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Erratum: Why cannot the term development just be dropped altogether? Some reflections on the concept of maturation as alternative to development discourse

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The sentence is therefore corrected to:

> As Aristotle already realised, a metaphor requires the ability to see the similar in the dissimilar, what David Tracy (1981) calls an analogical imagination (see also Conradie 1992).

This correction does not alter the study's findings of significance or overall interpretation of the study results. The publisher apologises for any inconvenience caused.

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The Editor regrets that an important note was inadvertently omitted during the final editing process from the article.

The note reads: This article forms part of the special collection on 'Engaging development: Contributions to a critical theological and religious debate' in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Volume 72, Issue 4, 2016.

The Editor apologises.

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This contribution is aimed at some provocation by questioning the basic assumptions of current development discourse (also in the context of religion and theology). It asks for conceptual clarification and differentiation on the meaning of various process terms. It needs to be recognised that the word development remains a metaphor than can indeed be extended but can also become over-extended and ossified. The concept of development is then contrasted with the process of maturation. It is argued that the concept of maturation is, (1) better able to indicate the final goal of the process than most other process terms, (2) recognises inherent limitations and (3) follows natural cycles better than exponential growth, sustained development or endless progress.

A word about development as metaphor

The term development is used so widely that any attempt at conceptual clarification is probably futile. 'Development' is of course a metaphor that is extended from its roots (in the French *développement*) to indicate the 'unfolding' of property, 'bringing out its latent possibilities', for example, by making improvements to land through the erection of new buildings, infrastructure, renovations or the cultivation of land. It may also describe the process of rolling one surface over another with the aim that such cross-folding would add layers of complexity and capacity – and not merely 'unfold' a potentiality that is already there.[1]

The metaphor may be extended to a wide range of areas and spheres of life, including biology (embryogenesis, neural development, the process through which an organism achieves its genetic potential), the human person (cognitive development, language development, pre-natal development, early childhood development, youth development, personal development, career development), society (human development, social development, community development, cultural development), the economy (business development, rural development, leadership development), technology (the development of products such as drugs, photographic films, software, etc.), arts and culture (the development of a theme in music composition, the development phase in film making, strategies in playing chess) and religion (faith development). In each case development does not only entail growth, but also increasing layers of complexity, added capacities and capabilities that allow for new possibilities to emerge. In each of these spheres the agents or units of development would be perceived differently. Alongside the nation state, banks and large companies and a host of other role players, especially in civil society, may come into play.

Any extension of a metaphor towards another category can at best be relatively adequate. As Aristotle already realised, a metaphor requires the ability to see the similar in the dissimilar, what David Tracy (1981) calls a development discourse as well as current forms (see also Conradie 1992). The danger is that what is regarded as similar may not take difference into account but it is also not possible to recognise difference without a degree of similarity. Suffice it to say that similarity is always elusive. Moreover, what is regarded as similar may be subject to change so that metaphors can easily become fossilised. Then it is no longer able to evoke the same insight on the basis of a recognition of similitude.

What if this applies to the term development? One may say that the very use of a range of qualifiers for the term development indicates that its connotations have become so amorphous that it is no longer clear what similarities are recognised when the metaphor is extended. Such qualifiers include

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1.See the entry for development in the *Collins English Dictionary* – Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition. HarperCollins Publishers, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/development (accessed: January 16, 2016).

well-known terms such as human development, human-centred development (John Galtung), human-scale development (Manfred Max-Neef), people-centred development, grassroots, community-based development, assets-based development (Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum), sustainable development (the Brundtland report) and holistic development. Admittedly some standardisation has been achieved through the widely used Human Development Index (HDI) since 1990, but such indicators will always be contested as approximations of human well-being. Indeed, development 'can easily become so vague as to require a sanctifying adjective' (Goodland & Daly 1996:1003).

In addition to the different spheres where the term development is used, the appropriate agents of development and the various qualifiers that are introduced to circumscribe the noun (as indicated above), one may also account for different models of development. This relates to distinct approaches to development that are followed in any given sphere, second-order reflection on such approaches and theories that are developed to undergird such approaches. It would be impossible to list examples given the complexity of development discourse. Suffice it to say that the full range of economic and political theories may be brought to bear on such development (for a discussion, see Nederveen Pieterse 2001). The term development has also undergone a development of its own with shifts and turns from cost-effective colonial resource management to modern, post-World War II views and thereafter from one decade to a next.[2] It is sometimes conflated with anything from modernisation and colonisation to various forms of aid and dependence theory, while alternative forms of development (e.g. 'from below'), for the sake of social transformation and in the quest for social justice have often been proposed, also from within ecumenical circles (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:73–98). In short, development means very different things to different people in different contexts; it ain't what it used to be![3] This prompts the need for qualifiers but would never stem the tide of diversification.

Such an amorphous use of the term development may be regarded as inevitable so that any attempt at reducing

complexity would be reductionist. However, a laissez-faire attitude would not do either. This is already indicated by the pejorative use of terms such as 'developed' or 'developing' economies as a euphemism for poverty, even backwardness but hiding the continued legacy of imperialism, colonialism and 'Empire'. 'Developed' may simply refer to levels of industrialisation but the contrast clearly also brings into play stereotypes around culture, political structures and contested notions of 'civilisation' and 'enlightenment'. The word development is therefore hardly innocent; it is plagued by plurality and ambiguity (Tracy 1987), that is, by radical and systematic distortions. The critique of the 'development paradigm' is aimed at exposing such distortions and the structural violence associated with that.

A thought experiment

So here is a thought experiment: What would happen if the word development were to disappear from the English vocabulary (the same kind exercise could be considered in other languages)? For example, a few banks may have to close down and several government departments would need to be merged with others. More specifically, what would happen to academic discourse on development if the word is or may no longer be used? One may worry about jobs that will be lost, reputations that may be damaged, departments that would have to close down or request a name change, journals that would be discontinued and reference indices redesigned. There have been previous calls for the demise of development. Wolfgang Sachs (1992:1) provocatively stated two decades ago in *The Development Dictionary*: 'The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary'. This statement can hardly be regarded as prophetic so that it seems unlikely that the very word development would be phased out any time soon.

This begs the question whether such a thought experiment is at all plausible? One may consider a scenario where the word becomes so amorphous and all-encompassing that it becomes meaningless.[4] Given the evolution of language, any word may appear and later disappear. The online *Collins English Dictionary* has it that the French *développement* first gained currency only by the mid-eighteenth century. Or perhaps the pejorative connotations could become radicalised so that it is no longer politically correct to use the term, at least not in academic contexts. Then the thought police may be called upon to corner any culprits that continue its usage.

A more playful possibility may be found in the delightful children's story entitled *Die Land van die Groot Woordfabriek* by Agnès De Lestrade (2011, translated from the French original *La grande fabrique de mots*, 2009), with beautiful illustrations

2.To capture the history of development discourse would be far beyond this essay. I came across this paragraph from Deneulin and Rakodi (2011:48) that would suffice here given the way in which the role of religion is recognised: 'Recognition of the shortcomings of increased (per capita) GDP as the primary indicator of progress has contributed to a re-orientation of development's aims from economic growth to more holistic concerns for human wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Dissatisfaction with monetary conceptions of poverty started with the basic needs approach in the 1970s, and was followed by an emphasis on livelihoods in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, in parallel, post-development critiques of the Western dominance of development debates, over-reliance on expert knowledge, lack of recognition of local culture and agency, and failure to acknowledge the contribution of social movements and grassroots mobilisation to producing alternative visions of wellbeing and means of achieving social change emerged … Particularly influential has been the human development approach, based on the conceptual works of Amartya Sen and his 'capability approach', which has enabled religion to be granted some room within development studies.'

3.Nederveen Pieterse's conclusion to a chapter on alternative forms of development is in my view helpful to capture the underlying tensions: 'Development is not what it used to be. It might be argued that the big hiatus in development now no longer runs between mainstream and alternative development but within mainstream development. Mainstream development now incorporates many alternative development elements and practices. It is the vast stretch of contemporary mainstream development, from the Bretton Woods institutions all the way to grassroots empowerment, that makes for its cacophonic, schizophrenic character. Broadly speaking, the divide now runs between human and alternative development, on the one hand, and the number-crunching approach to development, the positivism of growth, on the other' (2001:96).

4.Sachs (1992:4) states this bluntly: 'By now development has become an amoeba-like concept, shapeless but ineradicable. Its contours are so blurred that it denotes nothing, while it spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions. … Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner. The term creates a common ground, a ground on which right and left, elites and grassroots fight their battles'. See also the essay by Gustavo Esteva (1992) on the concept of development included in *The Development Dictionary*.

by Valeria Docampo. The story goes that there is a country where people scarcely talk to each other because they have to pay for every word used. To put it concisely, they have to choose their words carefully. There is a huge factory producing pieces of paper with words that have to be purchased and swallowed before they may (or could) be pronounced. Some words (those that are often used) are more expensive than others: some are simply unaffordable while others are cheaper. The rich buy lots of the words while the poor look for pieces of paper with words, thrown away by the rich in the garbage. In spring there are special sales of cheap words but many of them (like hermeneutics and semiotics) are hardly used and are thus of no use. The rest of the enchanting story is about the poor boy Daniel who is in love with Hanli but literally cannot afford to say that to her while the rich Heiko is lavish in his declaration of love.

Applied to discourse on development, if the word development becomes all-encompassing, it would become uneconomical to use because it would not convey meaning clearly. If the demand for the word is high, the price would go up so that only the rich could afford to talk about development. They would tend to control discourse on development, ensuring that it was structured to serve their interests. Some would say that this is indeed a fair comment on mid-twentieth century development discourse as well as current forms of 'aid' (Moyo 2009). It would not help to pursue a Darwinist economics and then to send Florence Nightingale to tidy up the damage (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:127). However, if development discourse may become hegemonic it may also be used to challenge hegemony (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:8).

Or consider the profound chapter in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2006) entitled 'The Hidden Sketchbook'. The sketchbook contains the story about the 'word shaker', a gift to Liesel (the book thief and the main character in the novel) from Max, the young Jew who was hiding in the home of Liesel's foster parents. This story within a story is a parody on Hitler's propaganda machinery. The Führer had decided to rule the world with words. He plants the seeds of words and symbols across his country and cultivates them. He captures the imagination of people with his freshly-picked words from the forests where words are harvested by word shakers and then placed on a conveyor belt for mass consumption. The story continues about a girl who befriends a man despised by his homeland. She sheds a tear on his face when he is ill. The tear, made of friendship, becomes a seed, which the girl plants and cultivates. The tree steadily grows to become the tallest in the forest. The Führer is enraged and orders the tree to be cut down.

This, too, is a story about the power of words – to be chosen carefully and with compassion. Such compassion may be shown in working for development but development may also become a conveyor belt of propaganda sold to the masses with the pretence that this is in their best interest. It is therefore necessary to consider what the word development may mean and in what context it is best used and how its

scope can be somehow restricted. My aim here is not to sketch alternative forms of development or to consider alternatives to development as proposed in post-development theories often without actually offering an alternative (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:99–112), but to call for a less all-encompassing terminology because that may not only lead to confusion but may well mask the abuse of power. The abuse of a word such as development (like democracy, human rights, civilisation and many others) is no real reason to discontinue its usage altogether. In the discussion below I will suggest that it is important to recognise that it describes processes and that the study of development is the study of *processes* rather than objects.

The study of processes

Distinctions between academic disciplines have always been contested. Even broad distinctions between the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities (including the creative and performing arts) remain deeply problematic. Because humans form one species alongside others, they can scarcely be somehow separated from the rest of nature. This would foster what Larry Rasmussen (1996:75–89) has called apartheid habits, that is, thinking of humans as an ecologically segregated species. There is a 'great divorce' between nature and history that simply cannot be sustained. Moreover, disciplines tend to become imperialistic by incorporating parts of other disciplines as emerging fields within their own discipline. Frank Tipler (1994:xv) once even suggested that the time has come to absorb theology into physics because physics has better retained an interest in the far-future universe. There are many other culprits, including philosophy (the mother of all sciences), education (which covers basically any field), sociology (studying whatever humans do), linguistics (everything is linguistic), economics (assuming that everything has a price tag), environmental studies (studying surroundings everywhere), law (which covers almost any sphere of life), history (nature itself is historical), gender studies (everything is gendered), ethics and of course also theology (which sits uneasily between the languages, the other humanities, art, philosophy and the social sciences and has to engage with the natural sciences as well). One may even say that there are only two disciplines, namely those that are studying the past for the sake of the future and those that are seeking to create that future (including engineering and the creative arts). Indeed, the past is never dead, it is not even past (as William Faulkner maintained in *Requiem for a Nun*).

The divides between disciplines will always remain artificial. No household can afford to separate education for children from food, medicine, money, culture or social cohesion. Yet, given the need for specialisation, government departments and academic departments alike have to introduce distinctions that tend to lead to fragmentation and the isolation of different spheres of life. This may be countered by interdisciplinary work at the edge of existing disciplines (always with fears of losing disciplinary specialisation), by multidisciplinary problem solving, by a transdisciplinary notion of pedagogy as transformation and by metadisciplinary reflection.

What, then, about the study of development? It is widely recognised that development studies are by nature interdisciplinary, evoking metadisciplinary reflection. It therefore easily becomes amorphous or else becomes indistinguishable from economics, public administration, social work, public health programmes, sociology or gender studies.

In my view it would take the debate forward to see that the study of development is the study of a process with the aim of fostering that process towards some form of transformation. There are many similar fields that study some or other process, most notably education, psychological therapy, pastoral care, correctional services and social work. Sustainability studies, likewise, consider long-term processes albeit with the aim of 'sustaining' the resource basis and therefore of transforming economic production and social consumption in order to do so. One may also include engineering and most of the health processions as studying processes but these tend to remain more focused on a specific area where a process of transformation is required. By contrast, the study of development and education is necessarily multidimensional. One therefore typically finds calls for an integrated or so-called 'holistic' approach, even though no one can really see 'the whole', much less understand it.

To study a process is tricky for several reasons. Of course, except for studying past processes, the future is necessarily uncertain. It is tricky to spot catalysts for change, trends that will become amplified or tipping points that will accelerate change.[5] There are always many necessary and contributing factors to a process of transformation so that it is difficult to isolate any one decisive factor. To study transformation requires theories of social change that not only describe the dynamism but also the mechanisms or dynamos that would elicit such change.[6] What is the difference that makes the difference: clarity of vision, improved policies, using available assets, funds, skills, notions of personhood, values,[7] stories or coalitions?

5. One interesting way to model such complexity in order to develop a platform for transformative innovation is provided by the International Futures Forum in terms of three horisons, i.e. the dominant system at present representing 'business as usual (H1), the long term successor to business as usual growing from fringe activity in the present (H3) and a pattern of transition activities and innovations in response to the ways in which the landscape is changing (H2). See the homepage at http://www.iffpraxis.com/ for resources in this regard.

6. Bob Sutcliffe (1995) provides a very helpful survey of economic debates on development. Using metaphors of travelling, he shows how earlier debates focused on the 'vehicle' (the respective roles of the market and the state, viz. the systems of capitalism or socialism) and the 'route' (the question whether the socio-economic system would ensure that development is of mutual benefit) required for development but assumed the possibility and necessity of development. More recent debates centre around the very 'destination' of development and the validity of the 'map' itself. Two distinct critiques of development emerged in this debate, i.e. the welfare critique (the question whether development can actually produce human welfare) and the environmental critique (the question whether development can be environmentally sustainable). He also discusses the need for an integrated model of development that will focus on 'sustainable human development' and shows that a redistribution of economic power remains crucial to ensure both the goals of sustainability and of equity. However, such development is not in the interest of the 'driver', i.e. the powerful minority who has monopolised political and military power to control economic wealth.

7. In a report for Tearfund entitled *The Restorative Economy – Completing Our Unfinished Millennium Jubilee* (2015) Alex Evans and Richard Gower argue that social transformation takes place through social movements and that the most successful movements drive changes in three crucial areas, namely what the economy incentivises (prices, taxes, spending, investment), what the law allows (legislation and its enforcement), and what society expects (the social norms that govern much of our behaviour). Underlying all three areas is the need for common values (see p. 19). See http://www.tearfund.org/~/media/Files/Main%20Site/Campaigning/OrdinaryHeroes/Restorative%20Economy%20long%20report%20HR%20singles.pdf (accessed 23 January 2015).

Processes also tend to be become intertwined with other processes. They are typically uneven so that close scrutiny may distort the picture while long-term views, although necessary, become all too abstract and unhelpful for concrete processes. The more difficult problem, though, is related to a description of the very nature and aim of the process. The word 'transformation' (despits is use in progressive circles) only insists that the 'form' needs to be changed, but does not indicate the direction of such a process. What kind of process is to be studied then? Social work may be comparatively easy, namely to resolve conflict that undermines the well-being of households and communities more or less satisfactorily – without needing to stipulate the long-term goals of the process. Correctional services, preparing inmates for their release from prison, tend to be more difficult while the outcomes are often discouraging. Education is notoriously difficult to define given the need to balance the acquiring of knowledge, insight, skills and academic virtues and dispositions.

All of this begs the question: what is being studied in development studies? Why is this process described as 'development' and what are the aims of such development? These questions will be explored below.

Process terms

In this section I would like, for a moment, to bracket the way in which the term development is used in development discourse, let us say in the context of the programmes of the United Nations, the HDI, the Millennium Development goals and the revised Sustainable Development goals.

The focus here is on conceptual clarification. What are the connotations of the term development if compared with other available process terms? In what follows below I will consider civilisation, education, evolution, flourishing, growth, innovation, progress, maturation, modernisation, reform(ation), surviving and development itself as examples of such process terms, whereas 'transformation' is perhaps best understood as a generic term that does not by itself specify the direction of the process or of the change that is required. Because each of these terms has considerable baggage and a history of interpretation, conceptual clarification cannot be easily obtained. It would certainly be senseless to seek standardisation. Instead, it would suffice for my purpose to merely contrast the colloquial use of such terms. For that Wikipedia may serve as a helpful guide (simply because it indicates current usage), as good as and as open to contestation as any other. Here are some short definitions provided in the relevant Wikipedia entries:

- A *civilization* (US) or civilisation (UK) is any complex society characterised by urban development, symbolic communication forms (typically, writing systems), and a perceived separation from and domination over the natural environment by a cultural elite [it is not described as a process of civilising or civilisation].
- *Education* is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits.

- *Evolution* refers to the accumulation of change over time. This may be applied within a biological context to describe changes in heritable traits of biological organisms over successive generations due to natural selection and other mechanisms, but the term may also be used in a social context to describe changes in language, culture or ideas.
- In positive psychology, *flourishing* is living within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth and resilience.
- *Growth* refers to a positive change in size, and/or maturation, often over a period of time. Growth can occur as a stage of maturation or a process toward fullness or fulfilment.
- *Innovation* is the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs and is accomplished through effective products, services, technologies or ideas. It may refer to something that is 'original', more effective or 'new', that 'breaks into' the market or society.
- *Maturation* is the process of becoming mature; the emergence of individual and behavioural characteristics through growth processes over time.
- *Modernisation* is described as a progressive transition from a 'premodern' or 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. In a rather telling addition the Wikipedia entry reads: '[Modernisation] theory looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that, with assistance, "traditional" countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have. Modernisation theory attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of societies, and seeks to explain the process of social evolution'. Note how many of the terms included in this list appear in this formulation.
- *Progress* (history) [is] the idea that the world can become increasingly better in terms of science, technology, modernisation, liberty, democracy, quality of life, etcetra.
- *Reform* suggests the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, unsatisfactory. It is generally distinguished from revolution (basic or radical change), whereas reform may lead to no more than fine tuning, or redressing serious wrongs without altering the fundamentals of the system. Reform seeks to improve the system as it stands, never to overthrow it wholesale.
- *Surviving* requires a set of skills that persons may use in a dangerous situation like natural disasters to save themselves and others. These skills may be used to provide basic necessities for human life: water, food, shelter, to avoid possibly fatal interactions with animals and plants, and to cure any incurred injury or ailments.

Wikipedia does not offer a single short definition of 'development' and merely lists its different usages in the context of land use, science and technology, biology, social science, the international and regional political economy, business and professions, and other miscellaneous uses.

Why, then, is the term development privileged as a process term? I would think this may be because it goes beyond growth or expansion in order to indicate some qualitative growth in terms of added characteristics and capabilities. It may be used in conjunction with education to indicate some of the goals of education. It avoids some of the pejorative culture baggage that plagues terms such as 'progress' or 'civilisation'. Unlike the term maturation it describes an open-ended process without indicating the goal of that process, namely reaching maturity. This is perhaps a strength, allowing for some evident flexibility, but may also become a weakness because development may then be deemed to be a goal in itself. In ordinary life this would be awkward because any process would require a general sense of direction, if not a clearly defined goal. Not even education is regarded as an aim in itself. Its purpose is, as defined above, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and virtues that may be helpful for yet other purposes. The same applies to the concept of liberation: the term may be used to offer a critique of the development paradigm but it also does not indicate by itself the aims of such liberation, what the gained freedom is to be used for.

In what follows below I will suggest that, at least at a conceptual level, there are clear advantages associated with the concept of maturation that may be helpful to overcome some serious weaknesses given the association of development with economic growth.

The concept of maturation[8]

The category of maturation applies to individual organisms but also to species, social institutions and traditions. It applies less obviously to geological or biological history, where the term 'evolution' may be more appropriate. It can be extended to communities (to contrast that with community development) and perhaps to regions (regional development) but such metaphoric extension may fall in the same trap as described above with regard to 'development'. The term 'maturation' is therefore imperfect. However, its main advantage is that maturation allows for the fulfilment of potential and a certain directionality – but then within natural patterns that are finite (including death). It entails an implicit acknowledgement of limitations more so than the somewhat vague term '(human) flourishing' – which may easily become elitist or consumerist if it is not related explicitly to contexts of disability, poverty, inequality, injustice, death and destruction. I wish to introduce the notion of 'maturation' in a polemic way against the more indefinite category of 'development'. Education and development are not aims in themselves. Infinite development (if and in so far as it is based on biophysical throughput) cannot be sustained on a finite planet, given various planetary limits.[9] The use of the

8. This section and the next contains a revised and recontextualised version of an argument included in a section entitled 'Removing the obstacles for maturation' in my book *The Earth in God's Economy* (Conradie 2015:287–297).

9. There is no need or room here to debate the (in)famous notion of limits to growth (see Meadows, Club of Rome & Potomac Associates, 1972; Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1992). In an excellent early article, Larry Rasmussen (1975) pointed out that three limitations to sustained economic growth may be distinguished, i.e. *economic* limits (the use of renewable and non-renewable resources), *biospheric* limits (the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the waste products of economic production) and *social* limits (the degree of social change that is possible in a short period).

term maturation would therefore be inappropriate if it meant condoning some form of evolutionary optimism or hidden theory of progress. In fact, the term is introduced for the sake of a critique of such ideologies.

The term maturation may be used with respect to different entities. An individual person can come to maturity. A business, organisation or political party (also a university) can grow in order to reach maturity. One may also speak of the maturation of a language, a culture, even of a civilisation, in order to indicate the need to reach its full potential, allowing it to flourish. One may then speak of a 'world come of age' (Bonhoeffer), even amidst its own self-destruction. It is less clear whether one can speak of the maturation of a community or a country, but countries are certainly also subject to change over longer periods of time. And one can indicate the maturation potential of a seriously good red wine, suggesting perhaps that it will reach maturity at 10 years, may last 20 years (if kept under suitable conditions), sometimes with surprising results, but will inevitably become undrinkable at some stage and may then be kept only as a museum piece for a few 10 years. No wine has become better after centuries of keeping.

For the sake of simplicity, it may be helpful to consider the process towards reaching maturity of an individual human person. This may then become applicable by analogy to organisations and even to larger social systems although such metaphoric extension should be done with circumspection. In an individual person's life, one can identify different dimensions of the process of reaching maturity. Each of these has economic implications (in terms of the availability of resources) that call for further consideration. In each case, maturation may be thwarted by injustices.

Firstly, there is the need for bodily maturation. This requires adequate and nutritious food *but* also adequate health care where needed. Bodily maturity is reached around the age of 20, with some differences between boys and girls.

Linked to that is the ability to exercise control over one's body. Agility and dexterity (e.g. demonstrated in tennis) probably begins to decline around the age of 25 although the mental aspects of some sports allow for good performance well beyond that. Bodily speed can still increase so that sprinters can run their best times around the age of 30. Bodily strength may reach an optimum by let's say the age of 35. Fertility would be better at the age of 20 than at 40 or so. One may certainly consider exceptions and debate the numbers, but no one will dispute that there is indeed a curve of maturation in this regard.

Mental maturation is of course highly complex. The foundations for basic education have to be laid very early in life. If one has not gained an ability to read and write in at least one language by the age of 12 or so, it will be difficult to develop basic academic skills later in life so that peak performance will not be reached. Mathematical agility may peak at the age of 25, whereas language proficiency may peak much later. Of course one may acquire new knowledge until death in ripe old age, but the ability to assimilate such knowledge may peak much earlier, again depending on the nature of the subject matter. Because the assimilation of knowledge depends on the development of a frame of reference it does not correlate with brain elasticity – which may be at its best in infancy.

Emotional maturity is more difficult to assess because it is never complete. Becoming an adult has a lot to do with the ability to control and direct one's emotions. I would suggest that few people would reach a peak before the age of 30 and that a long plateau may be applicable here. Associated with this need for emotional maturity is a form of independence (not being overly dependent upon one's parents). This has implications for housing and furniture, for finding employment, for starting a family of one's own, and so forth. This is a crucial factor in rising patterns of consumption given the presumed need for single-family homes in suburbs.

Motoric skills may begin to decline earlier in life, but one may suggest that those who practise disciplines that require technical skills will reach maturity only later in life. Musical performers, technicians and artisans may produce their best work only in their forties or so. Variations are likely in particular disciplines.

It is generally agreed that social scientists will take longer to reach maturity, given the complexities of social systems and the need to gather insights over a longer period of time. Arguably, most social scientists will reach a plateau only in their fifties but may produce their best work only in their sixties or seventies, but seldom in their eighties.

The wisdom that is required for political decision-making is not easily acquired. Often political leaders gain optimum influence only in their sixties. Those who hold onto political power into their nineties are seldom doing so in the interest of their countries.

Such categories may also be understood in terms of the category of self-realisation but then in the sense that an individual cannot reach maturity without being part of a network of relationships that becomes mature in love. Moreover, that also applies to relationships with non-human living beings and non-living entities. The Self that has to be realised constitutes a community of life. It requires an identification with and participation within the totality of being with porous boundaries between self and world (see Rasmussen 2013:322, also Balcomb 2014:33). Being means interbeing (Rasmussen 2013:295–296); being together (*ubuntu*) is only possible within a larger community of being where all beings share in the same nature. The notion that beings are separate is an illusion. All beings are interconnected. As Rasmussen (2013:294) notes, 'The great illusion is that the other is an object apart from me, rather than a subject in whose presence I am whom I am'.

In short, the process of maturation is multidimensional. It has psychological and pedagogical connotations that make the term attractive also from a social, ethical, religious and indeed a theological perspective. Each of these perspectives may be explored through a thorough literature survey but this cannot be undertaken here.[10] Moreover, reaching maturity is a goal that is widely recognised across cultural differences. It certainly speaks to indigenous wisdom in an African context. It would be in line with the urge to strengthen the moral fabric of society, to build upon the moral and religious foundations of society. It is easily abused by moralisers (patriarchs but also matriarchs) who claim to possess such maturity and assume that they need to teach others accordingly. Yet, the need to search for such maturity is undeniable.

In each case, there are needs that have to be met through services and structuring opportunities in order to reach maturity. My suggestion is that an economics based on the concept of maturation should respond to such needs. The aim of economics is therefore not growth for its own sake but to provide means and services that would enable persons, institutions and businesses to reach maturity and to maintain that maturity over a period of time. That requires various resources (including food), education opportunities, health and other services, but these cannot be regarded as aims in themselves. They are means towards the end of reaching maturity. If teleology is eschewed in ethics, it may well have disastrous consequences. Such an economics would also have to factor in the costs and resources related to decline, death (termination) and recycling.

Maturation and the critique of development

In my view such an emphasis on maturation is preferable to economic discourse on social 'development' or, for that matter, sustainable development. Development is not and cannot be an aim in itself, whereas reaching maturity may articulate the goal of whatever 'development' might entail. There is indeed a need for development but this is aimed at reaching maturity, not at mass consumption.[11] The process towards reaching maturity may be described as maturation – a term deliberately borrowed from the art of winemaking (or wine 'growing').

This has to be understood in the context of the widespread critique against the failure of the development paradigm,

found in secular[12] and ecumenical literature alike.[13] The notion of 'development' emerged in the 1950s as an economic programme proposed by the industrialised world to help industrialising countries to 'develop'. It is hence criticised as a form of cultural Westernisation and homogenisation (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:99). The failure of many 'development' programmes has led (as indicated above) to the need to use a proliferation of qualifiers such as 'social' development, 'community-based' development, 'human-centred' development, or 'sustainable' development to describe what such development could mean. Such qualifiers indicate that development must be something other than the accumulation of material wealth. Development cannot be quantified in terms of economic welfare because it has to focus on improving the quality of life and therefore has to respond to both material and non-material needs, desires and aspirations.

In short, the criticisms raised against the dominant use of the term development include the following:

The notion of development assumes that lifestyles adopted in Western industrialised countries set the standard for 'development' (based on technological progress, industrialisation, economic growth, democracy, education and standard of living) against which other countries must be measured. Moreover, the assumption is that more economic growth is necessary for human development because the overconsumption by the wealthy elite is taken as the standard for human well-being.

This notion of development continues to assume economic growth and is therefore almost by definition not sustainable (Ekins & Jacobs 1995). Infinite economic growth on a finite planet is not possible, at least if such growth correlates with the use of raw materials (including fossil fuels) and can be measured in terms of biophysical through put. The problem is that the concept of sustainable development has been discredited by accelerated consumption of energy and material. Sustainable growth may therefore be regarded as a contradiction in terms (Béguin-Austin 1993). Leonardo Boff (1997:67) concludes that sustainable development, too, is an oxymoron that only leads to confusion; it does not symbolise a new way of looking at the world. In response, some exponents of an environmental economics therefore call for a zero-growth economics, at least in highly industrialised economies. Others call for efficiency standards in order to make better use of non-renewable resources – to make the production of wealth more sustainable. The only sustainable

10. One example may suffice here: In *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* David Korten (2006:42–52) analyses the development of five levels of human consciousness, ranging from the least to the most mature, namely a magical, an imperial, a socialised, a cultural and a spiritual consciousness. The last of these go beyond conventional group loyalties to encompass the well-being a larger whole. Korten extends this analysis to speak of a mature society and a mature democracy, led by citizens with a mature consciousness (2006:48). He argues that 'The culture and institutions of Empire feed on, and reward, psychological immaturity and dysfunction and reproduce it from generation to generation. In so doing they stifle healthy human development and the creative capacity required to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances' (Korten 2006:55).

11. In *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), Walter Rostow identifies five stages for economic growth: traditional societies, preparation for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity (!) and the age of high mass consumption. Accordingly, the aim of development is high mass consumption (quoted in Rasmussen 2013:241).

12. This critique is well articulated by Wolfgang Sachs (1992:1): 'The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crime have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished: development has become outdated. But above all, the hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted: development has grown obsolete'. Sachs continues to offer a critique of the premises on which the development paradigm launched by an inauguration speech of Harry S. Truman is based.

13. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (1992:3) summarises this 'failure of development' in the following way: 'Growth itself was not growing. Even when wealth for some was successfully created, poverty for many more was increasing more rapidly. The "underdeveloped" world was not "catching up" with the developed world. In many respects the gap between the rich and the poor was growing wider, rather than being narrowed'.

alternative is to ensure that economic growth is based on dematerialisation (Swilling 2007; UNEP 2011). This is a feasible economic model but rarely found. A UNEP report (2011:ix) entitled on *Decoupling Natural Resource Use and Environmental Impacts from Economic Growth* indicates that, on a worldwide scale, resource consumption is steeply on the rise while resource consumption is still a reliable companion of economic prosperity. Development can only be sustainable if it is without growth in throughput of matter and energy beyond regenerative and absorptive capacities (Goodland & Daly 1996:1002).[14] This would require 'decoupling', that is, 'using less resources per unit of economic output and reducing the environmental impact of any resources that are used or economic activities that are undertaken' (UNEP 2011:xiii). Dematerialisation then entails using less material, energy, water and land resources for the same economic output (UNEP 2011:4).

Development programmes remain embedded in processes of economic globalisation. As a result, they continue to benefit industrialised economies that control the availability of markets, while so-called developing economies have to carry the environmental and social side effects of economic globalisation disproportionally.

Moreover, the recipients of such aid in so-called developing countries (including South Africa), especially the new elites, seem intent on emulating the overconsumption of so-called developed societies and adopt the growth-consumption paradigm underlying the globalised economy.

In response to such criticisms, the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 indicated eight goals to effectively reduce poverty by 2015 and to provide a basis for sustainable and equitable economic development. This commitment to reducing poverty is based on the assumption that peace and democracy in the world can only be achieved if the social conditions of people living in poverty are improved decisively. These eight goals correctly identify areas of concern which have to be addressed, but do not indicate the final goal of such development. They offer necessary corrections, but these remain within a development paradigm premised upon economic growth.

14. The UNEP report (2011:33–35) distinguishes between economic growth and the physical growth of an economy. Economic growth is measured by the GDP of a country and is defined as 'the added (monetary) value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time, usually a calendar year. It includes the sum of economic value added at every stage of production (the intermediate stages) of all final goods and services produced during that time'. The physical growth of an economy means that 'it spreads over more physical area, or it has a larger material and energy throughput, or it has a larger stock of physical products, buildings or infrastructure'. The report suggests that physical growth is often coupled to increased environmental pressures, damage and resource depletion but also that economic growth can theoretically be decoupled from the physical growth of an economy. The report discusses the global dynamics of resource use and sketches scenarios for the future. It calls for such decoupling of resource use and economic growth but it remains unlikely that the actual use of resources will stabilise soon. The case studies in the report confirm that relative decoupling with respect to resource use is already underway in developed economies, but the report recognises that 'Resource use reductions will be much more difficult but are, ultimately, what really is needed most' (UNEP 2011:51). This suggests a need to distinguish between relative decoupling (in which the growth rate of resources used is lower than the growth rate of GDP, though resource use continues to grow) and absolute reductions of resource use. The report admits that 'Absolute reductions are rare, as they require resource productivity to grow faster than GDP' (2011:72).

Following the conclusion of the timeframe of the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations adopted a revised set of intergovernmental Sustainable Development Goals entitled 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' on 25 September 2015. This document outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 169 associated targets and 304 proposed indicators to show compliance. It may be worthwhile, as a reminder, to include the list of goals here, even though these are widely available:[15]

- Poverty – End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Food – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Health – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Education – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Women – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Water – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Energy – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Economy – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Infrastructure – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
- Inequality – Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Habitation – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Consumption – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Climate – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Marine-ecosystems – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Ecosystems – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Institutions – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Sustainability – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals aim to go beyond the Millennium Development Goals in order to end all forms of poverty. They 'call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the

15. http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed 27 March 2016).

planet. They recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection'.[16] This formulation from the official website indicates to what extent these revised goals remain premised on economic growth and a notion of 'sustainable development'. Although the proximate aims are clearly defined and although it is easier to recognise the factors inhibiting (human) well-being, the conceptual problem regarding the overall aim of development as outlined above remains unresolved.

The underlying problem is that the notion of sustainable development does not escape from the ambiguity of the notion of development itself. The UN definition seems to assume that the meaning of 'development' is evident and that such development now has to become more sustainable. However, the ongoing debates about development indicate that such conceptual clarity is elusive, to say the least. The notion of 'sustainable development' simply cannot be clarified if the ongoing controversies around what 'development' entails are not resolved, especially because such 'development' has failed to bridge the gap between the affluent in the centres of economic power and the impoverished on the economic periphery (see Conradie 2002).

Would the category of 'maturation' be able to overcome the underlying problems indicated in such criticisms regarding the very notion of development? To answer this question will require much further deliberation and critical testing. At this stage any affirmative answer would be presumptuous. Allow me to offer the following considerations nevertheless:

If the overall goal is described in terms of maturation, scarce resources should be allocated appropriately in order to reach the desired goal. Too little and too much food would be unhealthy. Too few opportunities for extracurricular activities would not allow one to reach maturity or to develop one's talents, but no one would benefit from engaging in too many such extracurricular activities so that everything becomes a mad rush from the one thing to the other. Reaching maturity therefore requires a sense of proportion. In principle, economists may identify minimum requirements and benchmarks for what resources and services should be available in order to allow for maturation. These benchmarks may be easier to quantify although maturity itself cannot be quantified. Economists may count what can be counted as long as the trap is avoided of thinking that what economists cannot count does not count. This is indeed the value of the notion of maturation.

It goes without saying that economic injustices, especially in the form of structural violence, would curtail the possibilities for individuals and organisations to reach their full potential, to attain a degree of maturity. There may well be

16.See http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/ (accessed 25 January 2016).

a need for liberation from oppression in order to address systematic distortions that undermine both development and the possibility of reaching maturity. Even without such injustices and without the incredible waste of resources, the required raw materials to enable the current global human population to attain full maturity may have to be stretched to the limit.

The goal of reaching maturity offers a standard for judging economic activities. Economic growth cannot be an aim in itself and is, in any case, unless based on dematerialisation, not sustainable. There may be a need for socio-economic development, but such development is not merely an open-ended process. It has a sense of direction, namely to reach an optimum level of maturation. When that day arrives, the bottle of wine may be opened and enjoyed with food (bread) in the company of friends and (in the case of the holy communion) even of traitors and foes.

A crucial difference between maturation and development should be noted in terms of the curve that it assumes. The curve assumed by the term economic development is incremental (growth upon previous growth) and therefore exponential, albeit that the curve is characterised by periods of slower growth, of reaching plateaus, but always with the hope of new periods of incremental growth. In principle the curve tends upward all the time. This is neither sustainable nor true to life.

Instead, the curve assumed by the term maturation would indicate an initial period of sharper growth, followed by a period of slower growth until gradually reaching the point of full maturity – where the curve may stay for a while before starting a period of slight decline, followed by the possibility of rapid decline. This curve is in line with natural and evolutionary cycles that allow for growth and progression (if not endless progress), but also recognises the inevitability of ageing, death and the need for recycling. It is thus introduced to counter the ideology of progress or an evolutionary optimism.

The plateau of maturation has a crucial function in terms of mentorship. That is the time when a transfer of skills to younger participants becomes desirable. This applies with respect to all the different dimensions of the process of reaching maturity. Consider the role of senior players in a sports team, the presence of grandmothers that offer guidance to young mothers, the value for an apprentice of learning the tools of the trade with a master artisan, the role of music teachers, the mentoring of younger researchers or the schooling in management that future business leaders require. In each case, one would hope that those who have reached maturity would be able to remain on the plateau at least long enough in order to pass the baton on to others.

An added value of the notion of maturation is that the inevitability of degeneration is recognised. Although the term maturation is akin to the widely used metaphor of flourishing, the former indicates a certain directionality

whereas the latter does not recognise the reality of degeneration. One loses one's bodily strength and agility in the middle years of one's life, but that is made up for by the other dimensions where maturity is yet to be reached. Only beyond the age of 80 or 90, the process of degeneration begins to touch upon all dimensions. However, there is still room for mentorship, for transferring wisdom at that age. Degeneration is seldom total. Even in the hour of death, one usually has far more capabilities than at the point of birth. The period of rapid decline is often reasonably short so that one can enjoy some quality of life for a long period of time. The curve is not that of a rainbow, but it does follow natural cycles where recycling is recognised to have some value too.

This sense of degeneration applies to organisations, business corporations, languages, cultures, legislative frameworks and civilisations as well. In the case of language, it may take centuries for a language to flourish to the point that it can produce a Homer, a Virgil, a Shakespeare or a Goethe. It requires the inputs from parents and teachers over long periods of time to reach such a point of maturation. Nevertheless, history provides ample illustration of the rise and fall of empires and of entire civilisations. There is a saying that all civilisation start with the felling of the first tree and collapse with the felling of the last tree. The current global order based on industrialised capitalism will not last forever either. It may not have reached full maturity in terms of technological progress yet. Will it ever be able to attend to the other dimensions of maturity? Or will the available resources be squandered for short-lived pleasures?

Admittedly, this analysis raises new questions related to the process of ageing and the need for proper care for the elderly who are often marginalised in development discourse. It also suggests, if the metaphor is extended to 'ageing' neighbourhoods, for example, in inner cities, the need for regeneration, again following a natural curve and cycle. Old dilapidated structures (including social structures) at times need to give way to new ones.

Conclusion

It would be naïve to think that the word development would somehow be replaced in discourse on socio-economic development by another word such as maturation. There are far too many vested interests at stake while the frequency of references to 'development' would suffice to demonstrate its usefulness in contemporary discourse. There is also no need to drop the term development altogether – as suggested in the provocative title of this contribution. In terms of conceptual clarification there would remain a need for a term to describe a process in which new layers of complexity emerge over time. Such emerging complexity may be found, for example in brain development, in the development of infrastructure on land or in the acquiring of capabilities and skills. As such, a term such as development may also be extended as a metaphor to cover other fields of society.

The aim of this contribution is to warn that metaphors can become over-extended or ossified. Moreover, if a metaphor requires the ability to see the similar in the dissimilar, there is always a danger that dissimilarity may become domesticated. This would happen whenever development is used as a blanket term covering various processes. In order to guard against that it may be helpful to retrieve the full spectrum of process terms as discussed above. My proposal is that the concept of maturation may play a crucial role in this regard because, (1) it is better able to indicate the final goal of the process than most other process terms, (2) it recognises inherent limitations, and (3) it follows natural cycles better than exponential growth, sustained development or endless progress.

The limitations of this philosophical exercise in conceptual clarification need to be acknowledged. It would need to be supplemented by literature surveys of the ways in which the concept maturity is used (and abused), for example, in the context of Christian Ethics,[17] practical theology and discourse on theology and development. Hopefully, this contribution may prompt others to take up this task.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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17. Bonhoeffer's oeuvre may provide a suitable point of departure. See Bonhoeffer's reflections on being a child, towards the end of his study *Act and Being* (1996). He says: 'The child (full of anxiety and bliss) sees itself in the power of what 'future things will bring, and for that reason, it can live only in the present' (p. 159). He addresses in rather cryptic form the eschatological role of baptism as 'new creation', namely of 'those born from out of the world's confines into the wideness of heaven, becoming what they were or never were, a creature of God, a child' (p. 161).

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