

EXAMINING THE CARTESIAN FOUNDATIONALIST REFUTATIONS OF AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

Western epistemology is presented foundationally as the epitome of epistemic systems and the Cartesian foundationalist epistemology is at the heart of this epistemic epistemology. Whatever mode of knowing that seemingly deviates from it becomes an epistemology without foundations and does not worth the name. African epistemology, as a result, is viewed from the Cartesian foundationalist epistemic prism and adjudged to be a cultural mode of knowing fraught with unphilosophical features such as emotions, particularism, mysteries, lack of methodology and subjectivism. African mode of knowing is therefore a foundationless epistemic system and cannot provide the absolute cognitive certainty that characterizes objective human knowledge. The major problem that this research presents is to determine what kind of knowledge system that benefits humanity while seeking epistemic certainty, without undermining objectivity. Using the method of philosophical analysis, this research argues that Cartesian foundationalist epistemology narrows the matrix of human knowledge while seeking an airtight brand of knowledge. It further argues that such knowledge is so conservative that it breeds a closed epistemic system devoid of the dynamism that knowledge systems need. Following from the above complexities, the research concludes that African epistemology rather than being judged with alien paradigms should be appreciated for its dynamic and liberal nature with its diversified methodologies. This owes to the fact it promotes dialogue and collaboration with other disciplines for the purpose of a more holistic problem solving.

Keywords: African epistemology, Cartesian foundationalism, epistemic dynamism, objectivism, particularism

Introduction

The nature of human knowledge is an epistemological issue that has come to determine scholars' attitude towards accepting, rejecting or tolerating knowledge systems in human existence. This constitutes a very significant problem of knowledge which featured and still features in human activities, and which became very prominent in the Modern period of the history of Western

philosophy. In this era, Descartes demonstrated that what qualifies to be knowledge must completely bear the mark of absolute certainty. His position is found in part II of the *Discourse on Method*, marking the epistemological beginning of the quest for knowledge that is absolutely certain. The search, according to Descartes, became necessary because of the skeptical disrepute into which traditional philosophy and other bodies of knowledge had fallen into. He expressed his disillusionment at the uncertainty in existing knowledge systems thus:

... of philosophy, I will say nothing, except that when I saw that it had been cultivated for many ages by the most distinguished men, and that yet there is not a single matter within its sphere which is not in dispute... I reckoned as well-nigh false all that was probable¹

This above is what has been referred to as Cartesian foundationalism which rests on the *Cogito*. The foundationalism of Descartes became a major hallmark for knowledge in Western epistemology as a result of its acclaimed absolute cognitive certainty, which other epistemic orientations lacked.

African philosophical knowledge became one of the notable victims of Cartesian foundationalism as many Western and even African scholars discredited forms of knowledge that are typified as African epistemology on the basis that it lacks the Cartesian kind of foundation and absoluteness. Knowledge claims in Africa do not proceed in such a manner, hence African epistemology is without foundation.

The fall out of this denigration of African epistemology is that African knowledge systems have become very much undervalued in different areas of human existence. Lack of certainty in knowledge in Africa on the basis of Western orientation of knowledge with foundations seems to gain support, even from African scholars. As opportunities present themselves daily in different facets of human lives, ranging from health, education, business, religion to social and political lives among others, little or no place is given to African epistemology. It is therefore the major aim of this research to revivify African epistemology discourse with the aim of showing its relevance in various endeavours of human existence.

^{1.} Rene Descartes, "Discourse on Method," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 85-6.

A Historical Voyage into Cartesian Foundationalism: Knowledge with Absoluteness

The epistemological path taken by foundationalist scholars is that of an error-proof knowledge which is founded on some axiomatic truths. In line with this, Okoye defines foundationalism as a “theory which asserts the certainty of knowledge”.² This indicates that our beliefs are generally justified by other beliefs which are indubitable. The key idea of foundationalism is that it becomes a doctrine that knowledge institutes a structure such that the grounds for the structure need no support themselves. It is this structure that Descartes applied in his foundationalism.

Among the ideas that sharpened Descartes' epistemology are mathematical procedures. This is why Moorman opines that Descartes was “directed by mathematics”³ and it explains why Descartes says mathematics should constitute the foundation of all disciplines if they are to have a solid foundation. The method of mathematics never allows anything that is not 'clear and distinct' to pass as knowledge. Orangun exposes this orientation by saying that “Descartes turned his back on the Aristotelian and scholastic idea of different types of sciences, with their different methods of procedures, and substituted instead the idea of one universal science and of one universal method”.⁴ From this exposition, physics and other natural sciences obviously have their subject-matters that are experiment dependent but all truths about the world must be deduced from self-evident principles.

Descartes' foundationalist methodology also gives credence to Euclidean axioms and postulates in geometry, though with certain reservations. In spite of the reservations, the Euclidean method is significantly evident in the Cartesian deduction method with the following rules:

1. Anything which is not known clearly and distinctly as true should not be accepted as true.
2. Break down complex problems into many necessary simpler parts until a solution is arrived at.
3. The converse situation to (2) above is that ideas should be arranged in an orderly manner, from the necessary simpler parts to the more complex parts.
4. In order to ensure that nothing is omitted, the very detailed facts must be taken into cognizance.⁵

². Chuka Okoye, “Evaluation of Descartes' Rational Foundationalism”, *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 12. No. 1(2011), 35.

³. R.H. Moorman, “The Influence of Mathematics on the Philosophy of Descartes”, *National Mathematics Magazine*, 17. No. 7 (1943), 298.

⁴. Adegboyega Orangun, *Epistemological Relativism: An Enquiry into the Possibility of Universal Knowledge*. (Ibadan: African Oddsey, 2001), 10.

⁵. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 51-2.

Ariew notes of Descartes that “the goal of studies ought to be the direction of one's mind towards having solid and true judgments about everything before it”.⁶ The essence of these rules by Descartes is for the mind to strictly adhere to and arrive at truth in a clear, adequate and orderly procedure. It is in line with this that Hatfield affirms that “this method would recall every truth for the knowledge to which human reason is adequate”.⁷

Another influence on Descartes' foundationalist epistemology is St. Augustine. The thought of St. Augustine and those of Descartes in the build up to the *Cogito* is almost inseparable. This intellectual affinity evidences itself thus: “I know that I live; I know that I think; if I am deceived, I exist; I know that I live if I doubt; I know that I am if I am deceived”.⁸ No doubt, *Cogito Ergo Sum* is an offspring of Augustine's methodic-like reasoning.

In examining the procedures adopted by Descartes in promulgating his epistemology, principles such as intuition, analysis, synthesis and deduction featured very prominently in his foundationalism, especially in the four rules espoused above. Descartes explains intuition to be the conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds fundamentally from the light of reason. Hence, Flage and Bonnen opine that Cartesian intuition “consists in a mental or intellectual 'look' or 'gaze’”.⁹ Analysis is associated with rule (2) which entails simplifying complex problems for clear and distinct understanding. Cartesian synthesis on its own is like a composite knowledge because with already broken down concepts, one can proceed upwards until a more sophisticated knowledge is acquired. Deduction is the “inference of something as following necessarily from some other propositions which are known with certainty”.¹⁰ With simpler parts already established, deductions do not take place all at once but sequentially. All of the above are the bases and explanations of Cartesian foundationalism.

The Nature of African Epistemology: A Concise Exposition

African epistemology is a more holistic interpretation and understanding of reality. The identification of what epistemology is all about from this perspective led Etim to say that

⁶. Roger Ariew, “Descartes and the Tree of Knowledge”, *Syntheses*, 92. No. 1 (1992), 105.

⁷. Gary Hatfield, “Science, Certainty and Descartes”, *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, 2. No. 4 (1988), 252.

⁸. E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Augustine*. (Paris: Random House, 1947), 229.

⁹. D. Flage and C. Bonnen, *Descartes and Method: A Search for Method in the Meditations* (London: Routledge, 1995), 43.

¹⁰. Descartes, R., *Discourse on Methods, Optics, Geometry and Meterology*, trans. P. Olscamp (Indiana Polis: Bobbs-Merril, 1965), 212.

“knowledge is also used to describe the act of being aware of a thing, to witness or experience, to learn or grasp, to be familiar with, to know the cause of something”.¹¹ African epistemology may be simplified to mean unique African ways of knowing as different from certain abstract justificatory modes of knowing from their Western counterpart. The emphatic distinctions of African approaches to knowledge involve the unity of experience, vision, feeling, imagination, recollection and thinking; all at the same time. In fact, this is what reliable knowledge about reality means to the African.¹² As an aspect of African philosophy, African epistemology in its multidimensionality has certain features which include pluralism, perspectivism, provisionalism, relationalism, mysticism and premonition.

1. Perspectivism: Horizon of knowledge for the African is not narrowed in the name of objectivity. It is rather recognized to be perspectival with an individual revising what he originally called knowledge in the past, having come in contact with new variables, forces and perspectives that enable him to reshape and reinterpret his understanding. Different persons, either as groups or individuals, are also at liberty to express separate perspectives of knowledge. Helen Lauer highlighting this perspectival attribute of African epistemology says: “clearly, the contents of our thoughts on any given occasion do not necessarily imply any definite formulation of our beliefs...”.¹³ Perspectivism is accused of having the capacity to foster multiplicity of knowledge systems without regulations but Luer also allayed that fear when she said that “a coherent social structure partly validates and countenances different experiences according to the status of the individual having the those experiences”.¹⁴

2. Ontologism: Knowledge in Africa is significantly connected with the relationship among beings in the hierarchy of beings. According to Uduigwomen, “in the hierarchy of life-forces, God is at the apex. He is followed by the divinities, then the ancestors, then the elders, and so on, in descending order”.¹⁵ Oguejiofor appreciates this perspective when he said that “the interaction of vital forces underlies fundamental reality, and it is this interaction that explains the movement

^{11.} Francis Etim, “An Examination of Ibibio Epistemology,” in *Four Decades of African Philosophy: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. M.F. Asiegbu and J.C. Agbakoba (Ibadan: Hope, 2008), 93.

^{12.} F.A. Aioboman and A.A. Asekhauno, “Is there an 'African' Epistemology”? *Jordin*, 10. No 3 (December, 2012), 15.

^{13.} H. Lauer, “The Politics of Philosophical Discourse about the Concept of Time in Africa”, *African Philosophical Inquiry*, 3. No 3 (June, 2013), 39.

^{14.} Lauer, *Time in Africa*, 43.

^{15.} A.F. Uduigwomen, “The Place of Oral Tradition in African Philosophy,” in *Footmarks on African Philosophy*, ed. A.F. Uduigwomen (Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbinaka, 2002), 38.

and [knowledge] of reality”.¹⁶ This feature of African epistemology is very well associated with old age. The older an individual gets, the closer he interacts with the life-forces and the more knowledge he acquires.

3. Relationalism: This feature is closely connected to ontologism as it refers to knowledge that is interdependent on the relationships existing among individuals, between individuals and communities, and between communities and communities. Relational knowledge in African epistemology also involves the interaction between man and the environment. Interactions at this level explain that knowledge in African epistemology can develop through dialogue and conversation. African epistemology is social in the sense that knowledge is also based on interaction within kinship ties and community relations rather than individualism. The emphasis is that knowledge is not simply abstract and individualistic but inclusive and communal.

4. Provisionalism: By this, African epistemology demonstrates dynamism of knowledge. This means that knowledge is not a static phenomenon but always open to revision among Africans. The notion of absolute cognitive certainty is strange here because no knowledge is ever complete and one's knowledge can be discovered to be erroneous and would need to be revised. On the basis of new encounters and information, knowledge can be re-interpreted.

5. Pluralism: In Africa, there are different modes of knowing such as premonition, spiritual encounters, perception, oral tradition and so on. Premonition is a way of knowing through signs. Kicking one's toe against an object can be interpreted as a bad omen. An individual can acquire knowledge through a message from the spiritual world. Africans also perceive objects with their senses and acquire knowledge in the form of empirical knowledge of western epistemology. Most of the knowledge claims of Africans are as a result of the unwritten tradition of transmitting information from one generation to another.

Foundationalist Critique of African Epistemology

The key point of the criticisms of Cartesian foundationalism against African epistemology is that it (African epistemology) promotes knowledge systems that have no grounds for establishing a justification for its claims. This is the crux of Cartesian foundationalist rejection of African epistemology and it is expressed in different ways.

¹⁶ J. Obi Oguejiofor, *Philosophy and the African Predicament*, (Ibadan: Hope, 2016), 93.

One of the bases on which certainty rests is universal truths. For anything to qualify as certain knowledge, it must be couched in propositions that are epistemologically considered as truth, universally. African epistemology, however, is particularistic to the extent that systems of knowledge in Africa are localized. Epistemic particularism in Africa focuses on the unique aspects of African culture at the detriment of standards for assessing everyone and every culture equally.¹⁷ On the strength of this objection, African epistemology is said to promulgate culture and individual inequality. For instance, the relational feature of African epistemology has the dire implication of making one individual or culture feel superior to the other. Such epistemic system has led African cultures not to have standard laws, for example, for settling disputes. The consequence of this is that most Africans resort to taking the law into their hands by engaging in self-help and trial by ordeal.

According to Akpotor, self-help “in Africa is an old habit... which ... is the rule of force rather than the rule of law. It is used in debt recovery among the Yoruba and others. Its effectiveness is derived from its preventive act...”.¹⁸ He further says that:

Trial by ordeal in Africa usually a mixture of oath-taking and endurance test in cases where hard evidence or witnesses could not be sourced. They could be in form of thong piercing with feather (or Kamba thong oath), or the poison ordeal. In... Ghana, the accused was made to drink water treated with sour and bitter tasting wood. Whoever succumbed to the effect of the poison deal is the offender.¹⁹

The above specific illustrations are just a few of the numerous effects of culture particularity promoted in African epistemology, in the view of the foundationalists.

Another aspect of African epistemology that flows from the foundationalist accusation of lack of foundations for such knowledge systems is the absence of any systematic methodology. Rather than being methodological, African epistemology is primitive, overly pre-logical, fundamentally oral, hugely descriptive and significantly emotional. In Owolabi's view, scholars of African epistemology simply extract knowledge systems from communal thoughts through the mere

¹⁷. FonsTrompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, (London: Nicholas Brealey, 1998), 31.

¹⁸. Akpovoyomo S. Akpotor, “African System of Law and Western Values,” in *Philosophy and Social Change: Discourse on Values in Africa*, ed. TemisanEbijuwa (Ibadan: Hope, 2007), 78.

¹⁹. Akpotor, *African System of Law*, 79.

description of folk ideas and world views.²⁰ He further states that “the descriptive approach has been severely criticized ...not only for using descriptive method that is considered to be anthropological but also for reacting to folk thought in an uncritical manner”.²¹ From the foundationalist perspective, African scholars are engaged in just describing experiences as epistemology. What method of knowledge acquisition does intuition, premonition and relationalism possess? How are the claims to knowledge from such sources justified? In fact, these questions are seen to expose the methodological deficiency of African epistemology which should in no way be equated with Cartesian foundationalist epistemology.

On his own part, Afolayan acknowledges the existence of methodological approach in African *episteme* but expressed the worry that the originality of such knowledge systems was founded in traditional African culture, which is largely oral tradition. In his words, “the fundamental content of these [African] belief systems is defined by the cultural products of language found in oral literature, what NgugiwaThiong'O has imaginatively called *orature*”.²² The non-literate culture, which is comprehensively oral, is therefore the motif for the presentation of African epistemology. How is the belief from an oral account justified? From the perspective of Noah Lemos, one is justified in holding beliefs from such a source if he is infallible about the source or he deduces that source from yet one or more of other sources that he infallibly believes.²³ But what is that source that is prior to oral account in African epistemology that one can infallibly believe in? It is commonplace that infallibility is the cannon of Cartesian foundationalism and since knowledge associated with knowing systems in Africa most often do meet the criterion of infallibility, then African epistemology comes under heavy attack from the Cartesian epistemologists.

The mythical aspect of African epistemology is another reason the Cartesian foundationalists criticize knowledge systems in Africa. Myth, for foundationalism, is fraught with unverifiable components such as spirits and unknown imaginary human figures. Uduigwomen says that “myth relates to a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time. It is a special story about past happenings which are generally held to be real. The actors of the myth are in most cases

^{20.} Kolawole A. Owolabi, “Narrative Model of African Philosophy: The Fagunwa Paradigm,” in *African Philosophy Down the Ages: 10,000 BC to the Present*, ed. Francis Ogunmodede (Ibadan: Hope, 2004), 372.

^{21.} Owolabi, *Model of African Philosophy*, 373.

^{22.} Adeshina Afolayan, “Some Methodological Issues in the History of African Philosophy,” in *Core Issues in African Philosophy*, ed. Olusegun Oladipo (Ibadan: Hope, 2006), 24-5.

^{23.} Noah, Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51.

gods or cultural heroes...”.²⁴ Other actors in the mythical aspect of African epistemology include: spirits, deities, mystical plants and unknown heroic ancestors among others. Foundationalists attack mythical epistemic systems for lack of rationality and justified inference among some other philosophical elements. In terms of rational assessment of African epistemology couched in myth, Western science conception of rationality became the relevant tool that determines whether African epistemology has foundation or not. According to Ogbenika, “...western science rationality can be described as the articulation or understanding of phenomena obtained by means of experimentation and observation.”²⁵ Rationality, however, goes beyond observation and experimentation and also extends to having basic information which necessitates one to apply reason and draw logical inferences. One's knowledge is therefore rational to the extent that it is a product of deduction from already established belief systems. In epistemic systems in Africa, knowledge again is short of this brand of rationality.

Finally, for the Cartesian foundationalists in this work, African epistemology is overly subjective because of its social leanings. Since there is no individual reflection and logicity, then objectivity which is a major goal of foundationalist epistemology is non-existent in African epistemology. What is obtainable in knowledge systems in Africa is socially-acclaimed certainty of knowledge, which is subjective. Bewaji states it thus:

In situations where one is subjectively assured of the truth of one's belief, there is the possibility of the comfort derived from such assurance which may make life meaningful, bearable and even purposeful, but this utilitarian value of such comfort does not translate into truth of what the assurance is directed at. In many instances of emotional, religious, nationalistic and communalistic cases, it is this kind of certainty that accounts for unwarranted dogmatism.²⁶

What Africans seem to be enjoying presently in their knowledge systems is simply the self-assurance of non-existent objectivity. This reduces African epistemology to collective expressions of emotions, passion and psychology. Hence, for the foundationalists, African epistemology exists are a collection of communal beliefs and thoughts euphemized as African epistemology. Although Descartes never directed his attacks on African epistemology, scholars

²⁴. Uduigwomen, “The Nature, Function and Logic of Myth,” in *Footmarks*, 45.

²⁵. Gregory Ebalu Ogbenika, *The Idea of Spirit in African Philosophy: Scientific Rationality and the Phenomena of Spirit in Traditional African Societies: The Relevance of Spirit in the Contemporary World*, (Ibadan: Safmos, 2011), 31.

²⁶. J.A.I. Bewaji, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge: A Pluricultural Approach*, (Ibadan: Hope, 2007), 87.

on Cartesian foundationalism have based their disenchantment against it (African epistemology) on the above reservations.

Refuting the Cartesian Foundationalist Onslaught on African Epistemology

It is important to reiterate that the explanation of the practical values of African epistemology is enough refutation of the misplaced denial of knowledge systems that are peculiarly African. However, it would be rewarding to give some brief responses to the scathing views of African epistemology by the Cartesian foundationalists.

Cartesian foundationalist rejection of African mode of knowing simply on the grounds of being mythical is a form of denying the history of the development of philosophy generally. African epistemology would have obviously had myths as one of the ways of knowing at its earliest stages of development just as it is in Greek philosophy. This means that every culture has its own mythological stage in the development of modes of knowing. To think therefore that Africa is still at the same stage of religious mythology as determining her epistemic systems would be anti-philosophical. Gambattista Vico realized this development long ago and appreciated the stages of mythology and observed them to be three: age of the gods, age of the heroes and the age of men.²⁷ The first stage was the emergence of civilization where there were Greek gods such as the primordial deities, titans, Olympian gods and demigods. Egyptian mythology which was swallowed up in Greek mythology had Amon, Ra, Ptah and Maat among others.²⁸ The second stage had heroes such as Orpheus (musician) and Psyche (lover of eros) who played roles in the emergence of Aristocratic states while the third stage saw the emergence of the early Greek philosophers up till the present. This is the stage of philosophizing. African ways of knowing as part of African philosophy developed in like manner. That African epistemology still discusses such invisible notions like spirits does not mean elements of philosophy such as logic, reflection, rationality and criticality are not parts of the conceptual frameworks within which such notions are examined.

In terms of describing African epistemology as illogical, illiterate and irrational on the basis of not having a culture of writing but rather relying so much on knowing through oral traditions, Cartesian foundationalism also got it wrong. It is imperative to state that the fact that there was no

^{27.} Uduigwomen, *Logic of Myth*, 46

^{28.} Francis Ogunmodede, "Akhenaton's Religious Philosophy", *African Philosophy Down the Ages: 10,000 BC to the Present*, ed. Francis Ogunmodede (Ibadan: Hope, 2004), 159.

writing at a moment in a people's life does not mean that the people are unphilosophical. If such equation of illogicality, illiteracy and irrationality with the lack of writing and foundations holds, then there would not be Western philosophy with Socrates. Oral tradition laced with criticality, logicity and rationality engenders conversation, dialogue and new ideas and perspectives from respondents. It is an undervalued method of doing philosophy. In Emina's view, "Socrates asked primary questions upon which the expositions of his ideas by his interlocutors were based. ...Socrates regarded himself as a midwife of sorts because he merely helped those with the knowledge to bring it out. He brought out what was in each case really the property of his interlocutors, not his own".²⁹ Udoidem, on his part, is of the opinion that lack of writing does not in any way mean illiteracy. In his word, "Socrates argued in favour of the spoken word being more relevant to human creativity than the written word. Thus, Socrates shared the Thamean philosophy of the written word and objected to putting his ideas in writing. He would rather discuss his ideas freely at the market place where they can be contented".³⁰ This work is not justifying the oral tradition in Africa's scholarship development history because it comes with its own negative effects. However, it succinctly points out that the literacy level of a people does not guarantee infallibility of epistemic systems of the people.

Finally, Cartesian foundationalist epistemologists criticized African epistemology for being subjective and emotional to the point of not being able to distinguish between the knowing subject and the known object. This, for them, is part of the reason African epistemology cannot meet the condition of universal truth. Unah exposes this traditional Western epistemologists' orientation thus: "...knowledge of anything presupposes a duality-the knowing mind and the object of knowledge. In other words, there is a subject-object duality in epistemology. There is the epistemic subject and the epistemic object, the knower and the known. ... the external world is known only through an impersonal study of objects..."³¹. But he takes a counter position on this foundationalist attack on African epistemology, thus offering justification for African epistemic systems. In his words,

For the African to know, he has to experience it personally. He cannot completely detach himself from the object of knowledge. What is known is part

²⁹. Kemi Emina, "Introduction to African Philosophy", *Philosophy and Human Existence: GST 102: A Publication of General Studies Directorate, Delta State University*. ed. J.O. Enuwosa, et al. (Abraka: DELSU, 2017), 42.

³⁰. S.I. Udiodem, "The Thebean School on the Value of the Written Word", *African Philosophy Down the Ages: 10,000 BC to the Present*, ed. Francis Ogunmodede (Ibadan: Hope, 2004), 134.

³¹. J.I. Unah, "Ontologico-Epistemological Background to Authentic African Socio-Economic and Political Institutions", *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (Ed.), A.F. Uduigwomen, (Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbinika, 2002), 112-113.

of the knower... In a world where everything interpenetrates, where the physical and the spiritual coalesce, it is not possible to arrive at any meaningful knowledge of reality through reason or sensation alone because the epistemic object itself is a concatenation of the mental and the physical both of which also co-mingle with the epistemic subject or knower.³²

What is clearly evident to humanity across cultures, which Unah exposes here, is that a people's conception of reality determines their epistemic systems. Africans' perception of reality can be interpreted as ontological monism and consequently, the knowledge systems in African cultures can be best described as epistemological holism. That African mode of knowing is not drawn into the dualist controversy of how the subject dispassionately interprets the object is not a reason it should be adjudged as promoting subjectivism. In fact, it is either the ignorance of or the inattention to African ontology that engenders the misplaced rejection of African epistemology, with all its actual and potential benefits.

Existential Values of African Epistemology Amidst the Cartesian Foundationalist Onslaught

Beyond the refutations above, this research reflects on the following benefits of African epistemology: decolonization of dominant knowledge systems, promotion of culturally sensitive policies, cultural revitalization and the encouragement of interdisciplinary approach.

Most African scholars have been oriented towards the Western perception of the meaning and structure of knowledge which are either rational or empirical. This view emanated from the influence of Galileo Galilee's mathematico-deductive method and Francis Bacon's empirico-inductive method in the history of the development of modern science. In Hegel-like expression, the real is either rational or empirical and the rational or the empirical is the real. Africans and African scholars became intellectually and epistemologically colonized as knowledge systems that became operational in Africa must either be by observation or by reason. African modes of knowing became debased and denigrated with western scientific paradigms of knowledge regarded as superior just like their Western-centric race superiority.³³ But African epistemology plays the role of epistemic decolonization. As a reaction to the epistemic colonization of Africa, African epistemology exposes how non-Africans and their African cohorts viewed and

^{32.} Unah, *Ontologico-Epistemological Background*, 112.

^{33.} Ndubuisi Christian Ani, "Appraisal of African Epistemology in the Global System", *Alternation* 20. No. 1 (2013): 296.

interpreted realities with Western lenses. To decolonize the so-called universal standard of understanding realities which shuts out numerous realities in African modes of knowing, African epistemology has attempted to remodel explanations and methodologies of explaining African realities to reflect the contextual situations in Africa.³⁴ It has also gone further to ensure the whittling down of the initial overwhelming influence of Eurocentric epistemological issues in African philosophical discourses. African scholars and non-African scholars alike are now more conscious than they were in the past of contextualizing issues in history, medicine, culture, politics, religion, sociology and other areas of human existence from African perspectives.

Related to the value of African epistemology explained above, there is also its import in drawing attention to development policies that should recognize cultural peculiarities instead of the universal standard built on Western theories of development being the sole standard of development. This point is expressed as a worry when Alumona and Alumona (2024) argue that the Western theories of development have informed African development policies, programmes and policies without taking into cognizance African peculiarities that do not fit into their development matrices. They specifically opined that Western development paradigms exported to Africa are largely descriptive without considering African ethical perspectives to development strategies.³⁵ African epistemology as an ontologically holistic mode of knowing entails the ethical perspectives of African realities as they affect development policies in Africa. It therefore contributes to the enactment and subsequent implementations of policies that acknowledge the incontrovertible fact that knowledge systems are significantly shaped by varied contexts in culture, history, sociality, religion amongst other aspects of human societal existence. In the midst of challenges that confront humanity, African epistemology advocates for the recognition of such variations in cultural contexts as policies and strategies are designed to tackle those challenges such that such solutions, beyond addressing universal problems, will also be culturally responsive.

Furthermore, African epistemology is very valuable in the revivification of African cultural values that are being currently replaced with imperialist values of the West in the name of

^{34.} Abel Akintoye Akintunde & Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale, "Conceptualizing and Framing Realities of Africa's Development", *The Development of Africa: Issues, Diagnoses and Prognoses*, ed. Olayinka Akanle & Jimi Olalekan Adesina (Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 18.

^{35.} Nicholas Onyemechi Alumona and Chinye Magdalene Alumona, "Afro-centric Ethics of Development in a Global Capitalist Order", *Nexus International University Journal of Humanities*, 9. No 1 (2024): 87-9.

globalization. It is a community-centred mode of knowing with values attendant to ontological interconnectedness of beings.³⁶ Such values include but not limited to cooperation, togetherness, solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity, and respect for elders as repository of knowledge among others. What all these values portray are a lived life of communal experience with the spirit of collectivism against that of individualism. This life of collectivism is what the joint concept of *botho/Ubuntu* is all about. This concept makes individual human beings more human and humane but at the advent of colonialism and the subsequent imperialism, these values eroded Africans because territories were not only colonized but Africans' psyches were also colonized. Family names were Anglicized, individuals were alienated from other individuals and communities, traditional passage rites that define individuals from one community social grade to another were equally abandoned.³⁷

African epistemology with its collective modes of knowing repudiates individualism and self-rationality with the attendant effects of alienation and unhealthy competitions among individuals. These effects have the further deleterious effects of waning cultural values that explain the essence of humanity. This is what is prevalent now with the age of globalization, now extended to artificial intelligence with the resultant controversies on the erosion of human dignity and the ethics of humanity, generally. African epistemology is already addressing these issues and has shown effectiveness in the recovery of pristine African cultural values.

Finally in this work, African epistemology accepts the multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach in dealing with problems that confront Africans and humanity, generally. It recognizes that the Western epistemic paradigms operate what is referred to as the Popperian close society and Heidegger's society of no-thingness of being. In both societies, there is a narrow criterion of reality; what fails to meet this criterion means nothing and nothing should be discussed concerning it. This is what operates in Western epistemic systems; a monolithic approach to problem solving. On the contrary, African epistemology having a holistic ontological background brings about more holistic ways of solving complex problems. It promotes dialogue and collaboration across disciplines; what seems insoluble through the paradigms of reason and observation can have solutions outside the Western orthodox methods. African epistemology therefore is very accommodating and allows for the spirit of complementarity while its validation

³⁶. Tosin Adeate and Anusharani Sewchurran, "African Epistemologies and the Decolonial Curriculum", *Acta Academia*, 55. No 1 (2023), 11.

³⁷. RamathateDolamo, "Botho/Ubuntu: The Heart of African Ethics", *Scriptura*, 112. No 1 (2013), 7.

procedures are multifaceted depending on the perspective of knowledge claims, as discussed above.

Conclusion

This essay is a renewed awakening of the relevance of the African modes of knowing in human endeavours. Cartesian foundationalist epistemology carried out an onslaught against African epistemology with the description that it (African epistemology) is an epistemology without foundations and cannot stand the rigours of what qualifies to be called epistemology. However, this work has demonstrated that foundationalist epistemology is out-fashioned and too narrow a mode of knowing to be a dependent nature of human knowledge. African epistemology is rather a more fashionable mode of knowing with its methodological diversity and dynamism.

This research therefore is of the view that African knowledge sees knowledge as all-encompassing and interconnected and abhors fragmentation of modes of knowing, thus promoting integrative knowledge. This orientation of African epistemology makes room for the incorporation of science and technology into indigenous epistemic systems, where necessary. Conversely, it also calls for science and technology to infuse African modes of knowing into their existing procedures. This way, certain complex problems seemingly devoid of solutions because of isolated approaches from a perspective can be better handled. The goal of epistemology therefore should be pragmatic rather than absolute certainty as the latter is Utopian and describes epistemic systems as non-revisionable; a controversy that is competently addressed in African epistemology because of its dynamism without undermining objectivity.

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