

# **A TRILOGY OF PHILOSOPHY, LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Against the backdrop of the ascendancy of science and technology in world culture and the slow pace of invention of indigenous science and technology, the humanities are harangued and challenged to show their relevance to national development. The challenge is made all the more biting because the apologists of the idea of the pre-eminence or priority of science and technology take national development to be synonymous with economic productivity. This paper responds to such cynical and disdainful query on the relevance of the humanities to national development. In doing so, this paper employs the logical and analytical methods of philosophy in critiquing such a warped view of national development and goes on to posit that national development is a composite of a people's culture, science and technology, politics, governance and economics among other aspects. Against this broad canvass of national development, it is argued that man is the centre-piece of national development and, since the humanities play a leading role in the cultivation of man, no national development paradigm can be conceived and executed without the humanities, especially philosophy and language, coming into the bargain. Thus, the paper develops what it calls the dynamics of the trilogy of philosophy, language and national development and concludes, based on such dynamics, that the neglect and marginalization of the humanities in a country's national development program leads to the atrophy of a people's values and a fortiori to the degradation of our humanity.

## **Introduction**

The arts and humanities are the engine of the holistic notion of development advocated in this paper. They are so regarded because they civilize man by cultivating the mind. The arts and humanities forge and fashion the spiritual spring of the passions and imaginations that drive man's engagement with his environment (science and technology). This thesis is not without regard to the discovery of Marxian dialectics that the environment which man acts on also acts on man. Modern governments in their policies on education recognize the role of the anti-thesis of man's action on his environment (science and technology) by their emphasis on science and technology education. It is regrettable that such emphasis has morphed into contempt for and, in some cases, deprecation of the arts and humanities. This paper's analysis of the role of the arts and humanities, namely, philosophy and language, in the national development dynamics shows that science and technology without due regard to the arts is a most unbalanced education. Indeed, scientists and technologists require knowledge of the arts and humanities to enhance their intellectual competencies and to cultivate a multi-disciplinary mind necessary for the solution of the numerous problems of society. And what is more, such multi-disciplinarity broadens and liberalizes the mind and makes a person an intellectual and social critic who can objectively and dispassionately apprehend, comprehend and analyze issues and decisions and, by so doing, promote a humane and rational social order. Thus this paper is the academic's exercise of patriotic passion and, ipso facto, a call for renewal and harnessing of man's multi-faced faculties towards a holistic notion of development advocated in this paper.

## **The Notion of National Development**

In discussing this, we will stave-off the ideological dissensions amongst pro-western and anti-western scholars over how development is to be construed in Africa and the other Third World regions vis-à-vis the colonial experience of these countries. Such dissensions have generated the themes of “neo-colonialism” and “underdevelopment” which many of us are familiar with in the writings of development theorists, historians, philosophers, commentators, and literary authors.

Thus, in all simplicity and neutrality as much as the latter can be possibly attained, I conceive development as the totality of the systems and mechanisms for articulating a society’s goals and achieving the same. If my definition is too conceptually concentrated and abstract, then the one by V.A Panadiker gives a down-to-earth construal of development. According to him, national development is “improvement in standards of societal living and participation in matters economic, social and political” (Panadiker1988, 43).

The definitions of national development which I and Panadiker offered above are strongly anthropocentric. I dare say that it could not have been otherwise. Who articulates and achieves goals? Who improves standards of societal living and participation? It is all by man and for man. This explains why development writers have readily harped on what they call “the human capital or factors” in the national development calculus.

National development has different indices such as income of the population, population growth rate, the level of life expectancy, the level of school enrolment, the level of industrial production vis-à-vis primary production, the volume of commodities produced by a people both for internal consumption and for export etc. Nations which do not record high levels in each of the above indices (with the exception of population growth rate presumed to be low in developed nations) are regarded as under-developed or more charitably, developing; while those who do are generally known as developed nations (Ndianefoo 2009, 92).

The last of the over-arching concepts in our discourse is the phenomenon of language. Nevertheless, only a bare digest of what language is all about will be proffered in the preliminary context or definitional purpose meant here.

## **Language as a Social Convention and Medium**

The social or community character of language is generally accepted to be beyond doubt. Two eminent language experts Sturtevant and Sapir proffer authoritative definitions of language as a social convention. According to Edgar Sturtevant, language is “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which members of a social group cooperate and interact” (Quoted in Ijoma 1988, 4). Edwin Sapir (1921, 18) on his part construes language as “A purely human and non- instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”. The notion of language as a social convention depicted in the above definitions gets a dramatic demonstration if we imaginatively invoke the scenario of a Robinson Crusoe in his isolated island. Will he need any language? If he had never used any language at all in his life before his isolation, can he ever construct one in his isolation? Even if he could, what would be the use of such language if it cannot by its very nature be explained to or interpreted by others? Was he to make signs to himself, signs that can in no way be made meaningful to others?

The nature of language as a social creation and convention is logically and inextricably linked with its role as a social medium of communication. Community life without language as a medium is unimaginable. Social life is inexorably hinged on language as a medium of communication and *ipso facto* as an overarching social facility. It is from this fundamental nexus between language and community life that this paper derives its main motif that language plays a pivotal role in national development even though this is not widely appreciated and popularized. No thanks to the overweening ideology of science and technology which marginalizes and chokes the spiritual and humane aspects of life.

Nevertheless, a people develop a language appropriate to their cultural experience. Such a language serves them as a medium for communication, the transmission of knowledge, laws and customs and values and for the articulation of their worldview. In this regard, various languages can be said to be equal so far as each serves adequately the fundamental language needs of its linguistic groups (Ndianefoo 2011, 172).

The above analysis of the key concepts of this paper, namely, philosophy, language and national development, has done more than explicate these concepts. It presages some kind of organic relationship between them. The exploration of such organic relationship will be done in the next section of this paper.

### **A Trilogy of Philosophy, Language and National Development**

The concepts of philosophy, language and National development are infinitely anthropocentric and as such are inextricably intertwined with man in his evolutionary path. In a manner of speaking, they are intangible social institutions of man generated as products of man's social activities. The same way honey and webs are respectively the products of bees and spiders (Karl Popper 1971, 117). This analogy which I borrowed from Karl Popper, a leading 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher of science is particularly apt because as there is a feedback respectively between the bees and the honey on the one hand, and the spider and the spiders' webs on the other hand, there is a feedback between man philosophy, language and national development as products of his social existence. Although they are produced by man, they assume an objective and independent existence with internal logic and order of their own unintended by man initially. Language for instance developed out of animal-cum-social need of association.

To associate with the other, man needs both some symbol and vehicle of meaning (language). Thus, we have expression and communication as lower functions of language. But the higher functions of knowledge, namely, the descriptive and argumentative functions, as Popper has correctly maintained, were not intended at the bare animal-cum-social need of association. No primitive founders of any language ever developed the grammar of the language which makes it possible for the descriptive and argumentative functions to be developed. The rules of grammar and the descriptive and argumentative functions of language were eked out on the anvil of usage. An analogy to the development of language independent of the will of the founders of the language occurs in numerology. The series of natural numbers which we construct creates prime numbers which we discover and these in turn create problems of which we never dreamt.

The foregoing instances of independent growth of language based on its internal logic and order has its philosophical analogue. Although philosophical theories and systems are products of

individual philosophers determined, as it were, by their respective cultural experiences, there has emerged a body of philosophical knowledge which grows by natural selection independent of the wills of the individual philosophers that contributed to the pool. It is in this wise, that one hears of such classifications as British philosophy, German philosophy, Russian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, African philosophy etc, and then of course a Universal philosophy. All these exercise decisive influences on man who accordingly react to them either by observing their implicit moral or critiquing them. In either case the body of philosophical knowledge grows independent of the wills of the founding pundits. A few examples are not out of place. Plato's philosophy of nature or cosmology in which he referred to physics as 'a likely story' was critiqued and superseded by the Cartesian Vortex and the latter critiqued and displaced by the Big Bang theory. The Big Bang Theory has equally been critiqued and superseded the Super String Theory which properly accounts for the observed expanding nature of the universe.

The next example of the independent growth of philosophical knowledge is still coming from Plato. This will not surprise anyone as Whitehead has rightly remarked that "all western philosophy consists of footnotes to Plato". Plato's philosophy of politics as postulated in the Republic was critiqued as oppressive totalitarianism and superseded by the liberalism of John Locke and J.J. Rousseau. The independent development of philosophy of politics from the seeds sown in Plato's Republic has flowered in the rather audacious claim of Fukuyama (1992, xi) that liberal democracy is the most successful and, *ipso facto*, the paradigm social theory.

Can we ascribe the same independent growth in language and philosophy to national development? There is no doubt that the same logic applies. This is clearly shown in the fact that most countries' national development as an instance of public policy is determinate and phased. Although the product of a whole panoply of professional experts, technocrats, bureaucrats, public policy analysts and international consortia and extant political administration, national development remains a simulacrum of a country's development objective or plan independent of the will of the long chain of its contributors.

The autonomous and evolutionary character of philosophy, language and national development as an intellectual pool which develops independently of the will of the individual contributors and outlives them has been presented above to facilitate an understanding of the objective and autonomous dynamics of the trilogy of philosophy, language and national development proposed for discussion here.

It is pertinent in discussing the dynamics of the trilogy of philosophy, language and national development to observe that the trilogy is as old as the official history of philosophy dating back to Socrates (470-399BC). Socrates did not just interrogate the thoughts and concepts of his interlocutors to score points in oratorical sagacity. He was predominantly a social critic of the Athenian society who believed that philosophy would improve the Athenian Society. Through his intellectual "midwifery" he sought to examine, clarify and improve social concepts and the concomitant social practice with the unwavering aim of improving the Athenian commonwealth.

The trilogy has not fallen apart in our day although the apologists of analytic philosophy would hardly consent to this proposition. Even in the face of the so-called anti-foundationalist and anti-rationalist trends in contemporary philosophy, mainstream philosophy still strives to eke out its

normative mandate and sustain development even as it retains its function of clarification of our thought and language.

Philosophy, both in its normative and analytic functions, plays incisive role in language development (through concept evolution and concept analysis) which complements man's identity as a rational being who must, however hard it may be, cut his path to meaning, truth and development. Philosophy, by its logical purification of our concepts towards precise reference impacts positively on our cultural repertoire which not only determines our society's development but indeed is mirrored by the latter. Concepts understood as inarticulate bundles of personal intuitions and lived experiences constitute the fabrics of a society's culture and development. And culture itself is preserved and transmitted in a language. The upshot is that the philosopher's improvement of our concepts enriches our culture which in turn enriches our language in the sense that the latter achieves larger cultural contents which may be scientific knowledge, the arts, institutional forms and practices.

It may be interesting if only for the sake of provoking further reflection to note that the rigorous dynamism that bonds philosophy, culture (a simulacrum of people's development) and language in generative rhythm has led philosophers and language scholars into the debate whether language is culture -dependent or vice versa. Whatever is the result of such debate, our age has developed beyond seeing language as merely picturing external existent facts or objects; language for all we know is inextricably bound up with culture and therefore development since the latter is a simulacrum of the former. What is more, the dynamic unity between philosophy, language and development enunciated above constitutes and delineates for a people their range of consciousness of truth, their ontology, *what there is*. In this way, philosophy, through the instrumentality of language contributes to the constitution of a people's objective consciousness (culture) which not only describes their truth but also determine their social praxis or national development.

It is this obvious and unbreakable link between philosophy, language and social praxis or national development which has inspired philosophy to seek to clear our heads of mental rubbish and free us from linguistic obfuscation through conceptual analysis geared towards clarification of meaning. What is more, the close relationship that exists between logical analysis of our language and the linguistic efficiency thus attained makes them indispensable instruments of meaningful communication in the pursuit of social praxis or national development. Where there is difficulty in the logical and linguistic links there is equally difficulty in achieving unified and purposeful social praxis or national development. This difficulty could manifest in different areas between individuals and groups, between individuals, between groups and groups and even between nations.

Since no serious, meaningful, purposeful and unified national development or social praxis can be carried out without a common logical, linguistic and cultural concepts (which constitute the people's *Weltanschauung*), it becomes imperative to continue to improve and drive our national development through philosophical critique of our *weltanschauung*. This, according to Popper (1972, 116), is the only apology for philosophy.

## Conclusion

The forgoing correlation between philosophy, language and national development has again demonstrated the relevance of the humanities to national development. A development policy which relegates the humanities to the background by reason of having a low cash-value amounts to asphyxiating humane concerns and, a fortiori, a denudation of the core human values.

Africans are confronted today as we stand on the threshold of industrialization (the way the West was once confronted at the advent of their industrialization) with the temptation to exchange values with the apple of capitalism. The West as we read from history fell to the temptation. Edmund Husserl's *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man* (1936) and Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) were scathing criticism of that fatal fall of the West. But the spiritual and economic conditions Husserl and Marx decried have turned out to be a mere dress rehearsal of the devaluation of Western humanity that would happen after them. Now that there are drone technology and drone attacks and increasing legalization of gay marriage in the West, the devaluation of Western humanity has entered its nadir.

How Africa will manage its industrialization and capitalism will be measured in part by the quantum of attention and place given to humane concerns in national development policies of the national governments. At the present, there is a tug between African values and Western values as Kwame Nkurumah clearly pointed out in his *Consciencism* (1964). This tug can only be resolved in favor of the African if man is made the centre-piece of national development policies and the humane disciplines are, as a matter of development policy, bolstered to make their well-known contributions to the cultivation of the individual.

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