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Joseph C. A. Agbakoba, "Development and Modernity in Africa: An Intercultural Philosophical Perspective"

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The background for this work is set within the context of the shifts in the existential and epistemic concerns of Africa. The book is a response to the inadequacies of the intellectual responses to these transforming concerns, which have been largely oppositional or reactionary (E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books 1994). The dire need of human improvement in post-independence Africa makes imperative a shift in existential concern form an identitarian kind to a developmentarian one. In this developmentarian approach, there is commitment to reason and its supremacy: 'However, supremacy here does not require or imply exclusion of emotions, the intuition, drives, desires, humanness, respect for persons, empathy, beneficence; but these must not contradict reason; must be compatible with or derivable from reason in-itself, including especially, transcendental reason' (27). In line with this understanding of reason as consistency-beneficence, this theory understands development as 'the unfolding of reasonability in the sphere of human activities, relations and institutions as well as states of consciousness generally' (93). The ultimate end of this unfolding is the accomplishment of self-realization and the various freedoms thereof, particularly positive freedom.

Using the Igbo ethnic group as a case in focus, this approach to development in the African context demonstrates the various ways in which weak ideological compositionality of Africa resulted in subjective irresponsibility for development. Starting with the *Umunna* construct among the Igbo, the text attempts to demonstrate how poor agential compositionality is a problem for development in Africa. The *Umunna* literally means 'father's children' and by wide implication refers to a community of persons bound by blood or religion. Ethical validation often operates within this circle of *Umunna*. Thus, particularistic and partialist circumscriptions characterize Igbo ethics, and perhaps African ethics generally, for any act, no matter its gravity, is an offence only in relation to the *Umunna* and its members (177). At a more fundamental level, the relationship between the ancestors and the Earth goddess, as agents of moral enforcement, give further credence to this position. These ancestors have no influence beyond their families, thus the foundation of public morality in traditional society is not universalizable (178). This particularity and partiality of traditional morality and the kind of agency it results in raises difficult questions about the slave trade, colonialism and the failure of development even after the independence of African nations.

However, this particularistic model of *Umunna* is not all there was to the *Umunna* phenomenon in traditional Africa. The text attempts a distinction between the *Umunna-Obodo* and the *Umunna-Uwa* typologies in the traditional scenario. While *Umunna-Obodo*, which is community of the town, has remained the dominant understanding of community in traditional societies, the emergence of missionaries in the Igbo speaking parts of Nigeria gave impetus to the development of the *Umunna-Uwa*, a model of community based on universal brotherhood and humanity (209). In line with the ideal of *Umunna-Uwa*, this theory of development identifies initiative justice/pro-active solidarity as an intercultural means of beginning to foster development (reasonability-beneficence) in Africa. The expression of this form of justice can be seen in how the African (Igbo) execute numeric equality, as

an aspect of justice, especially in property and wealth distribution. In the event of the loss of a propertied man who has two wives, the Igbo in distributing the man's wealth to both wives will do so equally, not minding the fact that one of the wives has just one child and the other has more than one. The sense in this is that, while the wife with numerous children may suffer in the present because her inheritance may not be enough for her and her children; in the long run, at her old age, these children will translate to numerous pair of hands at her service when her energy begins to fail her. For the wife with a single child, she will have just a pair of hands to see her through the advanced stage of her life. This means that the flow of temporality has a way of balancing the inconsistency of numerical equality. At a deeper level, it behooves the wife with a child to assist the wife with numerous children from her abundance so that these can in turn render her services when old age begins to take its toll. In Agbakoba's words, 'she (wife with one child) should be pro-active and expect compensatory justice in the form of reciprocity—this is pro-active solidarity, especially regarding vulnerable, exploitable, relatively weak persons or groups outside one's circle of responsibility (specifically, outside one's circle of subjective responsibility but within the scope of one's objective responsibility)' (352).

This model of justice can apply transculturally. In the first instance, the colonial master failed in initiating pro-active solidarity. This is because the colonial master was only out to exploit the weakness of the colonized (even if the colonized has a share of the blame too). Even today, advanced capitalist nations have not been able to refrain from exploiting the weaknesses of developing nations, knowing full well the consequences of the global system on these communities in terms of poverty, poor living standards, violence, displacement of people and forced migration. In the end, 'the point is that pro-active solidarity and initiative justice on grounds of enlightened self-interest could have averted some of these problems because a more developed Africa and Middle East would have been more secure economically, politically and thus make migration less necessary or attractive to many of the people in these regions' (363). From the African standpoint, the Africanization policy which was favoured at independence did not demonstrate pro-active solidarity or initiative justice in any way. At best, it was retributive and only helped to plant ill-prepared Africans in the public service and the result is the high level of insensibility and apathetic-inconsistency prevalent in Africa today.

Following the discussions in the foregoing, it is obvious that the ideas in the text are rich and original. An outstanding legacy of the text is that it challenges the dominant discourse about African underdevelopment being externally induced. For too long, the story of external forces and factors as being responsible for the African predicament has continued. This has resulted in a situation of lack of creativity and ingenuity on the part of Africa in dealing with its development deficit. The book reverses this perspective and gaze by insisting that the drive for development is internal, and that the persistence of underdevelopment is a result of internal factors. Thus, the effort to build Africa must begin from within. Africa must make the required efforts to do away with all forms of insensibility and pay adequate attention to producing reasonable consistency and beneficence. By insisting that development is a form of positive freedom aimed at accomplishing self-realization, the text is drawing attention to the fact that development is not about what we were not allowed to do (negative freedom), but it is more about what we are able to do in terms of self-capacitation, given the means

and resources available to us (positive freedom). It is important that we understand what we can do for ourselves and begin to accomplish that immediately.

On the downside, in conceptualizing positive justice, the work presumes the inherent goodness of people. Thus, it is not worried about a situation in which one renders assistance with the hope of getting back and one does not get such assistance in return. Let us take the case of the wives in the previous discussion on positive justice. The proposal is that, in the African context, not minding the number of children the wives have, once the husband dies, his wealth will be distributed equally between the wives. Proactive solidarity/initiative justice will require that the wife with just one child and excess wealth at the time of the sharing should invest in assisting the other wife with more children and less wealth. The hope is that in the future, the other wife and her children will reciprocate. While this sounds ideal, human beings are not as good in the real world. People could take and not be willing to give in return. If such a situation ensues, how does one seek redress? This is one question that is yet to be properly addressed in this work. In spite of this, the work is a sound and cogent contribution to the philosophy of development generally and African development in particular. It is a very useful guide for those interested in a course in the philosophy of development and African social, political and economic philosophy.

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