

Dialogue: An Effective Route to Peaceful Coexistence in a Heterogeneous Human Society

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Abstract

So long as man's ontological constitution presents him as having a social character, he naturally finds fulfillment in inter subjectivity and social relationships. However, consequent upon their inherent antisocial tendencies, human beings are frequently entangled in the mire of controversies, misunderstanding, disputes and conflicts. These antisocial tendencies notwithstanding, man's ratiocinative faculties still provide possible panacea to guide him aright. As rational beings, men possess the capacity to engage one another meaningfully in dialogue with a view to broadening their visions and perspectives on reality, reaching mutual understanding, achieving satisfactory resolution of controversies, disputes or conflicts, and charting more objective courses of action. Against the backdrop that peace and progress are functions of successful dialogue, this discourse defends the thesis that dialogue constitutes an effective means of fostering, sustaining and consolidating mutual coexistence in a heterogeneous society. This paper uses the Nigeria socio-political situation, which is a typical example of a society that consists of multi-ethnic groups and multi-variant socio-political orientations, as a case study. Considered as a concrete expression of man's rational potential, therefore, dialogue is strongly recommended as an efficient means of achieving mutual cooperation and socio-political progress.

Keywords: Dialogue, dialectics, heterogeneous, controversies, conflicts

1. Introduction

Man's natural instinct for survival or self-preservation has a tint of selfishness. However, while his appetitive faculties naturally drive him to egocentrism, his rational faculties boosted by his natural gregarious instinct, inspires the desire to search for grounds for mutual coexistence. Formally established laws, norms, rules, regulations and similar principles of social relationship considerably fill this need in the civil society. As ordinances of reason, therefore, laws are enacted and promulgated for the common good. The government of any given human society, irrespective of its forms or level, is basically vested with the vital responsibility of maintaining peace and order, as well as protecting the lives and properties of citizens through the enforcement of these laws.

This discourse revolves on the hinge of a basic presupposition, namely, that misunderstanding, conflict, dispute and even violence constitute intrinsic features of most contemporary human societies, especially given their heterogeneous nature. Using the Nigerian situation as a case-study, the paper examines the diverse dimensions of heterogeneity and their possible effects on contemporary human societies. In fact, in the context of this discourse, heterogeneity is not only considered a natural character of most contemporary human societies but also a considerable cause of social instability.

With a view to providing a possible panacea to the challenges associated with heterogeneity, this paper prescribes dialogue as a veritable course of action. Leveraging on a philosophical review of the concept of dialogue and its practical imports, the paper highlights its implications for integral development and socio-political progress. In other words, it features a critical exposition of the nature and scope of dialogue as well as

the implications of dialogical approach to human relationship and peace-building. Simply put, the paper projects dialogue as a veritable principle and necessary paraphernalia for achieving mutual and peaceful coexistence among people despite their individual differences, varying ethnicities and diverse socio-political backgrounds.

2. **Heterogeneity:** A considerable basis of conflict and social instability

The concept “heterogeneous” as predicated of the human society is suggestive of a group of people with diverse ethnicities, different socio-cultural backgrounds, multiple religious persuasions and varying shades of political and ideological orientations. It designates an agglomeration of multi-variant ethnicities to form a single unit or community of human persons. In this context, it is used in contradistinction to “homogeneous”, which designates a human society consisting of people from the same ethnic group and who share similar values and socio-cultural orientations.

Most modern human societies are heterogeneous consequent upon the phenomena of immigration, emigration, and such trends of modernity as urbanization, civilization, globalization, cross-cultural relations, as well as mutual interaction in business, education and religion. Other secondary factors that could advance the thesis on the imports of heterogeneity as an essential character of most modern human societies include differences in language, age and gender. On the strength of this supposition, linguistic relativists like Sapir and Whorf argue that the diversity of languages in the world has also led to a diversity of cultures and also wields influence on such institutions as religion, kinship, social stratification, and ideology. Sapir (1929:209) avers that “it is an illusion to think that we can understand the significant outlines of a culture through sheer observation and without the guide of the linguistic symbolism which makes these outlines significant and intelligible to society.” For him, “language is a guide to reality.” The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis strongly suggests that the language one speaks can influence one’s worldview, thought pattern, general experience, perception and understanding of reality (Lucy, 2001:13490-13490). In fact, Whorf strongly contends that since language determines one’s worldview, speakers of different languages will invariably have different worldviews (Caroll, 1956:137). Very much like language, the other aforementioned constitutive elements of the human society also play significant roles and have critical imports in the determination of its pluralistic outlook.

Heterogeneity and homogeneity, as possible characters of human societies, constitute critical determinants of their stability. The pursuit of the particular interests of one’s ethnic or cultural group in a multicultural society, for instance, instigates unhealthy competition and rivalry, stifles mutual cooperation and militates against societal progress. No doubt, heterogeneity, as a feature of most modern human societies, has its merits and demerits. By means of culture contacts and intercultural relations, with their consequent cross-pollination of ideas, different cultures are mutually enriched as people gain new perspectives on reality. However, conscious and deliberate effort is required to meet the demands of mutual coexistence and harmonize varying interests, worldviews, and ideologies of the component groups of people.

The consideration of heterogeneity as a decisive and very sensitive feature of the contemporary human societies in this discourse is mainly based on the supposition that heterogeneity borders on its ontological constitution; it borders on very fundamental constitutive elements of any given human society. Indeed, internally generated strife and conflict are often more catastrophic to any human institution, system, or society than attacks from external forces, given that they undermine the very foundations of such system. Heterogeneity could be a blessing in disguise if its positive aspects are properly explored and harnessed for the benefit of the society, else it could pose a serious challenge to development and socio-political progress. Indeed, the experiences, values and ideological orientations of the component groups of the human society could be employed in the establishment of solid foundations for the present and as the basis for future social relations.

3. Dialogue and dialectics: A historico-philosophical review

The purposes of this discourse and the avoidance of conceptual ambiguity necessitate a critical and expository review of the concept 'dialogue', especially as it correlates with "dialectics". From the point of view of the present discourse both are considered philosophical or didactic devices with the same underlying principle. Hence, the expository review that follows, aims at highlighting the interlocking relationship between the two concepts and at demonstrating that the fundamental principle underlying both is basically ordered towards the same end.

As a philosophical concept, dialogue has a long history and has considerably evolved in terms of meaning and practical implications for intersubjectivity. The term dialogue stems from the Greek διάλογος (*dialogos*, conversation); its roots are διά (*dia*: through) and λόγος (*logos*: speech, reason). It is a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and a literary and theatrical form that depicts such an exchange (en.m.wikipedia.org). As a similar philosophical concept, dialectic or dialectics (**Greek**: διαλεκτική, *dialektiké*) also refers to a [discourse](#) between two or more people holding different [points of view](#) about a subject but wishing to establish the [truth](#) through [reasoned argumentation](#); it is a method of reasoned discourse basically ordered towards mutual search for truth and not necessarily a repudiation of the interlocutor's argument (en.m.wikipedia.org).

Philosophico-historical records locate the origin of the concepts 'dialogue' and 'dialectics' in the East and West. In the West, the dialectic method of reasoning and philosophizing found expression in the philosophical thoughts of Socrates and were further developed and systematized by Plato as an independent literary genre. Although Aristotle alludes to the pre-Socratic philosopher Zeno of Elea (c.489-420 BC) as the inventor of the dialectic method, its application by Socrates and Plato in the classical period of Greek philosophy gave it the prominence for which it is known. Socrates (c. 470-399 BC) conceived dialectics purely as dialogue, that is, the ability to conduct disputes and bring out the truth by disclosing and resolving contradictions in the arguments of the opponents. This dialectical method, as exemplified in *Apology* and *Euthyphro*, employs questions and answers to stimulate thinking. The Platonic dialogue is a distinct genre which features Socrates as a speaker and one or more interlocutors discussing some philosophical questions. In fact, the dialogues of Plato are examples of the Socratic dialectical method. In *Gorgias*, for instance, dialectic occurs between Socrates, the Sophist Gorgias, and two men, Polus and Callicles. Because Socrates' ultimate goal was to reach true knowledge, he was even willing to change his own views in order to arrive at the truth. The fundamental goal of dialectic in this instance was to establish a precise definition of the subject and with the use of argumentation and questioning, make the subject even more precise (en.m.wikipedia.org). In a similar manner, Aristotle conceived dialectics as logic, the method by which the mind approaches truth, and the mental structure in which reasoning takes place (Rhet. 1.2, 1356a30f).

As the concept dialectic evolved, it assumed different dimensions, varying approaches, and diverse interpretations. In Platonism and Neoplatonism, dialectic assumes an ontological and metaphysical role in that it becomes the process whereby the intellect passes from sensibles to intelligibles, rising from Idea to Idea until it finally grasps the supreme Idea, the First Principle which is the origin of all. In fact, it is against this backdrop that Giovanni (1990:150) insists that the philosopher is a 'dialectician'. For Simon Blackburn (1996), dialectic in this sense is used to understand "the total process of enlightenment, whereby the philosopher is educated so as to achieve knowledge of the supreme good, the Form of the Good".

In the Middle East and Asia, instances of dialogue are found in such works as *Sumerian Disputations*, *Rigvedic Dialogue Hymns* and *The Mahabharata*. In the 13th century, the philosophical works of Japanese Nichiren Daishonin, including "Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man." (Daishonin 1256, 99-140), "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" (1260, 6-30), and "Questions and Answers about Embracing the Lotus Sutra" (1263) were written in the form of dialogue. The medieval, modern and contemporary periods also feature a harvest of literature that embodied the essence of dialogue. Such literatures express an acknowledgment of the positive import of dialogue and mutual intellectual engagement

in authentic interpersonal human relationship. Some of these include Fontenelle's (1683) and Fenelon's (1712) *Dialogues des Morts* ("Dialogues of the Dead"), Nicolas Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, Berkeley's (1713) *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (1821-1828), George Santayana's *Dialogues in Limbo* (1926 2nd ed 1948), Murdoch's *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* (1986) as well as Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (en.m.wikipedia.org).

Against the backdrop of his view that all knowledge begins with sense, advances to understanding and culminates in reason, Kant conceived dialectics as the logic of appearance as well as the study and critique of transcendental illusions. For Kant (1998:14), dialectics, as part of transcendental logic, is the spurious attempt of reason working independently of sensibility to provide metaphysical insight into things as they are in themselves. According to him, "We termed dialectic in general a *logic of appearance*. This does not signify a doctrine of *probability*; for probability is truth, only cognized upon insufficient grounds, and though the information it gives is imperfect, it is not therefore deceitful. Hence it must not be separated from the analytical part of logic. Still less must *phenomenon* and *appearance* be held to be identical. For truth or illusory appearance does not reside in the object, in so far as it is intuited, but in the judgement upon the object, in so far as it is thought." (Hutchins, 1952:108). On this stress he concludes:

Transcendental dialectic will therefore content itself with exposing the illusory appearance in transcendental judgements, and guarding us against it; but to make it, as in the case of logical illusion, entirely beyond its power. For we have here to do with a *natural* and unavoidable illusion, which rests upon subjective principles and imposes these upon us as objective, while logical dialectic, in the detection of sophisms has to do merely with an error in the logical consequence of the propositions, or with an artificially constructed illusion, in imitation of the natural error (Hutchins, 1952:109).

Hegel's and Marx's thoughts and discourses also feature very outstanding insights on dialectics. Their philosophies of history express a novel idea of dialectics which presents it as a contradiction between contrasting ideas or realities. However, even in this sense, it still culminates in the realization of a new order of things or ideas. Hence, it is conceived as a movement from thesis to antithesis culminating in a synthesis. While in Hegel this process of evolution of ideas culminates in the Absolute Spirit, in Marx material factors propel this process of evolution through the realization of the ultimate end of history and profound social order.

Hegel, following Johann Gottlieb Fichte, advanced a dialectical model of nature and of history that presents dialectic as a fundamental aspect of nature and reality. Hegelian dialectic is usually presented in a threefold manner, comprising three dialectical stages of development: a thesis, giving rise to its reaction; an antithesis, which contradicts or negates the thesis; and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis. Although, the thesis – antithesis – synthesis model of dialectics is often ascribed to Hegel, he rather credited it to Kant as he himself used a three-valued logical model with the terms: Abstract – Negative – Concrete (Hegel, 2010:125).

As in the Socratic dialectic, Hegel claimed to proceed by making implicit contradictions explicit: each stage of the process is the product of contradictions inherent or implicit in the preceding stage. For Hegel (1874:81), the whole of history is one tremendous dialectic, major stages of which chart a progression from self-alienation as slavery to self-unification and realization as the rational constitutional state of free and equal citizens. According to him, the purpose of dialectics is "to study things in their own being and movement and thus to demonstrate the finitude of the partial categories of understanding." The outcome of such dialectic might be the refutation of a relevant proposition, or synthesis, or a combination of the opposing assertions, or a qualitative improvement of the dialogue. From this perspective, therefore, the contradiction that dialectics engenders is considered a basis of progress.

In his *Das Kapital*, published in 1867 with Friedrich Engels, Marx appropriated Hegel's dialectical principles but advanced an idea of dialectics that is rather tempered with materialism. This culminates in his concepts of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. As a direct opposite of Hegelian idealism which considers the real world only the external or phenomenal form of 'the Idea', Marx's dialectics considers the material world as the ideal, though translatable into thought. Clothing dialectics in a materialist garb, Marx considers it a method of examining personal, social, and economic behaviours and an authentic means of intersubjective experience. In fact, class struggle is the primary contradiction to be resolved by Marxist dialectics because of its central role in the social and political lives of a society. Nonetheless, Marx and Marxists developed the concept of class struggle to include the dialectical contradictions between mental and manual labour, and between town and country. Philosophic contradiction is thus considered central to the development of dialectics – the progress from quantity to quality, the acceleration of gradual social change; the negation of the initial development of the status quo. For Marx, dialectics is a method of cognizing reality which expresses a clash of material forces and which culminates in social change; "the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." (Marx, 1887:14). Generally, therefore, dialectics is a form of reasoning based upon dialogue of arguments and counter-arguments, advocating propositions (thesis) and counter-propositions (antithesis).

Within the purview of the present inquiry, the concepts dialogue and dialectics would be considered as correlates with emphasis on the common principle underlying both. Despite the diverse interpretations and connotations they may have, the present discourse adopts their most common understanding, namely, their conception as conversations aimed at discovering truth and arriving at objective stance on issues bordering on human and social development. The discourse essentially considers dialectics as a philosophical method of argument, engaging in conversation and interchanging standpoints with a view to arriving at an objective judgment and a means of fostering peaceful coexistence. Understood as denoting bodies of literature and philosophical treatises as well as discourses expressing the dialogical and dialectical method, dialectics and dialogue enhance cross-pollination of ideas; both concepts, resonate with the conscious efforts at fostering an open-minded approach and disposition to inter subjectivity.

4. Nigeria: A typical heterogeneous society

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a country in West Africa. It is the most populous country in Africa covering an area of about 923,769 square kilometers (356,669 sq mi) with a population of over 250 million. The country is presently constituted of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory located at Abuja. Nigeria has a history of several pre-colonial states and kingdoms since the second millennium BC, with the Nok civilization in the 15th century BC marking the first internal unification in the country. The modern state originated with British colonization in the 19th century, taking its present territorial shape with the merging of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Northern Nigerian Protectorate in 1914 by Lord Lugard (en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>Nigeria).

Nigeria is unarguably a pluralistic and heterogeneous society being constituted of multi-ethnic and religious groups, diverse cultures and languages, as well as varying socio-political orientations. Accordingly, the people are often divided along socio-cultural, political, economic and religious lines. The CIA *World Factbook's* statistical records indicate that Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups and over 500 indigenous languages, each associated with definite cultural values. The major ethnic groups include Hausa (30%), Yoruba (15.5%), Igbo (15.2%), Fulani (6%), Tiv (2.4%), Kanuri/Berberi (2.4%), Ibibio (1.8%), Ijaw/Izon (1.8%), Others (24.9%). (*World Factbook*, 21 December 2022).

As a natural consequence, the socio-cultural differences, diverse worldviews and ideological orientations that characterize most contemporary human societies engender multiple perspectives on life. If this is not properly managed, it poses a threat to peaceful coexistence. The Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, for instance, always express a sentiment of being politically marginalized and denied sufficient opportunities in the administration of the

nation's resources since its independence and existence as a nation-state. The people of this region, who arguably produce the major drivers of the nation's economy through their commitment to socio-political development and considerable contributions to trade and industry, feel short-changed in terms of leadership opportunities. This feeling of being relegated to the background naturally predisposes them to a political ideology that tilts towards political emancipation and zealotry. Little wonder, their incessant agitations are geared towards the quest for autonomy. Of course, for similar reasons some other regions occasionally also seek political autonomy.

In the pursuit of political and economic ideals, one's values, orientation, and worldviews invariably bear on one's choices and actions. While political and economic dispositions, orientations and principles that are inclined towards fostering social and civic responsibilities advance the common good the selfish disposition and orientation would certainly seek personal gratification and advance selfish ethnic concerns. The latter is the current experience in Nigeria's political and economic scenes; hence the urgent need for dialogue and conscious interfacing with a view to improving human relationship.

In addition to Oil, which is its dominant source of revenue, Nigeria also relies on agriculture, telecommunication, entertainment, and other social services as alternative sources of income. Citing the World Bank's statistics, the *Trading Economic Macro Models* reports that Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as at 2021, was estimated at 440.83 billion USD. This is expected to reach 504.99 billion USD in 2024 and 522.16 billion USD in 2025. ([www.tradingeconomics.com>nigeria>gdp](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/gdp)). Owing to its large economy and population, Nigeria has often been referred to as the "Giant of Africa". Unfortunately, the giant of Africa tag is fast becoming nominal; it has become a tale of a sleeping giant. The nation is fast becoming a shadow of its old self consequent upon poor management of her rich natural and human resources, incompetent leadership and endemic corruption.

In view of the prevalent tendency for each political region to emphasize its particular rather than the general national interest, Nigerian politics has over time become one of violence and bitterness. In principle, some measures have been put in place to ensure peaceful coexistence but gross lack of political will to enforce them continues to threaten the unity of the country. Without prejudice to the imperative of merit, competence, and capacity for efficient service delivery, the federal character principle, for instance, entails equal representation of the federating states in the elective and appointed public offices. Unfortunately, this is not being effectively maintained. In practice, the winner-takes-it-all mentality holds sway. Appointment into and management of public offices are mostly at the discretion of the ruling political party or individuals in power, who often emphasize sectional interests and concerns to the detriment of national unity. The danger of marginalization or the tendency to sideline a particular region would have been considerably averted if every group is given a sense of belonging by taking active part in administrative decisions that concern them. Hence, spreading opportunities overboard remains a very sensitive strategy for peace-building in a heterogeneous human society. Religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue are also critical considerations in any comprehensive assessment of the prospects of peaceful coexistence in heterogeneous human societies. As a pluralistic society religion is also one of the major causes of conflict in Nigeria. Granted that a considerable number of adherents of the mainline religious persuasions are found in the different ethnic groups, specific religious denominations and practices are more pronounced in specific areas and among specific groups. Accordingly, the research outfit, *Family Search*, presents a report on Nigeria's religious records thus:

The Hausa ethnic group (predominant in the North) was found to be 95% Muslim, 5% Christian, the Yoruba tribe (predominant in the West) was 55% Muslim, 35% Christian and 10% adherents of other religions, while the Igbos (predominant in the East) and the Ijaw (South) were 98% Christian, with 2% traditional religions. the middle belt of Nigeria contains the largest number of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria who were found to be mostly Christians and members of traditional religions, with a small proportion of Muslims. ([https://www.familysearch.org>wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki)).

The multiple principles and practices of religion not only constitute an index of heterogeneity but pose significant threat to the prospects of peaceful and mutual coexistence among the composite nations or groups. In other words, the conflicting religious ideals and diverse interpretations of human values often culminate in unpleasant consequences for the human society. For instance, whereas some religions maintain absolute sanctity of human life and would in no circumstance subscribe to its willful termination, others would even feel obliged to terminate it at the slightest provocation. Sometimes, this is even done as a religious duty with eternal reward.

In Nigeria, religion has so much been entangled in the subtle and sometimes implicit animosity and mutual fears among the major ethnic groups, which are some of the unfortunate negative vestiges of the civil war otherwise known as the Nigeria-Biafra war. In addition to the sinister seed of mutual suspicion sown by the civil war, religious intolerance is further aggravated by the myopic and parochial world outlook, and the consequent nefarious activities of religious bigots, fanatics, and extremists. Little wonder, the slightest provocation elicits unprecedented violent reactions, inter-religious conflicts, inter-tribal wars, and general socio-political instability. In addition to concerns about the fundamental tenets of different religious groups, such sensitive elements of religion as rituals, modes of worship, places and times of worship, as well as religious garments have often fanned into flame the embers of conflict in Nigeria. Certainly, there are some established contemporary theoretical religious principles on the basis of which religious tolerance could be advanced. Yet, there is, at the moment, gross lack of good will and sufficient motivation to apply them. Considering dialogue as a practical means of achieving peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious society, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (1993:80-95) identified and encouraged four types of dialogue including the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of discourse, and the dialogue of spiritual experience. In the documents *Nostra Aetate* (dialogue with other religions), *Unitatis Redintegratio* (dialogue with other Christians), and *Dignitatis Humane* (dialogue with political authorities), The Second Vatican Council presents dialogue as a credible and feasible tool for interreligious dialogue. In a similar manner, the Quran acknowledges the usefulness of inter-faith dialogue, especially as a means of getting rid of the prejudices and misconceptions about Islam; hence it avers, "Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and engage with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (Quran 16:125).

In effect, since the major religions in Nigeria, at least in principle, express openness to dialogue, there is a glimmer of hope. The positive values associated with dialogue could be utilized to her advantage. Of course, this is applicable to other societies that share similar characteristics. Hence, a renewed emphasis on the concrete and practical application of the principles of dialogue in the organization of pluralistic human societies would, to a very large extent, foster religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

5. Dialogue, social reform and development

The basic principle underlying dialectics and dialogue has a wide range of application as it finds relevance in social relationships, politics, education, business, religion, etc. The Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (2000:89-93), for instance, advanced dialogue as a type of pedagogy, insisting that dialogued communication allowed students and teachers to learn from one another in an environment characterized by respect and equality. In his view, too, dialogued pedagogy is not only about deepening understanding, but also about making positive changes in the world. He expresses the view that true dialogue, which is founded on and propelled by love, humility, faith, trust and critical thinking, drives the interaction between people who critically think about the world together.

In inter subjective engagement through dialogue, the aim is to have better understanding and appreciation of the problem in question with a view to positing consensual action. Dialogue helps in providing home-grown or indigenous solutions to problems. It also has to do with the acknowledgement and explorations of multiple perspectives on issues, especially in complex problems. In a heterogeneous society, it helps in the formulation

of policies that are relevant and of interest to the component groups or communities of persons. By means of dialectics and dialogue, therefore, people compare thoughts and experiences as well as re-examine meanings, beliefs and their ultimate social effects on actions. This necessarily extends to objective assessment and better understanding of shared moral values. Indeed, on the basis of their being founded on objective principles, open-minded analysis, and review of concepts and judgments, dialogic relations advance the prospects of peacemaking and value reorientation.

Any human society built on dialogical principles undoubtedly makes remarkable progress. A dialogue-propelled society features a continuous interchange of ideas as well as conscious and deliberate interface between the government and the people or citizens; it features an attempt to carry the people along in policy formulation and implementation. Dialogical approach to governance and human management ultimately results in improved relations and cooperation in the community, more enriching social and political actions and the provision of constructive and lasting solutions to developmental challenges. Against this backdrop, Vladimir Lenin (1837:367) articulates his dialectical understanding of the concept of development thus:

A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis (“the negation of the negation”), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; “breaks in continuity”; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and the closest and indissoluble connection between all aspects of any phenomenon (history constantly revealing ever new aspects), a connection that provides a uniform, and universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws – these are some of the features of dialectics as a doctrine of development that is richer than the conventional one.

As a positive principle of interpersonal relationship, true dialogue is propelled by dynamism, openness, honesty, and mutual commitment. It presupposes a disposition to listen to the other, enhances mutual confidence and allays mutual fears among people. To the extent that dialogue fosters interpersonal relationships, it largely correlates with diplomacy; it borders on tactful human management. Dialogue also involves a deliberate effort to sit down and take council with people with divergent perspectives and worldviews. This, no doubt, requires mutual understanding and strong will power since a closed mind hardly yields to the spur of dialogue. It also presupposes an acknowledgment of the fact that no single individual or group has a monopoly of true knowledge. Opting for dialogue indicates a considerable sense of social responsibility and expresses an acknowledgement of the rights of others. By means of dialogue, therefore, some gratuitous assumptions that constitute the basis of disagreement in multicultural human communities are exposed for what they are and substituted with more profound ideologies.

The contrasting forces of gregariousness and egocentrism are often operational in man, relating to social and anti-social tendencies respectively. These are, in fact, ontological components and natural attributes of the human person. While the former is propelled by man’s power of ratiocination the latter is driven by man’s appetitive faculties and the instinct of self-preservation. The natural polarity between these two forces creates a tension that wields a decisive influence on social interaction. Dialogue douses this tension, inspires a sense of social security as it serves as a means of striking a balance and steering a middle course between the two contrasting forces. As an ordinance of reason, it provides justification for compromises with a view to achieving social progress, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development. It involves a disposition to accommodate the other in spite of one’s personal inclinations, idiosyncrasies or proclivities in terms of ethnicity, family, social, political or religious backgrounds.

The logical consequence of human weakness is that human systems and institutions that operate them are necessarily characterized by limitations and imperfections. To be human is to be limited in perspectives; it is to

be fallible. Openness to dialogue presupposes an acknowledgement of man's weakness and the limitedness of human social systems. It indicates a disposition to shift grounds in search of common grounds of relationship among people of diverse orientations and backgrounds. While human systems have their merits they also have their demerits and shortcomings. Indeed, it is on the basis of their possible demerits that one finds points of controversy, conflicts, and disputes and disagreements among people. Where one's rights stop another's begin. One man's meat, it is said, is another man's poison. One's comfort zone is another's discomfort zone. Finding a middle point through dialogue would mean an attempt to accommodate the other's strengths and weaknesses. In fact, this sensitivity to the other's conditions and concerns largely tames egocentrism. It invariably implies steering a middle course between man's gregarious instinct and the egocentric instinct of self-preservation. Dialogue therefore heals, reforms, and fortifies the foundation and roots of the human society. This is especially given that the civil society has its foundation on the gregarious instincts and the need for unified efforts at conquering the world or subduing the earth and the filling of different human needs. A resort to dialogue is a resort to a reliable strategy for social reform and revolution as well as an effective means of social development.

Remarkably, virtually every human principle and human action has some form of justification behind it. The extent of objectivity of such justification is another kettle of fish. In as much as the truth or what is actually the case remains of a single essence, it is still possible to approach it from diverse perspectives. Of course, the law of contradiction would have been gravely violated to state that under the same condition one can have multiple truths. It is either the case or not the case. Where point T is the truth, points A, B, C and D could serve as possible routes to the truth but not "the truth". A positive disposition to dialogue would imply an acknowledgement that neither of the routes enjoys a monopoly of authenticity or credibility as far as the route to the truth is concerned. It also affords an opportunity of mutual enrichment through the collation of the merits of each of the means to the truth. This is tantamount therefore to sustainable development through cross-pollination of ideas.

To be sure, openness to dialogue is not just a one-off phenomenon which ends at a table of discussion. It is rather a habitual principle of action and relationship among the members of any given human society, which enhances social relationship in spite of individual differences, differences in socio-cultural orientation, varying worldviews and multiplicity of interests. As a veritable tool for managing differences among men in a polarized society, dialogue makes for sustainable development and a more peaceful human society. Openness to dialogue indicates an acceptance of man's imperfection and limitedness, an expression of humility, an acknowledgment of the fact that there are more that unite humanity than divide them. It is an affirmation of the fact that there are positive, objective and common values that cut across the different human communities. On the basis of such values the human society can make more meaningful progress as they are united in love, attend to the vicissitudes of life from a common front and consciously advance the cause of justice and fairness.

6. Conclusion

Given the present-day advancement in human knowledge as expressed in logical, mathematical, scientific, literary, and socio-political breakthroughs, the use of force and violence to obtain compliance has obviously become obsolete, counterproductive and incongruous with civilization. Diplomatic options, especially as captured by the principles of dialogue are preferable and indeed more effective.

As a valuable relationship skill proper to a rational human person dialogue plays a decisive role in social bonding, interpersonal relationship and ultimately in social development. Dialectical resolution of disputes, conflicts and differences transforms obstacles into stepping stones for socio-political progress. Dialogue is a veritable instrument of social change and a key driver of development. By fostering interchange of standpoint, dialogue opens avenues for peaceful coexistence, comprehensive progress and sustainable development in heterogeneous human societies.

In essence, while the heterogeneous character of most contemporary human societies naturally predisposes them to conflicting worldviews and ideologies, individual differences, racism, tribalism, violence, social injustice, human rights abuse, and socio-political instability, dialogue is strongly recommended as an effective and practical means of fostering and maintaining world order and peaceful coexistence in contemporary human societies that are predominantly pluralistic.

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