (2001:46-63) locates the root of the problem in the psychological trauma bequeathed on the Third World by historical antecedents which has led to inferiority complex among the members of that world.

For Wiredu, (1985:213-220) the problem lies within the identity crisis in the Third World, namely how to strike a balance between nationalism and modernization. He opines that development will continue to elude the region until it is ready to give up a section of its traditional values.

To be taken very seriously is Agbakoba's opinion that the bane of African societies, and by extension, the Third World societies, is to a large extent their particularistic ideologies and value system (1998:21-240). The traditional ideologies of the Third World societies are particularistic with ontological, epistemic and ethical values that negate development. In traditional Africa, for instance, communalism was limited to the very members of the same clan. Among the things considered as social crime in it were stealing and murder (Ndubisi, 2007:65-17). Yet these were offences only when committed against any member of one's clan. Thus a man who kills his kin is a murderer but the one who beheads a stranger, and possibly away from his village is honoured as a hero. Muendane (2006:29) laments this particularistic ideology as having engendered disunity among African communities and thus facilitated slave trade and European conquest.

Complaining against poor ideology of Africa, Bodunrin (1985:38-42) argues that Africa cannot move ahead with her magico-religious assumptions of the world. Citing an instance, he points out that in African traditional ideology, the time for starting a meeting is not so much important as ensuring that everybody is present. And when it ends does not matter as reaching a consensus that is pleasing to everybody. He therefore suggests that this magico-religious rationality must be jettisoned to embrace the sciento-technical rationality which is at the base of every development.

Having identified the root of developmental problems in the Third World, the task ahead is to show how philosophy can tackle these problems and thus move the region on to the next level.

Philosophy and Development

The question here is whether philosophy can make any meaningful contribution to development, whether human, structural or infrastructural. Is there any links between philosophy, which is largely speculative and theoretical and development, which is more or less practice-oriented? In fact, of what use is philosophy to development.

This paper groups responses to these questions into three, namely, the pessimists, the lukewarm, and the optimists. The first groups are mostly non-philosophers who feel that the functions traditionally allotted to philosophy have vanished with the division of the erstwhile queen of all sciences into different disciplines. They argue that philosophy is highly speculative and metaphysical and has nothing to do with the experiential world. Thus philosophy had abdicated its contribution to the development of man and his world to other disciplines.

Oraegbunam (2005:3) blames this stand on gross misunderstanding of what philosophy is and underestimation of the importance of philosophical logic and rational procedure in any discipline without which knowledge emanating from such discipline cannot be communicated in the first place. Another point this group fails to take into consideration is the fact that every discipline has an underlying philosophical assumptions on which all the arguments and discoveries of such discipline are built. The growing awareness of this fact has led to the study of philosophy of every discipline e.g. philosophy of science, law, etc. Suffice it to say that this school of thought is ignorant of the fact that any contribution by any discipline to development is an indirect contribution of philosophy to the same.

The second group, the lukewarm, has little hope in philosophy to improve the lot of man in his existential predicament. For them, philosophy has next to nothing to contribute to the development of mankind and his environment, physical or social. The submission of Oguejiofor (2001) in his much celebrated *Philosophy and African Predicament* belongs to this category. For him, the functions that were originally given to philosophy are now better performed by other disciplines. It is important to note that this argument has not in any way denied philosophy of these functions as Oraegbunam (2005) thinks. It simply made a choice among choices. Hence, Oguejiofor concludes that the very peculiar contribution of philosophy to development is in the nature of the discipline itself, namely, its non-definitive nature and accommodation of divergent views (2001:143) which when adhered to would bring about proper dialogue, tolerance and inclusiveness in the society.

The optimistic group is occupied by mostly philosophers who have high hopes in the capability of philosophy to save man from the consequences of the intractability of his existence. But it has to be noted here that most members of this group praise philosophy without the benefit of argument but simply because the failure to do so would make their engagement irrelevant. The language of presentation notwithstanding, the group vehemently holds that the traditional functions of philosophy are still intact today as they were in the days of Aristotle. These functions include training the human person in both rationality and morality and the critique of ideology.

This paper sympathizes with the optimistic group. However there is an intricate relationship between philosophy and development it wishes to explore. Philosophy as ideology of a people has greater implication to development than the academic philosophy. As already mentioned, the ideology of a people incorporates their ontological outlook, as well as their ethical and epistemological outlooks. Each of these has enormous implication to development.

The ontological outlook of a people is the way they conceive being and the mode of being. There are varieties of ways people conceive being and mode of being. However, with regard to development one of the important ways of looking at being is in terms of sacredness or non-sacredness. If for instance, a high degree of sacredness is placed on the physical world people are not likely to feel free to experiment with it and manipulate it as they please until the desired results are achieved. The assumed link between the physical world and the divinities place much limitation to how one handles and interacts with it. With such barrier scientific and technological revolutions that propel development are highly hindered.

The epistemic outlook of a people is their predominant knowledge acquisition process. There is no doubt that knowledge is essential factor in development. But such knowledge is acquired through experimentation. Thus, when the epistemic outlook of a people favours sorcery, divination and magic, development will be hindered for want of prerequisite knowledge.

Similarly, the ethical outlook has to do with the horizon covered by their definition of moral concepts, for instance, good and evil. An ethical outlook which defines good as any positive thing done to oneself and one's kin and evil as the opposite will never see things like

embezzlement of public fund as evil provided one's kin are nourished from the loot. Such ethical outlook is also likely to fuel intertribal conflict.

From the foregoing it could be very myopic to hold that philosophy is far removed from development and thus has nothing to offer to it. The truth is rather that philosophy is the key to development. The First World is what it is today because of the philosophical foundation laid some centuries ago on which their scientific and technological as well as economic, social and political developments are built. Sequel to this, this paper re-iterates that philosophy is not helpless in the face of the development problems of the Third World.

Philosophy and the Development of the Third World

The areas in which philosophy can influence rapid development of the Third World abound. However, this paper focuses human development in rationality and morality, critique of ideology and conflict resolution.

There is no gainsaying the fact that human development is the most vital aspect of development. This is because man is at the centre of every development. Philosophy ensures proper development of the human person by training him in both rationality and morality. It is a well-known fact today that education is the bedrock of development. Okere (2007:5) rightly points out that education is clearly another name for realizing one's human potential as it brings about the fulfillment and fruition of the mental, psychological, physical and moral development of man through the knowledge gained in the process. However, the knowledge gained in philosophy is unique and the most sublime. This manifests even in careers not related to philosophy. A politician that has studied political philosophy is quite incomparable to his counterpart that has not. The same difference is noticed between medical doctor who has studied special ethics and his counterpart that has not. This is why Maritain (1956:92) writes, "[...] philosophy is the highest of all branches of human knowledge and is the true sense of wisdom. The other sciences are subject to philosophy, in the sense that it judges and governs them and defends their postulates". The kernel of this submission is that philosophy should provide the Third World the philosophical knowledge which has served as the foundation of Western development. The ability of the philosopher to clarify concepts is the best way to change idea in the human person which the latter will bring to bear in his contributions to policy making and governance. The benefit of appropriate knowledge to the Third World is its instrumentality in the amelioration of over-spiritualization of the physical world and overdependence on non-scientific and superstitious knowledge that have combined to clog the wheel of development especially in Africa.

Similarly, no one can meaningfully contend the fact that morality is highly needed for rapid development. Omoregbe (1990:197) corroborates this idea, expressing it thus: "Indeed, moral development is the important aspect of national development, for there can be no development of a country if its citizens are morally undeveloped ... neither science nor technology can develop a country if its citizens are not morally developed". This is statement of fact as it is experienced in the Third World countries today. It has been shown that features of the Third World include endemic corruption, poor attitude to work, tribalism and so on. It is the task of philosophers of the Third World to prove beyond reasonable doubt the negativity of such attitude and bring to the limelight the positive ethical values. Philosophers should endeavour to reorient the particularistic ethical outlook of the people of the Third World toward universality by expanding the horizon of consistency of moral concepts. This is what Nyerere's (1968) Ujamaa stands for: an attempt to universalize the Africa value of family.

On another note, it is the duty of philosophers of the Third World to constructively criticize her ideologies. This paper has demonstrated that the ideologies of the Third World societies are poor, sacred in their ontological outlook, particularistic in ethical values and magico-religious in epistemic outlook. It is the task of philosophers to reform these outlooks and

adapt them to the present realities of contemporary existence in such a manner that will pave way for development.

In the same vein, philosophers of the Third World should challenge the status quo and policies bringing to bear sublime philosophical insight for the benefit of the society. They should ensure that they get involved in the choice of ideology and policies of their countries. Philosophy has done this in Europe and deposed hereditary monarchy. The result of John Locke's critique of monarchy is the American constitution that is adjudged the best in the world today and its influence on development of America is self-evident.

Finally, Oguejiofor (2001:143) has rightly pointed out that the use of philosophy is in its non-dogmatic nature. Philosophy is the only discipline in which even the fool is listened to. No one has the final say. Even the method of critique and reply is a way of dialogue. It shows that no one is beyond probity. This nature of philosophy can serve the Third World in development by installing tolerance and conflict resolution through dialogue. If the spirit of philosophy is allowed to underlie discussion of conflict by ensuring that everyone is listened to, it will provide the opportunity for ventilation of anger which could have otherwise be expressed in violent actions. Also paying attention to everyone as the nature of philosophy will foster inter-subjectivity and mutual comprehension of the root of conflict by the parties involved, thereby paving way for easy resolution of the conflict. It also has the capacity to promote good government as it will enable the participation of the entire citizenry in arriving at political decision, and development follows when the citizenry feel involved in the issues of their country.

Conclusion

The relationship among the Third World, development and philosophy is intricate. The Third World is known today for backwardness in development. This underdevelopment is a child of myriads of factors, with poor and primitive ideologies that ill-fit development as the most emphatic. However, it is the conviction of this paper that philosophy has indeed the capacity to save the Third World from its developmental predicament. This, it can achieve through provision of rational and moral knowledge for the development of the human person, critique of ideology and by exploiting the nature of philosophy itself to foster the spirit of tolerance, dialogue in conflict resolution, and promotion of good governance. In so doing, it will provide a fertile ground for other aspects of development to follow.

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