

EXPLORING AFRICAN WORLDVIEW AS A PHILOSOPHY: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE FEATURES, VALUES, AND IMPACTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE GLOBAL WORLD

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Abstract

This examines African worldview, explores the features, values, its conceptual underpinnings, and the profound impacts on contemporary African philosophy and the world in its entirety. African worldview which deeply rooted in communalism, spirituality, and harmony with nature, lays the foundation for understanding the cultural, ethical, and epistemological frameworks that shape the contemporary African people's life style. The features of African worldview included the interconnectedness, relationality, and the integration of material and immaterial worlds. The core value "Ubuntu", humanity and interconnectedness, addresses the issues of communal well-being over that of individuals. African worldview has significantly impacted contemporary African philosophy. It provides the unique lenses through which the critical issues such as identity, justice, development issues, etc are addressed. The study highlights how the synthesis of traditional African values and the modern philosophical thought pattern fosters an evolving study that resonates within the global philosophical traditions. Exploring these, this paper will contribute to deeper apprehension of African philosophy's relevance in addressing not only the modern African challenges, but that of the globalized world.

Keywords: Worldview, African worldview, Contemporary African Philosophy, Values, Global World

Introduction

African worldview represents a rich and diverse tapestry of cultural, philosophical, and spiritual perspectives that have evolved over centuries. Rooted in the traditions, beliefs, and practices of various African societies, this worldview provides a holistic framework for understanding human existence and the universe. At its core, the African worldview emphasizes interconnectedness, communalism, and the inseparability of the material and spiritual existences. These foundational principles emphasized how individuals and communities perceive realities, construct knowledge, and approach ethical and social responsibilities. Features of African worldview such as relationality, respect for nature, and the centrality of community, stand in contrast to the individualistic and materialistic tendencies often associated with Western worldviews. Concepts like Ubuntu—the idea that "I am because we are"—epitomize the collective values that define African societies. African spirituality, which underscores the dynamic relationships amongst humanity, ancestors, and divinity, plays a significant role in shaping moral and ethical frameworks. The influence of African worldview extends beyond traditional societies, deeply shaping contemporary African philosophy. Modern African thinkers draw from these values and concepts to address the challenges of identity, decolonization, justice, and development. Blending traditional African wisdom with that of contemporary philosophical discourse, they insighted into the global challenges and enrich the broader philosophical landscape. For broader understanding of the dimension to which this topic intends to address, the paper will explore the conceptual framework of the topic of the study viz; African worldview and its features, contemporary African philosophy, the values African people keep, and global world. The paper will proffer answer to the aching question, whether African worldview is a philosophy, examines the impacts of this worldview on the contemporary African philosophy. Through this

exploration, therefore, it will highlight also, the impacts of African thought patterns in a rapidly globalizing world and its potential to offer transformative perspectives for addressing modern challenges. Conceptual Exploration of the keywords of the topic

What is African Worldview?

To answer the question on the meaning of African worldview necessities looking first at the meaning of world view.

What is Worldview?

Worldview etymologically, is a direct translation of the German word "Weltanschauung": Welt "World" Anschauung: "View" or "Perception". Worldview refers to the comprehensive framework of beliefs, values, and assumptions through which an individual or a group interprets and interacts with the world around them. It shapes how a people perceives reality, makes decisions, understands existence, and the purpose of human life. It often includes perspectives on the fundamental questions about reality, morality, knowledge, and human destiny. Worldview according to Naugle (2002:7) is, "an interpretative framework through which one understands, and engages the environments around them, integrating beliefs, values and actions." Ninian (1983:8) defines worldview as "a set belief and practices which orient individuals in the world and guide them in their actions." Following suit, James (2009) says worldview is "a commitment, a fundamental orientations of the hearts that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions about the constitution of reality that provides the foundation on which we live, move and have our beings.", etc. The concept of worldview universally, is culture bound. It encompasses of both the cosmological, metaphysical (ontological) and eschatological assumptions about reality entertained by a people."

African Worldview?

African worldview encompasses the collective ways in which many African cultures perceive, interpret, and interact with the world around them. African worldview is shaped by the African traditions, beliefs, value system and practices that have evolved over centuries. Although Africa is a versed continent with over 50 countries and thousands of cultures, certain themes and principles are common across the society.

Is African Worldview a Philosophy? If the Answer is in Affirmative, What Factors Make it a Philosophy? African worldview is a philosophy. It embodies a system of thought and understanding that addresses fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, values, and reality as a whole, much like other philosophical traditions. Having acknowledged the philosophical undertone of African worldview, below are the factors that make it a philosophy:

1. Ontological (Study of Being) Factor

African worldview places much emphasis on interconnectedness, and communal nature of existence. Concepts such as Ubuntu ("I am because we are") highlights the relational nature of African being, extending to human being, ancestors, nature, and the spiritual realm. African worldview explores the nature of reality, focusing on the unity between the material and spiritual worlds. Complementing this view, Gyekye (1996:3) described African worldview as "emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things, including the physical and spiritual realms, with communal values being placed at the center of human existence." Menkiti(1984:171-181) in concordance to this, highlights communal nature of African worldview noting, "in African thought, the community defines the person and individuality is derived through partisipation in community life."

2. Epistemological Factor

African philosophy incorporates oral traditions, proverbs, myths, and folklore as sources of wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge here, is considered experiential, communal, and deeply tied to lived experiences and cultural practices.

3. Ethical/Moral Factor

African thought lays emphasis on morality through communal values, harmony, and mutual respect. Ethical conduct in this context, is guided by the well-being of the community rather than individualistic principles.

4. Metaphysical Factor

African worldview often acknowledges a spiritual dimension of life, including the role of ancestors, spirits, and a supreme being or God. This metaphysical aspect seeks to explain the nature of existence and humanity's place in the universe.

5. Cosmological (Understanding the Universe) Factor

African cosmology views the universe as a holistic system where all elements—living and non-living, seen and unseen—are interconnected. This holistic perspective seeks to explain the origin, structure, and order of the world.

6. Practicality and Pragmatism Factor

African worldview as a philosophy is practical and action-oriented, seeking to address real-life issues such as social harmony, justice, and human flourishing. It is a philosophy that is lived and applied rather than abstract or speculative.

7. Holistic Approach

Unlike the Western worldview that focuses on individualism, and compartmentalization of reality, African worldview is holistic, integrating dimensions of life such as social, spiritual, and environmental into its philosophy.

African worldview is a philosophy. It systematically addresses the existential questions on there is, provides frameworks for understanding and interpreting reality, and guides human actions and moral conducts. Its unique characteristics, such as its communal focus, spiritual depths, and holistic perspective, significantly distinguished it as a rich and valid philosophical tradition

Features of African Worldview

African worldview is characterized by the following traits:

1. Holistic Perspective

The African worldview sees the universe as interconnected and holistic. There is no sharp division between the physical and spiritual worlds; they are seen as intertwined and mutually influencing one another.

2. Communalism

African societies prioritize community over individualism. Identity is closely tied to one's family, community, and ancestors. The saying, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Ubuntu) reflects this communal ethos.

3. Religion/Spirituality

Spirituality plays a central role in the African worldview. The divine, ancestors, spirits, and nature are all integral to understanding life and the cosmos. Many African traditions believe in a Supreme Being, along with various deities, spirits or gods that influence daily life. Drawing from this context, Mbiti (1996) says "African worldview is communal and spiritual. Africans are notoriously religious, and each aspect of life is suffused with a sense of the sacred thereby making religion an integral part of African worldview."

4. Relationship with Ancestors

Ancestors are considered intermediaries between the living and the spiritual realm. They are revered, consulted, and honored through rituals and ceremonies because they are believed to provide guidance and protection.

5. Harmony with Nature

Nature is not seen as separate from humanity, but as part of the same divine creation. Respect for the environment and living in harmony with it is a core aspect of many African cultural practices.

6. Oral Tradition

Knowledge, history, and wisdom are passed down orally through stories, proverbs, myths, and songs. Oral tradition is a key way of preserving cultural values and educating younger generations.

7. Cyclic View of Time

Time is often viewed cyclically rather than linearly. Life is seen as a series of repeating cycles, including birth, life, death, and rebirth. This cyclical view often shapes how events and life stages are understood.

8. Importance of Rituals and Symbols

Rituals and symbols are used to mark important events, transitions, and relationships with the spiritual world. These include rites of passage, ceremonies, and festivals.

9. Collective Morality

Moral values are derived from what benefits the community rather than the individual. Ethical behavior is measured by how actions impact the group, emphasizing virtues like generosity, respect, and responsibility.

10. Dynamic and Adaptive

While rooted in tradition, the African worldview is also dynamic, adapting to modern influences while maintaining its core principles.

African worldview has created much impacts on African people's approaches to economic activities, political organizations and governance, as well as health, education, and relationships, thereby, shaping unique lenses through which the world is understood, and continues to play a vital role to authenticate the contemporary African identity and culture.

What is Value?

The meaning of "value" varies depending on the context. Broadly, value refers to worth or importance, that is, the significance or usefulness of something. The concept of value, could be looked at the dimensions of; educational value, economic (monetary) cum business value, ethical (moral principle) and aesthetical - artistic values, numerical value, quantitative and qualitative cum measurement valves etc. The value of concern this context,, is that of the ethical/moral principles, which centers on the beliefs or standards that guide behaviors and decisions of individuals, that are conventionalized in the communities. Values according to Frankena (1973:6) are, "the principles or standards which individuals consider worthwhile and desirable in life as approved by the community." This, according to Singer (2011:11) consists of "the significance attributed to actions, objects or ideas based on moral and ethical principles." From the sociological dimension, Macionis and Plummer (2012:42) described values as "the cultural standards which guide individuals' actions and judgments in the society." The

concept of values could be weighed base on the economic cum business transactions aspects of human activity. From this therefore, Marshall (1890:48) explains value as "the measure of the worth of goods and services, typically determined by the utility or, the market prices they command." Rokeach (1973.5), approaching the word value from the psychological angle of life, defines it as, "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-states is personally/socially preferable to its opposite."

Values kept by African People

African values are diverse and deeply rooted in the continent's cultural, social, and historical contexts.

While they vary among different countries, ethnic groups, and communities, here are some common core values shared across African societies viz:

1. **Ubuntu (Humanity/Social compassionate)** This emphasizes interconnectedness, compassion, and mutual support. Ubuntu is often expresses as "I am because we are", highlighted the values which community or collective well-being have over individuals that constituted it. The value promotes kindness, empathy, and respect for others.
2. **Respect for Elders and Authorities:** African elders are seen as the custodians of wisdom, tradition, and experience. Hence respecting them is an important virtue in African. This therefore, reinforces the importance of guidance, mentorship, and inter generational knowledge transfer.
3. **Strong Family Ties:** Family is the cornerstone of African societies. Both nuclear and extended families are highly valued, with a fervent emphasis on maintaining harmony in the fulfillment of obligations. This however, encourages collective responsibility and emotional support.
4. **Sense of Community Solidarity:** Community often functions as an extended families, where individuals work in solidarity for mutual aids, and common good. This value builds and fosters unity, and cooperations to ensure the well-being of all the members in community. This of course, complements Julius Nyerere's "Ujamaa Villagization" ideology and the Igbo people's maxims of "Bunu, bunu, ibu anyi danda, onye aghana nwanne ya" and "Umunna bu ike (igwe bu ike)". These ideologies cum maxims encourage solidarity, the act of being one's brothers keepers, that's helping one another in the situation of needs.
5. **Respect for Nature/Land:** Many African tradition perceived land and environment as sacred and integral to human existence. This however, encourages sustainable living with deeper connections to the natural world.
6. **Spirituality and Religious Faith:** Spirituality plays central roles in African culture, these could come through the traditional African religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islamic religious/faiths practices. Many African people believe in higher powers and the interconnectedness of both the physical and spiritual realms. This value guides moral behaviors, fosters hopes, resilience and responsibilities.
7. **Hospitality/Generosity:** Sharing resources evenly with one another, as well as warmth welcoming of strangers, are amongst the values keep in African culture. These values, nevertheless, strengthens social bonds and creates goodwill.
8. **Hard Work and Resilience:** Persistence, hard work, and adaptability are admired traits of the African people, especially in overcoming challenges. This inspires perseverance and a strong work ethic.
9. **Honesty/Integrity:** Truthfulness and maintaining one's moral integrity are emphasized in many African cultures. These promote trust and social harmony.

10. Oral Tradition and Story telling: Stories, proverbs, and songs are used to pass down knowledge, values, and history from generation to generation. This value is to preserve cultural heritage and educates future generations.
11. Obidience to Custom and Tradition: Rituals, ceremonies, and customs are essential while celebrating life events, resolving conflicts, and maintaining societal order. This nevertheless, reinforces identity and continuity of culture.

The values which African people keep, in essence, have contributed much to the rich tapestry of African identity and have profoundly influenced the individuals interaction with one another and with the environments in which they inhabit.

Contemporary African Philosophy

Contemporary African philosophy is the modern, and systematic study of African realities, culture, and thought. It integrates traditional African knowledge system with critical reflection and analysis to address issues like identity, ethics, politics, and decolonization. It challenges the Eurocentric ideas and explores the impacts African worldview to the global philosophical discourses

Reasons/Significance for Development of Contemporary African Philosophy

Contemporary African philosophy emerged in response to colonial disruptions of African society, the need for intellectual decolonization, and the quest to reclaim African identity and heritage. Post-colonial struggles, globalization, and the desire to address Africa's unique challenges like, governance, development, and cultural preservation are also included to the factors for its development. This African philosophy seeks to affirm Africa's intellectual autonomy and provide solutions to African and universal issues. These reasons and significance are categorized as follows:

1. Decolonization of Knowledge

Challenge to Eurocentrism and Reclaiming African Identity: African philosophers sought to counter the dominance of the Euro-Western philosophical frameworks in defining philosophy, emphasizing African contributions and perspectives. Post-colonial thinkers emphasize the need to restore indigenous ways of knowledge and understanding that were marginalized during colonial rule.

2 Cultural Revival and Identity

Restoring African cultural heritage is one of the reasons contemporary African philosophy was developed. African philosophers struggled to reclaim traditional African values, languages, wisdom and systems. Approaching philosophy at the angle of identity formation: Contemporary Africans reflected on what it means to be African in a modern, globalized world.

3. Critical Engagement with Tradition

Questioning African Myths and Practices: Philosophers critique certain traditional beliefs and practices to align them with contemporary human rights and ethical standards. Balancing traditional African thought system with modern and global philosophical trends is amongst the reasons contemporary African philosophy developed

4 Addressing Postcolonial Realities

Tackling social problems such as governance, corruption, social justice, and development in African context is also the reason for developing contemporary African philosophy. For example, group of African political philosophers named Pan Africanist foster unity and collective progress across the continent.

5. Philosophy of Liberation

Resistance to Oppression is the reason contemporary African philosophy came to be. Contemporary African philosophers often engaged to tackle themes such as liberation, both physical (e.g. independence movements) and intellectual (freedom from Western hegemony).

Empowerment: It seeks to empower African societies through critical thinking and self-reliance.

6. Engagement with Global Philosophy

Dialogue on Universalism: African philosophers intended to contribute to global philosophical discussions, by offering unique insights from African perspectives. Thus It challenges the idea that Western philosophical principles are universally applicable.

7. Focus on Communalism

Ubuntu Philosophy: The key theme is Ubuntu, which emphasizes the communal relationships, mutual care, and collective well-being over individualism.

Ethics of Care: This approach redefines morality within the context of African communal life.

8. Philosophical Pluralism

Multiplicity of Voices: Contemporary African philosophy recognizes the diversity of African cultures, histories, and experiences, resisting the notion of a singular "African philosophy."

Cross-Cultural Philosophy: Engages with other philosophical traditions, creating a space for hybrid and interdisciplinary approaches.

Addressing these themes, contemporary African philosophy provides a framework for understanding the status of African society in the modern world while grounding itself in the continent's rich intellectual traditions.

Critique on African Worldview

Critiques on African worldview often focused on perceived generalizations, essentialists perspectives, and the issues of modern relevance. These critiques stemming from the philosophical, cultural, and practical considerations include:

1. **Essentialism and Homogeneity:** Critics argued that African worldview often portrays Africa as a monolithic entity, overlooking the continent's vast diversity in culture, beliefs, and practices. This generalization risks erasing individual and regional differences.
2. **Romanticization of Traditional Belief:** Some interpretations given to African worldview is that it emphasizes much on traditional values and communal life, often romanticizes precolonial Africa, while ignoring historical complexities of the internal conflicts in the social hierarchies.
3. **Resistance to Modernity:** Traditional African focus on communalism, spirituality, and traditional knowledge is sometimes seen as incompatible with modernity, technological advancements, and the global competitiveness, raises concerns about adaptability in a rapidly changing world.
4. **Determinism and Fatalism:** Critics claimed that the spiritual and communal focus of African worldview encourages fatalistic attitude, and potentially discourages individuals initiative and innovation.
5. **Gender Inequality:** Some aspects of traditional African worldview have been criticized for perpetuating patriarchal systems, and thus limiting women's roles and opportunities in the society.
6. **Subjectivity and Relativity:** African worldview's emphasis on the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual world, has been criticized for lacking objectivity. Though it's often valued in the Western rationalist traditions, particularly in areas like science and policy-making.
7. **Colonial Influence on the Interpretation of African worldview:** Critiques also question whether African worldview is authentically African or the constuct influenced by colonial narratives and Western frameworks. While these critics highlighted potential limitations, they also encouraged the deeper engagements with African philosophies by promoting the nuanced understandings that balance tradition and modernity.

The Impacts of African Worldview on the Contemporary African Philosophy

African worldview crested significant impacts on contemporary African philosophy. This it did via shaping the themes, methods, and approaches. The impacts nevertheless are centered on the following:

1. Holistic Approach to Reality

African worldview emphasizes interconnectedness between individuals, communities, nature, and the spiritual realm. This holistic perspective has inspired contemporary African philosophers to challenge Western dualisms (e.g., mind/body, individual/society) and advocate for integrated ways of understanding existence.

2. Communalism

The African emphasis on communal living and collective responsibility informs contemporary African philosophy's focus on ubuntu (human interconnectedness) and communal ethics. This contrasted the Western philosophy's emphasis on individualism and highlights the centrality of community in moral and political thought.

3. Interconnectedness of Knowledge

Traditional African thought (African Worldview) does not separate philosophy, religion, and culture. Contemporary African philosophy reflected this by adopting many interdisciplinary approaches to integrate metaphysics, ethics, politics, and sociology into its discourse.

4. Oral Traditions and Indigenous Knowledge

African oral tradition shaped contemporary philosophical methods, encourages the inclusion of proverbs, folklores, and myths in philosophical analysis. This has expanded the scope of philosophy beyond written traditions.

5. Pragmatism

African worldview's focus on practical solutions to communal challenges influences contemporary African philosophy's emphasis on addressing real-world issues such as governance, human rights, and economic development.

6. Spirituality and Cosmology

African cosmological perspectives which integrated the material, and spiritual realms, have impacted much on the metaphysical discussions of contemporary African philosophy, and thus emphasized spirituality as the fundamental aspect of human existence.

7. Ethics and Morality

African ethical systems, rooted in concepts like reciprocity, harmony, and respect for all beings, have enriched moral philosophy, providing alternatives to Western moral frameworks.

8. Decolonization of Thought

The African worldview's rejection of imposed colonial ideologies has empowered contemporary African philosophers to reclaim indigenous knowledge and critique the Eurocentric paradigms by fostering intellectual autonomy. African worldview summarily impacted much on the contemporary African philosophy by enabling its continuity in the development of the unique perspectives which address the continent's historical, cultural, and existential realities while contributing to global philosophical discourse.

Impacts of African Worldview on the Global World

The African worldview, shaped by its rich cultural, philosophical, and spiritual traditions, has made significant contributions to the global world in various domains. Here's how:

1. Philosophy and Ethics

The African concept of Ubuntu ("I am because we are") has influenced global ideas about community, interconnectedness, and shared humanity. It emphasizes compassion, collective responsibility, and mutual respect, which resonate in discussions about social justice and peace building worldwide.

African ethical frameworks have contributed to discourses on environmental sustainability, highlighting the harmony between humans and nature.

2. Cultural Influence

African music, dance, and art have profoundly shaped global culture. Jazz, blues, reggae, and hip-hop have African roots, while African art and fashion have influenced global aesthetics.

Festivals and rituals rooted in African traditions, such as Carnival in Brazil and the Caribbean, highlight the global impact of African diasporic cultures.

3. Spirituality and Religion

African spiritual systems, like Ifá, Vodun, and other traditional beliefs, have influenced global religious practices and inspired movements in the African diaspora, such as Santería, Candomblé, and Rastafarianism.

These spiritual traditions have enriched global discourses on holistic health, healing, and mindfulness practices.

4. Politics and Social Movements

African struggles against colonialism and apartheid inspired global movements for decolonization, civil rights, and racial justice. Leaders like Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Lumumba became symbols of resistance and freedom.

Pan-Africanism fostered solidarity among African descendants worldwide, influencing political thought and cultural pride in the global African diaspora.

5. Knowledge Systems and Science

African indigenous knowledge systems have provided insights into medicine, agriculture, and environmental management, particularly in addressing challenges like climate change.

The agricultural techniques of ancient African civilizations, such as terracing and crop rotation, have influenced sustainable farming practices globally.

6. Language and Communication

African languages and storytelling traditions have influenced global literature and oral traditions. The proverbs and folktales reflect universal values and wisdom. Hence this Afrocentric narratives have shaped global discussions on identity, heritage, and cultural preservation.

6. Diaspora Contributions

The African diaspora has significantly contributed to global intellectual, artistic, and scientific advancements. Figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, Chinua Achebe, Maya Angelou, and more have had a lasting impact on literature, philosophy, and human rights discourses.

In essence, African worldview, with emphasis on interconnectedness, community, resilience, and creativity, continues to shape global perspectives, fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching the human experience.

Conclusion

Exploration of African worldview reveals a rich tapestry of thought that is deeply rooted in communal values, spirituality, interconnectedness, and respect for the natural world. Key features such as Ubuntu, which emphasizes communal harmony and human dignity, and reverence for the ancestral guidance, highlighted the distinctiveness of this worldview. Its values—collectivism, harmony, respect, and moral responsibility—serve as a cornerstone for ethical decision-making and societal organization. African worldview nevertheless, does not escaped criticisms. Some argued that its traditional focus on communalism can inhibit individual autonomy, while others critique its adaptability in an increasingly globalized and technologically driven world. Additionally, the impact of colonialism has led to the tensions between traditional African values and Western influences, hence prompting questions about the authenticity and evolution of the African philosophical identity.

Aside these challenges, African worldview has made profound contributions to contemporary African philosophy, inspiring movements toward decolonization, cultural revival, and social justice. Globally, it offers alternative perspectives on pressing issues such as environmental sustainability, conflict resolution, and the ethics of globalization. By integrating the African worldview into broader philosophical and practical discourses, humanity can benefit from its emphasis on interconnectedness, inclusivity, and the holistic understanding of existence. Ultimately, African worldview not only enriches the global intellectual landscape but also reminds the world of the enduring value of human and ecological harmony.

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