

Three Objections to Gyekye's Functionalist Conception of Development

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Abstract: I consider three objections to Gyekye's functionalist conception of development. According to the first objection, the goal of development is ultimately economic development. I examine this objection but find Gyekye's integrative functionalist conception vindicated. The second objection pertains continuity: it argues that development must be a continuous process. I agree with this objection because (a) there will always be goals to create and accomplish, (b) certain goals, such as the exhibition of certain behaviors, will remain goals in as much as they can never be totally achieved, and (c), existential challenges are ever changing, necessitating that behavioral adaptations to (dealing with) them remains a continuous process. The third objection results from the second: it argues that if development is a continuous process, then no society qualifies to be called "developed." Since I agree with the second objection, it seems I have to agree with this: in as much as no society has fully captured all of the behavioral attributes necessary for a society to respond adequately to its entire physical and socio-cultural environment, no society should strictly be called "developed." But we can, nevertheless, use that attribution in a loose or attenuated sense for ease of convenience in a relative context. I conclude with a few reflections about the implications of this discussion for debates in post and alternative development.

Introduction

The subject of "development" is highly significant, given that it forms a central point of comparative evaluation between countries ranked on the higher side of development and others on the lower. We normally call the former the "developed" nations and the latter the "developing" or "underdeveloped." As currently constituted, this seems the single most important way of categorizing the world today, as it influences most of other international decisions on international politics, migration, aid, the nature of international relationships, educational rankings, sources of knowledge production, and so on. While "developed" nations see themselves as developed, "developing" and "under-developed" nations are still embroiled in the struggle to become "developed."

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Post development and alternative development scholars have criticized these ideas and categorizations as a Western imperialistic contraption. Whilst alternative development seeks local and indigenous alternative development ideas, post development rejects the very concept “development.” Whilst alternative development struggles to find alternative models, post development is saddled with offering credible alternatives to “development” itself.¹ It seems that the problem is that the entire debate about development has raged with no one critically examining the concept “development.”

Perhaps we may need to step back from what we (and all parties to the debate) assume to be “development.” Not only could this offer the realization that we may not be dealing with the strictly correct conception of “development,” but also that those that see themselves as developed may not have even arrived at their condition through the currently presumed notion of development. It is in this regard that it is fruitful to examine Kwame Gyekye’s functionalist conception of development. Gyekye’s notion of development does not come without its own difficulties, however, and I shall present and discuss these as three major objections to his conception. The outcome of this discussion is that I support Gyekye’s integrative functionalist conception of development, but I disagree with his notion of non-continuous development. The disagreement leads to a logically extended disagreement with the prevailing notion behind the current categorization of nations in development terms, and a concession to that categorization only on the basis that it is used in a somewhat loose sense, which I will explain. The discussion also serves to clarify the debate, particularly in correcting the meaning of development that has made the last century of debate about “development” such a gridlock.

Gyekye’s Functionalist/Integrative Conception of Development

Kwame Gyekye, one of the most prominent philosophers in Africa, argues that the economic conception of development, which has all along been touted by development “experts,” and which has become the monolithic framework for understanding and tackling the problem of development in post-colonial and other Third World countries, is lopsided and terribly inadequate. According to him:

That conception, it seems to me, fails to come to grips with the complex nature of human society and culture. That complexity...calls for a comprehensive, not segmented, approach...development must be perceived in terms of adequate responses to the entire existential conditions in which human beings function, conditions which encompass the economic, political, social, moral, cultural, intellectual and others.²

Gyekye observes that “development” is clearly an urgent term in Third World countries: it is the reason for aid from First World countries, the reason for military coups, and usually the promise of those who want to lead/rule. But Gyekye notes that almost all of these rationales see development as economic development. As a result it has been taken to be the problem solely for economists, engineers, agriculturalists, technologists, bankers, populations experts, town planners, and others whose professions are directly connected with the production of material means of livelihood.

Gyekye also notes that it is because of the economic notion of development that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have geared most of their activities in the developing countries towards the production of material things, increases in food production, provision of electricity and good drinking water, the building of roads, and the reason why centers of research, called Institutes of Development, around the world have devoted almost all their attention to problems of economic development or economic growth.

Given the complex nature of human society, however, Gyekye faults this notion of development. He argues that the very concept of development needs to be examined. Thus it does not do to answer the question "What is development?" by pointing at particular facts or symbols of development, since this would be begging the question. Gyekye argues that we can answer the question "What is development?" by trying to answer the question "What is it to say that something is developed?"³ On what grounds can we judge that *x* is developed while *y* is not?

First of all, Gyekye denies that development is simply "growth" and argues that interchanging "development" with "growth," as has been commonly done, is a mistake. This is because that while growth is a physical concept measurable in quantitative terms (such as economic growth) development is essentially a behavioral concept. Using a brief example, Gyekye argues that "when a person who has not seen his nephew for six years suddenly sees him looking tall and big," he is likely to refer to his "growth" rather than "development." He is likely to say "Hi, Opata, you have *grown*." He can only say "Hi, Opata, you have developed" if he wants to refer to behavioral attributes that Opata has acquired over the years.⁴ Gyekye urges us to see development in this way—the acquisition of certain behavioral attributes rather than simply growth.

What, however, are the behavioral attributes of development? Gyekye asks us to consider a zoological model—the development of an insect from an egg to larva, pupa and then adult bee or mosquito. Because the adult, the end process, functions in certain ways, we say it is *developed*. The reason for the zoological model is that we can easily see the developed nature of the insect, but the limitation is that while the insect develops *intransitively* (that is, mechanistically, automatically, predictably, without any conscious effort on its part), human development is *transitive* (has to be conscious, deliberate, planned, and is unpredictable). Despite the simplicity of the insect model, Gyekye argues that it helps us to objectively know when an object has reached a stage in its development that we can call "developed."

Gyekye admits that someone might reject the insect model and argue that if all human societies belong to the same *species*, then we can perhaps arrange them all on one linear scale of "degrees of development" and use the characteristics of the "more developed" societies as the objective criteria for defining development. Gyekye disagrees with this and argues, "... it is not as easy to come to a definite and *objective* conclusion about the nature of a more developed society as it might be supposed. For what might be regarded as a "more developed" human society may nevertheless fall short of certain ideals, norms and expectations."⁵ This fact, for him, calls for adequate and comprehensive criteria for determining the nature of a "more developed" human

society; criteria that he thinks could be more fruitfully explored in an oblique or less direct manner.

Applying the insect model to human society, Gyekye defines development as “the capability to perform satisfactorily the functions appropriate to the object, such as a society or institution, said to be developed.”⁶ Gyekye is quick to point out that functions of various objects differ, and the nature and purpose of an object determines its function. But in spite of this, the capability of an object to perform its functions satisfactorily would include certain signs such as a high degree of independence, self-reliance and self-sufficiency, being able to face serious challenges to its existence, being able to control its environment and feed itself, demonstrating signs of inventiveness and innovativeness, and others. Gyekye argues that although these behaviors are manifested in different ways by different objects, they are expected of a rational human society. Taken together, they mean that development should be seen as “adequate responses to the environment in all its complexities.”⁷ Gyekye points out that by environment he does not simply mean physical environment, but the whole gamut of socio-cultural conditions, the complex of existential conditions in which people live, move and have their being. Such conditions would include social, cultural, economic, political, technological and moral conditions. The complex nature of these conditions makes development a comprehensive, multifaceted concept, but for the same reason, it unleashes a legion of problems on human society to grapple with. A society that is developed should be able to take care of the social, economic and political problems threatening its existence. To respond adequately to the environment – to face squarely the challenges generated by those complex circumstances – is to function satisfactorily, and thus, to be developed.⁸

Back to economic growth, Gyekye argues that equating development with economic growth is clearly without conceptual or empirical warrant, because, although growth is involved in development, “it is clearly not economic growth that is immediately or particularly intended [italics are mine for analysis further on].”⁹ Gyekye concludes that economic growth, as such, can only be considered “as a consequence or measure or manifestation of (economic) development.”¹⁰ We cannot deny that economic growth is essential to the concept of development, but to equate development to it is to perceive only a tip of the iceberg whose base is more complex and ramifying. The relationship between economic growth and development is this: economic growth is only a manifestation of economic development, and economic development is itself (only) a species of the genus development, a genus that is made up of other species such as cultural, moral, social, political development. No species is identical with its genus. The relationship between the species is not automatic: none is sufficient for the other. Economic development, for instance, does not guarantee high standards of morality and justice. There is, however, one species that, although not sufficient for other species to thrive, is necessary for them. It is political development: nothing would work without a congenial and conducive political atmosphere. In spite of this, Gyekye concedes that economic growth can, in some cases, be a necessary condition for development in democratic politics.¹¹

The above forms the major part of Gyekye's functionalist conception of development. Most prominent is the proposition that development is behavioral: what we usually saw as development, things such as economic growth, are *results* of development, not development themselves. Behavior (or behavioral competence) comes first, then the results of behavior (or behavioral competence) would follow. When we have acquired behaviors necessary and ideal to function satisfactorily in tackling our existential challenges, then development has happened. That is development. If we are referring to human societal development, then the appropriate behaviors must be reflected in the prevailing habits, attitudes, behavioral patterns, mental outlooks, values, institutions and social practices of the people.¹² Those of these that are obstacles to development effort must therefore be re-evaluated and revised to suit the arduous task of development.¹³

Let me pause at this point to entertain the first objection that can arise to Gyekye's conception of development. According to this objection, development at societal level is ultimately economic development, and therefore, Gyekye is mistaken about his conception of development.

What is the Ultimate Goal of Development?

This is the most common question that arises from treating Gyekye's functionalist conception of development. It is normally understood that the goal of a society's development, at least in the context of modern nations, is economic wellbeing. This can be confirmed from the promises usually made by candidates who are vying to be elected leaders of political units. We do not normally hear an electoral candidate in today's politics promising moral or spiritual development, or some other such related normative ideal; what is obtainable is to promise economic wellbeing. Even if there were already some measure of economic wellbeing in a society, then it is usually wise to promise more economic wellbeing.

However, now that we are confronted with a behavioral conception of development (development as the acquisition of certain behaviors) as well as a multi-dimensional and integrative notion of development (development as adequate response to a complex of social, political, cultural, moral, technological, and other challenges) we must answer that question "What is the ultimate goal of development?" This question is certain to persist even after understanding Gyekye's concept of development because there is the persistent intuition that the goal of every society is economic wellbeing, and that the other aspects of behaving to tackle challenges are in service of this wellbeing. I think there is a point to this intuition: let me provide a few conceptual warrants for this worry.

We not only have different dimensions of development (moral, social, cultural, economic, and so on), we can also discuss development at two levels: the individual and societal levels. An individual can aim for integrative development: to be a better person. This involves not just improving one's economic wellbeing, but improving intellectually, morally, psychologically. An individual could be working to increase her financial income. She could also be working on eliminating certain behavioral defects. She could also be working on improving her attitude to life (to, for instance, stop being suicidal at

times). She could also be working on improving her religious practices and spiritual development (whatever it may consist). This, in fact, is what many individuals would do. But what about societies: can they aim for integrative development? It would rather appear that societies (only) aim for economic development, and that integrative development at societal level (the development of political, social and economic frameworks) are means to this goal, the economic goal. Thus when, for instance, we aim to ensure political stability or a conducive political atmosphere, it is because we know that a lack of it would hurt economic growth. When we aim at democracy, it is because we know it would enhance economic growth. When we fight terrorists, it is because we know that if we do not, we would be starved of foreign direct investment, arresting economic growth, and so on. As such, societies can only aim for things material. In fact, we may remember that individuals go to heaven; societies do not. As such, the non-material goals of development (some of which we have just enumerated) are valid only at the individual level.

As much as I am impressed with this objection, I find some difficulties with it. First is that not every society is focused solely upon economic goals, since focus on economic pursuit (if we are to conceptually agree that it is the case) is largely a product of modernity. Secondly, it can be argued that sole preoccupation with economic pursuit, together with its technological implications, is a vicious cycle that is terminable only with the destruction of the planet. Conserving nature would automatically mean going beyond solely economic pursuits. Third is that when societies tackle existential challenges, such as environmental disasters and even terrorism, it is not solely with economic growth in mind. I would still want to be free from terrorism even if I do not want to get richer. And fourth, there are electoral candidates who run, not on an economic ticket, but on things like environment, education and equality, which are ethical issues, especially when economic indices are encouraging but there are threatening social, moral and environmental challenges. As such, we can still say that societies aim, not simply or solely at economic goals, but at societal wellbeing, wellbeing understood as having physical, moral, psychological and intellectual elements. We can thus say that the notion of a multi-faceted or integrative development also applies at the societal level. So in my view, Gyekye's integrative functionalist conception of development survives this criticism. But does he survive two others? Let me look at them.

Development is a Non Continuous Process

Ultimately, Gyekye must tackle the question "Is development a continuous process?" This question arises because of his denial that development is economic development, and his view that development is a behavioral concept, that development is development in behavior. We all know that economic development is a continuous process: we can never stop economic pursuits. But when development is a behavioral concept, do we have such a thing as continuous behavioral development?

Gyekye notes that it would be intuitive and common for people to think development is continuous, after all that follows from the view that development is

economic development. But he disagrees, because he thinks the notion of development as a continuous process raises some logical and epistemological problems. The epistemological problem is that if development is continuous, then it would be impossible to justify a claim to the knowledge of a developed object: "... an object in continuous, infinite process cannot be fully known, and cannot therefore be characterized as developed."¹⁴ The logical problem, which is a corollary of the epistemological, is that development as continuous process means that we would have no justification for using the past and perfect tenses of the verb "to develop": "... we would not be able logically to say of an object *O* that it *developed* or has *developed*. The reason is that past and perfect tenses are used of actions and processes that have come to completion."¹⁵ But completion is denied by continuous process. Importantly, Gyekye then remarks that we seem to know, or at least we feel convinced, that an object is developed (such as the insect, or a society), and we can contrast it to another object that is less developed (behaviorally), hence the contrast between the developed world and the developing or less developed world. Such contrast implies that we should reject the notion of continuous development.¹⁶

Gyekye further illustrates his defense of development as non-continuous process with a diagram showing two vertical lines, represented as figures 1 and 2.¹⁷

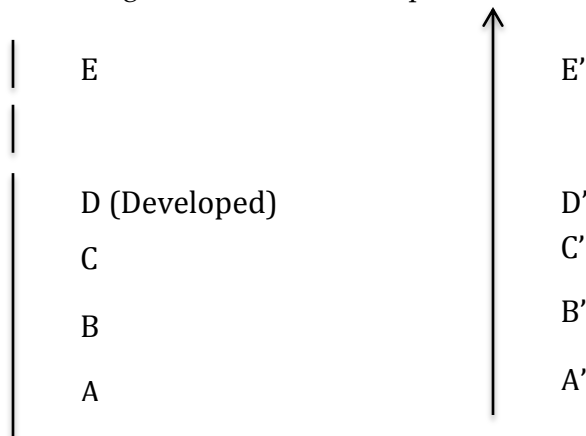


Figure 1 (NCP)

Figure 2 (CP)

The difference between the two vertical lines is that one represents development as continuous process (CP) while the other represents non-continuous process (NCP). The CP line has an arrow at the top pointing upwards, while that of NCP does not. Gyekye says that the CP arrow shows that the process simply continues. He differentiated both lines by simply marking the CP alphabets with single quotation marks ('). As such, we have A', B', C', D', and E' for CP, and A, B, C, D, and E for NCP. Since the process of development in CP continues beyond E', Gyekye argues that at no point (at none of the CP alphabets) can we say that the object is developed. But since development in NCP is non-continuous, we can place the completion of development somewhere, such as D. So we can say that at D the object is developed. But what happens to E? To answer this question, Gyekye reminds us that we are using the insect model of development, and that at D, we can say that the object has acquired the necessary behaviors, ways of acting

and reacting, that are necessary to *function* successfully to effectively tackle its existential challenges.¹⁸ Earlier before D, such as B and C, the object has not begun to function satisfactorily. Gyekye also argues that the decision to regard the object as developed at a particular point such as D is not arbitrary or capricious, since, according to the insect model, the developed character of the object that emerges (that is, the bee or mosquito) can hardly be questioned (because there are clearly objective criteria for recognizing the nature of a developed mosquito). Since successful functioning (development) emerges at D, whatever comes after D, such as E and others, can be regarded as *more* developed: whatever comes after D must be regarded as

... refinements, trimmings, prunings, embellishments, higher levels of sophistication, realisations of greater hopes, plans and ambitions, *etc*, all of which result from the fact of the developed character of the object, that is, from D. [I add the word "might" in order to accommodate the historical fact of the decline or demise of nations, empires, civilisations, institutions, cultures].¹⁹

So, concludes Gyekye, despite the fact that we can say that human history is continuous, we can say that development cannot be endless. Gyekye concludes with several implications of his functionalist conception of development. First, the transitivity of the concept of development when applied to human society means that development is purposefully deliberated upon, planned and executed, not mechanistic like the development of the mosquito. This means that development is not only a creative act but also an ethical one, since it involves the setting of rational and consciously defined goals, and the goals must be values cherished by a human society.²⁰ This in turn means that development must be a cultural activity, since a few isolated persons cannot bring it about.²¹ Development must therefore be based in culture. But since development is a behavioral concept, the fact that it must take place in a culture, or must be based in culture, does not mean that every culture is a viable framework for development. Every society has a culture, but not every society is developed.

Let me now proceed to entertain the second objection that can arise to Gyekye's conception of development. According to this objection, development cannot but be a continuous process.

Is Development a Non-Continuous Process?

This is another question that can intuitively arise in response to Gyekye's conception of development. It will be recalled that Gyekye denies that development can be a continuous process. At this point, let me quote Gyekye directly on his reason for denying that development is a continuous process:

It is obvious that CP (continuous process) bristles with absurd and difficult consequences which we can hardly accept. For we seem to know or at least feel strongly convinced, with respect to some particular object, that it is developed. This is the reason why we are able confidently to contrast it to another object which is undeveloped or less developed: thus

the contrast between what is referred to as the developed world and the developing or *less* developed world. The contrast implies that the process of development cannot be held as continuous and unending.²²

But the intuitive feeling that development is a continuous process is so strong that it persists even upon confronting Gyekye's defended denial. However, I think that this intuition is still based on the economic notion of development, since we all know that there is usually no end to economic growth. Such intuition is likely overlooking the fact that Gyekye is talking about development in behavior, and has deployed the insect model to support his position. What he is saying is that when behavioral development comes to a point when the behavior is adequate for tackling life's challenges, the development is non-continuous in the sense that there is no need for further behavioral development, although the results of the developed behavior continue to accumulate.

In spite of this mistakenly intuitive way of expressing this objection, however, the objection itself has led me to continue to examine Gyekye's arguments for non-continuous development more closely, and, on close inspection, find logical problems with even his notion of non-continuous (behavioral) development, and hence his subsequent denial that development is a continuous process. First is that when Gyekye was defending his insect model against a potential objection that it translates to a linear model of development where all societies can be arranged in "degrees of development," Gyekye had argued: "... it is not as easy to come to a definite and *objective* conclusion about the nature of a more developed society as it might be supposed. For what might be regarded as a 'more developed' human society may nevertheless fall short of certain ideals, norms and expectations."²³ That argument is a direct contradiction of his argument above:

...we seem to know or at least feel strongly convinced, with respect to some particular object, that it is developed. This is the reason why we are able confidently to contrast it to another object which is undeveloped or less developed: thus the contrast between what is referred to as the developed world and the developing or *less* developed world.²⁴

So he has already taken a position earlier that undermined his epistemological argument for development as a non-continuous process.

Second, there is an over-simplified analogy between knowing that an object (any object) is developed (such as a mosquito) and knowing that a human society is developed. This analogy informs the hyper-simplified movement from knowing that an object is developed to knowing that some societies are developed, resulting in an endorsement of the common distinction between the developed and the developing or less developed world. It is obvious that a mosquito can acquire certain simple and basic functions that it needs to suck blood and fly away from danger. But can we make the same simple conclusions for a human society in its encounters with complex existential challenges? Gyekye thinks that all a society needs is to (1) acquire certain basic behaviors necessary for responding to existential challenges; (2) that those behaviors would keep solving problems as we go along; and (3) once such satisfactorily functioning behaviors have been attained, no further changes in existential condition would render them

unsatisfactory, necessitating yet a further drive toward a new standard of satisfactory behavioral function. But here I must disagree. Development is a continuous process since (a) there will always be goals to create and accomplish, (b) certain goals, such as the exhibition of certain behaviors, will remain goals in as much as they can never be totally acquired, and (c) existential challenges are ever changing, necessitating that behavioral adaptations to (dealing with) them remains a continuous process.

I will begin with (a). It is impossible for an individual to be a behavioral perfectionist or to function satisfactorily, much less an entire society. Crime will always exist (it is a basic human temptation); corruption must always rear its ugly head one way or another. History has shown that rather than eliminate corruption, punishment and reforms can only engage it in a hide and seek game that reduces but does not eliminate it.²⁵ The same appears to obtain for issues of racial differences: every society, including all of the so-called “developed” countries, is (still) grappling with racial animosity and, as yet, has not evolved competent ways of dealing with it. Worse, not all leaders of any society or successive regime will be guaranteed to behave well: some will lead the society (and entire regions of societies) into political, military or/and economic quagmires (such as George W. Bush landed both the USA and the entire Middle East with the unjustified invasion of Iraq and its ever-spiraling effects on the entire region).

Gyekye notes that the political initiative is so necessary for other aspects of society’s functioning. But there is no guarantee that every successive leader and regime of any society will be well behaved. What it means is that the acquisition of all the behavioral attributes necessary and sufficient for development can never become a perpetual possession: it will remain, at best, a goal. One reason for this is that behavioral attributes cover, not just economy-related behaviors, but moral and political ones, and it is hard to imagine that a perfection of all these three behavior segments will converge in a society or even an individual. Another reason is that progress in the acquisition of certain behaviors can be lost, either partially or completely, at any time. As individuals we know that there can be backslides to our moral progress, in our quest to be better ethical entities. The same should apply to a society’s quest for progress in its developmental functional efficiency. Causes of functional backslides could include complacency, vain glory, senses of entitlement, the growth of the mentality of rent-seeking, feelings of accomplishment, and so on. These psychological dangers are real and ever present. They ensure that no society or individual can ever lay claim to all the behavioral attributes necessary and sufficient for development as a *perpetual* possession. Here, we see that the analogy of the mosquito becomes too simplistic as a way of showing us what it means to have all the functional characteristics necessary for development.

Let me put the argument against the non-continuous notion of behavioral development in another way: from the dynamic nature of existential challenges. It is said that development consists in adequate responses to the environment in all its complexities. But environmental challenges are not static; they are dynamic. The physical environment could have escaped this, since a lot about it is static. But since Gyekye talks about the entire gamut of socio-cultural conditions, or existential conditions, these conditions are dynamic, and since they are dynamic, they present ever-

changing challenges. If they do this, then responses to their challenges must be always and continuously developed. What it means is that development construed as the acquisition of behavioral attributes in order to function satisfactorily, in terms of responding adequately to existential challenges, is a continuous process, a perpetually on-going process. We are therefore condemned to continue to learn to respond adequately to our existential circumstances. As such, the notion of satisfactory function is possible only in attenuated, transient, indeed fleeting senses. This is perhaps why every society, including those with the currently-regarded advanced economies, are still (and seems will always be) in the process of grappling with behaviors that are appropriate to dealing squarely with the entire range of their existential challenges, challenges that are not just economic, but moral, political and cultural.

Can We Term Any Society as “Developed”?

This question is a logical consequence of the previous question. And I raise this question because of my acceptance of the second objection that development is a continuous process. As such, my response to this third question is a logical consequence of my support for the notion that development is a continuous process. So from foregoing analyses, it would seem that the response to the above question is quite obvious, and it is that no society strictly qualifies to be called “developed” in as much as no society has fully captured all of the behavioral attributes necessary for a society to respond adequately to its entire physical and socio-cultural environment; in this regard, all societies are, not just a work in progress, but will remain so. As such, development is a constant struggle, a goal that beckons us towards itself, but simultaneously keeps us somewhat away.

In questioning why any society should be called “developed” however, let me revisit the possible reason for the use of that categorizing terminology. The characterization of “developed,” “developing,” and “under-developed” are obvious economic characterizations, since they synchronize with the economic achievement of the member countries of the characterization. But the economic disparities that give rise to the characterization are a reality, and they are so clear-cut that we need to find a way of referring to them when we undertake economic discussions. Since we have seen the logical futility of using the term “developed” to describe any society, an idea would have been that we consider an alternative term. The best way to look for such an alternative is to take into consideration the reason for the economic disparities in the first place. If we agree with Jared Diamond that those on top of the economic ladder enjoyed an agricultural (and hence, economic and technological) head start thousands of years ago, then we can call them the First World (as is often used) while those coming up the ladder would be the Third World or “emerging economies.”²⁶ The problem with this is that many of the “emerging economies” are possibly catching up, in economic pace, with the First World, and it is easy to see that fulfilment of the economic status of a First World nation would qualify a Third World nation to change categorization and characterization. But what if the greater number of Third World countries achieve the economic stability of the First World in the course of time? Then we would have to

either collapse/remove the First/Third-World categorizations or invent some other terminology to suit the new situation. That brings us back to where we started in seeking categorizations.

At this point, we can still assume that the economic disparities are obvious. We have little choice but to re-examine the “developed” and “non-developed” categorization to see if we can still salvage it for use. But again, these characterizations (“developed/non-developed” and “First-Third Worlds”) focus mostly upon economic disparities (although there are also disparities in institutionalized leadership accountability, these are not as clear-cut as the economic). While it makes sense to talk of economic and technological head starts because progress in these areas is cumulative, it does not appear to make sense to speak of moral, spiritual, or cultural head starts. In fact, if we were to argue about superiority in moral development, we can refer to the Akan of Ghana, who preside over a culture that promotes peace to the extent that all manner of verbal (and hence, physical) aggression (even to foreigners) are tabooed.²⁷ Beyond this, if we want to refer to disparities and stages in multi-faceted and integrative development, what kind of characterization would we use? There seems none possible, since the Human Development Index, the closest candidate, is by no means integrative, and as such does not account for many of the facets of behavior necessary and sufficient for responding to a society’s entire range of existential challenges.²⁸ When we take full stock of Gyekye’s concept of development, there is, on the whole, hardly any justification why certain nations should then be called “developed” — contrary to Gyekye’s view.

At this point, a legitimate objection can be raised. According to this objection, the conclusion that development is a continuous process does not have the force of necessity needed to conclude that no society should be called “developed.” This is because not all attributions presuppose their meaning in the perfect sense. An example would be that when we call someone a physician, it is not because she has acquired all the expertise in that field. We can agree to call someone a physician at a certain point even though it is true that learning to be a physician continues throughout life. From this perspective, there would be no need to question why we call such a person a physician if it happens that there is a problem in medicine that still puzzles her. Although this analogy may not be perfect, we can say roughly the same thing about calling certain societies “developed.” According to this objection, we all know that the nations we call “developed” have not reached some end of development, become static, and hence stopped developing. As such, we must be using such attribution rather because they embody the capacity to deal with their existential challenges more than other nations (they have come a longer way in acquiring these capacities to deal with their existential challenges), and so the attribution “developed” is for ease of convenience in discussing them relatively to others who are yet to acquire such capacities as much as they have done.

I would call this the ease-of-convenience-in-comparison argument (or the relativity argument). I would grant it a certain point, which is that it is the so-called “developed” societies that have shown, in the way they have, that human societies can develop

systematic capabilities to deal more effectively with their existential challenges. It can, for instance be argued that their political organization exerts accountability from their leaders in a way we exert it from servants and house helps; their crime-solving capabilities are, at this point, equal to solving even the most carefully planned crimes; their average (or middle class) citizens are "quite rich" in the metrics of other nations; one would expect a relatively fair (at least not embarrassingly nepotistic) treatment at the hands of their court judges; and so on. But we have seen earlier that these nations are nowhere better than others in handling certain other challenges, such as racism, verbal aggression, physical violence, climate degradation, and others. These are serious challenges in themselves. It means that the "developed" nations are still saddled with existential challenges, and their rendezvous with these are far from over. We must then distinguish between the strict and loose senses of qualifying something as "developed."

In the strict sense, it is obvious that the ease-of-comparison argument does not provide sufficient justification for attributing a society as developed. It is strictly logically inconsistent to conclude that development is a continuous process and then maintain that some societies are developed. In fact, accepting that development is a continuous process means that the word "developed" lacks epistemological warrant, strictly speaking. It seems to me that it was the lack of this distinction between the strict and loose senses of the attribution that left Gyekye with the only option of attempting to demonstrate that development is a non-continuous process in order to justify why some countries can be called developed. But we have shown that it is not necessary to argue that development is a non-continuous process in order to justify the attribution. Rather, the attribution "developed" is a matter of ease of convenience in comparing societies than that development can come to an end at some point. And once the distinction between the strict and loose senses of "developed" is made, it becomes obvious that the relativity argument attributes certain nations as developed only in the loose sense of pointing to something that is making some relatively significant progress in dealing with (at least some of) their existential challenges. Taking the distinction between the strict and loose senses into account means that one who insists that the attribution "developed" to certain countries is strictly not warranted is strictly correct, and one who, on the contrary, decides to make this attribution can then be assumed to be correct only in the context of a universal informal consensus about its use in a somewhat attenuated sense.

Conclusion

We have treated Kwame Gyekye's functionalist conception of development and entertained three objections that logically arise in treating it. Since he departs from the notion that development is economic growth, the first objection arises from the obvious feelings of intuition we normally have as human beings that development is ultimately economic. One would therefore expect this kind of objection to arise routinely from reading Gyekye's conception of development. But I rejected this objection and have marshalled enough arguments to show that Gyekye's departure from the notion that development is ultimately economic growth is correct. The second objection is a

continuation of the battle from the first objection. According to this objection, development must be continuous since there is no stop to economic growth. I pointed out that this misses Gyekye's reason for arguing that development is a non-continuous process: Gyekye argues that since development is behavioral, we must reach a certain point where we have acquired the necessary behaviors for effectively tackling the environment. But here I disagree with Gyekye and argue that existential challenges are complex and continue to change, necessitating that we continue to search for behavioral responses that can respond to existential challenges. So I argue that even in behavioral terms, development is a continuous process. I also raise a third objection as a consequence of the second objection, which is that if development is a continuous process no nation can be called developed. Since I agree with the second objection, I am logically obligated to agree with this objection too, and I presented reasons that also follow logically from the reasons that support the second objection. The justification for using the attribution can only be that it is being used in a relatively loose sense for ease of comparison when discussing development in the context of the (behavioral) development disparity of nations rather than that development is a non-continuous process.

We can now situate Gyekye's conception of development within the context of the debate about post-development and, in a way, alternative development. For instance, post development scholars mainly reject the very idea of development. Their reasons for this are that it "has to be seen as an invention strategy produced by the 'First World' about the 'under-development' of the 'Third World,'" does not work, is an imposition of science, is the religion of the West, amounts to Westernization and homogenization, and so on.²⁹ Alternative development, as the name implies, is concerned with alternative models of (or approaches to) development, in terms of alternatives to the mainstream models of development, which are seen as linear.³⁰ What to note is that these criticisms are directly chiefly at economic (and, to some extent, political) theories of development.³¹ This is reflected even when it is doctored to pay some attention to "people" or human development. But the implication of Gyekye's functionalist conception is that the entire debate is mistaken because it takes place on a platform that is too narrow and strictly insufficient to represent the concept of development, strictly speaking. It is largely because development is couched mainly in socio-economic terms that the persistence of poverty leads to scepticism about the validity of the term "development." It is precisely because "development" has been assumed to be largely only economic (and to some extent political) development that the whole debate about development has entered such a gridlock; those who oppose the very concept "development" are saddled with the unenviable task of crafting what to do next in the wake of the rejection of the very concept. Another difficulty that is emerging from the discussion of the last century about development is that, paradoxically, economic development cannot be achieved only by economic or material initiatives; the functionalist conception argues that even economic development is better guaranteed when society begins to tackle its existential challenges in their much broader perspective.

Both post and alternative development presuppose the idea of specific development models. These scholars are tasked with the burden of seeking credible alternative models of development (in the case of alternative development) or alternative to the phenomenon "development" itself (post-development). And of course, development theorists (the objects of criticism) have proposed models of development, which is the reason for the agitation of post and alternative development theorists in the first place. But Gyekye's functionalist conception does not need to begin discussing models that cut across any societies (even across Third World societies) for tackling the entire range of existential challenges. This is because, although certain existential challenges are common across humanity, the integrative functionalist conception implies that each society faces a unique set of challenges. This is why he clarifies that the function of an object is appropriate to its nature and identity, and it is only in relation to this that we can determine (if we can) when its functioning is satisfactory. It means that each society has a unique set of assignments on its hands: to respond to its environmental challenges as they come, be committed to the task, and that becomes its model. The model is for itself, and we can only talk of a model that can cut across several societies when we are discussing the species or sub-sets of development (ideas for tackling particular [aspects of] existential challenges), and that is where the politico-economic development discourses (development, alternative development, and post development) could come into the picture.

Finally, post-development scholars accuse development thinking as being driven by the desire to engineer the society, a kind of interventionist and managerial discipline.³² In short, development theorists are, by this view, trying to tell people what to do in the name of modernizing. But here one must make a distinction between telling people what particular things to do and offering a general moral imperative. Political and economic development theories may be telling people what to do about particular day-by-day issues, but the functionalist conception of development does not offer such retail services. Its only imperative is that every society needs to rise up to its environmental challenges. The uniqueness of objects in their nature (such as societies and institutions) does not encourage such retail services, especially from someone who is not embroiled in the existential challenge in question. It (the functionalist imperative) is as such a moral imperative, which is seen in the fact that there is no alternative to it (such as do not rise up to your own environmental challenges). This is why Gyekye argues that development is predominantly a moral affair. The moral imperative acts as a guide for particular and mundane strategies for developing.

Notes

1 Pieterse 2000.

2 Gyekye 1994, p. 45.

3 Ibid., p. 46.

4 Ibid., p. 47. Italics are used when Gyekye has used them in the original article.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 48.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 49.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 50.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 55.

14 Ibid, p. 51.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 50.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 52.

20 Ibid., p. 53.

21 Ibid., p. 54.

22 Ibid., p. 51.

23 Ibid., p. 47.

24 Ibid., p. 51.

25 See Ani 2015, p. 19.

26 Diamond 1997. Incidentally, journalists and media houses, such as Richard Quest of the Cable News Network (CNN), are now using the term 'emerging economies' more frequently. For a specific example of growing usage of the term, see discussions at: <http://www.peeplo.com/search/?type=web&from=adw8&q=list%20of%20emerging%20economies>.

27 See Obeng 1994 and Agyekum 2010.

28 The Human Development Index (HDI) was the first serious effort to shift the development paradigm from gross domestic product (GDP) to human development (HD). It is contained in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s Human Development Report (HDR) for the year 2010.

29 As invention strategy, see Escobar 1992, p. 22; for does not work, Kothari 1988; as an imposition of science, Nandy 1988; is the religion of the West, Rist 1990; amounts to Westernization and homogenization, Constantino 1985 and Latouche 1993.

30 See Sheth 1987 and Pieterse 1998.

31 Also, see Ziai 2007.

32 Pieterse 2000, p. 182.

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