

AN EXAMINATION OF CAUSALITY: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Causality simply connotes the idea that everything has a cause, though for some western scholars, this idea is just a figment of imagination of people. David Hume for instance attributes this to the habit of associating events with causes which is not empirically verifiable. For the African however, causality permeates his cosmology and worldview the idea of chance is completely alien to the African. The universe is an ordered universe where everything is caused and potentially explicable. This study explores the concept of causality in African thought and the implications it portends therein and argues that, though causality is at the heart of the African worldview, it has some implications that should not be overlooked because of the consequences they portend for social relations and development in African societies. The study combined the hermeneutical, analytic, and evaluative methods in its investigation.

Keywords: Causality, Metaphysics, African Metaphysics

Introduction

According to Aristotle, there are two ways of accessing reality. First reality can be accessed through knowing individual things or events as individual things and events. And as they appear to us; this kind of knowing does not include the ultimate causes of the reality that is accessed or known. This kind of knowledge is mediated by the senses and is common to all. Secondly, we can approach reality through going beyond the perceptive instruments of the senses, beyond the perception of things and events as individuals and isolated to the perception of the ultimate causes or the underlying principle of reality. A cause here implies that which brings about a certain effect. According to Kanu, the Ionians were concerned with this level of knowing when its representatives like Thales spoke of water as the underlying principle of being; Anaximander spoke of a neutral element as the ultimate cause of reality and Anaximenes spoke of air as the basic unity in the midst of plurality of things¹⁴⁸. Aristotle (in Aja) classified this kind of knowledge as philosophical knowledge born out of intellectual reflection. He classified the causes of things into four: material cause, which implies the material a thing is made off, the formal cause which is the form or essence which makes a thing that particular thing, the efficient cause, which connotes the source or agent responsible for bringing a thing into being, the final cause which is the purpose or end for which a thing is made¹⁴⁹. Causality is one the various problems that

¹⁴⁸ Ikechukwu A. Kanu "Being Qua Belongingness: "The Provenance and Implications of Pantaleon's Concept of Being" *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 9. 3. 218-223, 2012

¹⁴⁹ Egbeka, Aja. "Metaphysics: An Introduction" (Enugu: Donze, 2001)

philosophers had grappled with over the years. It is perennial issue that has attracted the attention of thinkers in all times and climes.

Causality is the context from which African metaphysics sprung. The African metaphysical thought is re-affirmation of dynamism and vitalism that does not limit causation to the empirical world but freely blends and relates empirical causation with supernatural causation. The concept causality necessitated a myriad of practices associated with African metaphysics. African metaphysical doctrines can only be made meaningful and defended on the basis of causality. It is imperative therefore to interrogate the dynamics and relationships that underlie causality in African metaphysics and extent to which African metaphysics is grounded on causality. In African ontology, the problem of causality is one of the central issues that elicits close observation by an average African. The idea of chance is alien to the African as almost anything and everything is potentially explicable. Extraordinary occurrence however provokes the curiosity of the African. The questions however are:

1. is every occurrence necessarily tied to a cause?
2. What is the nature of such a cause?
3. Do this have social implications for the African?

This study seeks to critically examine these posers for an understanding of what causality entails for the African.

The Concept of Causality

The concept of causality predates the Socratic era, however, it was Plato who first advanced the principle of causality: everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause, for nothing can come to be without a cause¹⁵⁰. Plato's placed emphasis on the causal importance of formal causes which through analysis would imply that nothing can be unless there be a changeless pattern of formal phenomenon is a mere appearance. Aristotle is however credited with advancing an extensive account of causes. According to Aristotle, in reference to any singular entity, the question "what is it this?" could be approached from four different ways, each of which corresponds to what he called a cause, in the sense of something without which the thing would not be¹⁵¹. Thus reference is made to material cause each time we are concerned with questions like: "what is this thing made of?" efficient cause with questions like: "who is this made by"? final cause for questions like: "what is this made for"? and formal cause for questions like: "what is it that makes it what it is and not something else"?

¹⁵⁰ Plato. "Timaeus and Critias 28" (trans) D. Lee, Penguin Classics (Harmon worth Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971)

¹⁵¹ Aristotle. "The complete works of Aristotle, I and II, Ed. J. Barnes, (Princeton, N.J. 1984)

The great Scottish philosopher David Hume discussed the notion of causality at length in his “Treatise on Human Nature” and “Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding”. Beginning with the empiricist assumption that the content of all of our ideas had to be drawn from experience, Hume set out to determine what the content of our idea of causation is. One thing we normally take to be a central aspect of the idea, Hume claimed is the notion of necessary connection. If we believe that something A causes the effect B, we take B to have been a necessary consequence of A given that A happened in the way it did, it was necessary that B should occur.¹⁵² Yet turning to experience, Hume was unable to find any such necessary connection. In both the outer and inner worlds, all we experience is a succession of things-nowhere do we sense anything stronger than temporal connection between things. Where then does the thought of necessary connection come from? Hume claimed that our apparent experience of necessary connection was nothing other than the experience of a tendency of our own minds to anticipate consequences based on past associations. For instance, once we have experience lightning followed by thunder a number of times, our minds begin to expect thunder every time we Lightning.¹⁵³ the implication here is that, Hume rejects the notion of causation, and attributed it to our minds configuring necessary connections that do not exist. Hume’s analysis has been used as an argument against metaphysics, ideology and attempts to find theories for everything. A.J. Ayer and Karl Popper both claimed that their respective principles of verification and falsifiability fitted Hume’s ideas on causality.

The most famous response to Hume’s revisionist/skeptical views on our notion of causation comes from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. In his Critique of Pure Reason and Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Kant accepted Hume’s claim that we could not draw the notion of causation from outer experience, but drew the opposite conclusion from Hume. Whereas Hume combined this claim with the claim that all the contents of our ideas had to come from experience, Kant combined the claim with the claim that it is unquestionable that our notion of causation involves genuine necessary connection.¹⁵⁴ From that, Kant concluded that the empiricist claim is false in this case and that the concept of causation is a priori -not drawn from experience.

In his theory of agent causation, Thomas Reid maintained that, we all have an idea of productive cause. These productive or efficient causes for Reid are causes that have the power to bring about certain events. Efficient causes have the power to bring about changes. According to him, events in nature, humans come to realize,

¹⁵² David, Hume. “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Sec. VII., 1748

¹⁵³ David, Hume “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, sec. VII., 1748

¹⁵⁴ Kant, “Critique of Pure Reason” trans, N. Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1929)

are passive rather than active. “instead of moving voluntarily we find them to be moved necessarily, instead of acting, we find them to be acted upon...”¹⁵⁵ Reid further pointed out that, constant conjunction does not link true causes with effects as held by Hume. For Reid, a preceding event does not have the power to produce with which it is constantly conjoined. Yet we all have a notion of causes that productive-of causes which actually produce and are responsible for change.¹⁵⁶ Roderick Chisolm’s incompatibilist view contends that, a free action is an action that originates within the agent alone, not as result of a previous event.¹⁵⁷

Some Approaches to Causality

Counterfactual Theories

Counterfactual theories define causation in terms of a counterfactual relation, and can be often be seen “floating” their account of causality on top of an account of the logic of counterfactual conditionals. Counterfactual theories reduce facts about causation to facts about what would have been true under counterfactual circumstances.¹⁵⁸ The idea is that causal relations can be framed in the form of “had C not occurred, E would not have occurred”. This approach can be traced back to David Hume’s definition of the causal relation as that “where, if the first object had not been, the second would never have existed”.¹⁵⁹ More full-fledged analysis of causation in terms of counterfactual conditionals only came in the 20th century after development of the possible world semantics for the evaluation of counterfactual conditionals. In 1973, David Lewis proposed the following definition of the notion of causal dependence: “An event E causally depends on C if, and only if, (1) if C had occurred, then E would have occurred, and (ii) if C had not occurred, then E would not have occurred”.¹⁶⁰ Causation is then analyzed in terms of counterfactual dependence such that each event I the sequence counterfactually depends on the previous. This chain of causal dependence may be called a mechanism. It is pertinent to note that, the analysis does not purport to explain how we make causal judgments or how we reason about causation, but rather to give a metaphysical account of what it is for there to be a causal relation between some pair of events. If correct, the analysis has the power to explain certain features of causation.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Reid, Haakonsen, Knud, Harris, James A. (eds) “Essays on the Active Powers of Man” (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p1

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Reid, EAP 208

¹⁵⁷ Roderick Chisolm, in Zalta Edward N (ed) The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021)

¹⁵⁸ Ney Alyssa, “Metaphysics: An Introduction (2 ed) (London: Routledge, 2023)

¹⁵⁹ David Hume, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Sec. VII

¹⁶⁰ David Lewis. “Causation” The Journal of Philosophy Vol.70, no 17, 556-567

Derivational Theories

Herbert A. Simon and Nicholas Rescher, opined that, the asymmetry of the causal relation is unrelated to the asymmetry of any mode of implication that contraposes. Rather a causal relation is not a relation between values of variables, but a function of one variable (the cause) on to another (the effect).¹⁶¹ So given a system of equations, we can introduce an asymmetric relation among individual equations and variables that corresponds perfectly to our commonsense notion of causal ordering.

Manipulation Theories

Some theorists have equated causality with manipulability. Under these theories, X causes Y only in the case that one can change X in order to change Y.¹⁶² This coincides with commonsense notions of causation, since often we ask causal questions in order to change some features of the world. For instance, we are interested in knowing the causes of crime so that we might find ways of reducing it. However, these manipulative theories can be criticized on two grounds, first, these accounts are circular. Attempting to reduce causal claims to manipulation requires that manipulation is more basic than causal interaction. But describing manipulations in non-causal terms has provided a substantial difficulty. The second criticism centers around concerns of anthropocentrism. It seems to many people that causality is some existing relationship in the world that we can harness for our desires. If causality is identified with our manipulation, then this intuition is lost. In this sense, it makes humans overly central to interactions in the world. Some attempts to defend manipulability theories are recent accounts that do not claim to reduce causality to manipulation.

Process Theories

Some theorists are interested in distinguishing between causal processes and non-causal processes. These theorists often want to distinguish between a process and a pseudo-process. For instance, a ball moving through the air (a process) is contrasted with the motion a shadow (pseudo-process). The former is causal in nature while latter is not. According to salmon, causal processes can be identified by their ability to transmit an alteration over space and time.¹⁶³ An alteration of the ball (a mark by a pen perhaps) is carried with it as the ball goes through the air. On the other hand, an alteration of the shadow (insofar as it is possible) will

¹⁶¹ Simon, Herbert; Rescher, Nicholas, "Cause and Counterfactual" *Philosophy of Science*, Vol.33, no p 4323-340

¹⁶² R, Collingwood. "An Essay on Metaphysics", (London: Clarendon Press, 1940)

¹⁶³ W. Salmon. "Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022)

not be transmitted by the shadow as it moves along. These theorists claim that the important concept for understanding causality is not causal relationships or causal interactions, but rather identifying causal processes. The former notions can then be defined in terms of causal processes.

The Concept of Causality in African Thought

Overview of African Metaphysics

Metaphysics seeks to advance a comprehensive view of reality by exploring whether there are principles that are applicable to all reality and whether there is something that is ultimately real. In the context of this understanding, the African mind thinks in hierarchical categories and modes as contrasted with thought in single, isolated and individualistic terms. The African mind conceives reality as a relationship of things and consequently analyzes phenomena in terms of cause and effect, balance and conflict. It is pertinent to note that any metaphysical study subsumes under it both transcendentals and particulars of individual existence, it avails the study to investigate the relationship of the particular within the universal. It therefore seeks to provide a comprehensive view of reality while at the same time taking into cognizance the individual phenomena the holism of reality. African philosophy implies African metaphysics. It is an aspect of the African philosophical enterprise that focuses on the African distinctive notion of reality and existence. Reality is basically universal but variously conceived by people based on their peculiarities and conceptions of life about their existential realities.

Ontologically, African thought is in hierarchical categories.¹⁶⁴ Being does exist but in a hierarchical structure. At the apex is the supreme Being known as Aondo among the Tiv, Abasi Ibom among the Ibibio, Oludumare by the Yorubas, Chineke or Chukwu among the Igbos, Allah in Hausa etc. Man is next in the hierarchy of beings. Though the Africans differ in regards to the constituents of man, but they are agreed that man has a material/mortal body and an immortal soul. According to Gyeke, (in Etim) the Akan believes in a dualistic conception of man, that is, *okra*-body and *nipadua*-soul.¹⁶⁵ The relationship between the body and the soul seems metaphysically problematic. It is unclear if the union is substantial or accidental. Man plays a critical role within the community of beings either as an intermediary cause (who exploits and manipulates the gods and nature to his advantage), or as the receiver of the causal effect. As mortal, man is checkmated by space and time, however, this limitation can be overcome by acquiring some mysterious and

¹⁶⁴ A.J.A. Esen, "Ibibio Profile" (Calabar: Pacific Press, 1982)

¹⁶⁵ Francis Etim, "African Metaphysics" *Journal of African Scientific Research*, 2013, vol. 3 no 1

esoteric knowledge of nature and the gods. This is what Africans believed of the witches, wizards, sorcerers and traditional medicine men.¹⁶⁶

In the hierarchical structure of beings, man appears the dominant spirit among the created visible spirits. God is the source and the highest vital force followed by the divinities and ancestors (the living dead) in the invisible realm. Apparently however, this African conception of reality gives privacy to the spirit, but not in the exclusive nature of Descartes' dualism or in the absolute spiritualism of the eastern thought. The Africans also gives room to the physical but only as a secondary consequence. No being however exist in isolation but ontologically in connection and interaction with other beings (both animate and inanimate). An African therefore, realizes himself only in the midst of hierarchy of beings, some acting above and others below, outside of which human beings have no existence.¹⁶⁷ This interaction is referred to as "communal spiritualism" by Momoh,¹⁶⁸ which is the culture of harnessing the spirit of the whole community for the benefit of the individual. The visible grouping is simply a reflection of the ontological order and harmony in the universe, which is animated in various senses by the dynamic power of the spirit. This spirit is not identified with God or with something mysterious, but only an aspect of reality. Hence reality cannot be said to be one, two, many or state but dynamic.¹⁶⁹

The African believe in a dualistic, cyclic but regulated cosmology such that any upset is an intrusion. The world and nature only work optimally if there is proper balancing and blending of all the ingredients in a given situation. Consequently, the African abhors extremities since this will upset the balance necessary for proper functioning of nature and society. Despite the desire for balancing and harmony, however, conflicts and contradictions abound.¹⁷⁰ Both realities too do play significant and vital roles in African metaphysical thought especially in upsetting monopoly in nature and also revealing the mysterious nature of existence. These contradictions and disharmony sometimes reveal the uncertainties that characterizes existence without which life will become boring and meaningless, unfulfilled expectations and disappointments. In African worldview therefore, contradictions co-exist. In any case, events do not just occur per chance to upset the harmony in nature. Every event is traceable to a cause, which necessarily has to be identified if the harmony is to be restored or event is

¹⁶⁶ Francis Etim, 2013

¹⁶⁷ Jim I Unah, "The Nature of African Metaphysics" *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol,1,2. P64-69

¹⁶⁸ C.S. Momoh, "Nature, Issue and Substance of African Philosophy" (Auchi: African Philosophy Projects, 2000)

¹⁶⁹ G.O. Idjakpo, "The Meaning of African and Western Metaphysics: A Conceptual Analysis", (Lagos: OOP Press, 1995).

¹⁷⁰ Francis Etim, 2013

to be properly understood and handled successfully. Rituals and sacrifices are often employed as a veritable means of maintaining, and sometimes restoring the much cherished and needed harmony. In agreement with the theocratic nature of African cosmology, the supreme Being is regarded as the ultimate cause, ancestors and localized deities are intermediate causes, besides witches, wizards, sorcerers and traditional medicine men. Since the cosmos is integrated with interplay of spiritual and physical forces then, the material cause/event must necessarily and concomitantly have a spiritual cause or dimension. To treat any event in isolation, only as physical, is to achieve no result or only a transient one.¹⁷¹

Ozumba defines African metaphysics as “The African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions among beings and reality in general. It is the totality of the African perception of reality. African metaphysics will therefore include systematization of African perspective as its relation to being and existence”¹⁷². African metaphysics is holistic. Its logic underlies the basis for the standards and expectations of the African in the sense that the metaphysical worldview of the African defines his/her attitudes to situations and issues in everyday living with the multiples of cultures in Africa. We cannot argue that all African communities uphold the same standards or share the same expectations but the basis and underlying principles of their cultural values are basically the same. Lovemore Mbigi maintained that, “Although African cultures display awesome diversity, they also show remarkable similarities.”¹⁷³ African metaphysics is also pragmatic. Ideas or beliefs that produce the desired result are maintained as paradigmatic. The question of meeting the standard of objective reality is not an obstacle for the African. The fact that it works and produces the required result justifies it. African metaphysics blends empiricism with rationalism as the African minds combines the experiential with reflection to validate beliefs. The African tests experiences to ascertain their veracity, accepting only that which agrees to reason and has evidence to support it. This background knowledge of the nature of African metaphysics positions us to understand how certain concepts feature in African metaphysics.

Causality in African Thought

David Hume in talking about the compatibilism of freedom and necessity, alluded to things happening by chance, implying that things could happen by accident.¹⁷⁴ However, if the question, does anything happen by chance? Were put to an African, what will be the response? According to Aja, the African conceives the

¹⁷¹ Francis Etim, 2013

¹⁷² Godfrey, O. Ozumba, “African Traditional Metaphysics”, in *Quodlibet Journal*, vol. 6. No. 3, 2004, p2

¹⁷³ L. Mbigi “The Spirit of African Leadership” (Randburg, South Africa: Knowres, 2005), p75

¹⁷⁴ David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902

world as an ordered universe in which everything is caused and potentially explicable.¹⁷⁵ Gyeke, concurred with the doctrine of universal causation in the Akan-African world. The African does not just speak of mechanical, chemical and psychological interaction as is the case in the west, the African speaks of a metaphysical kind of causality, which binds the creator to the creature.¹⁷⁶ In his reaction to the western conception of chance which held that things could happen by chance, Ozumba maintained that allusion to chance in western thought is borne out of ignorance of the series of actions and reactions that have given rise to a given event.¹⁷⁷

Though, many African scholars maintained a universal doctrine of causality in African ontology, it must be stressed that the emphasis is on extraordinary events and not on natural occurrence. Normal events like rain during rainy season, growth of plants, drought during dry season etc. do not constitute a problem for the mind of the African because such events are held to normal and natural. Such events are empirical, scientific and non-super-naturalistic. However extraordinary or contingent events necessarily become thought provoking for the African. Events such as a man barking, a tree falling suddenly and crushing somebody, a woman carrying a pregnancy for a prolonged period of time etc. Gyeke maintains that “these events are infrequent and hence are considered abnormal; they are discreet and isolated, they appear to be puzzling, bizarre and incomprehensible; they are not considered subsumable under any immediate known law of nature”.¹⁷⁸ Such events have particular traits and are deemed insufficient to explain causes thus, the ultimate cause of the event is sought. The interest here is not necessary on what has happened but why it happened in the manner it does.

Iroegbu explores two kinds of causes in African ontology: the ontological cause and the functional cause. The ontological cause produces the being of the effect, without the ontological cause, the being which is the effect would not be, an example can be seen in the relationship between God and human beings. God is seen as the ontological cause of human beings.¹⁷⁹ The human being can also be the ontological cause of another human being by producing his/her own kind. The second cause, functional cause explains the reason for the operation of being in relation to other beings as regards the force they exert on other beings. Regarding functional causes, Tempels averred that in the created force, a causal force

¹⁷⁵Egbeka Aja., 2001, p7

¹⁷⁶Kwame Gyeke. “An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme”, (Philadelphia: Tempel University Press, 1987)

¹⁷⁷ Ozumba, G.O., 2004

¹⁷⁸ Gyeke, 1987

¹⁷⁹ Pantaleon Iroegbu. “Kpim of Time: Eternity”, (Ibadan: Hope, 1995)

emanates from the very nature of that created forces to influence other forces.¹⁸⁰ Through this interaction, a force could weaken or re-enforce another force. Each force has an activating principle or vital force which allows it to function in a specific manner. The idea of created force excludes God who is the creator of the created force. He is the uncaused cause and the ultimate cause of all things. For traditional Africans, force is not communicated or reduced primarily by some form of physical causality, because force does not belong to the physical order, it is metaphysical. It is therefore, not accessible to scientific or empirical verification. It belongs to the order of invisible entities which cannot be known but believed in; which cannot be rationally proved but only revealed by tradition; which cannot be coaxed into action by exercising a direct causal influence on them but only by symbolic and ritual (quasi sentimental) form of causality.¹⁸¹

The catchphrase of African ontology or metaphysics is that, causality cannot be rationally and empirically perceived or conceived but spiritually intuited through the consultation of the supernatural. Thus, the world of aesthetic quality and aesthetic continuum imply the transmutation and transformation of forces. In such a world, the forms of entities are altered by the animating and de-animating dynamic of spirit or forces. What the west regard as lifeless and inert is to the African alive and energized by spirit, this explains the effect of witches on people, as well as sorcerers using vessels for evil intents, appeasing the gods etc. that the African ontological or metaphysical notion of causality is religious, is in no way denigrating since this has been reiterated severally by African scholars. Idoniboye explains the spiritual nature of African ontology or metaphysics thus: “The ontology of any distinctively African worldview is replete with spirits. Spirits are the one entity that remains constant in African belief systems”.¹⁸²

When something happens, there is the dual causal complimentary questions of “how?” and “why?”. The how entails a detailed description of the event in question. Having accessed the “how”, the attention shifts to the “why”. The inquiry here shifts from the empirical verification to the metaphysical. At this level of inquiry, African sacred scientists are called upon to inquire into the spiritual realm for an understanding of the “why” of that event.¹⁸³ Profound inquiries such as these are based on the African principle expressed in the Tiv people’s saying:

¹⁸⁰ Tempels, P. “Bantu Philosophy” in E Chukwudi Eze (ed), “African Philosophy: An Anthology”, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997

¹⁸¹ Sylvester S.S Apologun. “Causality and African Metaphysics: A Meeting Point” international Journal of History and Philosophical Research, vol 8, no 2, 2020. Pp11-18

¹⁸² D.E. Idoniboye,. “The Idea of an African philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics”, Second order, vol.2, no 1, 1973

¹⁸³ Ikechukwu A. Kanu. “African Philosophy: An Ontologico-Hermeneutical Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues”, (Jos: Augustinian Publications, 2015), p 288

"kwagh gbe eren ga" (something don't just happen). Thus, if lightning for instance strikes a person and he/she dies, the Tiv people believe such an event is not ordinary, it is caused by metaphysical forces. Why was that particular person struck by lightning, or a branch falls on a person in a particular place, the question will be, why that particular person many people having passed that same way? There are basically two kinds spirits in African ontology, the benevolent spirits and the malevolent spirits. The benevolent spirits are generally seen as good spirits, though they can also mete out punishment on people for wrong doings. The malevolent spirits are conceived as bad spirits that inflict misfortunes on people. These spirits as conceived affect the activities of human beings either way, consequently, every event in the life of a person is seen as punishment or reward by the gods through the instrumentality of the spirits.

In the realm of causes and forces in African cosmology, the vexed issue of witchcraft is a topical one. According to Ozumba, this phenomenon implies the spiritual skill of being able to carry on certain inimical activities in disembodied form. They possess great current of waves which can be deployed to bring about certain desired ends, though with some limitations.¹⁸⁴ These could include some heinous activities such as inflicting sickness, casting spells, causing accidents and deaths, nocturnal evil meetings etc. Cases of witchcraft abound in Africa. In western thought however, the phenomenon of witchcraft is consigned to the dustbin of fetishism. Words also have causal powers in Africa. There are cases of threat on people coming to pass in terms of death or strange illnesses. Usually, the culprits are accused in such situations. Curses are also example of the causal power of words. The words are believed to be potent especially when uttered by an elder or a parent on a child. Thoughts and words in African metaphysics have the capacity to bring about what they symbolize. Evil words are believed to cause harm to people while good words bring blessings. This explains the import of parental blessings on children.

Evaluation

It is pertinent to note that, the idea of chance does not have a place in African cosmology. Even when chance is alluded to in terms of accidents, it does not connote chance but just an occurrence whose cause is not yet ascertained. The idea of causality informed a lot of practices and activities associated with African metaphysics. African metaphysical doctrines are tailored in such a way that they can be better understood and defended against the backdrop of causality, which highlights the import of causality in the dynamics of African belief systems. However, the African concept of causality which links causes to unquestionable

¹⁸⁴Godfrey O. Ozumba., 2004, 6

forces have implications on the level of socialization and development in Africa. For instance, when certain ailments are seen and interpreted from the perspective of the malevolent actions of the spirits and not natural causes, it forecloses the possibility of proper medical care for such an individual. Soothsayers, witch doctors become the point of patronage for such people instead of health facilities where such ailments could be properly diagnosed and treated. The argument is, some of these ailments are not spiritually induced, resultantly, many have needlessly lost their lives in this manner.

Psychologically, people who subscribe to the above way of thinking are affected and some even slide into paranoid personality disorder. Such people always think and are afraid that people are trying to harm or inflict certain calamities on them. A lot of people today in Africa attributes their failures in life, business, etc. to causal forces which in some cases are imaginary. This has stagnated a lot of people who are imprisoned by this mindset from seeking and exploring alternative ways to add value to their lives. Cases of innocent people accused of witchcraft abound; this sometimes result in unpleasant consequences for people so accused. It becomes worrisome when jungle justice is meted out to people accused of bewitching people without empirical proof. Sometimes such accused people become isolated or even ostracized in the community. There are even communities where people are even afraid to even showcase certain achievements and development for fear of causal forces that may impinge negatively on their efforts. This study therefore argues that, in as much as this concept plays a pivotal role in African metaphysics, its implications especially from the negative perspective should not be lost on the African who needs to balance the operations of this concept for the social wellbeing of both the individual and community.

It is pertinent to note however that, the limitations adduced above does not in any way diminish the African notion of causality. Africans are able to explain the inevitable predicaments and vicissitudes through their notion of causality. It also buttresses the fact African metaphysical and ontological experiences cannot be confined to the dustbin of illusion. African notion of causality is robust and dynamic.

Conclusion

This study examines the concept of causality from the perspective of the African cosmology. Causality no doubt permeates the African belief system. Causality is the context from which African metaphysics sprung. The study examines the western conception of causality tracing its roots from ancient to the modern era where the Humean account of the concept elicited responses from diverse scholars. David Hume sees the concept as needless since things could possibly

happen by chance without any cause. He attributed the notion to human habit of always associating effects with causes. Certain theories associated with the concept have also been explored to enhance a better understanding of the concept. However, the African sees the idea of causes differently. For the African, nothing happens by chance, every occurrence is potentially explicable. Causality plays a crucial role in the dynamics of African belief system. However, there seems to be an over emphasis on the African concept of causality as almost everything and anything is attributed to causes with the exception of normal natural occurrences. The negative social implications of this concept on the African social life and development are not lost on the society. These has no doubt created issues for individuals and communities alike. It is to be noted that, despite some limitations, the African experience no doubt surpasses the narrow causal conception of the west. Since science itself is not enough and absolute, African sacred scientists go beyond the phenomenal to explain the complexities of the metaphysical causes.

The idea of chance is definitely not African. The existence of natural laws and the search for causation when those laws are violated are important components in the traditional African worldview. The African universe as adduced earlier is an ordered universe and this ordered functions everywhere. The African however do not believe that these laws do not govern absolutely. When the natural laws are violated, the principle of causality does govern absolutely and the cause must be found. The connection between cause and effect is immediate; secondary causes are either not admitted or considered negligible, an event that heralds good fortune is linked ultimately to God and a bad event is attributed to a spiritual force and sanction by God. Causation flows in all directions to maintain balance and life in the universe. Thus, every event is seen to have a cause and potentially explicable.

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