

Complementary Epistemology: A Viable Framework for Environmental Philosophy

Akinpelu Ayokunnu Oyekunle

The research is aimed at eliciting the viability of epistemology for the prevention and effective management of environmental crisis, and thus, argues for an epistemic outlook in environmental philosophy. Noting that the environmental crisis of today's world is a crisis of epistemology, I question the epistemic assumptions that detach the epistemic subject from the epistemic object for enhancing the "frontier mentality." This is to unearth the descriptive and prescriptive nature of epistemology in dealing with environmental issues (Scarfe 2008, 98).

The proposed epistemological approach to environmentalism rests on the "beyond the ethical perspectives" to environmental philosophy (Zimmerman 1998; Colyvan 2006; Oyekunle 2011, 2021). This epistemological approach emphasizes the position of Cheney and Weston (1999), Preston (2003), Scarfe (2008), Kawall (2010), Bryant (2011), and Oyekunle (2011, 2021) that argues for epistemology in environmental discourse. However, exploring the intellectual utility of both the Western and African epistemic perspectives on environmentalism is a major contribution that my research at the RCC is aiming at. This is to show the advantage of a multi-perspectives approach to resolving global problems. Thus, from Western perspectives, the synthesis of epistemological internalism and externalism¹ will be explicated while the African epistemic process will be explored. The term complementary epistemology (CE) will capture the interrelatedness of the epistemic subject and object.

In the state of the internalism/externalism complementarity, the epistemic subject and the epistemic object become two sides of a coin that complement each other in knowledge justification and acquisition (Oyekunle 2015, 58). The African epistemic process reveals a unitary ontologized epistemic thought, where there is a "fusion of the epistemic subject and the epistemic object" (Jimoh and Thomas 2015, 120). With the epistemic interrelatedness of object and subject, a nature-human relationship devoid of polarization and exclusiveness is motivated. CE is thus an epistemic system that helps us to "know *in nature*" (Bryant 2011, 26); hence, it underscores the significance and imperativeness to respect and have reverence for nature (Oyekunle 2021, 239).

Drawing at insights from empirical case studies of environmental challenges at the The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park GLTP in the southern part of Africa and the Lake Chad Basin Region (LCBR) in the western part of Africa, the research employs the philosophical-

¹ The hybrid notions obviating the internalism/externalism dichotomy has been advanced by various scholars like Alston (1988), Sennett (1992), Schurz (2009), and Oyekunle (2015).

phenomenological method to interrogate overreliance on ethics in environmental issues. Conceptual clarification and hermeneutical method will be used to reinterpret texts; while logical reconstruction of existing ideas is done to aid the creation and application of proposed CE for environmental purposes. Complementary epistemology encapsulates the unification of the subject and object of perception in the account of knowledge claim, hence, obviating the traditional scientific paradigm of disembodiment, decontextualization, and isolation that engenders the misuse of nature. CE thus becomes a framework for an inceptual thinking that enhances social-cultural awareness of human-nature relationship. In the light of CE's stance, a position readily adapted for environmental concerns is arrived at as we get rid of the bias of seeing humans as separate from nature.