

Reasserting African critical authority in the national development picture¹

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Abstract

The self-promotional rhetoric generated by Western development aid industries and scientific research cartels sustains a popular pretence that Africans require foreign technical wherewithal and moral initiative to meet their development goals. I argue to the contrary. Focusing first upon medical care delivery as a case in point, I demonstrate how global health spending in billions of dollars perpetuates the chronic morbidity and short life expectancy of people in economically-disadvantaged regions of the world. Secondly, turning to Africa's so-called 'resource curse', the sheer ignorance of foreigners about the social significance of land and the meaning of legitimate political authority in Africa defeats cutting edge proposals of Western-oriented ethicists to solve the gross distributive injustices of globalisation. The dearth of African control and decision making authority in international partnerships implicates proposed natural resource reparation schemes which, if carried out, could exacerbate the economic injustices they were designed to reconcile. I argue that, in general, unregulated economic principles determining success in the global knowledge market are an unreliable indicator for ranking the value of knowledge or for predicting the potential success of strategic plans in the management of national development.

Introduction

It is anachronistic to point out the numerous challenges faced when attempting to implement those ideals of social and economic transformation associated with the contemporary development policy (as envisioned by the UN's post-2015 Sustainable Millennium Development Goal framework, for example).² Arguably, the source of these difficulties of programme implementation and technology transfer is not the existence of complex global partnerships in science, technology, or social engineering as such; but rather the problems in large measure stem from science,

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²Centre for International Governance Innovation (2011).

technology and social engineering partnerships as chiefly *profit-driven* enterprises. Or so I shall argue.

Granted, nowadays there appears to be no practical way of meeting the global expenses of doing research or developing technologies designed to enhance social welfare in poor economies other than to keep a strict eye on cost-effective applications and mass marketing opportunities that will secure dividends sufficient to retain shareholders' investments. For example, global vaccine and pharmaceutical research purportedly generate annual research losses in billions,³ resolved currently by a very lucrative practical arrangement:⁴ shelved experimental drugs are repurposed and declared "essential" for Africa at the discretion of manufacturing innovators themselves, who then produce widely marketable one-step, quick-fix silver bullets for bulk export to developing countries, with no binding requirement to demonstrate the product's unilateral efficacy or safety.⁵ This practice was endorsed in 2008 by the sixtieth World Health Assembly as one of several measures comprising the Global Strategy and Plan of Action to ensure that the bottom-line priorities of pharmaceutical companies retain parity in public discourse with the tentative and awkward increase of moral obligation, sensed by the UN Security Council, to at least avoid exacerbating the rate of maternal and infant mortality "of remote peoples . . . elsewhere."⁶

The concerns raised here extend beyond the global health arena to other domains of international researches that help to shape the agenda for funding partnerships and programmes to aid African development, including agricultural economics and extraction industries. Despite the billions of dollars invested annually to attain the post-2015 Sustainable Millennium Development Goals,⁷ venture capitalism invested in science and technology over decades since WWII has given rise to the dual crises of the twenty-first century—these being the "tragedy of the

³ David Taylor (2015).

⁴ A human rights theorist widely renowned among analytic philosophers, and thereby a highly influential enthusiast for creating parity between health care demand and supply on lucrative terms, is Thomas Pogge (2005) and (2011).

⁵ The excessive focus on essential drugs and technical innovations to relieve the disease burden of the global South has been addressed by Anup Shah (2000). Repurposed anti-carcinogenic drugs applied to AIDS treatment are irreversibly damaging, as published in *The Lancet* (November 19, 1988) – see Joan Shenton (2015, pp. 98-123). Although lucrative, it is detrimental to Africans' health to sustain the fallacy that one uniformly replicating virus worldwide is uniformly responsive to treatment regimes. But recombinant strains of viral replication are very unstable; so antiretroviral drugs showing some effectiveness in South Africa or in North America may prove completely useless or counterproductive in Ghana; see J.A.M. Brandful, Virology Department, NMIMR, University of Ghana, in H. Lauer (2006, p. 99).

⁶ On the UN Global Plan of Action, see G. Velasquez (2014, p. 67). The quoted phrase, reflecting the norm in philosophical literature on global justice, is from Marilyn Friedman (2000). See Leif Wenar (2008).

⁷ Centre for International Governance Innovation (2011).

global commons,”⁸ and the accelerating deterioration of confidence in central liberal welfare state leadership—threatening the survival not only of Africans but also of the entire human family. One can demonstrate that it is not the fact that so much money has been spent on rectifying the imbalance of social and economic welfare between the global North and South, but that so much of it has been spent under false pretences, which perpetuates the entrenched poverty and short life expectancy of people in economically disadvantaged regions of the world.

Foreign expertise often unwittingly reflects the historic enmity which polarises African and non-African knowledge traditions, reinforcing myths which retard the synthesis of scientific advances in post-colonial societies.⁹ These myths include the stereotype of African specialists as methodical mimics of folkloric, derivative rituals associated with the global South’s impoverishment, who are indifferent to intellectual rigor and shy of technical innovation—in contrast with the superior intrepid ingenuity of knowledge producers associated with wealthy technocracies. The self-promotional rhetoric generated by Western scientific research cartels sustains the pretence that Africans require *foreign* technical wherewithal and initiative to meet their development goals. The disproportionate measure of avoidable harm done to people living in economically-dislocated economies can be traced to the excess of error tolerated in theory and practice when the focus is Africans’ chronic impoverishment and avoidable fatalities.¹⁰ Misimpressions about African ineptitude continue dominating the global arena because those best placed to provide corrections are discredited by virtue of their location in the poorly-endowed periphery of the knowledge network. Systemic and routine failures to honour basic codes of medical conduct and scientific rigour manifest most often, and most predictably go unchecked, under severely compromising conditions of extreme uncertainty in regions where logistics and infrastructure are at their worst. Since these conditions prevail in the world’s poorest economies, it is assumed in the upper echelons of global health management that people living in those regions will be disproportionately disadvantaged as a norm.¹¹

⁸Robert W. Cox (1986 [1981]). The transforming ‘noosphere’ suffers the dual threats of cybernet crime and surveillance. Teilhard de Chardin (1959 [1955]).

⁹H. Lauer (2002).

¹⁰H. Lauer (2017).

¹¹ A standard articulation is the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Good Scientific Practice (2012). The standard rationale excusing the routinised violation of these professional standards is published by World Health Organisation (2004). In 2015, local due process was evaded by the GlaxoSmithKline and US National Institutes of Health, prior to launching their Phase II Ebola vaccine trial involving mass human experimentation in Ghana. See M. Rullet *al.* (2016). But I focus on recent events in West Africa only as a case in point. Comparably dubious scenarios have occurred in Haiti and currently transpire in Brazil, see C. Bernish (2016).

Correlatively, the raw wealth of Africa continues to be extracted and exploited by foreigners to the detriment of Africans' livelihoods and environments.¹² Market value is added to these primary goods and consumable items are processed overseas to be shipped back to Africans at unaffordable prices.¹³ Macro-agribusiness consolidates control over food chain governance worldwide, undermining indigenous agronomy and crop systems, in the name of the pro-poor Green Africa Revolution.¹⁴ When evaluating the ethical dimensions of these international atrocities in regions where local populations suffer poverty *in extremis*, political moralists domesticate the source of abuse, and thereby unwittingly reflect a legacy of disdain for Africans' presumed political immaturity and incapacity for self-rule, ratifying the antiquated imbalance between local governance and multinational corporate investors' extraction power, currently under the aegis of the World Trade Organisation.¹⁵

Nowadays, sciences applied to Millennium Development Goal objectives are so interdependent with the *modus operandi* of profit-motivated institutions for their very existence, that the commodification of results and creation of product-demand have become constitutive factors determining research goals and criteria for theory adjudication.¹⁶ The professionals who staff Africa's leading research and academic institutions are successful because they wisely avoid any openly critical, explicitly non-complicit stance which does not square with rationalising the top-down centralised management of multi-billion dollar aid partnerships directed from overseas. Those who can attract substantial funding for their research and applications deftly answer to market demands and for that reason are recognised as reliable international partners in development. Professional voices that do not comply with the principles of sound marketing and product development, or who deviate from their assigned roles in promoting lucrative 'aid for development' initiatives, are sidelined and silenced as irresponsible, attention seeking or "insufficiently committed to truth-oriented inquiry."¹⁷ Large-scale, on-going research programmes and collaborations maintain their fiscal viability in part by sustaining the global impression of a stable consensus, through the hierarchical structure of

¹² Leif Wenar (2016).

¹³ Kofi N. Awoonor (1990, p 59) and (2012 [2006], p. 202).

¹⁴ Kojo Sebastian Amanor (2009) and (2011) details how these damaging power relations are obfuscated by cosmetic semantics produced for global consumption in technical and ideological reports about the positive impacts of the IMF's African agenda.

¹⁵ Ann Claire Cutler (1999).

¹⁶ Henry H. Bauer (2012). Violation of the Bradford Hill criteria (and the older Koch's postulates) for identifying the causative agent of a disease are subjects of widespread (but suppressed, and fiercely derided) controversy. See A. S. Evans (1978). Concerning the inadequacy of both etiological identification and diagnostics for the declared Ebola viral disease (EVD)-defining symptoms in West Africa (2014-15), see Monica Rullet *al.* (2016).

¹⁷ Mark Navin (2013, p. 243).

institutionalised science and the regimentation of digital information management systems.

Free market enthusiasts will insist that cultural biases and doctrinaire power blocs are precisely what the new knowledge economy's unregulated marketplace rule out. The purported advantage of the free trade of ideas is that the worst results of intellectual monopolies are weeded out and the best knowledge offerings thrive. Momentarily we will consider why it is a mistake to calculate the value of knowledge, and the relative value of one knowledge product over another, using the economic terms of Adam Smith's perfectly free marketplace.¹⁸

Space in this journal for this contribution does not allow for an assembly of evidence to make the case that silencing autonomous experts exists.¹⁹ Already a rich literature addresses this phenomenon more generally.²⁰ Rather, here this silencing and muffling of African social and medical scientific authority is treated as a given part of the data which those specialists in Africa where the occurrence of this sidelining is a commonplace are familiar within a bid to explore what can be done about it. Without risk of losing the day job by attracting disrepute, professionals cannot raise significant challenges and corrections to a received view of Africa which risks upsetting the rationale for foreign investments resting upon a tightly orchestrated doctrine of local need. To remain professionals trusted in their fields of expertise, they cannot propose answers that may challenge a dominant—albeit misleading—picture of African needs promulgated in the global arena, or suggest explanations which involve awkward historical facts or highlight cultural contexts which bump against brittle, dogmatic convictions of foreign experts about what is wrong with Africa generally and how to fix it. So for these influential intellectuals to ask uninvited questions that are not scripted, or to introduce relevant conceptual insights, they should follow in the greatest gadfly tradition and don a philosophical cap in speaking Two-Thirds World²¹ truth to First World corporate power.

Epistemic advantage of African authority in post-colonial “frontier or boundary” positions²²

The standpoint of an academic in the global South is not just different from that of the elite class dominating global economic markets; it is also advantageous from the perspective of knowledge production. Here I follow Alison Jaggar's observation of the epistemic asymmetry built into the economic stratification within a modern

¹⁸ Adam Smith (2007 [1773]).

¹⁹ H. Lauer (2007) and (2011).

²⁰ Kristie Dotson (2011) and (2014).

²¹ This improvement upon the label 'Third World' is due to its light-hearted coinage by David Bussau, co-founder of Opportunity International interviewed on *BBC World Service* by Peter Day, "Global Business," broadcast August 27, 2004. Another tag loosely referring to this maximally diverse and geographically inchoate community is 'global South'.

²² The phrase is from Alasdair MacIntyre (1987, p. 385).

capitalist society.²³ That asymmetry is reified in the global arena. Intellectuals representing sectors of the global economic order with the greatest investment in progressive change are better suited to facilitate solutions to anticipated global crises.²⁴ Knowledge producers in the global South, particularly when cosmopolitan academics collaborate with indigenous experts, are more impartial (in the sense of being less biased) than their counterparts working in cyberspace, because their perspectives come closer to representing the interests of the global community overall, demographically speaking. Theorists and policy advisors familiar only with the perspective of multinational marketers reflect the priorities and needs of only a fraction of the global family. But the African intelligentsia based ‘at home’ can assess current events from a wider, richer repertoire of political experience than their counterparts who are encased in the intellectual monoliths created and maintained by the same network of global elites who control which topics get addressed in the top ranking international journals.

Africa-based knowledge producers are at an epistemic advantage because they are sitting proximate to precious mines of hidden and sidelined disciplines crossing the boundaries of art, religion, medicine, physics, ecology, history, sociology, dance, song—porous borders as yet to be explored. The global arena may one day benefit from new knowledge perspectives that have yet to be enunciated in internationally accessible vocabularies, waiting to be coined by African intellectuals whose cultural heritages and access to the experts of indigenous knowledge facilitate their venturing beyond the established boundary taboos and disciplinary divides that currently dominate our understanding of the human condition.²⁵ Pioneering examples include the anthropological work of the independent scholar Alexis Tengan²⁶ who is building an explicitly renovated lexicon with a conceptual apparatus that reunites metaphysics, biology, botany, physics, social psychology, art, medicine and spirituality to explain the science of Dagaaba healing specialists. Fluency in the local language and trustworthiness recognised in the local culture are required for this nuanced hermeneutic work; not anyone can do it. The ingeniously innovative biochemist Sam Sackey at the University of Ghana has illuminated on the importance of foregrounding axioms of indigenous Ga religion, metaphysics, earth science and environmental protection which have governed artisanal uses of wetlands over the

²³ Alison Jaggar (1983, p. 371).

²⁴ One example is the immanent dangers of poorly-managed coastal cities in the tropics where the mass influx of climate refugees fleeing droughts and floods poses a grave threat in future than terrorist cells. David Kilcullen, *Hardtalk* BBC World Service interview with Zeinab Badawi, Sept 30, 2013.

²⁵ Otto Neurath noted the loss of insight due to the traditional delineation of knowledge that isolates theories into “political economics, history, sociology . . . religious, science law and so on . . .” whereby, without “delimiting” differently, we will never be able to penetrate “the total process of life” (1973 [1931], pp. 345, 352).

²⁶ Alexis B. Tengan (2006).

past centuries.²⁷ Through Sackey's facilitation, central state technocrats of Ghana's national Environmental Protection Agency now work with elder conservationists, artisanal salt producers and local canoe fishermen to merge their customary religious observances with formal regulations, to modernise district level policy. Without such hermeneutic brokering, this advance in environmental legislation would not be feasible.

If you think all of this is romantic diversion from bottom-line concerns to grow the GDP, consider the anatomy of economic growth as it is conventionally measured and its sociological implications in the twelfth largest GDP in the world. That is South Korea, whose economic status was equivalent to Ghana's in 1940, and its growth through industrial development and massive manufacturing revolution has skyrocketed, thanks to South Korea's function for American as a borderline country in Cold War politics. Massive infusion of factories and investments by US-based companies after WWII accounts for this Asian tiger's economic stealth. Despite the dominant Korean presence of Samsung, LG and Daewoo, the minimum wage is less than 8,000 Tanzanian shillings, only twice what it is on offer in Ghana today. In South Korea only 15 percent of the people live under the poverty line compared to Ghana's 30 percent in 2014. Yet it is in South Korea, not in Ghana or in Tanzania, that the overall suicide rate is the highest in the world's wealthiest nations, as monitored by the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]. In South Korea, suicide is now the most frequent cause of death among the youth. In 1980, South Korean students protested against their military regime's repression, and after three days the government's response was to gun down an estimated 2,000 civilians at the site of the student demonstration. Is this an example of rapid national industrialisation which should be regarded as worthy of Tanzanians' emulation?

To direct Tanzania's future of industrialisation in directions which are inclusive and transformative, the methods of analytic and linguistic philosophy, hermeneutics and critical social theory belong in every researcher's, engineer's and scholar's toolkit. These are essential devices for expanding the impact of Africa's intangible living heritage, which includes as the pole star an inherently humane standpoint, one which needs to be voiced in response to today's crisis of confidence in global leadership and the normalised gang rape of the earth.

Calling upon African social scientists and professionals to engage in philosophical reflection about development

For the purpose of facing these crises, African social scientists and social engineering professionals—including lawyers, medical researchers, epidemiologists, health providers, business managers and public administrators, policy makers, legislators—

²⁷ Sam Sackey, "Going Back in Time: The Science Behind Cultural Practices that Preserved Ghanaian Lagoon Ecologies until the Advent of Western Religion and 'Civilisation'" presented at the 50th International Anniversary Conference of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon (November 24, 2013).

must adopt a philosophical and reflective stance. Philosophy is understood here as an activity, not as a doctrine or a creed, nor as a fixed system of beliefs, but as something which is interactive, inherently social, theoretical, dialogical, at times dialectical, requiring divergent viewpoints—although often enough one’s fiercest opponent may be one’s former or future or ideal self.²⁸ As to whether there exists such an activity as *African* philosophical discipline or methodology—this is an insoluble dispute in which no African can participate without begging the question, which is predicated upon a suspicion that having Africa as its source or content precludes any answers being philosophically original or substantive.²⁹

Philosophical reflection on national development in this sense is neither idle nor abstract when pursued by social science experts; it is engaged with a mission to interact for the greater good—but on the condition that the definition of *summum bonum* (what gets defined as ‘the greater good’) undergoes continual reassessment. In this respect, philosophical reflection from the perspective of African authority is importantly distinct from doing applied philosophy and philosophy of development as it has currently developed in the global arena for some three decades.

To demonstrate the difference, consider the widely acclaimed proposal of Leif Wenar designed to break Africa’s resource curse.³⁰ Wenar’s reputation as a practical rights theorist is unparalleled throughout the Western analytic philosophical community.³¹ He has ingeniously applied principles of Western political philosophy in the classic liberal tradition to trace and provide solutions to the complexities of intersecting and conflicting human rights assertions worldwide. But when he does this to unravel the paradox of African nations endowed with the world’s best deposits of natural riches are also beset with the world’s worst levels of entrenched poverty. However, Wenar neglects considering that essentially contestable moral concepts carry significant implications in Africa that stand at variance with the meanings tacitly assigned by his analysis. So Wenar’s blue ribbon assessment and solution to Africa’s resource curse appears at best woefully outdated; at worst it suggests a programme for reparation which, if followed, could exacerbate the problem it proposes to solve.

On the most superficial level, it is not obvious what the basis is for treating societies and geographical areas as divergent as Sudan and Equatorial Guinea since the 1990s to the same causal thesis about the source of severe distortions in growth of primary export economies. Apart from their location on the same continent, the demographic differences of the two regions, their employment styles, their histories,

²⁸ Gilbert Ryle, Frederick Waismann, Max Black and Jack Goody all regarded both the critical thinking process itself, and the act of introspection as derivatives of early conversations we learn to have with others as we develop language use.

²⁹ As Mogobe Ramose sternly pointed out (2005 [1999], p. 29).

³⁰ The ‘resource curse’ is a tag for describing economies narrowly dependent upon raw exports—i.e. unprocessed minerals, crude oil, unrefined precious metals, unprocessed timber and primary cash crops—rubber, cotton, coffee, cocoa.

³¹ See Wenar (2005) and (2005b).

and current statistics alone, reveal starkly different budget profiles, social service expenditures, and investments in human capital, and economic diversification over the period—suggesting two regions that could hardly be more distinct.³²

Curse upon curse

The shortfalls in Wenar’s account and recommendations could be readily corrected by consulting and deliberating with African philosophers familiar with the relevant history, the collective memory and cultural orientations towards key notions in his analysis.

According to Wenar, ultimately the resource curse boils down to a failure of the international community, and of impoverished citizens in fragile export economies to resist complicity with tyrannical despots and violent marauders responsible for the wilful mismanagement and malfeasance chiefly responsible for entrenched poverty.³³ But to trace the root of natural resource theft in former colonised nations to dysfunctional idiosyncrasies of individual leadership is to confuse symptoms with the cause of the curse.

More germane from an African philosophical perspective is that Wenar disregards the various ways available to understand and evaluate phenomena reflecting different concepts of ownership, property value and legitimacy of authority over the disbursal and control of natural goods—be these access to grazing pasture and farmland, rights to mine precious minerals and metals, fishing territory, hunting groves, and forest resources. In agrarian and nomadic economies, such properties are so intrinsic to an individual’s integrity and security, and so central to a community’s perpetuation over generations that the value of natural resources of a region is too precious to quantify in terms of market exchange.

In these same political cultures, the land and natural resources associated with it stand in symbiosis with the social groups who, in turn, are economically dependent upon each other. So whichever of the many farming and herding ethnic groups that might lay claim to a portion of the Darfur in Western Sudan as belonging to themselves, for instance, would thereby also see themselves as belonging to that land—as they also belong to their ancestors and to their successors in future generations. Such a symbiosis is *prima facie* obvious among the many agrarian cultures of Ghana; belonging to the land of one’s birth, rather than owning it, as a spiritual, economic, cultural and political entitlement is central to one’s sense of person-hood as understood by a Tibetan, to take a very different traditional example. Other ways of putting this point is to say that assessing the value of land or timber or gold or minerals in terms of its potential for profit in commercial transactions

³²Damian Ondo Mane (2012) for analysis of economic data from Sudan and Adam B. Elhiraika (2012) for analysis of economic data from Equatorial Guinea.

³³ See Leif Wenar (2016) and (2008a, pp. 9-10). I am grateful to organiser Prof. Peter Deutsch for soliciting this analysis for presentation at his Summer School on Global Economic Justice, Centre de recherche en éthique (CRÉ), University of Montreal, Quebec, June 1-5, 2015.

involving strangers is a category mistake, an aberration of history, a cultural abomination, a defiance of the natural order of things. Hence you cannot sell land or its precious reserves any more than you can sell your mother; of course, in congress with foreigners this sort of thing has been done under the aegis of the logic of capital; it is no less an abomination.

Wenar also overlooks entirely these moral considerations just as he disregards historical facts, e.g. that the European scramble for Africa's primary commodities (and the colonial land grab) has left in its wake entrenched conflicts about the criteria appropriate for establishing *bona fide* national boundaries, and for determining entitlement to inherited and communal assets within those boundaries, and for granting legitimate custodial trusteeship of ancestral lands and their allocation to present and future generations, and for garnering loyalty and respect for political authority, in places where human as well as natural resource assets have been siphoned away for centuries, in the midst of entrenched poverty. The Sudan and Equatorial Guinea both exemplify this legacy, but so very different from each other that it is hard to fathom offering their economies as instances of the same causal account of negative growth.

Wenar suggests clever strategies for accumulating an equitable portion of proceeds from the global movement of stolen resources, to be channelled back to the communities settled at the original extraction sites of those resources.³⁴ From an African perspective, this scheme makes about as much sense as chopping off a person's legs and then fund-raising so he can purchase prosthetic limbs. Of course, given the assumptions shared in the milieu where Wenar's humanitarian programme is widely acclaimed as a bold and practical strike against injustice, this analogy would fall flat since the question of how to legitimize the resources being stolen in the first place must never arise.

The advantage Wenar finds particularly noteworthy in promising rollbacks to very poor people abandoned by national economic growth when it is narrowly dependent upon raw exports is remarkable: He believes that his global tariff and trust mechanism will incentivise a disorganised majority such as the Sudanese "to unify and replace the regime in Khartoum that is looting their resources, with a minimally decent, unified government . . . if only they knew there is a great deal of money waiting to be handed over to them" if they do so.³⁵ In this remark Wenar appears oblivious to the (quite accessible) post-colonial view of economic engagements between central state authorities and foreigners as morally culpable collaborations; their transactions render them jointly responsible for perpetuating a legacy of ceaseless commercial atrocities over generations, commissions beyond imagination or expression since the days of feudal mercantilism. These deep-seated, inchoate

³⁴ Leif Wenar (2008a, p. 29).

³⁵ Leif Wenar (2008a, p. 29).

collective impressions are not meant to be available for international scrutiny; they may even be closed off completely from public discussion.³⁶

To be sure, countenancing all the various enigmatic and muted moral standpoints concerning culpability for collusion with foreigners in the international arena complicates the analysis of global injustice immeasurably. But in this neo-colonial era, confronting such complications is essential to devising strategies that can actually correct, rather than perpetuate, the grotesque inequity that persists by continuing invasive and isolated extraction activities on mass industrial scale.³⁷

In fact, there is nothing really new being proposed here. Philosophising in this respect has been recommended to every professional for millennia, since Plato's Socrates in Greek antiquity advised his peers to shun the impoverishment of an unexamined life, no matter how much wealth and public recognition they were able to attract through their expertise as judges, lawyers, merchants, and priests. To succeed in any professional venture—epidemiology, civil engineering, corporate law, oil rig manufacturing—one must meet some crossroads which compel taking stock of one's work, to reflect upon how it may be impacting others, and one's own conscience—how does work square with the basic priorities and core values of one's upbringing? In this respect, quality assurance involves considerations far beyond a check list testing efficiency against a fixed standard of optimality for a given task or service.

Why scientific and technical knowledge cannot be bought and sold

In the current day, industrialisation fuelled by science and technological ingenuity can no longer succeed if it is profit-driven. Risks must be taken by directing development with idealistic vision. This is to practice philosophical reflection critically in a way which necessarily means taking risks, making maverick moves. The voice of African critical authority may offend potential investment partners in the global arena. To urge critical reflection and inquiry which is unpopular, unsafe and unprotected may seem irrational. It implies going beyond the security provided by competitive market indicators of what is likely to have exchange value. The market framework provides the technician, scholar and scientific researcher a level of security in very practical terms, by suggesting a calculated risk of return for one's intellectual efforts and resource consumption. If one stays within the borders circumscribed by one's area of expertise, the result will at least bring a publication or a contract; what you say or do will attract approval, recognition if only because it is

³⁶ There are many communities today in northern Ghana where it is taboo, highly offensive, to call someone a descendant of a slave. I am grateful to this disclosure by Kofi Anyidoho, International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) 2010 *Culture and Justice in the Contemporary World* conference panel discussion, University of Ghana, Legon, April 2-4, 2015.

³⁷ Not only are natural resources at stake but also intellectual property. See Ivan Addae-Mensah (2012).

familiar; it will validate your professional existence; it will pay the rent. Why forego a normal business sense in what are, after all, our professional lives?

The problem is that business as usual may not address an unprecedented catastrophe. Responding to market forces does not result in adaptations that resolve the tragedy of the global commons, nor does it face the crisis of political disaffection. These problems require initiatives that corporate elites are least inclined to pay for. The global knowledge markets are currently structured to serve the business interests of the elites; so they do not recognise and cannot cater for basic needs of protection, security, environmental integrity, quality of life and gainful livelihood, of which the majority of people on the planet remain in want. The knowledge monopolies and research cartels that now dominate the global markets rather exacerbate these needs. For modern humans to survive as a species, professionals have to do more than adapt to a deteriorating *status quo*.

Even if corporate elites take on such matters in philanthropic projects (as is the trend now among the ICT multi-billionaire personalities Bill and Melinda Gates, Mark and Priscilla Zuckerberg), the commercial market is no place to evaluate the worth of a new explanation or innovation. Alvin Goldman and James Cox³⁸ recall that completely unregulated markets operate at optimal efficiency only when all consumers are fully informed about the products on offer before they choose to make a purchase. As uncertainties are introduced by degrees, the market's efficiency tends to drop proportionately. As such, knowledge itself cannot be one of the goods that get distributed most efficiently under optimal free market conditions. If the relevant knowledge we need to be ideal consumers can be acquired reliably only by buying it *in* the unregulated market, then necessarily we cannot fulfil the condition of bringing *to* the market all the relevant knowledge required to make cost effective choices. We will be unprepared to differentiate true packages of belief from the false ones on offer.

Moreover, the perfect market competition fails to ensure maximal epistemic value for money due to what can be described as the *laissez faire*, an economist's notion of knowledge as a public good, whereby the value of a public good cannot be restricted to its original consumer. Once acquired, the essence of knowledge is to get passed along and spread around, at no extra cost to the producer or the original consumer. So it is that medical knowledge, along with theories and data in the earth sciences which unveil threats to the biosphere, seems integrally to belong to one and all. Widespread protests and years of litigation have followed from the wrongheaded effort to restrict access to one lifesaving drug or to hide information about the debilitating side-effects of another.³⁹ But the free market accords greater value to a consumable only insofar as its use can be restricted, meaning that the fewer the number of people can enjoy an item's utility—i.e. the more exclusive it is—the greater its market value. Thus, even if their inner mechanisms were exactly the same, the Rolex brand of wristwatch would still command more prestige and higher market

³⁸ Alvin I. Goldman and James Cox (1996).

³⁹ David Healy (2012).

value than a Casio brand because fewer people on a given day can afford a Rolex and must opt for a Casio. By the same token, the town clock-tower carries no prestige or market value at all since everybody can use it. Like the clock-tower, the inherent utility of knowledge as a public good is completely inclusive. Unlike the Rolex, the value of knowledge increases with the number of people who enjoy using it. Moreover, its value increases at no added cost to the producer.

Thus the logic of capital rules out calculating the optimal allocation of resources for the production of knowledge that can be applied to expanding projects that can transform society such as the sustainable MDGs intend to articulate. You cannot use a competitive marketplace to value knowledge applied to national development, not if it is to be of use in reaching the goals to which a civic majority might subscribe.

Conclusion

Similar to science and technology, the end product of philosophising in and about Africa, is not something you can put a price tag on; but that does not make it worthless; it just means it cannot readily be bought and sold. On the other hand, these reflections in no way imply that a change in philosophical perspective or adopting the right attitude by African practitioners will dissolve the material and structural obstacles to African practitioners designing and controlling a fruitful development agenda. On the contrary, the considerations assembled here provide independent corroboration for the cogency of those narratives of political scientists and sociologists that highlight the legacy of colonialism as enduring unscathed in its toxic agenda of underdevelopment for Africans (Rodney, 1972). Without presupposing an explicit theoretical stance or historical framework to explain why, I have attempted to illuminate on the face value of development initiatives which reinstitute—through translation and ombudsmanship—those indigenous epistemic values and technical practices which were salient in African cultures before the colonialist intrusion aborted the possibility of a timely modernity for Africans (Taiwo, 2010). By spelling out the inherent incoherence of commercialising knowledge and development activities, my aim has been to provide an independent, theory-neutral view of the effects of deeply entrenched capitalist structures and geopolitical relations perpetuating the dynamics of domination, which in essence have not changed in five hundred years. One superficial difference is that nowadays people are not forcibly removed from their native lands; it's cheaper to forcibly make Africans stay in the lands of their ancestors' birth and bury their disproportionately high premature fatalities on home soil. No mere shift in philosophical perspective alone can deter the lawless brutality of today's multinational corporations—in league with international organisations and institutions of higher learning—from continuing to undermine development in Africa (Rodney, 1972; Amin 2012 [2003]).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For the clarification of the purpose of this essay provided by these closing remarks, the author is indebted to the painstakingly thorough comments of an anonymous blind reviewer for this Journal.

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