An African Epistemological Approach to Epistemic Certitude and Scepticism

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1.1   INTRODUCTION

The certainty of our epistemic claims, which logically implies the defeat of scepticism has for long been an issue in epistemology. To be certain about an epistemic claim is to assert that such epistemic claim is either immune to scepticism or is more warranted than any sceptical consideration; this in itself is largely dependent on one's understanding of 'certainty' as a concept. For some scholars, certainty would mean 'immutability' while for others it means that which is more warranted than other possible claims or propositions. It would mean therefore, that for one to establish the certitude of a claim one would have to first of all establish an agreeable meaning of 'certainty' between the sceptic and non-sceptic. Otherwise, there will always be a polarisation on opposite directions between the sceptic and non-sceptic; as it is the case through the history of Western epistemology. The implication of this is that we may never arrive at that which is certain and that which is not certain, therefore, we may never be able to make a claim to knowledge as that which we are certain about. This situation has remained albatross to Western epistemology, thus, this paper seeks to examine how African epistemology deals with the issues of doubt (scepticism) and certainty. It researches into the notion of African epistemology as that which is strongly based on the African ontological conception of reality and examines how African epistemology justifies epistemic claims.

1.2   THE AFRICAN CULTURAL AND ONTOLOGICAL REALITY

Culture plays an important role in the cognitive understanding of reality and "unless one is intimately familiar with the ontological commitments of a culture, it is often difficult to appreciate or otherwise understand those commitments." (Brown, 2004). Therefore, it is important that we understand the African cultural and ontological conceptions of reality to enable us understand the African approach to knowledge.

Central to traditional African thought is the idea that there are ancestral spirits whose intentions we can know. Ancestral spirits are individuals who once lived in our physical world. Though they are now physically dead, they are still capable of initiating actions on their own. Such actions of theirs have intended consequences on our physical world. Having the knowledge of their intentions "provides grounds for understanding physical occurrences." (Brown, 2004). This implies that for the African, there is more to reality than what is within the realm of empirical inquiry.

According to Brown "a fundamental tenet of traditional African culture is that there is more to reality and to the realm of experience than that which is readily accessible through empirical inquiry, and that one can acquire an understanding of natural phenomena by appealing to experiences whose characterizations are not empirically confirmable but are nonetheless warrantably assertible." (Brown, 2004). The point here is that there are spiritual components of nature that influence human experience and perception. Therefore, when a phenomenon is not readily explainable by empirical verification, it can be explained by the causal efficacy of the spiritual components of nature. By 'spiritual components of nature,' we mean incorporeal components that have consciousness. That means they have an awareness of nature as much as humans have. And they equally have the capacity to respond to perceptions.

The above analysis by Brown represents the typical African ontological and cultural view of reality, which is fundamentally different from the Western ontological and cultural view of reality. The fundamental teaching of Western culture is that science is the primary determinant of what is real and what is not real. Anything that cannot be confirmed or supported by science is considered a metaphysical fantasy or mere superstition.

It is important to note that not all of Western religion is supported by science, yet it is not considered a metaphysical fantasy or mere superstition. Rather, it is seen as "grounded in the literature, doctrines, dogmas ... revelations, and historical traditions that have shaped civil and political policies and norms." (Brown, 2004). It gives meaning and purpose to the faithful as well as motivates scientific inquiry and great art. "Moreover, it is grounded in a felt sense that the fundamental claims within its grounding literature, doctrines, and dogmas are true." (Brown, 2004). Thus, Western religion has given Western civilization a moral structure on which human behaviours and interactions are guided and judged. Consequent upon this, many Western scholars view traditional African culture as a myth, a metaphysical fantasy, or religious superstition. They conceive African culture as lacking the grounding that Western culture claims to have.

It is within this context that we understand what Udefi referred to as the "colonial myth on Africa." (Udefi in Akanmidu, (ed.) 2005). This myth consists in the denial of rational thought, civilization, history, etc, to Africa and Africans. The colonization of Africa by Europe was based on the ideological framework that Western

reason and civilization was superior to non-Western peoples and cultures, especially when that culture is African. A typical example of this is captured by the position of a few scholars in the West who already concluded that the black race is a genetically defective race. James Watson, a world leading DNA expert, and a Nobel Prize (1962) winner in medicine, has consistently argued that the Western policies towards the African countries were based on wrong assumption that the black race is as intelligent as their white counterpart whereas experience shows contrary. According to him,

> There is no firm reason to anticipate that the intellectual capacities of peoples geographically separated in their evolution should prove to have evolved identically. Our wanting to reserve equal powers of reason as some universal heritage of humanity will not be enough to make it so. (Cf. The Independent, Friday 06, 2012).

This is certainly not the case. Against this ideological framework, African scholars have risen in defence of the African rational, logical, and analytic consciousness and thought pattern. This paper is a step in that direction.

1.3 THE NATURE OF AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

According to Udefi, protagonists of African epistemology want to direct attention to the cultural embeddings of knowledge. This is against the ideological framework of European colonisation that upholds and affirms the supremacy of Western reason over non-Western peoples and cultures. (Udefi in Akanmidu, (ed.) 2005). Scholars like Seghor, Anyanwu, Onyewuenyi and others have argued that there is a distinctive African way of perceiving and reacting to the world. This is what constitutes African epistemology. However on-going debate suggests that we cannot continue to locate a discourse within a geographical boundary such as when we say African Epistemology or Western Epistemology. This is because the possibility of an unwarranted and unnecessary comparison is created. Such a comparison is bound to suffer unprecedented casualty. Epistemology, or any form of discipline at all, can be said to be the same all over. This notwithstanding, we cannot blankly deny the fact there could be different approaches and perspectives by which we understand the world around us. While we cannot argue that Africans have different cognition about the world from their Western counterpart as this may logically lead to conceptual relativity of some sort which ultimately may constitute an encumbrance to intelligibility; the fact remains that despite the uniformity of human nature, cultural and environmental nuances impose themselves on our understanding of reality. This fact is strongly reflected in Wiredu's thesis on Conceptual Decolonisation.(Wiredu, 1995).

African epistemology deals with what the African means and understands when he makes a knowledge claim. This consists of how the African sees or talks about reality. Concerning how the African sees or talks about reality, Asante writes; "there are several elements in the mind of Africa that govern how humans behave with regard to reality: the practicality of wholism, the prevalence of poly-consciousness, the idea of inclusiveness, the unity of worlds, and the value of personal relationships."(Asante, 2000). These constitute the elements of the African mind.They frame the African conception of reality, and they are the basis on which cognitive claims are made by the African. From the earliest times there was an underlining commonality in the African apprehension of the universe, environment, society, and the divine. This is because while the self remains real and the material is concrete for the African, both the self and the material however remain interwoven by custom and tradition with the latter based upon human correlativity. Therefore, the African conceives reality as one large system in which personalism is expressed in concrete consubstantiation of spirit.

African theory of knowledge, like other epistemologies is a social or cultural epistemology. It is an epistemology that is deliberately situated within a particular cultural context. When we talk about a phenomenon as being within a cultural context, we are talking about bringing it within the rational framework of the said cultural context; in this case, African culture. According to Kaphagawani and Melherbe, (1998) "the way in which epistemic rationality and its related concepts are instantiated, 'filled out' as it were, the concrete content that they are given in terms of linguistic descriptions and social customs, varies a great deal from one cultural context to another."

The body of knowledge, that is, the set of established facts that are accepted as true in the society, differ from one age to another. For instance, what would count, as a good theory, a widely accepted or a satisfactory explanation of a given phenomenon in traditional African society would differ from that which would count as satisfactory in contemporary African society. Such difference would also be noticed in the methods of acquisition of knowledge as well as the certification or justification of knowledge.

Since the social philosopher works within the framework of societies and their characteristics, it means he would be interested in the habits and customs, the religions, languages, belief systems, values, interests and preferred occupations of the people. Thus, "the social epistemologist … is concerned with the rational practices, values, institutions, etc. of a culture." (Kaphagawani and Melherbe, 1998). These rational practices consist in,

i.   The well-established general beliefs, concepts and theories of any particular people, in various fields such as medical science, religion, child-rearing, agriculture, psychology,

        education, etc.

ii.   The favoured ways usually institutionalised in the society, of acquiring new knowledge and evaluating accepted fact, science being a prime example of such an institution.

iii.   The accumulated wisdom that is passed on to the youth in the form of proverbs, revered traditions, myths and folktales.

iv.   The language of an ethnic group, the single most important repository of a society's accumulated knowledge.

v.   Customs and practices in the areas of religion and judicial procedure.

vi.   The accepted authorities (whether people, institutions or texts) in matters of knowledge and belief. (Kaphagawani and Melherbe, 1998).

These constitute the epistemic filaments in the fabric of a culture. The question is; how does African epistemology assess the beliefs and theories of traditional and contemporary African cultures? This may be reformulated as how do we decide what is rational in the context of African culture? This question is an inquiry into the application of the principles of rationality in the African context.

African epistemology is essentially and necessarily rooted in African ontology. The epistemological view of the traditional African is consonant with his metaphysics. It is within this context we have a clearer understanding of Placid Temples' idea that true wisdom, which is knowledge is to be found in ontological knowledge. Ontological knowledge is the intelligence of forces in their hierarchy, their cohesion and interaction. (Tempels, 1969).

Since epistemology is about the claims we make concerning the facts of our experience and these facts are always interpreted within certain assumptions, concepts, theories, and worldviews, it validates the necessity of the relationship between ontology and epistemology for this relation helps us to recognize, understand, and authenticate our cognitive claims. Anyanwu puts this very lucidly when he writes;

> We must know the basic assumptions, concepts, theories and worldview in
> terms of which the owners of the culture interpret the facts of experience.
> Without the knowledge of the African mind process and the worldview into
> which the facts of experience are to be fitted both the African and European
> researchers would merely impute emotive appeals to cultural forms and
> behaviour suggested by some unknown mind. (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1984).

The philosophy of integration and principles of understanding, as well as aesthetic continuum of the African cultural world differ significantly from the Western world of ideas, especially when it comes to what constitutes trustworthy knowledge and reality. In classical African philosophy, there is a concrete existence of man and nature. African tradition only talks about two entities in terms of conceptual numericality and not in terms of separate ontological existence. It is impossible for the African to separate man from nature. They are sacredly united. In this unity they both participate in the same locus without being opposites. So, the African world is a unitary world as against the analytical and pluralistic world of Western thought.

Since African ontology postulates a unitary world, traditional African epistemology does not attend to the problem of knowledge by dividing its domain into the rational, the empirical, and the mystical. The three constitute a single mode of knowing in both the intellectual and concrete divisions of reality. (Nasseem,Retrieved from the Internet 28/5/2012). Therefore, while Western scientific paradigm is laden with methodological and mathematical formulations, the traditional African paradigm goes beyond the outer reaches of formal logic. It goes beyond logic and acknowledges the irreducible mystery of the transcendent.

Traditional African epistemology sees man and nature as one inseparable continuum. As Anyanwu puts it, "man and nature are not two separate independent and opposing realities but the one inseparable continuum of a hierarchical order." (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1984). While we may accuse Western philosophy of intellectual dogmatism that permits a dualism of the subject and object, and Asian philosophy of monism in attempting to deny the reality of the material, African philosophy tries to avoid the embarrassment of both concepts by seeking a central position for the ego (subject) in the cosmic scheme. In this way, subjectivism and objectivism do not constitute a problem to African epistemology. They are both subsumed in the unity of existence. In this unity; the subject gets to know the object. This will not be the case if they were detached.

African epistemology does not demarcate between the epistemic subject and the epistemic object. The epistemic subject, which experiences the epistemic object and the epistemic object which is experienced are joined together such that the epistemic subject experiences the epistemic object in a sensuous, emotive, and intuitive understanding, as well as through abstraction, rather than through abstraction alone as it is the case in Western epistemology.

1.4   AN AFRICAN THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

According to Aja, "the problem of knowledge in traditional African thought is that of ascertaining whether or not what is claimed as knowledge is actually knowledge rather than mistaken opinion on the one hand, and the

means or source of acquiring the knowledge on the other." (Aja, 1993).In his opinion, there is confusion between knowledge and the source of knowledge in African epistemology. Anyanwu however seems to capture better the idea of knowledge in African epistemology. According to him,

> Knowledge, therefore, comes from the co-operation of all human faculties
> and experiences. He sees, feels, imagines, reasons or thinks and intuits all
> at the same time. Only through this method does he claim to have the
> knowledge of the other. So, the method through which the African arrives
> at trustworthy knowledge of reality … is intuitive and personal experience.
> (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1984).

Knowledge comes from "the co-operation of all human faculties and experiences (as man) sees, feels, imagines, reasons, or thinks and intuits all at the same time." (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1984). There cannot be knowledge of reality if man detaches himself from reality. So the subject is always involved, seeing and thinking, as well as experiencing and discovering reality. This implies that experience is vital for the cognitive process. According to Nasseem, "the cognitive process is not complete without the experiential." (Nasseem, Internet, 28/5/2012).The self of the subject and the objective world outside the self are united as one in a relationship in which the self of the subject vivifies and animates the objective world.

In the scheme of traditional African thought, the active self is dominant. And theoretical and practical philosophy are not considered as autonomous, but logically and metaphysically joined together in a single epistemological system. This means that the self or ego that theorizes and the world in which this theory takes place are bound together in a unitary worldview. There is no sharp distinction between the ego and the world, or the subject and the object. Where there is a conflict, the self takes pride of place.

There have been changes in contemporary times in the epistemological tradition of African thought. These changes have basically been in two modes,

    (i)   Those due to the internal dynamics of the thought-system and only accentuated by elements of acculturation.
         and
    (ii)   Changes brought about by the introduction of a paradigm alien to the ontological base of the African worldview. (Nasseem, Internet, 28/5/2012).

It is also necessary to note that contemporary African philosophy or scholarship generally is characterized by,

    (i)   A continuous recession of the traditional into the distant past.
    (ii)   A present characterized by lack of clarity.
    (iii)   A future devoid of logical predictability.
    (iv)   Absence of the certainty of the mystical.
    (v)   The authority of the oracle. (Nasseem, Internet, 28/5/2012).

The spatial change that has occurred has opened up African traditional thought to a wider world of learning. This has activated the epistemological crisis as the movement of new methods of learning from one cultural area to the other introduced two profound phenomena,

    (i)   psychological violence,
         and
    (ii)   literary revolution.

The literary revolution has affected the cognitive content and structure of the African mind. Literacy demands that the African acquired a new way through which he perceives other worlds as well as his own world. The impact of this on African epistemology is that the African lost his concept of continuum between the subject and the object, while acquiring the other person's subjectivity. The other person here is the new way through which he is forced to perceive. Therefore, the African lost his concept of the "universe" and acquired a concept of a "multi-verse." Unfortunately, this new concept, which he has adopted from the external, has no roots in his own ontological and contingent constitution.

The African achieves knowing through imagination, intuition, feelings, and abstraction.He therefore utilizes the oral traditions of music, folklores, myths, proverbs, etc. in his cognition of the world. With the literacy revolution, the Western tradition dominated with analytical, discursive, and rigorous logic helped to open the African thought system to a scientific system. This opening was however betrayed by those who became scientifically exclusive and consequently arrogantly banished revelation like intuition, as an epistemic medium. This is where we group the African Logical Neo-Positivist.

Bodunrin, a member of this group, consistent with his positivist orientation has maintained that any argument in favour of African epistemology must be convincing with regard to a method of testing knowledge claims, which are basically African. In contrast to this, Uduigwomen argues that experimentation is not the solution to disagreements regarding epistemic claims, especially in relation to perceptual knowledge. The traditional African would rather ask for the testimony of a third party to settle the difference. The point is that

much more than the difference between belief and knowledge as a main preoccupation in Western epistemology, the African epistemologist is interested in the truth or falsity of the epistemic claim. This does not necessarily imply that the African epistemologist equates knowledge and belief or that he is not interested in the difference between the knowledge and belief, but that the truth as an objective condition for knowledge comes first in the order of priority. According to Sogolo, the concern of the African when a claim to knowledge is made is mostly, whether it is true or false. (Sogolo, 1993).

Talking about truth and falsity, Peter Winch argues that,

> Whether a statement is true or false will depend upon what it means. What it means … will depend upon how it is being used; how it functions as part of the form of life it belongs to. The notion then, of translating one form of life into the terms, concepts, preconceptions of another, does not make much sense. The way belief operates in a form of life is peculiar to that form of life. In particular, there is no reason to suppose that a statement true-to-them is translatable into a statement true-to-us but if it is translatable into a statement true-to-us that does not show that it is false-to-them. One way or another, it makes no sense to talk of true or false *tout court*. (Jarvie, 1972).

There is a form of relativism in Winch's argument that proposes that truth or falsity is culture-dependent. This is to say that what is true or false depends on the paradigms, which include the linguistic convention, of the given culture in which the claim is made. Therefore, there is a denial by this argument of an extra-linguistic and universal concept of truth or falsity. Winch actually regards the latter as "the 'senselessness' of trying to translate the truth propositions of one culture from the standpoint of another." (Jarvie, 1972).

The Azande claim to the existence of witchcraft, which incidentally is common to most, if not all African cultures, supports the argument of Winch. According to Winch, the proof of truth or falsity of this claim can only be established within the context of the Azande culture. This will involve the application of the Azande conception of truth and what they mean when they say a statement is true. This implies that "there are no independent standards or criteria of truth applicable to all cultures." (Jarvie, 1972). This does not include the thinking that no standard is applied; it simply means that the standard or standards applied by the Azande are non-comparable with those of other cultures.

This argument considers it an erroneous assumption to think that the Azande claim to the existence of witchcraft can be established to be true or false through experimentation and scientific reasoning. It is an erroneous assumption because in the first place, the claim itself is neither a scientific hypothesis nor is it dependent on scientific principles. (Jarvie, 1972).

Like in most other African cultures, the Azande belief in the existence of witchcraft is tied to a whole form of life. Therefore, it cannot be considered, analysed, or disputed outside the context of the form of life of which it is a part. Therefore, if the part of the form of life to which a knowledge claim is made is to be judged true or false, it is to be done within the context of the whole form, to which the given claim is a part. The culture "is to appraise the truth or falsity of its own part."(Jarvie, 1972).

Winch's argument does not go without criticisms; but as Sogolo affirms, "all in all, the various critics of Winch seem to concede to him as much as they reject in his thesis."(Sogolo, 1993).Sogolo agreed also that "one thing, however, stands obvious, namely: that Winch's most violent critics are adherents of the correspondence theory of truth…" (Sogolo, 1993).So far, the correspondence theory of truth has failed to stand up to the massive attacks from rival theories like the coherence theory of truth.

The argument of Winch portrays an epistemological theory that is applicable to the thought system of most, if not all African cultures. It conceives knowledge more as a product of societal convention rather than an objectivistic phenomenon. Therefore, justification of knowledge claims is to be within the context of the culture within which the knowledge is made. Attempts to find justification for a claim made in one cultural context in another, would not only be senseless, but also, would not yield results, as the standards of both contexts may be incomparable.

The problem of scepticism is not a pronounced one in African epistemology, it is not the case that it is absent, but it is not an issue of contention. Scepticism in African epistemology pertains to particular epistemic claims, their formulations and truthfulness, and definitely not about the possibility or impossibility or even the communication of knowledge. The reason why scepticism is not an issue of contention in African epistemology is the very fact that African epistemology is based on the African ontological conception that makes no sharp distinction between the subject and the object. Such a unitary conception of reality affords the African the luxury of combining a representative realist view of the world with the common sense argument against scepticism.Given however that African epistemology rests its justification of knowledge claims within the context in which the claims are made, it would also have the problems that have confronted the various context-dependent theories in Western epistemology.

1.5   THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

Justification is the property ascribed to a belief in virtue of the belief satisfying certain evaluative norms, with regard to what a person ought to believe. The norms play the role of measuring the "correctness" of a belief, in relation to epistemic goals. These goals include attaining truth and avoiding error.

The justification of human knowledge is pitched against the doubts that we can attain the kind of certainty that is traditionally taken to be involved in knowledge. This is the same as asking whether it is possible to guarantee our knowledge claims against scepticism. Various theories of justification have evolved in the history of epistemology. They include foundationalism, coherentism, contextualism, reliabilism, and context-dependency theories.

African epistemology and indeed epistemology in general, tends towards the view that Human and social-cultural factors necessarily interfere with human understanding and therefore help to define rational certainty. Some scholars have argued that,"given that traditional epistemology is mistaken in seeking to establish fixed and unshakeable criteria or foundations for evaluating the genuineness of knowledge claims in terms which are remotely impersonal and indifferent to the socio-cultural milieu where such claims are derived, we must return to a critical reconsideration of those primitive factors of human nature and his environment which we regard as ultimate grounds and justifiers of human knowledge claims." (Aigbodioh, 1997).

These factors are (i) linguistic-conceptual scheme, (ii) human nature, (iii) socio-cultural values and interests and (iv) customs and habit. A similar idea can be inferred from Polanyi. According to him, there are exigencies such as mentioned above within which every human intercourse can be meaningfully realised.

> For as human beings, we must inevitably see the universe from a centre lying within ourselves and speak about it in terms of a human language shaped by the exigencies of human intercourse. Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity (1962: 3)

This suggests that whatever is, can only be within the purview of these exigencies. So they determine what is true and what is false since no cognitive or conceptual scheme can thrive without them. However, it should be noted that the projects of Davidson, Wiredu, and others, especially in their works "The Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme" and "Cannons of Conceptualisation" respectively, continue to define the possibility of inter-cultural intelligibility in some way that is able to engender a common framework, though not entirely fixed, but capable of generating a common understanding among humans at a particular time and particular place. Essentially therefore, these factors identified above may actually determine epistemic claims at least to a reasonable level. They are certainly the human additions to our epistemic claims and "they work together in every culture to instil in the human mind the confident feeling that one knows." (Aigbodioh, 1997). While the factors do not constitute fixed grounds, they however have universally fixed contents.

1.5.1   Linguistic-Conceptual Scheme: According to E. Sapir:

> The "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built
> upon the language habits of the group. The worlds in which
> different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the
> same world with different labels attached. We see and hear
> and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the
> language habits of our community predispose certain choices
> of interpretation. (Hollis and Lukes, (ed.), 1983).

This implies that whether specific knowledge claims are true or false depends on what the human society allows us to say through the linguistic-conceptual medium of communication. This notion is built on the observation that both the language and the modes of conception that enables a given society to comprehend the reality around her ultimately determine the society's perceptual experience of reality. Winch expressed this fact when he argued, as stated above, that the truth or falsity of a statement is determined by what the statement means. This implies that what a statement means is what the users of the statement mean rather than the statement itself. And what a statement means in turn is determined by how it is used as part of the form of life to which it belongs. Therefore, language determines how we construe our experience and it is the means by which we comprehend and evaluate truth and reality. It follows then that our linguistic conventions and thought-forms condition truth and reality (Sogolo, 1993). This means that what is real and unreal depends on the paradigms and the linguistic convention of the culture that uses the concepts.

Within the African traditional set-up for instance, we talk about witches and different types of spirits. With particular reference to the people of Igarra*,* in the northern part of Edo State in Nigeria, "*ori*" which translates into spirit-force is of various types, it could be associated with rocks, water, specific forests and trees. These witches and spirits are said to exist and feature prominently in the people's understanding of reality. The belief in the existence of witches and spirit is therefore an epistemic claim, which is tied to a whole form of life, and cannot be understood in isolation of the totality of the form of which they are part and parcel. Therefore, we

cannot start to talk about, understand, and grasp the meaning of *ori* outside the form of life or context that is alien to the people of Igarra and expect them to understand and appreciate or even accept as true, our epistemic claims.

The truth and falsity of claims to the existence of metaphysical beings, such as witches and spirits among the Africans, cannot be determined by subjecting the claims to other standards of justification other than the culture in which they are found. This means that we cannot deny nor affirm the truth or falsity of such a claim by analysing the claim from the point of view of Western scientific procedures, such as experimentation and logic.

On this note the truth-condition of a knowledge claim is contingent to a large extent, on the prevalent manner of speaking in a cultural setting, for instance, on what the linguistic conventions are in a socio-cultural milieu. (Aigbodioh, 1997).

1.5.2   Human Nature: By "human nature" we mean those personal characteristics of human person, which differentiate him/her from other animals.(Aigbodioh, 1997).They may not be physically visible, yet remain an essential part of the person. It consists of one's emotions, likes, dislikes and persuasions. Therefore, we say that human nature entails that which is specifically peculiar about human person.

Human nature plays a very important role in the construction of any viable theory of knowledge and has a conditioning influence on the extent to which we hold on to most of our entrenched beliefs. Personal human factors reinforce in us the conviction of the truth of our epistemic claims. Therefore Sogolo argues that human beings are endowed with emotional attitude that allows them not to question the acceptance of certain kinds of beliefs. These are beliefs that are either assimilated from their cultures or based on the association of ideas.(Sogolo, 1993). This acceptance is reinforced by the psychological reaction of the individual to his personal experiences. It is however not a psychological deficiency. It is part of what makes them human and such inescapable human factors like emotions give our beliefs a certainty that it is justified.

1.5.3   Interest, Habits and Socio-Cultural Values: Values and interests are understood within socio-cultural contexts and they play a vital role in our epistemic claims. This is with particular reference to the way we attribute truth-values to various propositions. Our epistemic claims are extensions of our social values, interests and preferences. (Aigbodioh, 1997).

Among traditional Africans for instance, the appreciation of good health could and does influence their epistemic concept of health. The Traditional African has a holistic conception of health, which includes the physical and socio-psychological states and dispositions of a person. For the traditional Africa, to be healthy is to be in total harmony with all the assailing forces of thewell-being of the person. These forces include the various spirits identified above, among the Igarras. On the other hand, to be ill for the traditional African is to be hungry, unemployed, lazy, etc. In the view of Sogolo, health as a concept is socio-culturally determined.

This implies, within the context of our study, that the truth or falsity of certain notions and concepts are determined by socio-cultural conceptions of such notions and concepts. In the case of the example of health above, the African would understand, when you say someone is healthy that the person is in total harmony with the forces that assail the human being. This would be contrary to the Western notion of health as absence of physical or psychological disorder, which excludes the socio-cultural dimension.

Knowledge claims among traditional Africans are not validated in objectivist terms like the rationalist and the empiricist have often argued but with regards to habits and customs of the people. (Aigbodioh, 1997). As human beings we are naturally inclined to follow tradition and whenever we do, the tradition itself is reinforced in us and we develop the habit of following it. This implies that neither *a-priori*nor *a-posteriori* reasons suffice in the justification of human knowledge. Ultimately, therefore, our epistemic or knowledge claims are justified by the customs and habits that convince us of the truth and falsity of such claims.

Justification in African epistemology is culture bound and therefore context dependent. The truth-value or falsity of our epistemic claims is ultimately dependent on factors that are human, social and culture based. While this is evidently true, we must note that we cannot limit epistemic justification to this alone. The debate between the modernist and traditionalist schools of thought in African Philosophy is beginning to attract some synergy especially in the works of Oladipo. Within this context, to limit the criteria of justification to culture alone will jeopardise the inter-paradigm intelligibility which is very crucial and germane to the realisation of a common platform of human intercourse. Therefore, although culture plays a significant role in epistemic claims, there are some nuances in cultures of the world which can provide the resource for cultural integration.

An appraisal of the factors discussed above would give us a clear assessment of rational certainty. African epistemologists should consider and take serious note of the role played by the human person and the society in establishing our knowledge claims. There are no epistemic claims whose justification rest wholly on the prescribed objectivist terms of the rationalist and empiricist as we have it in traditional Western epistemology. If the justification of our knowledge claims is situated within social practices, we would no longer think of knowledge, truth and rational certainty in abstract terms. Therefore, there would not be the need to study these concepts independent of the factors alleged as necessary conditions for human knowledge.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The fundamental difference between the way Western epistemology has attended to the issue of certitude and scepticism and African epistemology has attended to the same issue is found in the basic distinction between the cultural and ontological conception of reality. While Western epistemology limits itself to the scientific method of abstraction and divides reality into the subjective and objective in consonance with Western ontology, African epistemology in consonance with African ontology conceives the world as a basic unitary system therefore sees reality as interwoven and connected. Therefore African epistemology is able to see beyond the issues of the distinction between knowledge and belief, the subject and the object, the noumenon and the phenomenon, and appreciate the role and contributions of the human person, the environment, and the society to our epistemic claims. This implies that in African epistemology, the domain of knowledge is not polarised between the doubts that assail our epistemic claims and the certitude that assures our claims, rather African epistemology concentrates on the truthfulness and falsity of our epistemic claims.

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