

Man and Culture as Ontological Root of Technology Adoption for African Development

AJIBOLA MORUPH SURAKAT
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract. Advancement in the technological pursuits of man has really helped in pushing back the frontier of ignorance and enhancing deeper mastery of man's environment. There is a pushing down of those barriers that hitherto dogged human's socio-economic existence. A fundamental thrust of this paper shows that man and cultural experience cannot be ruled out of those cacophonies of factors that could shape the development of a nation. Ontologically, this paper opines that a sound philosophy of technological development must take root from the situation and cultural experience of the people, inextricably connecting both together. Therefore, the paper examines the ontological interpretation of man in Africa with emphasis drawn from Yoruba theory of human nature. This is pitched against the vibrant culture of development. The implication of a technicistic view of development is stated vis-a-vis the nature of man. The paper posits that African culture must be the primal point in the search of answers to the problem of development in the continent; this can then be harmonized with the global trend on terms defined by the people's situation and continuation

Keywords: Ontology, Technology, Science, Culture , Development.

1. Introduction

The overwhelming commitment to technological innovations with its underlying technicistic rationality is fostering a new epistemology that is not very good for the collective good of man. Realistically, science and technology have key roles to play in socio-economic development, but far above this is the fact that man is the central means for achieving social and economic development throughout the world. Moreso, the ontological

interpretation of man within a given culture and the situation within that locale cannot be brushed aside in the development or adaptation of technology. However, without critical attention to this imperative, many African nations transfer technology that eventually become a courier of complex problem. This shall be this crux of discussion of this paper.

2. Conceptual Clarification

There are five concepts in the continuum of this research. These are ontology, technology, science, culture and development. We shall briefly illuminate these concepts as a prelude to critical discussion in this work.

2.1 Ontology

Without being too technical "ontology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of existence" (A. S. Hornby, 2001:816). It is concerned with the attempt to explain the cause and nature of ultimate reality. It encapsulates "the relation which exists between reality and human beings on one hand and the soul on the other"(Idijakpo, 2002:153). Ontology attempts a holistic understanding of man through well entrenched perspective. An incursion into metaphysics shows idealism, materialism, pluralism, monism, among many others, as explanatory answers. It digs into the being of man and the nature of culture.

2.2 Culture

Culture in the context of this work is not just the mention of the totality of a people's way of life, but as Jibowo puts it, "culture consists of artificial objects, institutions and modes of life or thought which characterize a group"(Jibowu, 2000:1). As

germane as this is, it is yet to touch the crux of this essay. Evans (1975:15) captures our interest when he describes culture as "solutions to the problem of survive." In this respect culture is a cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, meaning, values, makes meaning as proffering solution to human problem within a given socio-temporal locale. It is also worthwhile to say that culture is predicated on a people's experience, it is dynamic and since human problems differ across society, culture is bound to differ.

2.3 Development

Development can be seen from different perspectives i.e. economic, political, social, religious, human development but in the context of this paper, development is regarded as human development. According to Perroux (2005:289), "it is the combination of mental and social changes of a people which enable them to increase, cumulatively and permanently their total real production." Nnoli reinforces this notion when he views development as "a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interacts with their physical, biological and inter-human environment transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process" (Nnoli,1981:27). Human development therefore is in existence when there are continuous opportunities given and opens to man in order to improve his skills and abilities.

2.4 Science

Science is defined as "the knowledge acquired by careful observation leading to the deduction of the laws which govern changes and government, and by testing these deduction by experiments". (Adegbola, 2003:123). What then is technology? Technology according to Adegbola (2003) involves an application of scientific knowledge in the transformative process of human society as people relate to nature and among themselves." As amplified by Kranzberg(1977:52), 'technology refers to all the ways man uses his inventions and discoveries to satisfy his needs and desires.'" Though, there is still serious polemic on which is first, science or technology, but we shall not delve into that now.

3. Man in the African Cosmos

In a simple way it can be asserted that man is man everywhere in the world but this deserves modification where cultural ontology matters. K.C. Anyanwu (1983:64) lends credence to this when he states that "the identity of the words in different

cultures, and even in different systems of philosophies within the same culture, does not imply an identity of meaning. The term man does not mean the same thing for an African and for a European." Using the Yoruba culture as our point of reference Hallen and Sodipo interpret man as made up of three elements Ara (body), *Emi* (life giving element) and *Ori* (that which is thought to be responsible for human destiny)." (Hellen and Sodipo, 1986:106) "The Bantu takes man to be composed of body, a shadow and the spirit force..." (Anyanwu, 1983:65).

The importance of destiny in African conception of person is underscored by Ali. when he writes that:

The concept of 'Ori' in Yoruba thought is synonymous with the concept of chi in Igbo Metaphysics and the concept of 'Okra' in Akan though system. In Igbo culture, 'chi' is regarded as human destiny, in the sense that it is what individual wills that his personal chi will endorse ... the Akan of Ghana in the same manner conceives that Okra is the bearer of destiny which makes man unique ... (Ali, 1997:54)

In a deeper perspective the notion of destiny that authenticate the social dimension of being of man and the self-fulfillment is realisable within the continuum of conducive ethical and social factors. The African idea of man embraces and emphasizes the sociality of man, the spirit of communality, corporate existence and togetherness in the society. Man defines his existence in nexus with others and the good of others goes a long way to determine the well-being of man.

4. Technological Advancements and Man in Africa: A Critique

Reflection on Africa's situation reveals that the continent is underdeveloped; poverty, low level of technology, political crisis, corruption, high level of insecurity, economic problems are some of the albatross that must be tackled in Africa. Meanwhile the phenomenon of globalization and the attendant burgeoning of informatics seem irresistible but can be surely redefined.

The world is on the verge of powerful technological experience. There is a phenomenal increase in the commitment to robotics and Artificial intelligence. "A robot is a machine that performs task usually done by people. It is a mechanical worker." (Brusi, 2002:306) Robotic is surely one of the powering technology behind Artificial Intelligence. Joseph Weizenbaum confirms this when he posits that:

Artificial intelligence can be seen as an attempt to build a machine on the model of man, a robot that is to have its childhood, to learn language as a child does, to gain its knowledge of the world by sensing the world through its own organs and ultimately to contemplate the whole domain of human thought (Weizerbaum, 1976: 202:203)

Robotics and artificial intelligence have really widened the scope of human knowledge, helps in the development of knowledge and mitigating the problem of man.

The fact that technology is a problem-solving enterprise is indicative of the fact that technology and development are inseparable. Yet, as crucial as technology revolution is, it must be tempered with care in continent like Africa. It has pushed back or ostracizes many people from the domain of productive work. It has given firm root to a system of review that justifies "right-sizing or downsizing of the work force. This is quite notable in the banking sector in Nigeria. African culture is surely not against review but it frowns at any act that can jeopardize the strong communalistic ethos on which it is based. Mass retrenchments do not take cognizance of the good of the individual. This retrenchment has been an offshoot of Artificial intelligence and profound computerization of office work.

Paying closer attention to the above fact, suggests that artificial intelligence is fostering a wide guilt between people in Africa. Our policy planners seem to define the good in a microeconomic sense without proper consideration of the individual. We cannot stick to this reason as it seems to gloss over the utilitarian scope of governance and the need to reckon the good of all as a fundamental axiom in politics. So, if the pragmatic recourse to informatics is changing the economic and political policies of nations, it is either a man keeps to the trend or leave the trend. "When life changing conflicts, that is, one between expansive individual liberty and necessary communal demands arose, they are generally resolved in favour of the community. The reason is that, since a community can do without this particular individual, but the individual can never do without a community, in the conflict of an existential choice the individual must submit to the demands of the community" (Ukagba, 2005:185) .

It must be noted that we are not advancing that the existence of African in family form (Ujama) should be totally discouraged and everybody should be on his/her own. That is not the issue. We are not in support of bad governance and unnecessary sack of

people." The community is not a tyrant. It offers the African the psychological and ultimate security as it gives each member both physical and ideological identity. The individual; and community are in dialectical complementary"(Ukagba, ibid).

In the African setting, goodness amounts to those acts, attitudes and behaviour which are congenial to the attainment of peaceful communal co-existence. "An act is regarded as good if it does not jeopardize the spirit of oneness, solidarity and the single purpose that guide the social existence of men in the society..."(Ozumba,1998:42). So, it will be unethical to sack a person without preparing the mechanism that will forestall possible retrogression of his/her humanity.

Cloning is another scientific innovation that is taking stride across the globe. The idea is permeating through Africa. Iroegbu (2005:636) opines that: *Cloning is the scientific reproduction of a given organism in its DNA molecule. It is to make a carbon copy or more technically to realize a nucleus transplant of the donor of the cell nuclei ... it is the repetition of the representing of and the reproduction of a given being.*

The process of cloning is very beneficial to infertile couple helps in replacing diseased organs and in the production of healthy embryos. Of course, it is not a violation of the pragmatic dimension of African culture but it must be situated on strict philosophy and legislation. This is crucial because, gay and lesbians may want to hijack it. Lesbianism is a critical subversion of African cosmology. It is immoral and it distorts the cultural understanding of marriage and sex. It is the belief among Africans that any act of immorality will mean desecrating the land and this will eventually bring about inclement conditions. But then, saying that lesbianism, male pregnancy, cloning, sex doll among others are immoral may be highly extravagant and jejune. Some lesbians are medically diagnosed to have lesbian genes. Will it not be unjust to disallow them from living according to type? There are other channels of medical rehabilitations. But, what if this is their destiny? An iconoclastic destiny that will subvert social order must be nipped in the bud. The deity and divinities in African pantheon at times share in the process of creation. In Yoruba Mythology *Orisanla* assisted God in moulding man and man conveyed different destiny among which cloning can be an answer to some of them.

Science and technology have been politicised even as Eboh opines that contemporary science and

technology were impacted by a particular vision that emanated from the peculiar European experience sequel to the Renaissance and this in most cases run at variance to African cultural experience. Indeed, Africa must borrow these technologies with caution or they must humanize the approach to borrowing of technology because any undue reverence to technological rationality may spell doom. "The technological world view sees the individual in the society as no more than an inanimate part of large inanimate universe in which everything there is governed by certain absolute and abstract laws. It has a mechanomorphic concept of social existence"(Amodu, 2003:29).

A mechanomorphic conception of man debases man as a thinking and rational animal. It commits us to a totally closed determinist worldview in which the actions of individuals in the society are seen not to be the result of individual freewill but of abstract laws over which they have no control. This view makes nonsense of morality. It must be clearly stated that no technology is totally bad but its utility, its needs and function at a time count a lot.

Ontology of Technological Adaptation and Adoption in Africa

A fundamental review of this paper shows that man and cultural experience cannot be ruled out of those factors that will shape the development of a nation. Holistic adoption of foreign technology and development model is inappropriate. Present day technologies, their application and their trends of development are not relevant to a universal model of development. On this note Eboh, 1997: 107) suggests that "we discard the western paradigm of modernity which has swayed modern technology and look for alternative mode of thought and value embedded in occidental culture... Africa will be well advised to take note of this and opt for technological inventions that are relevant to their situation. Nation like Nigeria must expound a philosophy that technological development must also involve respect for human values, persons and the good of the society.

5. Conclusion

Technological development is an imperative within the present sphere of a global world. However, Africa will be deepening the chasm of its underdevelopment if there is no critical attention to cultural particularities, critique of foreign model and internal drive to fertilize a technological consciousness via committed leadership. Ontologically, therefore, a sound philosophy of technological development must take root from the situation and cultural experience of

the people. This should be for the purpose of integrating and harmonizing technology with the global environment. Such philosophy must intricately connect the ethical and the technical so that the former can humanize the latter.

References

- Hornby ,A.S. (2001) *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Idjakpor,G.O. (2002) "The Meaning of African And Western Metaphysics A Conceptual Analysis" In A.F. Uduigwomen (Ed) *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbinaka Publisher).
- Jibowo,G. , (2001) *Essentials of Rural Sociology* (Abeokuta: Gbemi Sodipo Press).
- Evan,W.G.J , (1975) *Culture and Civilization* An Inaugural Lecture delivered at University of Ibadan: Ibadan University Press).
- Perroux,F. (2006) cf Iroegbu, P "Ethics of Progress and Development" in A.O. Echekwube and P. Iroegbu (eds) *KPIM of Morality: Ethics General Special and Professional* (Ibadan: Heinemman Educational Books).
- Nnoli, O., (1981) "Development Underdevelopment Is Nigeria Developing" in O. Nnoli (ed) *Path to Nigerian Development* (Dakar: CODESRA).
- Adegbola,A.A.,(2003) "Science, Technology and Culture in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities" in Ayo Fadahunsi (ed) *Philosophy, Science and Technology* (Ibadan: Hope Publication).
- Kranzberg,M., (1977) "*Technology*" In *World Book Encyclopedia Vol. 7119* (Chicago, Field Enterprises).
- Anyanwu,K.C., (1983) *The African Experience in the American Market Place* (New York: Exposition Press).
- Barry, H. and Sodipo,J.O, (1986) *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft* (London: Ethnographics).
- Ade Ali, S. A, (1997) "Person: A Yoruba Example" in S. Adebajo (ed) *Journal of Yoruba Folklore* (Faculty of Arts Seminar Committee, Olabisi Onabanjo University).
- Brusi,F.K., (2002) *Technology: Today and Tomorrow* (London: McGraw Hill)
- Weizerbaum,J., (1976) *Computer, Power and Human Reasons* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman).
- Ukagba, G, (2005) "Afroxiology" In A. O. Echekwube and P. Iroegbu (eds) *KPIM of Morality* (Ibadan: Heinemann Books).

- Iroegbu, P.(2005) "Cloning, Reality and Morality" in A.O.Echekwube and P.I.Iroegbu(ed.), *KPIM of Morality* (Heinemann Books).
- Eboh,M.P (1993) *Introduction to Philosophy and Philosophising* (Enugu: Claretian Institute of Philosophy).
- Amodu,A.A. (2003) "Technology and Social Existence" in A Fadahunsi (ed) *Philosophy. Science and Technology* (Ibadan: Hope Publications).