

Kant's Epistemological Model in Pluralistic Hypothesis: From an Interpretation of Religion in Africa

Jude Chinweuba Asike

Department of Philosophy Faculty of Humanities University of Port Harcourt

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijhphr.13/vol11n315>

Published July 26, 2023

Citation: Asike, J.C. (2023) Kant's Epistemological Model in Pluralistic Hypothesis: From an Interpretation of Religion in Africa, *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol.11, No.3, pp.1-5

ABSTRACT: *Here in this work, I tried to examine the nature of African traditional religion and explore the relative terms of its references on the concept of God; the definition and explanation of the concept of God as it pertains to the traditional cultures; the distinction between one's religion's tradition and another; and the explanation and analysis of the relationship between God and man on the other hand. My plight in this work is to draw an inference, a sort of examination of conscience in religion in certain ways that it appeals to African conditions to knowledge, and just as Kant elucidated in the Critique of Pure Reason. In doing this therefore, my objective is to find the real essence of religious pragmatism and traditionalism in African indigenous religion with reference to its point of reality in other religions. Thus, it is considerably under this panoply, that I envisioned the realism in Kant's epistemological model to repudiate the reality of God in pluralistic hypothesis. So, the finding of this research supports the thesis that phenomena and their appearances are based upon the interpretations of reality. Things appear differently in our mind and our understanding differs.*

KEYWORDS: Religion, Pluralistic Hypothesis, God, Perception and Appearances, Pragmatism and traditionalism.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of the concept of God today is situated within a seemingly intractable dilemma. On the one hand, how does one begin to speak about the concept of God, much less experience, his other intellect, not to mention his/her traditional beliefs, when in most part they have been disembodied-banished from, excluded from that very belief when he/her comes in contact within another culture(s). We tend to dislike others when there are variations in cultural hegemony. This really captures the important point that communities will not survive unless their members are prepared to define their interests in the light of more general good. So my plight here requires that there are adversaries and conflict in the conceptions of God, which in the actual sense is the same concept in peoples' respective terms of interpretations because there are many faiths or conceptions of God in one reality. Of course, citizens may be bound together as members of a community of faith in God who do not share the same conception of God, but who recognize in the face of adversity that it is best to hang together on the ground of common sentiments of morality.

The survival of human society owes much to the fact that there must be the pluralistic hypothesis that brings everyone together into one reality or level of paradigm. The social bond between citizens and state does not extend to religious differences.

It must conform to the nature of public policy where the individual will ruminate to the criteria of governance towards common good. Political communities endure the variants of religions because they are inclusive part of the civil society and must establish their peculiar identities by accentuating the differences between them in all ramifications. In the history of political community, the distinctiveness of religion has often been in war or in unifying struggles for national independence. For example, this has been the case in Nigeria where there are ethno-religious conflicts between the Northern and Southern Nigeria, and between the Christians in the South and the Moslems in the North. The phenomenon does not stand on its own. The religious communities do not simply form a nation to purchase their identities as a different political community. It exists in conjunction with others in unifying principles of a political community. So, it is in the light of this trajectory, that we will critically discuss the exigencies of the pluralistic hypothesis of religion in relation to African. Perhaps, Kant extols this very nature in his hermeneutics understanding of knowledge. He advocates the intensity of the structure of any unitary finite consciousness to establish a natural relationship of knowledge. He applied this basic epistemological principle to faith considered as propositional belief, concluding that although, God is unique and undifferentiated, God can only be known by human beings through complex propositions.

Kant is Epistemological Model in Pluralistic Hypothesis

In exploring this thesis, our main philosophical task will be one of Kant's most basic epistemological insights, namely that the mind actively interprets sensory information in terms of concepts, so that the environment as we consciously perceive and inhabit it is our familiar three dimensional world of objects interacting in space. This is the generalized version of Kant's complex theory of forms and categories of perception which he found to be inherent in the structure of any unitary finite consciousness.

Basically, in the course of this work, I vehemently decided to use his argument in the Critique of Pure Reason as well as his earlier related work on the categorical imperative to bridge the hiatus in the epistemology of religion. In strictly speaking, Kant extols the virtue of human knowledge in recognizing the mind's own positive contribution to the character of its perceived environment. Conflating in this thesis according to Kant, we experience the world: namely, by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorical scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experience.

All that we are entitled to say about the noumenal, is that it is the reality, whose influence produces, in collaboration with human mind, the phenomenal world of our experience. Literally, it is in this light that the impact of our environment upon our sensory equipment then comes to consciousness. So, it is under this panoply that we should borrow a leaf from his research work to apply it in the field of epistemology of religion. In this understanding, we are therefore employing a well consolidated development of contemporary propositional paradigm in interpreting reality and we chose to admonish that with Kant's epistemological model in pluralism between the existing mind and object of our experiences, that we can affirm the existence of knowledge in our pluralistic hypothesis. However, it is in this light that Kant emphasizes the essentiality of a posteriori and *a priori* elements in human knowledge. He asserts that:

Thoughts without content are empty, perceptions without conceptions are blind, and understanding can perceive nothing, the senses can think nothing, knowledge arises only from their united action (Sahakian, 1968:170-171).

It would seem that Kant is of view that nothing can exist in oblivion. The mind cannot exist without the functionality of the existing object corresponding with the thought form, for without sensibility no object would be perceptible, whereas without understanding, no object could be conceived.

Here, Kant is susceptible in line with the epistemology of religion which he does not refer to at all in his work, but in the Critique of Pure Reason which is quintessentially in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. According to St. Thomas Aquinas:

Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower. He applied this basic epistemological principle to faith considered as propositional belief, concluding that although God is simple and undifferentiated, God can only be known by human beings through complex propositions (Hick, 1989:166). Kant actually in his epistemological model resonates the sense of hybridization in bridging the hiatus or gap between different variables in our environment. He brought the elements of human thoughts into corresponding with object of our reality. Thus, under this guise in relation to the divine, the mode of the knower differs within different religio-cultural systems so that the Real is thought – and – experienced in a wide variety of ways. This concept of Kant's epistemological paradigm can be highly applied in plurality forms of awareness of god and other forms of consciousness.

As mentioned in relation to Thomist maxim, that things known are in the knower. This practically elucidates the starting of knowledge in understanding the pluralistic epistemology of religion. On the basis of this position, Kant later much distinguished explicitly between an entity as it is in itself and as it appears in perception, for the reason that the world, as we consciously perceive it, is partly our own construction leads directly to a differentiation in our understanding appearances of the phenomenon. That is how it was unperceived by anyone, and the world as it appears to, that is as it is perceived by us. This distinction plays a major part in Kant's thought. And that it is in this light, that he asserts that "knowledge is limited to the combined role of sensibility and understanding, both of which are concerned with sense experience though in different ways" (Hakim, 1996:526). Of course, it has to be mentioned that Kant postulated the bounds of man's cognition by asserting that the nature of things as they exist in themselves is in principle inaccessible to human knowledge, that knowledge is possible only of "phenomena" i.e. the means through which things reveal themselves in our experience.

Thus, within the dimensions of epistemology of religion, the world, as it appears is thus entirely real, and it is observed in different forms. The noumenal “real” is experienced and thought by different human mentalities forming and formed by different religious traditions as the range of goods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religion exposes in modernity. Perhaps, these divine particularities are in the same reality within their different hermeneutics understanding and heteronormativity of culture(s). Kant in giving considerations to the concept of noumenon and phenomenon, wants to admonish the visibility of space and time which the mind imposes on the sensory manifold in matter.

However, Kant does not postulate about God as encountered in religious experience, but as an object postulated by reason on the basis of its own practical functioning in moral agency. According to him, the categorical character of moral obligation presupposes the reality of God in which perfect goodness and perfect happiness will coincide. But this is not his real intention, because he is solely concerned in his discussion of categories, with the construction of the physical world in sense perception.

Thus, there is an indication of pluralistic hypothesis in Kant’s epistemology. It hypothesizes the hybridization of thoughts, by bridging the hiatus or gaps that existed in the environment of human knowledge. His theory on sense perception can equally be utilized in bridging the gap in pluralism of religious faith in God. One who is concerned with the construction of the divine within religious experience has the option of accepting or rejecting Kant’s view of sense perception. It is just for a mere academic research and willfully hermeneutic understanding of his epistemology.

The Indigenous African Religion: The Imperative of Epistemology of Religion

The question of the relation between religion and life can be formulated in many different ways. Some religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam argue that the present life is an illusory one which does not partake in the reality of permanent life. They understand life in preparation for a future life. There is a strong indication here that this present life is for the preparation of the future life after death.

At the opposite pole is African Indigenous Religion (ATR) with its total absence of any belief that the earth is no longer important after death. The primary concern of African traditional religion is with correct ordering of this present life with its emphasis on the well-organized society, filial piety, and respect for ancestors who pilot the affairs of the society. In African traditional religion, the concept of death is illusory, it is a process of initiation into the world of ancestral spirit, which look after their respective families on earth.

To the indigenous African religious person or religionist, there is also the idea of God the creator of the Universe. The perception of the universe is centered on the belief in a supreme being who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. God, in African concept, is the ground of all being. He is the creator of the universe. God is not seen in the sense of anthropomorphism occupying space and time. God is that which is real and has been experienced in real life situations, directly or indirectly. God is not far from humanity, rather God lives together with humanity, experience in concrete life situations in different relationship with people and rest of creation.

However, going with imperative of epistemology of religion, one will usually aspire to say that there are some positive and negative functions of religion to humanity; and this extols the virtue of Kant’s epistemological model of knowledge. Kant gave the insights that the mind actively interprets sensory information in terms of concepts, so that the environment as we consciously perceive and inhabit it is our familiar three-dimensional world of objects interacting in space. In the opinion of Okoro, “Kant makes us understand that the external world causes sensation but the mental apparatus orders it to and paves way for formulating principles, based on the experience” (Okoro, 2002: 148).

Yes of course, this is apt to the knowledge of our being. How do we understand things in the phenomenal world? “The mind thinks and exhibits consciousness in the light of “experience” or “exigency” (Okoro, 2002:148). The human mind has the power of limitless creativity based on experience or level of sensitivity to problems. In the status of limitation to knowledge, he neither positively nor negatively conduct himself, and this is how he orient himself in religion. Durkheim(1965) refers to religion as a

unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. KarlMarx (1967:140) defines religion as:

The sob of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of conditions utterly unspiritual. It is the opium of the poor. The idea of God is the keynote of a perverted civilization. To suppress religion which provides an illusory happiness is to establish the claims of real happiness.

For Marx, religion is good with the aim of providing moral pressure and psychological outlets which preserve the class structure. Religion seems to make life tolerable for the oppressed in society. According to Omoregbe (1999:4) “religion is an interpersonal being between a man and a transcendent personal being believed to exist”.

Critically, it is under this spell of analysis that I will examine the epistemological model of African Traditional Religion (ATR). Thus, as literarily endowed with Kant, in the nature of knowledge and cognition, the Africans have the conceptual clarification on their ontological world. Their belief in God is not quite a different one. It is in the same sense of cognition with all other cultures. “The universality of the sense or concept of God (gods) in all cultures is of manifest interest as it portrays

the universality of man or his nature” (Nze, 1981:20). God is usually God everywhere, and His very nature does not change. In cognitive theory of religion, we traced the origin of religion to man’s attempt to explain the phenomena in this mundane world. So, it is in this regard that religion is to provide patterned and familiar way of overcoming life and environmental crises and hope for a comfortable future. Religion also, could be traced to our emotional senses as a means of coping with emotional stress between the living and the dead. Freud traced such emotional stress to primordial incidence in which the children killed their father out of jealousy and sex rage. Religion helps to accentuate us into believing and having in the transcendence. It gives us the needed courage to bear sorts of emotional strain and stress in our lives. More so, religion has to do with man’s response to the demands of his social life. In this regard, religion is seen as something larger than individual, standing for the collective representation of society. Here, in African traditional religion, we utilize religion as a form of divine reverence, individual integration, social integration, self-identity and adjustment function.

Divine Reverence

In African society, it is believed that the well-being of the society depends upon the goodwill of the divine forces. So, it is in this way that they Africans before any function are embarked upon the spiritual forces before any other things. They are consulted and taken into confidence. At the beginning of farming, hunting, and fishing. Seasons, the gods are called upon to assist for successful ventures. In fact, everything done by the Africans; birth, marriage, fishing, hunting, travelling, holding meetings, learning, examinations, sourcing for employment, eating, drinking, going out etc, never left out of religion.

Individual Integration

In Africa, religion helps a great deal for individual integration. It helps man and woman to adjust themselves adequately well in the society. Marx corroborated this to assert that “religion is the opium of the masses”.

Social Integration

Religion mostly here in Africa society and elsewhere in other parts of the third world, perform a social function more than any other social institution. It reflects mostly in every aspects of man’s life. It provides a unified and unifying system of values for example, the ecclesiastical laws and code of ethics.

Self-Identity

Religion helps to create individual self-identity, self-understanding and self-definition. It is a spiritual consecrating thing and as such affect every aspect of man’s personal identity.

Adjustment Function

Religion helps man to adjust his life into a positive legality of the norms. Religion provides important spiritual and emotional comfort and consolation in the face of failures and disappointments in life. It gives

man a sense of security and providence that all is well (Oshitelu, 2010:13). It is a spiritual consciousness, as such it creates a moral and spiritual support to man in the face of uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is in due respect to the Kant's theory of knowledge that the scientific laws, belief in the existence of God, logical relations, propositional concepts, entities of categorical proposition, language and symbols etc, have been highly understood in the light of Kant's pluralistic hypothesis. Kant makes us understand that the external world causes sensation, but the mental apparatus orders it and paves the way for formulating principles, based on the experience.

The mind thinks and exhibits consciousness. The phenomenal object does not think but can be programmed to arrive at conclusion. So, the pluralistic nature of human understanding in the concept of God does not change the reality of his Being. He is God everywhere.

This is so because of the fact that human action is determined and informed partly by cultural values, partly by the socially recognized ways of attaining them. By cultural values, we meant the final or intermediate aims that are regarded as the essentially proper purposes of human activity in a particular society.

The African essence to knowledge is the same, but our experiences and perceptions differ. So Kant is right in assuming that there is a cognition in experience "thoughts without content are empty, perceptions without conceptions are blind" (Sahakian, 1968:171). Perhaps, Kant's position literally predicts that there is a synergy of corporation between the noumena and phenomena in human understanding of things and that knowledge is a unified principle in human existentialism through the priority of rights of individuals to its ends. So, by the Kantian standard, the significance of "cosmological ideas as expressions of moral values in relation to our conditions of life and the total social order is the same in every ontology of nature" (Forde, 1976:x). Perhaps, this explains why there is pluralistic hypothesis, because in line with Kant's epistemological model, he extols the priority of rights to individual will. So nature is authentic by the disposition of the individual will.

It is important to point out that the disposition of knowledge is sacrosanct in all cosmological systems. So, the concept of God in any society is not quite different from others, but can only differ by the cognitions of our intuitive experiences and perceptions of our world view. Any other thing to this proposition can be anathema and a negative to knowledge.

REFERENCES

- Durkheim, E. (1965) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free.
- Forde, D. Ed. (1976) *African World: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, Oxford University Press.
- Hakim, A.B. (1996) *Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Hick, J. (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion*, London: Macmillan.
- Marx, K. (1967) *Capitalism: A Critique of Political Economy*(1). New York: International.
- Nze, C. (1981) *Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Concept of God in African Culture*" in Uche, *Journal of the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, Vol. 5 1981
- Okoro, O. (2002) *Branches of philosophy in Education*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Oshitelu, G.A. (2010) *Religion, God and Evil: Issues in Philosophy and Religion*. Ibadan: Hope. Otakpor, N. (1982) *Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Concept of God in African Cultures: A Reply to C.B. Nze*, in Uche, *Journal of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, Vol. 6.
- Sahakian, W.S. (1968) *History of Philosophy from the Earliest Times to the Present*, New York: Barnes and Noble Books.