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Philosophy, Societal Development and the Future of Humanity

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Abstract:

This paper undertakes a philosophical consideration of societal development and the future of humanity. With the alarming rate of development our globe has witnessed, most notably in science and technology, the future of humanity has become a significant matter of much interest. This is because today's events will determine the nature of humanity's future. This paper adopts the philosophical method of exposition and critical analysis and contends that for humanity to realize an admirable bright future, the actions of humans today must be predicated on moral values that guarantee respect for the dignity of the human person. This is against the backdrop of the insatiable quest for material gains, power, pleasure, comfort, and freedom, which has resulted in man's exploitation, alienation, suppression, and oppression by his fellow man. As a result, humans are used by their fellow humans as a means to an end and not as ends. This, undoubtedly, is injurious to society and would likely lead to an austere future if unchecked.

Keywords: Philosophy, societal development, future of humanity, human dignity

1. Introduction

The future of humanity has been a subject of debate among thinkers. While some see a bright and happy future for humanity, some others see a bleak one. The optimism of a bright and happy future largely owes to the remarkable speedy developments we are witnessing today in various facets of life, basically made possible by science and technology. Science and technology have revolutionized our world so much that they tend to serve as the parameter for determining what is acceptable, meaningful, and true in our society. Regrettably, they have also impacted negatively on humanity. Climate change, atomic and chemical weapons, deadly poisons, and viruses, among others, owe majorly to science and technology. Aside from science and technology, religion and government are other significant subjects that will shape the future of humanity. Religion has so much influence on man that since the 19th century, when Marx dubbed it the 'opium of the people', it has remained so till date.

Government policies and decisions tend to be the major determinant of the future of humanity as they, directly and indirectly, regulate and influence all other significant subjects regarding the future of humanity. The philosophy of any nation's government determines that nation's direction, which altogether shapes the future of humanity. What type of future would humanity have in the light of people's actions in the present? What would determine the nature of that future? How should humans behave to realize a happy, desirable future? What contribution has the philosophy made concerning the future of humanity? What constitutes societal development?

In light of the above background and questions, this paper aims to philosophically analyze societal development about the future of humanity. Accordingly, we shall undertake a brief explanation of philosophy in the following section; after that, we will consider societal development. After that, we treat the future of humanity and, finally, undertake a critical analysis of societal development vis-à-vis the future of humanity.

2. Philosophy: An Overview

Although there is no generally accepted definition of philosophy, as numerous definitions abound, philosophy may be viewed as a systematic effort to understand our universe, including the living and non-living things that live in it. It attempts to understand and explain the workings of our universe, its origin, nature, and development. It wonders about anything conceivable and attempts to offer answers to the bewildering questions of life. It seeks to know the truth about our world through rational curiosity. It is in this light that Igwe defines it as 'the rational quest for truth, meaning and logical inter-connectedness of our fundamental ideas' (1999, p. 3). By fundamental ideas, Igwe means 'those ideas that are necessary for the determination of the truth or falsity of other ideas'. Igwe shows that philosophy is not just a reflective activity but a reflective activity that is concerned with a holistic truth about our universe. This reflective activity appraises all thoughts about our universe in the search for truth. For Eboh, 'philosophy examines the crucial issues that deeply affect human beings regarding their nature, origin, and destiny so that they may organize their lives better' (1998, p. 4). From

Eboh's perspective, philosophy deals with important subjects and concerns of man aimed at improving the well-being of man. These matters regard the characters, features, disposition, temperament, or personality of man as a being among other beings in our world. It also concerns how he found himself in the universe, his creator, and his purpose in the world; providence and future.

From the above, it is apparent that philosophy does not have any province or area that it is confined to. It has no sphere of life that it is limited to. It is a dogged effort to reflect on fundamental issues lucidly. It can start anywhere and anyhow. Through its branches and second-order activity status, it can deal with any issue of life that attracts its attention. Its major branches include:

- Metaphysics,
- Epistemology,
- Logic,
- Axiology (Ethics and Aesthetics) and
- Socio-political philosophy

As a second-order activity, it discusses and critically analyses other disciplines and important life issues; hence, we have, for instance, philosophy of science, philosophy of law, philosophy of education, philosophy of medicine, philosophy of technology, philosophy of gender, and philosophy of history.

3. Societal Development

Societal development generally denotes the idea of progress and well-being of people in the society. It involves growth and positive change in different aspects of the life of a society – mental, economic, social, environmental, educational, infrastructural, political, etc. This explanation shows that development is multifaceted. This position affirms Rodney's view that development 'is a many-sided process' which could be seen both at the level of individual and that of social groups (1972, p. 9 – 10). At the level of the former (i.e., individual), it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being.

In contrast, at the level of the latter (i.e., social groups), it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Rodney's position reveals that development is beyond physical growth or change.

In other words, development is much more than the erection of buildings, construction of roads, building of electric power plants, population increase, and other physical changes, growth, or increase seen in the society. Development is first mental, and then it is physical. Mental developmental drives and governs physical development and determines its durability. This view explains why many nations in Africa are still underdeveloped or developing. The physical structures in these nations hardly survive due to the lack of requisite mental capacity to drive and sustain them.

The mental development of individuals in a society determines the physical development of that society. An individual's mental capacity or development covers the individual's creativity, skills, self-discipline, freedom, knowledge, reasoning, and morality, all of which together build, maintain, and sustain the physical development of the society. Thus, the more mentally developed a society is, the better and more sustainable its physical development is, including its scientific and technological development.

Scientific and technological development is an upshot of mental development traceable to the ancient period. However, it was in the modern period, also known as the 'Age of Reason' and 'Age of Enlightenment', that remarkable empirical results were achieved. This period saw the growth of science, secular humanism, political and economic liberalism, and the decline of the authority of religion. This period emphasized the power of reason in understanding and explaining reality over religious dogmas. Its guiding principle or motto was 'Dare to Know' (Igwe, *Philosophy: Origin, Development, and Relevance*, 2022, p. 22). The period saw an intellectual revolution that has brought our world to the great level it has today. Scientific and technological innovations have revolutionized our world and made life easier, from our homes, schools, hospitals, and offices to outer space. Some of the notable scientific and technological innovations are: automobiles, airplanes, radios and televisions, microwave ovens, polio vaccines, computers, birth control pills, cordless tools, communication satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, fiber optics, electronic ignition, barcode, microscope, Microsoft word, DNA fingerprinting, world wide web, cameras, drones, CDs and DVDs, video players, audio players, international space station, Google, Facebook, phones, rockets, printing machines, scanning machines, electricity, bulbs, clocks and watches, and so on.

All of these owe to mental development. Clearly, a nation's relevance and respect in global affairs largely depend on its scientific and technological knowledge level. Hailsham recognized this fact when he stated, 'A nation's power to prosper in peace, survive in war, and command respect ... depends very largely on its degree of scientific and technological advance' (1963, p. 11). Truly, once a society attains a high level of mental development, its physical development, including scientific and technological advancement and other forms of development (economic, political, educational, infrastructural, environmental, social, etc.) become inevitable. The well-being of individuals in the society is, therefore, guaranteed.

4. The Future of Humanity

The future of humanity consists of the type of events or happenings, or the kind of life humans will lead in the time to come. A deliberation on the future of humanity, thus, is a discourse on how human life will be in time to come about the significant integrants of the human condition. These notable constituents of the human condition include the impact of science and technology on humanity, the influence of religion and culture on humanity, human interference in nature, genetic engineering, human mortality and immortality, nuclear war, climate change (global warming), system of government, and global peace among others.

Science and technology have so much impact on humanity that they are seen by many as the key to man's fulfillment and happiness. This is obviously against the backdrop of their superlative achievements, which have greatly benefited humans. Since the epoch of the industrial revolution, human achievements and progress have grown at an alarming rate due to science and technology. Industrial products keep emerging and getting more sophisticated, ranging from cars, trucks, trains, airplanes, warships, submarines, fighter-jets, firearms, mobile phones, computers, sewing machines, printing machines, televisions, and radios, to tables and chairs. What kind of impact will this products-continued-sophistication growth have on humanity in the future? Will it improve or worsen the human condition?

The field of artificial intelligence is an area with mind-blowing growth. The field is established on the postulation that a cardinal attribute of humans – intelligence 'can be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it' (Crevier, 1993, p. 28). Many scientists, particularly those in the field of cognitive science, believe that machines can act as intelligently as humans. McCarthy, Minsky, Rochester, and Shannon are among such thinkers. They claim that all facets of learning, as well as all attributes of intelligence, can be accurately defined such that a machine can be designed to replicate it ('A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence', 1955).

Artificial intelligence has been successfully used in many fields and sectors, such as medical diagnosis, stock control, security, and accountability. In light of the tremendous achievements made in artificial intelligence, some scientists believe there is no essential difference between humans and artificial intelligence. In other words, there is no limit to how intelligent machines can be. No doubt, tremendous achievements have been recorded via artificial intelligence. However, unfortunately, AI also poses some risks such as job loss, privacy violation, insecurity, inequality, weapon automation abuse, etc. The following questions, therefore, arise:

- What type of future does Artificial intelligence hold for humanity?
- Is it a future of optimism or pessimism?
- Can it guarantee human well-being? Or
- Constitutes an existential threat to humanity?

Artificial intelligence is only a sub-field of science. Other sub-fields and fields of science abound. This is also the case with technology. Science and technology have undoubtedly been a lodestone for humanity in view of their matchless achievements. They brought novel weapons of thought, increased man's intellectual insight, and hence strengthened the course of civilization. They tend to constitute the pillar of progress and the hallmark of development. However, despite their stupendous achievements, they have also negatively impacted humanity. This is evident in the production and use of atomic and chemical weapons, hazardous poisons, and viruses. Human activities, especially industrial, have, in line with developments in science and technology, caused severe degradation of the human environment. Industrial and locomotive wastes and smokes, as well as smokes from bush burning, cars, motorbikes, and generators, pollute the air causing global warming (climate change), acid rain, and depletion of the ozone layer.

Aquatic life is also seriously endangered. Water, which is essential to human life, is constantly polluted by human activities, leading to low quality of water, injurious to the aquatic ecosystem and human life. Undoubtedly, human activities in mining, agriculture and industrial production, power generation, and population growth have negatively impacted water resources. The negative impact has led to the deterioration of the quality and quantity of water. Consequently, this impacts humans negatively, thus, explaining why we have diseases such as cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, scabies, and worm infections, among others (Patel, p. 1).

Genetic engineering, also called genetic modification or genetic manipulation, is another significant human concern about the future of humanity. It entails the use of technology to modify or manipulate the genes of a living thing. An organism's genetic or hereditary material is altered to eliminate unwanted features or create wanted new ones. Genetic engineering has ensured an increase in plant and food production. It has helped diagnose diseases and produce vaccines and numerous drugs for human well-being. However, a lot of concerns are raised over genetic engineering, including ethical, economic, social, and religious. Some critics have questioned the safety of foods produced through genetic engineering and their impact on the environment and human well-being.

On the whole, science and technology have immensely benefitted man. Their benefits are truly invaluable. However, regrettably, they also constitute dangers to humanity in view of their negative impacts. For instance, human unemployment in view of the deployment of artificial intelligence (machines) and privacy concerns as intelligent technology will pervade the society (Hershock, p. 8). Therefore, the following questions arise:

- How would the future of humanity be in view of the speedy scientific and technological developments we are witnessing today?
- Are there moral implications to scientific and technological innovations? Should there be a limit to scientific and technological innovations? Should they be value-free?

Besides science and technology, religion is another significant subject concerning the future of humanity. The influence of religion on humans is so huge that it puzzles one's cognitive propensity. Some people have lost their sanity, possessions, and marriage owing to religion. Some see members of their families as enemies, witches, and wizards. The power of religion over man made Marx proclaim: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people' (1970, p. 3). Indeed, religion has also benefitted mankind via its teaching of love, generosity, forgiveness, and peace. Religion, thus, is both a boon and a bane to mankind. The future of humanity regarding religion remains a subject of varied opinions. Will religion still live with humans in the future? Or wither away as predicted by Marx and other thinkers? Is it really a blessing or a curse to humans?

Another significant issue regarding the future of mankind is governance. The fundamental question here is: What type or system of government would we possibly have in the future? Of course, the system in place at present can give us insight into how the future can be. Our lives are largely determined and regulated by the type of government we put in

place. At present, we are in a capitalist world. Capitalism presently prevails in our world. Despite its great merits, this system is considered by some thinkers as inimical to human well-being. Karl Marx was one of the major critics of capitalism who saw the system as exploitative, oppressive, and dehumanizing. He predicted its downfall and the emergence of communism, wherein humans would be free from exploitation, oppression, dehumanization, injustice, and suffering. However, the questions which have remained germane insofar as the future of humanity is concerned are:

- Will Marx's prediction of communism come to pass?
- Does communism truly hold the key to man's liberation and happiness?
- What system of government is the best for humanity?

5. Evaluation

Many issues have been raised about the future of humanity, which we are dealing with from a philosophical perspective. Philosophy has contributed enormously to societal development as an enterprise that covers all life issues. In fact, without philosophy, our world would not have attained the level of development it has today. Undoubtedly, science and technology have proved to be the hallmark of development in the world today. However, it is imperative to note that philosophy is the progenitor of science. 'Science', prior to the 18th century, was nonexistent. In fact, the word 'scientist' was only invented in 1833 by William Whewell, a philosopher, theologian, and historian of science.

On the other hand, the word 'science' emerged around 1725 (Igwe, 2022, p. 112). Prior to the 18th century, science was called natural philosophy, which is the branch of philosophy that deals with natural phenomena. Philosophers had, since the ancient era, studied our natural world and came up with theories that are relevant up to this day. We could talk about the 'water' theory of Thales, the 'air' theory of Anaximanes, and the 'atomic theory' of Leucippus and Democritus. Even Isaac Newton was not called a scientist. He was a natural philosopher. The title of his masterpiece is *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. The title of the work has no word like 'science'. Science, as we know it today, emanated from philosophy; it was the aspect of philosophy called natural philosophy.

So, talking about societal development, it is apparent that philosophy's contributions cannot be ignored. In its quest for humanity's well-being, philosophy plays a significant role. In this regard, Eboh remarks,

'Philosophy plays three key roles in its dealings: synoptic, critical, and normative. It gathers data from various disciplines, lays them side by side in an interpretative synthesis, and extract meaning from the data. It assesses the past and present to ascertain what is good and what needs to be improved upon. Then extrapolating and laying down norms or guidelines for the future.' (1998, p. 159)

Philosophy, thus, goes beyond the descriptive realm into the sphere of prescription for the well-being of mankind. In this connection, Maritain states: 'Philosophy reminds men of the supreme utility of life essentials ... for men do not live by bread and technological discoveries alone. They live by values and realities which are above time and worth-knowing' (1961, p. 19). Philosophy is concerned with both the tangible and the intangible. Beyond the laudable empirical achievements of science and technology, philosophy emphasizes value. It firmly upholds the dignity of man, without which the society is doomed.

The kind of future we will have tomorrow is dependent on our actions and inactions of today. Unfortunately, today's world seems to be carried away by the achievements of science so much that values and morals, as well as human dignity, are de-emphasized. Insatiable quest and lust for material gains have pitted men against their fellow men. Humans are treated as a means to an end by their fellow humans, particularly the rich and the ruling class. The big industries which contribute the greatest percentage of environmental pollution and degradation are owned by them. Their ravenous quest for more wealth and power makes them undermine human dignity and values. There is much exploitation, oppression, alienation, and dehumanization of other humans by the rich and the ruling class, even among the poor. Through its branch of ethics, philosophy brings to the knowledge and consciousness of humans that humans should be treated as ends, not as a means to an end. Moreover, until humans are so treated, the future of humanity remains bleak.

The contribution of philosophy to human development is very remarkable. While philosophy started with an attempt to understand our universe, it later shifted focus to man, the center of creation and all existents. This endeavor began with Socrates, who was famous for his good moral life and proclamations: 'Man know thyself' and 'The unexamined life is not worth living'. By building the individual person, philosophy builds the society. Therefore, whatever activity that is engaged in must have the dignity of man as the paramount consideration over material gains. Scientific and technological developments, as well as other developments, thus, that are detrimental to human dignity, should be de-emphasized. Instead, they should be 'carefully structured and evaluated to better our lives, environment, and future' (Cuellar & Huq, 2022, p. 335).

Respect for human dignity, thus, is a sine-qua-non for an optimistic future for humanity. Scientific and technological developments, Human dignity has largely been prominent in the context of human rights. In this regard, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights affirms that 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (1948, p. 1). The idea of human dignity rests on the notion that all persons have a distinctive worth that is tied to their humanity. This is devoid of race, class, ethnicity, religion, gender, or any other consideration other than being human.

The moral rectitude of the citizens of a nation determines the level of the development of that nation. Moral depravity breeds exploitation, oppression, dehumanization, discrimination, injustice, racism, race, alienation, and other moral vices. Therefore, morality must be greatly emphasized and upheld for humanity to have an excellent future. Scientific and technological innovations must not be value-free. When we encourage artificiality to the extent that it benefits humans, it should be de-emphasized when it comes in conflict with human values, morals, or dignity. We greatly applaud the superlative achievements recorded in artificial intelligence; however, we boldly say that there are

fundamental differences between human and artificial intelligence. Human intelligence is a product of nature, while artificial intelligence is a product of humans. Artificial intelligence is an imitation of human intelligence and so cannot be on the same footing with the intelligence that created it. Therefore, it is mistaken to consider artificial intelligence on the same plane as human intelligence as some scientists have done. It is also mistaken to consider machines as having minds. Minds are the intangible product of nature, while machines are tangible creations of humans. The minds attributed to them are *pseudo minds*. Their so-called intelligent actions and activities are mere manifestations of the programming of their maker, namely, humans. They lack self-consciousness, emotions, soul, and originality. Their existence, actions, and inexistence are absolutely determined and dependent on their maker – man.

Humanity's bright future also depends on man's attitude towards religion. Regrettably, religion has served as a weapon of exploitation and manipulation in the hands of some humans, especially the political class, the wealthy, and religious leaders. We are in a multi-religious and cultural world, so we need to tolerate and respect other religions insofar as they do not constitute harm. Reasonableness is a justification for toleration in view of the numerous religious crises, wars, and deaths witnessed in our world. John Rawls' theory of reasonable pluralism is quite significant here. It is the idea that there are numerous competing. Yet, there are reasonable opinions or views on significant matters of politics, religion, etc. Rawls theorizes that there are multiplicities of beliefs in our pluralistic society that are reasonable and should be tolerated. He notes that a reasonable person desires a social world of freedom, equality, and cooperation in view of the different beliefs or opinions that people may hold (1993, p. 50).

With regard to religion, for instance, reasonable pluralism may have a reasonable Christianity, a reasonable Judaism, a reasonable Islam, a reason Buddhism and a reasonable Hinduism. Rawls' view offers a bright future for humanity if upheld. We have different, yet, reasonable views, which we hold mainly due to our place of birth, environment, association, etc. So, divergent views must be tolerated if we must have a better religious future. Religion in itself is not evil; it is what people do in its name that may be evil. Religion, among other things, encourages love, peace, kindness, hospitality, tolerance, altruism, and patience. Sadly, humans use it as a tool for realizing their selfish desires. If the good tenets of the religion are emphasized and practiced, a great future for humanity is guaranteed.

Finally, a good system of government that is predicted on morality and respect for the dignity of the human person will offer an admirable future for humanity. Much emphasis on individual liberty today has the potential of offering a gloomy future for humanity:

- A future where gender is determined by an individual's choice,
- A future where nudity is glorified,
- A future where children are beyond the discipline and control of their parents,
- A future where an individual absolutely decides, without interference, what to do with his body, etc,
- A future of reasonable moral liberty is what we need

Regardless of the name of the systems that may be in operation, the foundation of morality and respect for human dignity is what will guarantee true happiness, peace, and the development of human society.

6. Conclusion

While science and technology are highly commended for their laudable achievements and leading the journey towards a venerable future for humanity, it must be accentuated that values and respect for human dignity are *sine qua non* for realizing that marvelous future. Centron observes that we are obsessed with 'technological advancement as an end itself that scant attention is paid to the problem of protecting mankind and its future against the hazards of technology' (1970, p. 321). In the same vein, Titus and Smith note that:

Philosophers are concerned over the situation in which our physical power, scientific knowledge, and wealth stand in sharp contrast with the failure of government and individuals to understand the pressing intellectual and requirements of life. Knowledge seems divorced from values, showing that power without insight is extremely harmful. (1974, p. 6)

The need to respect human rights is quite germane. We agree with Cataleta that as 'we delegate more responsibility to machines in regards to autonomous decision making, we must guarantee proper accountability in protecting human rights' (2020, p. 3). Human rights, as already shown, are predicated on human dignity. Without values and respect for human dignity, the desired adorable future for humanity remains a mirage.

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