

COGNITIONAL AND INTENTIONALITY ANALYSIS AS THE KEY TO EPISTEMIC FOUNDATION

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Since Descartes, the quest for the foundation in epistemology has suffered a series of setbacks. The consequence of the opposition against an epistemic foundation is epistemic skepticism. The irony of the skeptic position is that scepticism in all its hues is self-refuting. Although the establishment of a foundation is essential for coherent epistemology, the quest for epistemic foundation has suffered some oppositions because most attempts at establishing foundational epistemology have focused on intentional signs or products – beliefs, concepts, propositions, etc. In this essay, I argue that in order to establish foundational epistemology, cognitional and intentionality analysis should take priority over conceptual analysis. Hence, instead of focusing on intentional signs or products, attention should be paid to intentional acts – experiencing, understanding and judging – of the knowing subject. In other words, I argue that paying adequate attention to human cognitional structure is vital in the defense of epistemic foundation and that the foundation is found in the structure of human knowing rather than in the products of human knowing. Focusing on cognitional analysis will help to account for both epistemic foundation and epistemic pluralism. The shift from conceptual to cognitional and intentionality analysis has implications for the articulation of the African perspective on knowledge since the human cognitional structure is the same, but contextual differences arise because of one's epistemic environment. Following the example of Bernard Lonergan, I argue that self-knowledge or self-affirmation of the knower, as he terms it, is the paradigmatic case for the establishment of epistemic foundation.

Keywords: Epistemic foundation, cognitional analysis, intentionality, epistemic pluralism, knowledge, epistemology

INTRODUCTION

The question of an epistemic foundation is a perennial controversial question in epistemology. The question can be ignored or neglected by a philosopher; however,

its importance cannot be denied coherently. Any philosophical investigation of knowledge is influenced by a philosopher's implicit (assumed) or explicit position regarding the plausibility of epistemic foundations. Any attempt at the definition of knowledge is a manifestation of the quest for epistemic foundationalism. The two supposed alternatives – infinitism and coherentism – to foundationalism do not seem to be plausible alternatives (Cf. Duncan Pritchard 2014, 34-36; Alvin Goldman et al. 2015, 9-14). In fact, infinitism and coherentism are implicit manifestations of the quest for an epistemic foundation. Infinitism implicitly seems to hold that epistemic foundation rest on infinite chains of beliefs, while coherentism implicitly avers that human knowledge rests on the coherence of different beliefs in the form of systems or webs. So infinitism and coherentism at least implicitly assume foundationalism. Because of such an assumption, in line with the explanatory criteria of simplicity and parsimony, foundationalism is better than its competitors.

Granted that epistemic foundation cannot be easily dismissed, the approach one uses to address the question can raise problems like the problem of criterion in the quest for the definition of knowledge or epistemic scepticism. Since Descartes, the quest for the foundation in epistemology has suffered a series of setbacks. The consequence of the opposition against epistemic foundation is epistemic scepticism. The irony of the skeptic position is that scepticism in all its hues is self-refuting. Although the establishment of a foundation is essential for coherent epistemology, the quest for epistemic foundation has suffered some oppositions because most attempts at establishing foundational epistemology have focused on intentional signs or products – beliefs, concepts, propositions, etc.

Considering the challenges that the quest for the establishment of an epistemic foundation has faced since the beginning of the Modern era, in this paper, I argue that since epistemologists cannot do without at least an assumed epistemic foundation, the quest for an epistemic foundation should take a different direction. Instead of continuing to focus on conceptual analysis of cognitional contents and cognitional objects, attention should be directed to cognitional and intentionality analysis. This shift from the contents and objects of knowledge to the knowing subject and human cognitional structure will account for a defensible epistemic foundation and, at the same time, account for a plurality of epistemic perspectives. Besides, it will account for some differences between different epistemic perspectives like African and Western perspectives. It will also expose the problem with the so-called epistemic injustice.

In order to better appreciate the need for the proposed shift, this paper begins by tracing the quest for a foundation to the Cartesian epistemological turn and then examine the subsequent problems that Descartes' philosophical method led to. Finally, I will examine Lonergan's alternative that accounts for a solid epistemic foundation and the possibility of epistemic plurality.

RENÉ DESCARTES AND QUEST FOR EPISTEMIC FOUNDATION

The beginning of the quest for epistemic foundation could be traced to René Descartes' epistemological turn in his attempt to break away from the Ancient and

Mediaeval philosophical method in general and Scholasticism in particular. This is evident in his *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1997). Prior to Descartes, the emphasis was on being, that which is, what is known when we say we know rather than focusing on what we do when we know (cognitional theory) or the conditions for knowing (epistemology). Tracing the quest for an epistemic foundation to Descartes does not mean that the philosophers before him had nothing to say about cognitional theory and epistemology. Aristotle's *De Anima*, some questions in St Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (Part 1, Questions 77-79), and his Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* are epistemological in scope. However, the ancient and medieval cognitional theory and epistemology are contained within the frameworks of Metaphysics as the first philosophy. In fact, even though Descartes' quest for method, criteria for knowledge, and epistemic foundations are epistemological, he did not wholly break away from the ancient and medieval paradigm of situating epistemology within the confines of metaphysics as the first philosophy. Hence his philosophical tree identifies metaphysics as the root.

If Descartes' philosophical paradigm is similar to that of the ancient and medieval thinkers, why then should the origin of the quest for an epistemic foundation be traced to him? I defend the position for two principal reasons: first is the type of question he raised, and second is his methodological approach. Regarding the first point, Descartes' question is not principally about the objects of human knowledge but about the criteria for knowing/knowledge. Descartes' investigative methodology is geared toward the attainment of knowledge that is certain, evident, and indubitable. Hence his criteria for certain knowledge are clarity and distinction of thought. He (1912, 27) expresses his desired goal in the quest for method thus: 'I concluded that I might take, as a general rule, the principle, that all the things which we very clearly and distinctly conceive are true.' It is worthy of note to mention that Descartes was able to establish the criteria for truth because he (1912, 27) put his methodic doubt into practice and consequently arrived at that which is indubitable, evident and certain: *Cogito, ergo sum*, which he termed the first principle of the philosophy he was searching for. This knowledge of one's existence, therefore, serves as a foundation for Descartes. It is important to note that for Descartes (1912, 24), the quest for a method is a quest for a foundation, just as his methodic doubt is a quest for certainty, unlike the skeptics that doubt for the sake of doubting. Descartes (1912, 26-27) expresses how he arrived at epistemic foundation through his methodic doubt thus:

But immediately upon this, I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, I think, hence I am, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the skeptic capable of shaking it.

While Descartes's discovery is indeed essential for grounding epistemic foundation, he did not fully appreciate the ultimate implication of his discovery, and viz that epistemic foundation is ground on the cognitional structure of the knowing subject rather than on the known objects, cognitional contents or products since the

truth of the knowledge of his existence is grounded on his act of thinking. Articulating what Cartesian foundationalism consists of, Laurence Bonjour (2009, 177) asserts:

For Descartes, as for many foundationalists, the foundation for knowledge and justification consists of (i) a person's immediate awarenesses of his or her own conscious state mind, together with (ii) his or her a priori grasp of self-evidently true propositions. Beliefs deriving from these two sources require no further justification, whereas beliefs about most or all other matters, and especially beliefs concerning objects and occurrences in the material world, require justifications or reasons that ultimately appeal, whether directly or indirectly, to immediate experience and a priori insight.

BonJour's articulation of foundationalism in the quoted passage shows that the thrust of Cartesian foundationalism is a cognitional product, that is, beliefs rather than cognitional acts of the subject. Even when Bonjour acknowledges that immediate awareness of one's conscious state of mind is an element in foundationalism, he does not explicitly highlight that it is cognitional acts of a knower that necessarily involve an affirmation or judgment that grounds foundationalism.

However, an analysis of *Cogito, ergo sum*, as the first principle of the philosophy that Descartes was seeking and the ground for an epistemic foundation, shows that foundationalism is not grounded on cognitional content and products but on the cognitional act of the knowing subject. It is the act of thinking that makes the difference in the Cartesian approach and not what is thought about. However, because his emphasis was on the criteria for knowledge, that is, clarity, distinction, and certainty, he focused on the axiom "I think, therefore, I am." By doing this, he shifted attention from where the epistemic foundation is grounded, which is the act of knowing subjects, to the cognitional product, which in his case is the proposition <Cogito ergo sum>. I emphasize that the act of the cognitional subject grounds epistemic foundation because it is not existence that grounds the act of thinking. Rather, it is the act of thinking that grounds the certainty of the knowledge of one's existence. The consequence of the shift in Descartes is that he focused on the object of knowledge – the knowledge of one's existence – and thus, he neglected that what is common to all kinds and objects of knowledge is not grounded on cognitional contents or products but in the human cognitional structure. Commenting on the difference between Thomistic epistemology and that of Descartes, Andrew Beards (2010, 59) stresses that entertaining the possibility of one's nonexistence merely as a thought does not lead to a contradiction. A contradiction arises when one affirms one's nonexistence. He (2010, 59) writes:

In *De Veritate*, St. Thomas writes that one can, in fact, think the proposition "I exist" as untrue (DV, q.10, a. 12, ad. 7). It is a contingent proposition, and one can entertain the thought, as a possibility, of one's nonexistence. But it is when, and precisely when, one puts forward this thought with assent, *cum assensu*, that one lands in contradiction. Why?

Because the act of making the judgment, the affirmation "I do not exist," is the kind of conscious act that shows that I do exist. For this act is also connected with other intellectual acts of the soul, such as questioning and grasping concepts, and therefore the occurrence of acts, even in the moment of self-denial, is evidence that the thinking self exists.

The point that is emphasized in the quotation is that the ground for the self-evidence of the knowledge of personal existence is the cognitional act of the knowing subject. This supports my position that the epistemic foundation capable of accounting for epistemic pluralism must be grounded on the human cognitional structure, that is, on the cognitional acts rather than on cognitional signs, contents, or objects.

That the quest for a method is a quest for an epistemic foundation in Descartes is indicated by the title of his work on method - *Discourse on the Method for Conducting one's Reason Well and for Seeking the Truth of the Science*. Also, his use of the analogy of building to explain the project he undertook in the *Discourse on Method* is an indication that its aim is to establish a foundation.

Although the Cartesian enterprise was laudable, it was criticized by his contemporaries and later generation of philosophers. Why, then, did the Cartesian project encounter such opposition? My view is that Descartes did not take his quest for a foundation to its ultimate implication or logical consequence. Rather than seeking the epistemic foundation in the human cognitional structure, which was instrumental for him to establish the first principle of the philosophy he was seeking, he shifted his focus to cognitional signs and contents – ideas, *res cogitans*, and *res extensa*. In other words, instead of paying adequate attention to cognitional and intentionality analysis, he focused on conceptual analysis. While conceptual analysis is a tool that is commonly used in philosophy, it does not provide the ground for an epistemic foundation. This is because it breaks down concepts and ideas for easy understanding and provides the connection between various concepts and ideas, but it does not furnish the origin of concepts, ideas, and notions, which is important for establishing an epistemic foundation. Secondly, because of the plurality of epistemic environments and cognitional objects and products, it is essential that grounding an adequate epistemic foundation requires the reality of epistemic plurality to be taken into account. In addition, because of its shift to cognitional signs and contents, Cartesian foundationalism is limited. Pointing out the limitation of the Cartesian shift from cognitional act to content, Beards (2010, 61) argues that 'what is clear and distinct is not simply an idea of myself, but rather that the evidence is in, the evidence of my conscious debating and questioning activities, for making the judgment that "I am a knower."

Acknowledging the centrality of cognitional and intentionality analysis in the quest for epistemic foundation accounts for the epistemic and philosophical pluralism that Lonergan (1967; 1972 and 1992) highlights. Lonergan does this by arguing for the importance of distinguishing among three interrelated but distinct philosophical disciplines – cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics. The purpose of explicitly distinguishing among them is to fully appreciate a progressive continuum from cognitional theory through epistemology to metaphysics. Lonergan (1972, 25;

1992, 16; McCarthy 1990, 246; Beards 2008, 21) expresses the distinction by pointing out the principal question each of the three disciplines (cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics respectively) tries to answer: "What do I do when I am knowing?" "Why is doing that knowing?" "What do I know when I do that." I will examine Lonergan's approach to the epistemic foundation later, but before going into that, it is important to briefly examine the situation of the quest for foundations after Descartes.

POST-CARTESIAN QUEST FOR FOUNDATION

The post-Cartesian quest for an epistemic foundation is, in general, a reaction to Descartes's position either in the form of an agreement with or objections to his position. Agreement with Descartes regarding foundation does not necessarily mean agreement with the position that cognitional sign or content is to be considered as the foundation of human knowledge. This is exemplified by the positions of the rationalists (Gottfried Leibniz and Spinoza) and empiricists (John Locke and Hume). Although the rationalists and empiricists give primacy to reason and experience, respectively, they at least assume that there is an epistemic foundation. An outright opposition to Cartesian's quest is exemplified by a skeptical attitude in its different hues.

A common feature of the post-Cartesian quest for an epistemic foundation is an emphasis on the sources of knowledge or epistemic signs or contents like ideas, representations and beliefs. Hence the question of the foundation is reduced to the question: What is the basic idea, representation, or belief? The main oversight in such reduction is that whether we are concerned with Cartesian, Lockean, or Humean ideas, we cannot meaningfully conceptualize them without the act of the conscious, intentional subject. As will be argued below, any attempt to provide an epistemic foundation that ignores the role of the intentional, conscious subject or the knower will, at best, be inadequate or, at worst, end with some skeptic gusto.

It could be argued that Kant's transcendental idealism was intended to be an establishment of epistemic foundation that envisioned focusing on the human cognitional structure. In the preface to the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, he (1999, 101; A xii) states his understanding of the critique of pure reason thus:

I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive **independently of all experience**, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.

Critiquing the faculty of reason is not possible without being aware of one's cognitional structure or process. But whether Kant succeeds in achieving his goal is debatable. Being a man of his time when the philosophical focus was metaphysics or what Lonergan calls the period of classical consciousness (Lonergan 1971, 84;

McCarthy 1990, 6 -10), Kant did not carry his critique to its ultimate consequence. Rather, in his reconciliatory approach to the positions of the rationalists and empiricists (or dogmatists and skeptics, as he calls them), he focused on the sources of knowledge – sensibility, and understanding. Nonetheless, his epistemology was laden with empirical residue as he limited the notion of knowledge and objectivity to that which is empirical as he (1999, 685; A821/B849) takes the existence of an empirical object to be the ground for objective sufficiency. Consequently, instead of critiquing the faculty of reason, he ended up with a "dogmatic" assertion that reason is not a constitutive principle of knowledge but only a regulative principle. An assertion that is not a result of the critique but a presupposition of his critique. Due to a huge empiricist residue in Kant's epistemology, Giovanni Sala (1994) argues that Kant's theory of human knowledge is "a sensualistic version of intuitionism." He (1994, 44) argues that the major limitation of Kant's *Critique* is his focus on "formal components of the object of scientific knowledge (pure intuitions of sense, pure concepts of understanding), that is, with the discovery of content-constitutive or object-constitutive a priori." The consequence of Kant's concentration on the object is his neglect of the knowing subject and its cognitional acts in the quest for knowledge.

Because of the limitation of his cognitional theory, Kant was not able to clearly differentiate between understanding and judgment; hence he (1999, 684-685; A818/B845) avers that truth "is an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective ground but also requires subjective causes in the mind of him who judges." Due to his inadequate distinction between understanding and judgment, Kant's quest for an epistemic foundation was not carried to its ultimate implication. Summarily, one could say that Kant's quest for an epistemic foundation is hampered by the empiricist residue in his cognitional theory and epistemology.

The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' philosophical endeavours are significantly marked by the quest foundations. A critical analysis of Gottlob Frege's quest for logical primacy and assigning of truth to the third realm and his postulation of thought as the only truth-bearer (Frege 1956, 289-311), Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953 [2009]) emphasis on linguistic primacy and even the anti-metaphysical stance of the logical positivists indicates that they are a search for an epistemic foundation. Nonetheless, the defect of these attempts is their exclusive focus on cognitional signs or contents (concepts, words, thoughts, propositions, and sentences) at the detriment of cognitional acts of the knowing subject.

A significant defender of foundationalism in the twentieth-century philosophy in the Anglo-American tradition was Roderick Chisholm. The third edition of his *Theory of Knowledge* (1989) is a defense of foundationalism and internalism. In his view, foundationalism is inescapable in epistemology. Hence he rephrases the question of epistemic foundation as the question of the problem of the criterion. The problem of the criterion deals with the question of the extent of human knowledge and the criteria of knowing. Chisholm argues that the problem of criterion is highlighted by two questions: " 'What do we know?' and How are we to decide, in any particular case, whether we know?'" (1989, 6). According to him, the foundationalist would have to begin with one of the two questions. He or she who begins with the extent of human knowledge to establish epistemic foundations is a generalist or methodist, while the

one that begins with the question of the criteria of particular instances of knowledge is a particularist (1989, 6-7).

It is important to note that Chisholm's quest for epistemic foundation focuses on cognitional signs, products, or contents and ignores cognitional acts. He does not clearly differentiate among cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics as Lonergan does. In stating the subject of epistemology, Chisholm writes: "Theory of knowledge, when considered as a part of philosophy, is the concern with such questions as, 'What can I know? How can I distinguish those things I am justified in believing from those things I am not justified in believing? And how can I decide whether I am more justified in believing one thing than in believing another?'" (1989, 1). From the quotation, it is understandable why Chisholm's articulation of epistemic foundation focuses on cognitional signs and contents. However, his version of an epistemic foundation does not completely refute nor dissolve the skeptic challenge.

Considering that the skeptic challenge is not wavering and that the paradigm of focusing on cognitional signs and content exposes an epistemic foundation to skeptical attack, it is reasonable to change the paradigm in the quest for a foundation since foundationalism is inevitable for an adequate epistemological project. However, before I turn to cognitional and intentionality analysis as a version of foundationalism that addresses the skeptic challenge and accommodates epistemic pluralism, I will briefly examine alternative theories to foundationalism.

ALTERNATIVE JUSTIFICATION THEORIES IN EPISTEMOLOGY

This section briefly examines rival alternative epistemic justification theories to foundationalism. The two theories that I focus on are coherentism and infinitism.

Coherentism

Coherentism is a rival epistemic justification theory to foundationalism that claims that for any belief or proposition to be justified, it must cohere with a system of beliefs or a set of propositions. Keith Lehrer (1992, 87) expresses the basic thrust of coherence theory thus: 'A coherence theory affirms that a belief is completely justified if and only if it coheres with a system of belief'. Peter Murphy avers that coherence comprises three elements 'logical consistency, explanatory relations, and various inductive (non-explanatory) relations'. According to Bonjour (2009, 187), coherentists claim that foundationalism is seriously mistaken because 'the sole basis for epistemic justification is relations among beliefs, rather than between beliefs and something external. More specifically, it is alleged that what justifies beliefs is the way they fit together: the fact that they *cohere* with each other'. Put differently, the claim of coherentists is that epistemic justification is possible only in the relation that holds between cognitional contents and products like beliefs and propositions but never between cognitional acts and contents or objects. This view of epistemic justification minimizes or even eliminates the role of the cognitional subject in the quest for epistemic foundation and justification.

There are different versions of coherentism. For instance, Murphy identifies (i) necessity coherentism, which claims that coherence is a necessary condition for epistemic justification; (ii) sufficiency coherentism, which avers that coherence is a sufficient condition for epistemic justification; (iii) strong coherentism that claims "that belonging to a coherent system is both necessary and sufficient" for epistemic justification. Despite the various versions of coherentism, it is difficult to advance a coherence theory of justification that does not ultimately lead to a kind of skepticism. This is because it is difficult to adequately explain how beliefs are justified just because they cohere with a system of beliefs without accounting for how systems of beliefs are justified in the first place since any system of beliefs is composed of individual beliefs. There are two explanatory possibilities (i) that a system of beliefs is justified a priori, and in this case, one would ask, to what does that cohere? (ii) the second possibility is that the system is justified because the individual beliefs cohere with one another. The second option would lead to circularity or *petitio principii*. Bonjour (2009, 181) argues that a justification theory that relies solely on inference inescapably results in circularity or question-begging. He writes: "The obvious problem with a justificatory chain having this structure is that the overall reasoning that it reflects appears to be circular or question-begging in a way that deprives it of any justificatory force."

Although circularity or infinite regress is a common objection against the coherence theory of justification, Lehrer (1992, 88-89) opines that the regress objection does not collapse the position of coherence theorists because it is mistaken to move from the claim that one does not actually infinitely justify a belief to conclude a person cannot infinitely justify a belief. To substantiate his claim, he uses an analogy of adding three to a series of numbers. He (1992, 88-89) asserts:

It would be mistaken to infer that there is some number to which a person is unable to add three from the fact that she is actually unable to carry out the infinite task of adding three to each number. Similarly, it would be a mistake to conclude that a person is not completely justified in any belief from the fact that she is unable to carry out the infinite task of justifying every belief to another.

Lehrer's analogy does not seem to address the regress challenge. This is because the basic point of the regress argument is that the implication of accepting infinite regress in the quest for epistemic justification is that no belief is adequately justified because if the first belief in a series or chain is not justified, it means subsequent beliefs are not completely justified. Moreover, if it is claimed that the chain is infinite or endless, it means that all justification that relies on such a chain is, at best partial and inadequate. This situation inevitably would lead to skepticism about knowledge and justification claims. Secondly, Lehrer's analogy shows that his defense of epistemic regress only accounts for a possibility. However, to ground epistemic justification on a possibility is, at best, a thought experiment and does not really address actuality. From the brief exploration of coherentism, we can conclude that it is not a better alternative to foundationalism.

Infinitism

Infinitism, to a certain extent, is a response to the regress argument that is leveled against coherentism. It is a position that claims that epistemic justification relies on infinite reasons or evidences. According to Peter Klein (1998, 919; 1999, 297), 'Its central thesis is that the structure of justificatory reasons is infinite and non-repeating.' For Scott Aikin (2018), 'Epistemic infinitism is the view that justifying reasons are infinite, and so it is a particular solution to the regress problem.' Infinitists advance the position that neither circularity nor foundational or basic reason is to be accepted as a reasonable approach toward epistemic justification. This means that infinitism is considered to be a rival alternative to both foundationalism and coherentism. Klein (1999, 297) avers that infinitism has a justificatory advantage over its rival theories, foundationalism and coherentism, because it is capable of providing a reasonable account of rational beliefs where the alternative theories are incapable of doing that. In fact, he claims that infinitism is the only theory of epistemic justification that is worth the name. The charge of infinitism, especially what Aikin (2008) calls pure infinitism, against foundationalism, is its arbitrariness in the establishment of basic or foundational beliefs, while its objection against coherentism is circularity or question-begging that is inherent in coherentism as a meta-epistemic theory of justification.

In his classification of infinitism into pure and impure versions, Aikin (2008, 177) avers that infinitism is classified into three versions based on whether a position is pure and strong or impure and strong or weak. Hence, he opines that there are three versions of infinitism. They are strong pure epistemic infinitism, strong impure epistemic infinitism, and weak impure epistemic infinitism. The strong pure epistemic infinitists claim that the only adequate theory of epistemic justification is infinitism. On the other hand, strong and weak impure epistemic infinitists acknowledge that infinitism is not the only source of justification in that the justification of some beliefs may require basic beliefs or coherence with systems of beliefs. He identifies Peter Klein and Jeremy Fantl as advocates of pure infinitism while he regards himself as an impure infinitist. According to him (2008, 177), the difference between strong and weak versions of impure epistemic infinitism is that strong impure epistemic infinitism is a position opines that 'infinitely extended chains of inference are necessary for any J-tree [justification tree]'; while the weak version does not claim the necessity of 'infinitely extended chains of inference' for all justification trees.

Although Aikin argues that impure infinitism is to be preferred to pure infinitism, an impure infinitism ultimately is foundationalism since it acknowledges the role of foundational or basic beliefs in the quest for epistemic justification. In general, the basic problem with infinitism is that in claiming that an adequate epistemic justification requires a chain of infinite reasons, infinitists think of reasons as self-ordering justificatory tools. Such thinking undermines the fact that reasons are given by epistemic agents and are also challenged by epistemic agents. Reasons are not just there waiting to be discovered. They are not, as Klein (1999) claims, "subjectively and objectively available to us. Reasons, just as beliefs, are products of cognitional acts of epistemic agents. So, any justification theory that relies solely on epistemic products is, at best, inadequate. This is the problem of infinitism, coherentism, and traditional foundationalism. These three theories of justification focus exclusively on the

cognitional products – beliefs and reasons – without explicitly accounting for the central role of the epistemic agent.

Klein's (1999, 301) defense for infinitism rests on his conviction 'that being able to produce reasons for beliefs is a distinctive character of adult human knowledge.' For this reason, he claims that reasons and only reasons are necessary for epistemic justification. He avers that causal conditions or causal relations are not important for the justification of beliefs. For him, the consequence of rejecting causal conditions or causal relations as justificatory is that infinitism is the only viable theory of justification.

A careful analysis of Klein's claim shows that he subscribes to the definition of knowledge as 'justified true belief.' If this is the case, then it means that Edmund Gettier's (1963) objection applies to Klein's position. If the three conditions, truth, belief, and justification, are not sufficient for the attainment of knowledge, then it follows that a chain of reasons, whether finite or infinite, cannot adequately account for epistemic justification. Secondly, Klein's insistence that 'the structure of justificatory reasons is infinite' is, at best, ambiguous. It could either mean that human beings are beings that can produce an endless chain of reasons. In this case, the focus is not on reasons per se as on the cognitional capacities of human beings. A second possible meaning is that in the quest for justification, no human person can provide sufficient reasons for any of his or her beliefs because the chain of reasons is endless for each belief. If this is the case, it implies that no belief is adequately justified. Such a position calls into question all epistemic and doxastic claims. If the second meaning is the position that infinitists defend, then infinitism only relies on epistemic hope and so is not an adequate theory of epistemic justification.

From the exploration so far, it is contended that neither coherentism nor infinitism has been established as an adequate epistemic justification theory since they are accused of circularity and infinite regress, respectively. It does not seem that any of the two theories is better than traditional foundationalism, even though coherentists and infinitists accuse foundationalism of being arbitrary in its claim that some reasons are basic and requires no justification.

Therefore, it is important to ask; where do the limitation of traditional foundationalism, coherentism, and infinitism lie? My view is that the limitation of the three theories of justification lies in their exclusive reliance on cognitional products like reasons, beliefs, and propositions without explicitly accounting for the role of human cognitional acts. Reasons, whether basic or chain of reasons, by themselves, do not justify any belief. Justification and refutation of justifications result from the cognitional acts of the epistemic agent. In other words, epistemic grounding does not rely exclusively on reasons but on the acts of epistemic agents who make epistemic, rational, and truth claims. In the quest for justification, the decisive cognitional act is the act of judgment. Reasons are taken seriously in the quest for justification because they result from judgments that are made by epistemic agents. Since the quest for justification arises in the first place because of the questioning attitude of epistemic agents, it would imply that any theory of justification that does not take into account the central role of cognitional subjects would be, at best, inadequate. Consequently, the quest for justification and epistemic foundation must shift from analysis of

cognitional products (conceptual analysis) to cognitional and intentionality analysis. This is because only epistemic agents can make doxastic, epistemic, and alethic claims and can ascertain when any belief is sufficiently justified. Cognitional analysis is important because human knowing arises from the cognitional acts of a conscious knowing subject (Aleke 2021). On the other hand, intentionality analysis is vital because human knowledge is intentional. It is knowledge of something. It implies that the quest for epistemic foundation and justification cannot ignore or neglect these important aspects of human cognitional process.

COGNITIONAL AND INTENTIONALITY ANALYSIS: THE KEY TO EPISTEMIC FOUNDATION

Suppose it is conceded that focusing on cognitional signs, contents, or even objects is an obstacle to the establishment of an epistemic foundation; then, a change of paradigm necessitates that we turn to cognitional acts if we hope for a more successful grounding of epistemic foundation. This is because human knowing is conscious and intentional. In the process of knowing, the human subject is conscious of its intentional object and also self-conscious when he or she is engaging in the activities that give rise to human knowledge. On the other hand, human consciousness is polymorphic because of different patterns of experience since our attitude towards data of sense could be biological, aesthetic, intelligent, etc. At the same time, data of sense or intended object to be known can be diverse and multiple as our epistemic environments are. Hence focusing on the intended objects in order to establish an epistemic foundation would be problematic. The knowing subject qua subject, which is both conscious and intentional, is a preferable locus.

A thinker who argued for the shift to cognitional and intentionality analysis in the quest for an epistemic foundation was the Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904- 1984). His philosophical thought is an appropriation of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. According to Lonergan, mere jettison of tradition is not better than complete acceptance of tradition without making it relevant to one's epoch. His turn to cognitional and intentionality analysis contra the prevalent conceptual analysis in philosophy in general and in epistemology, in particular, is a consequence of his philosophical method, which he termed a generalized empirical method (Lonergan 1992, 96-97, 268; Beards 2018:1-48) which he also referred to as transcendental method (Lonergan 1972, 13-25; Beards 2018,5-14). Although Lonergan's philosophical method is called generalized empirical method or transcendental method, it is neither empiricist nor transcendental in the sense of Kant's transcendental idealism. In fact, Lonergan (1992, 362-366, 437-441) is critical of both the empiricist or naïve realist and Kantian cognitional theories because of their inadequacies as they take that which is obvious in knowing as obviously knowing. In his view, the empiricist reduces knowing to experiencing or perceiving, while idealist cognitional theory, in general, limits knowing to understanding, and Kant's critical idealism limits knowing to the knowledge of phenomena.

Lonergan's method is a critical realist method, which views knowing as a complex, and dynamic process that is comprised of various activities that are

performed by the conscious and intentional subject on different but complementary levels – experiencing, understanding, and judging, also called empirical, intelligent and rational consciousness respectively. According to Lonergan, none of the levels by itself is knowing. While they are all important components of the dynamic and cumulative process called knowing, it is when they are taken together that knowing arises. The decisive moment in this process is the act of making a judgment (Lonergan 1967, 223-224; 1971, 6-20; 1992, 346). Since human knowing results from cognitional and intentional operations performed by the subject, it is imperative to ground epistemic foundation on cognitional and intentionality analysis rather than seeking a foundation in conceptual analysis or focusing on intentional signs, contents, and objects.

In order to ground epistemic foundation on cognitional analysis, two things need to be done. First, a clear distinction must be made among three distinct but related philosophical disciplines, viz, cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics. The purpose of this distinction is to clearly show the progression from cognitional theory through epistemology to metaphysics. This is because when the three disciplines "are assembled in this cumulative order, cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics form a comprehensive account of cognition that advances from knowing through knowledge to the nature of the known" (McCarthy 1990, 318). Without distinguishing the three legitimate philosophical disciplines, there is a tendency to confuse one with the others. Such confusion manifests in the attempt to establish an epistemic foundation on epistemic contents or objects. In order to avoid confusing one discipline for the other, Lonergan spelled out the different questions that are central to each of the disciplines. The questions that distinguish among cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics are, respectively, "What am I doing when I am knowing?" "Why is do that knowing?", "What do I know when I do it" (Lonergan 1972, 25; Beards 2008, 21).

The second thing to be considered in grounding epistemic foundation on cognitional and intentionality analysis is an explicit exposition of cognitional theory. An explicit articulation of a philosopher's background cognitional theory is essential in the quest for foundation because a "philosopher's epistemological and metaphysical positions are dictated, or at least influenced by his or her cognitional theory" (Aleke 2018, 198; 2021, 214). Besides, an explicit articulation of one's theory of knowing is vital for the assessment of the adequacy or inadequacy of the cognitional theory and its underlying assumptions. This is because an inadequate cognitional theory would lead to an inadequate epistemic foundation. As Lonergan (1992, 365) puts it, "cognitional analysis is needed not to know being but to know knowledge." If it is conceded that the aim of cognitional analysis is to know knowledge or knowing rather than the object of knowledge or being, then cognitional analysis is the locus for an epistemic foundation. Highlighting the indispensability of cognitional analysis in the quest for knowledge, Sala (1994, 44-45) writes:

It is, therefore, appropriate that in our investigation into human knowledge, we should not concentrate solely on the object but should also take into consideration the operations of the subject – all of them, *each*

according to its own character – and thus construct a theory of subjectivity parallel to the theory of the object.

The analysis of the knowing process helps us to realize that in any instance of knowing, the knowing subject performs various activities that belong to different levels that comprise the human cognitional structure. The first phase or level of empirical consciousness (experiencing) is common to all sentient beings that have functioning sense organs. This is the level at which we perceive the data of senses and are aware of the data of consciousness. Though we share this level with animals, the subsequent levels are crucial for knowing. The second phase, which is intelligent consciousness, is ignited by the human inquiry spirit. Whenever we perceive or sense, we seek to understand that which we have perceived by raising questions like, What is it? Why is it? How often does it occur? Lonergan (1992, 297-300) refers to such questions as questions for intelligence since they aim at getting insight and understanding. When we gain an understanding of that which we have experienced, we formulate our understanding in the form of definition, description, and explanation. Nonetheless, in our quest for knowledge, we do not rest contented with our understanding, but our critical spirit comes into play when we seek to evaluate the correctness or the incorrectness of our understanding. This is the third stage of the cognitional process that Lonergan calls the level of rational consciousness or judging. It is at this stage that knowing/knowledge properly understood arises. Since the aim of this stage is to ascertain the correctness or incorrectness of understanding, Lonergan (1992, 297-300, 403) calls it reflective understanding. The guiding question for this stage is: Is it so? This kind of question Lonergan calls question for reflection. In order to answer the question for reflection and attain knowledge, there is the need to marshal out and weigh one's evidences so as to be sure that the relevant conditions for the correctness of one's understanding are fulfilled. When evidences are marshaled out and weighed, there is reflective insight. Because reflective grasp and the act of judging are decisive in the quest for knowledge, Lonergan writes: "What we know is that to pronounce judgment without that reflective grasp is merely to guess; again, what we know is that once that grasp has occurred, then to refuse to judge is just silly" (1992, 304).

From the brief outline of the three levels of cognitional structure, it is evident that the levels of consciousness are complementary since we cannot understand unless some data is presented to us, and we cannot judge unless we have understood the presented data (regardless of the adequacy or inadequacy of our understanding). Although the components of the knowing process are complementary, they are irreducible to one another. Hence it is problematic when knowing is reduced to experiencing or perceiving as the empiricists or naïve realists do or reduced to understanding as the idealists do. Knowing or knowledge, therefore, is attained when there is an intelligent grasp of that which is experienced and reasonable affirmation of that which is understood (Lonergan 1992, 456). For this reason, Lonergan (1971, 20) emphasizes the transcendental precepts in the quest for knowledge. The precepts are: 'Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable.'¹ In other words, for us to know, we must be attentive to the data, intelligent in our understanding of the data, and reasonable in

our affirmation of that which is understood. Without an intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation, it is mistaken to claim that there is knowledge.

Further, an explicit articulation or exploration of the cognitional process is important in order to clearly distinguish among the different stages or levels of consciousness that are necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. In doing this, the prevalent tendency to confuse consciousness and knowledge, self-consciousness and self-knowledge, is avoided. It is only through cognitional and intentionality analysis that we can reasonably and conclusively affirm that any form of awareness or consciousness that is not followed by correct understanding as a result of inquiry or questioning and subsequently by reasonable affirmation is not knowing or knowledge but remains only experiencing. It does not matter whether the experience is of other objects as data of sense or the self as a given datum of consciousness. This position is also defended by Giovanni Sala (1994), who argues that proper understanding of what knowing is, is fundamental in avoiding the too common confusion, even among philosophers, between consciousness and self-consciousness with knowledge and self-knowledge, respectively. He (1994, 91) asserts:

From the thesis that human knowledge in the full sense of the word (knowledge of reality as such) is a structure, it follows that consciousness is not knowledge, not even knowledge of self. We know ourselves as beings through the rational judgment 'I am,' which concludes the process of introspective knowing, just as we know the external world through the judgment that concludes the process of direct knowing.

From the foregoing analysis, an inevitable reasonable conclusion is that an epistemic foundation is grounded on cognitional and intentionality analysis since knowing (and knowledge) results from the conscious and intentional acts performed by the knowing subject. To search for an epistemic foundation by focusing on intentional signs, products, contents, and objects is, at best, inadequate. This is because our intentional objects, that is, objects to be known, are diverse in that they can be empirical or non-empirical, but the human cognitional structure remains the same. Also, intentional objects change from one epistemic environment to another, and the diversity of objects implies that they cannot guarantee the unity that the epistemic foundation requires. The same situation applies to cognitional products, signs, and contents like beliefs, propositions, and reasons. Beliefs, propositions, and reasons are what they are because they result from judgments that epistemic agents or knowing subjects make. Reasons by themselves, in the exclusion of the cognitional acts of epistemic agents, do not justify beliefs. Human cognitional acts are indispensable for the justification of beliefs. Hence, for the quest for epistemic foundation and justification to be adequate, it must be centered on human cognitional acts. That is why I argued that cognitional and intentionality analysis is the key to an epistemic foundation.

To highlight why cognitional and intentionality analysis is the key to an epistemic foundation, Lonergan takes the self-affirmation of the knower or self-knowledge as a paradigmatic example. His choice is informed by the fact that self-

affirmation of the knower or self-knowledge is the only instance of knowing in which the knowing subject and the known object coincide. In this case, the data to attend to is the data of one's consciousness, that is, the cognitional acts that are performed by the knower. To negate self-knowledge is self-refuting and contradictory because the act of negating or doubting is itself a performance of cognitional acts.

Using the self-affirmation of the knower (self-knowledge) to sum up what knowing (as differentiated from consciousness or awareness) entails and why cognitional analysis grounds epistemic foundation, Lonergan (1992[2013], 352) writes:

[I]n the self-affirmation of the knower, the conditioned is the statement 'I am a knower.' The link between the conditioned and its conditions is cast in the proposition 'I am a knower if I am a unity performing certain kind of acts.' The conditions as formulated are the unity-identity-whole to be grasped in data as individual and the kinds of acts to be grasped in data as similar. But the fulfillment of the conditions in consciousness is to be had by reverting from formulations to the more rudimentary state of the formulated, where there is no formulation but merely experience.

Another reason why Lonergan takes the self-affirmation of the knower (self-knowledge) as a paradigmatic case is that it settles the skeptic challenges definitively. Unlike all other instances of knowledge in which when the question: 'Is it so?' is asked, 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I do not know,' are all possible coherent answers, in self-affirmation of the knower, when the question, 'Am I a knower?' is asked, there is only one coherent answer – 'Yes.' Lonergan (1992[2013], 353) expressed the situation thus:

Am I a knower? The answer yes is coherent, for if I am a knower, I can know that fact. But the answer no is incoherent, for if I am not a knower, how could the question be raised and answered by me? No less, the hedging answer 'I do not know' is incoherent. For if I know that I do not know, then I am a knower; and if do not know that I do not know, then I should not answer. Am I a knower? If I am not, then I know nothing. My only course is silence. My only course is not the excused and explained silence of the skeptic, but the complete silence of the animal that offers neither excuse nor explanation for its complacent absorption in merely sensitive routines. For if I know nothing, I do not know excuses for not knowing. If I know nothing, then I cannot know the explanation of my ignorance.

If it is granted that cognitional and intentionality analysis is the key to an epistemic foundation, then, in that case, the unavoidable question is, what is the implication of our exploration so far for epistemological pluralism and African perspective(s) on knowledge in particular? This question is explored below.

IMPLICATION(S) OF COGNITIONAL AND INTENTIONALITY ANALYSIS FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM AND AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE²

If the logical and methodological implication of cognitional and intentionality analysis is that the epistemic foundation is grounded on the cognitional acts of the subject rather than intentional objects, it then means that epistemological pluralism is inescapable since there are myriads of objects to be known some of which are empirical while others are transcendental, spiritual, religious etc. The objects of knowledge and the means of preserving knowledge systems might differ from one epistemic environment to another, but the cognitional process – when adequately examined – remains the same. What grounds knowledge of any of the realms is not the object *per se* but whether there is an intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation. In other words, the evaluation of knowing and knowledge is not to be based on that which is known or that which is to be known but on whether the transcendental precepts – Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable – are employed in the quest for knowledge or not.

Since epistemological pluralism arises because of the multiplicity of epistemic environments and cultural contexts, it would be disingenuous to question the possibility of African perspectives on knowledge or African knowledge systems. This is because such a question amounts to questioning the capacity of Africans to know since the fact of the African epistemic environment or cultural context(s) is indubitable. Africans in traditional societies engaged (and in the modern contemporary era engage) in the cognitional process – experiencing, understanding and judging. The basic difference between the traditional African knowledge system and the Western knowledge system lies in the difference in epistemic environments and means of conserving knowledge. Knowledge in traditional African societies is conserved in riddles, myths, legends, folklores, proverbs, and specialized knowledge was and is conserved and transmitted through divination. To acquire the knowledge that is contained in the mentioned means of conservation, the one in pursuit of knowledge must perform cognitional activities, just like anyone seeking to acquire knowledge from written texts. In fact, to doubt the epistemological nature of myths, legends, and divinations or to claim that they are not epistemic categories brings into question the legitimacy of thought experiments and possible world semantics as epistemic categories since myths, legends, and divinations are "more real" than thought experiments and possible word semantics. It is because divinations are a search for knowledge that taking *Ifa* divination as an instance, Emmanuel Eze (1998, 174) argues that *Ifa* should be understood as a practice of "deep understanding" (*uche omimi*). This search for deep understanding, I believe, is of philosophic nature, because it is a reflective process of seeking knowledge about human life and action – by way of established discernment and epistemological processes.' To underscore that *ifa* is an epistemic source, Olufemi Táiwò (2006, 306) asserts that it is "regarded as a compendium of knowledge and wisdom."

To be dismissive of African perspective(s) on knowledge because of the means of knowledge conservation is similar to a philosopher being dismissive of medieval

philosophy when one has not carefully studied any medieval thinker. Rather than being dismissive, the human inquiry and critical spirit or attitude would demand a disinterested thinker to investigate unfamiliar sources and deposits of knowledge in order to ascertain its epistemological assumptions.

Of course, arguing that it is pure arrogance to dismiss African perspectives on knowledge offhand does not mean that philosophical works by Africans should be shielded from criticisms and critical engagements. Definitely, works by philosophers who explore the African knowledge traditions should be critiqued, but such critique or evaluation is misconstrued if it seeks to question whether there are African knowledge systems. As I have argued so far, if cognitional and intentionality analysis is the key to an epistemic foundation, and that philosophical pluralism is a consequence of the plurality of epistemic environments and cultural contexts, then a critique of African perspectives on knowledge that focuses on the sources of knowledge, intentional objects, and manner of knowledge transmission or even the very possibility of African knowledge systems is at best self-glorification of one who takes his/her epistemic environment and the intentional objects that are familiar to him/her as "the epistemic standard." If one takes philosophical pluralism and epistemic/epistemological diversity seriously, what needs to be critiqued while assessing any knowledge system is the adequacy or inadequacy of a philosopher's cognitional theory.

It is noteworthy to explicitly state that arguing that there are African knowledge systems or African perspectives on Knowledge because of the plurality of epistemic environment does not in any way imply epistemic relativism since, ultimately, the knowledge of any intentional object must result from an intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation of the which is experienced or rather of a given data. Data is broadly understood to include utterances, whether spoken or written. I take this to be similar to Kai Horsthemke's (2004, 39) critique of conceptions and misconceptions of indigenous knowledge:

If something is referred to as 'indigenous knowledge' in the sense of factual or propositional knowledge, it must meet the requisite criteria: belief, justification and truth. If it does, it is on a par with nonindigenous knowledge in a particular area or field. Thus, the *sangoma's* (traditional healer's) knowledge would be on a par with that of a general medical practitioner, like the knowledge of a naturopath or homoeopath.

Another way of putting the point that is being made here is that African perspectives on Knowledge or African knowledge systems are not contrasting or contradictory opposites to other perspectives on knowledge or other knowledge systems. Rather all knowledge systems are complimentary since knowing is a universal human phenomenon. Nevertheless, since human beings are beings in time and space (place), the expression of knowledge is contextual but not relative³. The contextuality of epistemic expressions results from the plurality of epistemic environments and cognitional objects, but this does not undermine the universality of the phenomenon of knowing since its universality is not dependent on epistemic environments or cognitional objects but on cognitional acts. So epistemic or

epistemological plurality (pluralism) does not imply epistemic or epistemological relativism.

Even without the intention of going into details, it is worth noting that what I have said regarding the implication of cognitional analysis for African perspectives on knowledge is applicable to the so-called epistemic injustice *mutatis mutandi*. This is because epistemic injustice is a neo-logism or euphemism for detrimental discrimination based on race or sex. In other word, epistemic injustice is covert or overt racism and sexism.

CONCLUSION

Any philosophical account of knowing and knowledge at least assumes some form of epistemic foundation. Any epistemological venture that denies epistemic foundation ends in self-refutation and defeat. Not even epistemological skepticism is exonerated from this predicament. Hence in this paper, I have tried to account for the plausibility of epistemic foundation in the face of epistemic plurality. I argued that in order to take into account epistemic foundation in pluralistic epistemic contexts without adhering to epistemic relativism or epistemic scepticism, there is an epistemic exigence to pay attention to cognitional acts of the knowing subject and intentional character of human knowing rather than overemphasizing conceptual and linguistic analysis. It is when cognitional and intentionality analysis is not appropriately carried out that coherentism, infinitism, and contextualism are viewed as contrasting opposite to epistemic foundationalism. I argued that focusing on cognitional and intentionality analysis in the quest for an epistemic foundation and justification has an advantage over conceptual analysis as found in traditional foundationalism, coherentism, and infinitism. This is because grounding epistemic foundation on the cognitional acts of epistemic agents eliminates the objections like arbitrariness, circularity, and infinite regress that are raised against traditional foundationalism, coherentism, and infinitism, respectively. I conclude by arguing that when cognitional and intentionality analysis is adequately carried out, any controversy regarding the possibility of African perspectives on knowledge is eliminated since the African epistemic environments and different cultural contexts would account for African perspectives on knowledge.

NOTES

1. There are two more transcendental precepts: Be responsible and Be unconditionally loving, which correspond to ethical and religious consciousness, respectively.

2. It is important to state that this section is not aimed at exploring or discussing different positions about African perspectives on knowledge. The objective is to show that if the quest for epistemic foundation shifts to cognitional and intentionality analysis, then the question of whether there are African perspectives on knowledge would not arise since the obviousness of the fact that Africans are epistemic agents in different and diverse epistemic environments would settle the question. I am making this point because the independent reviewers pointed out that this section is not detailed.

3. The point is applicable to an understanding of "X" Philosophy. Substitute X with any adjective you like (African, Africana, Analytic, British, Christian, Continental, European, Existential, French, Feministic, German, Islamic, Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern, Contemporary, etc.). If the function of the adjectives is adequately accounted for, then the misguided controversy between universalists and contextualists would not arise since the substantive is a philosophy while the "Xes" account for the contextuality of the human person as a being in time and place.

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