

SUPERNATURALISM AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL CHARACTER OF THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN THINKER

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Abstract

Owing to the prevalence of belief in spiritual beings and in the reality of some non-physical events in traditional cultures like those of Africa, the orientation of the people is typically regarded as supernaturalistic. But while some anthropologists and philosophers see belief in the supernatural as irrational, others argue in ways that seem to suggest that supernaturalism limits the rational capacity of the African thinker. This paper rejects the positions held by these scholars and, using Akan traditional wisdom, argues for the possibility of extricating rationality from the domain of cultures – making rationality a matter of conceptual, noncultural objectivity.

Introduction

A traditional culture is typically perceived as a non-Western one (such as the African Azande). It is portrayed as non-scientific or as approving or disapproving of things not on scientific grounds, but for supernatural-related reasons. Conversely, a Western culture is, seen as scientific and rational. Although the propriety of these characterizations is not the focus of this paper, it is right to caution that the characterizations could be misleading. For instance, I do not think that referring to a Western culture as “scientific,” suggests that there cannot be any persons from that culture who engage in rituals. Hence, the description of a culture as rational or irrational needs to be understood in a special sense. It only indicates that in social or intercultural philosophy where predominant views are sometimes used to characterize cultures in traditional-scientific or supernatural-antisupernatural terms, it is also possible to apply or at least learn to apply the concept of rationality in this general context. When E. R. Dodds (1951: 1) classified the supernatural as “irrational” and praised the West for its rational credentials, he was applying the concept

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in this sense. This is because there has never actually been a time when all Westerners were antisupernaturalistic, neither have the Greeks (whose philosophy arguably underpins Western civilization) ever had this kind of situation. Thus, the paper explores the general concept of supernaturalism (as done by its critics), but does not focus on specific instances of the supernatural.

Supernaturalism is sometimes used, as in the case of MacIntyre and others like him, in specific reference to belief in such notions as witchcraft and magic, which are regarded as irrational (although belief in God – Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, also counts as supernatural,, the view of such scholars is that a belief in these religions is not irrational, though this view always remains curiously unstated). In this paper, the belief in witchcraft or magic will be regarded as supernaturalism. In its primal sense therefore, supernaturalism is an orientation or a disposition and, in some sense, a world-view. This paper first identifies the flaws in the arguments advanced for the exclusion of supernaturalistic African thinkers from rationality. While the paper rejects any claim of contradiction between rationality and supernaturalism, it does not argue that anything supernatural should be rational. It contends that having a supernaturalistic orientation does not preclude determining the rationality of issues, and that it is possible to understand rationality as a human attribute but not necessarily as a product of any specific culture.

An action or belief which is rational is one that conforms to logical procedure and is intelligible. For the order that it will bring to the discussion, it is important to be guided also by some distinctions made by Anthony Flew with regard to rationality. He maintains that if a person is said to be rational, the term ‘rational’ could be understood in two senses: as (i) “[o]pposed to irrational,” and (ii) “[o]pposed to non-rational or arational” (1979: 298). Although Flew does not explain at all what he means by the former sense (i), it is most likely applicable to actions or thoughts or beliefs, while the latter is meant to explain rationality as a distinctive feature of a person (i.e., a person “as the rational animal”, as he indicates). The limitation of Flew’s definitions is that they do not indicate that arationality could refer to thoughts and actions as well. For instance, if I need to get to a store that closes in five minutes, it is irrational to take

a long meandering walk and chat with people along the way. If, on the other hand, I just want to go for a walk, meandering and chatting are non-rational behaviours.

To say then that a person (in sense (ii)) is the only creature that is rational is to suggest that he alone has a thinking ability, and a capacity for intelligent behaviour or action. In the former sense, a person is normally said to have behaved or acted rationally when his action or behaviour is seen to have been in line with rational procedure. However, based on the beliefs common in a culture, and on the way the people of that culture go about their activities, a culture – although in actuality we mean its people – is sometimes described as rational, scientific, traditional or primitive. Since, in this paper, (i) the concept of rationality will be discussed in connection with cultures [i.e. whether or not rationality is a cultural construct], and (ii) irrationality is not discussed, the former sense of rationality is the main concern of this essay. Rationality is thus explored in a context where an entire culture is the object of enquiry.

In an attempt to understand alien cultures, philosophers and anthropologists often try as much as possible to spell out both how such cultures' beliefs, practices, and values could be considered to be rational (that is, "intelligible"), and how the cultures can be seen to be using some standards to determine the rationality of beliefs and actions. This paper concerns itself mainly with the issue of standards. Although on a number of occasions it is claimed by some scholars¹ that traditional cultures (such as those of Africa) can determine the "rationality" of actions and beliefs, others disagree. Some, first, have questioned the capacity of such traditional cultures to make judgments of rationality that extend to issues pertaining to a paradigm which is completely different from theirs. Again, there are those who even think that what they refer to as "Western standards of rationality" take precedence over all others, and who are ready to view rationality – in its true sense (?) – through the spectacle of the "rationalistic" Western culture. These two, respectively, are the *impossibility* and *inappropriateness* arguments that are often made against traditional cultures.

Although these views are usually expressed by some who happen to be social scientists, there is evidence of the creeping of such positions into philosophy or, rather, the exploitation of such positions by philosophers. In this essay, I do not intend to discuss the often-cited exclusion of Africa in Hegel's philosophy of history from the historical races of the world, neither do I intend to look at views expressed earlier by Hume and Kant about Africans. "Hume, Kant and Hegel, under the euphoria of the Enlightenment and in various ways, believed that the history of the Western world was the incarnation of Reason as such, and characterized non-European forms of life as 'irrational'" (Eze 1993: 16). I will rather focus on arguments that have been made more recently, often subtly but with far-reaching philosophical implications for Africa. Throughout this essay, the term "Africa" stands for present-day sub-Saharan Africa whose cultures are not monolithic but still largely similar.

For a systematic discussion, the rest of the paper is divided into three sections. In the first two sections, it rebuts separately the inappropriateness and impossibility arguments. The last section presents an African (specifically, Akan) alternative to these arguments.

The Inappropriateness Argument

One philosopher who rejects, and will not accept any judgment of rationality that is not consistent with the "scientific" Western perspective is Alasdair MacIntyre (1977: 67-71). He discloses this stance in a reaction to Peter Winch and, earlier on, to Evans-Pritchard who argued for the thesis that one can accept that traditional cultures do hold, and can indeed determine by certain criteria, what is rational and what is not. MacIntyre denies this claim and asserts, in relation to traditional cultures, that "...beliefs and concepts are not merely to be evaluated by the criteria implicit in the practice of those who hold and use them." Consequently, he declares, "to make a belief and the concepts which it embodies intelligible I cannot help invoking my own criteria, or rather the established criteria of my own society...[but, I admit that] I cannot do this until I have already grasped the criteria governing belief and behaviour in the society which is the object of enquiry."

One commendable aspect of MacIntyre's criterion is that he makes attempts, successfully or not, to understand the Other's criteria before determining the rationality of issues that relate to that Other. It cannot also be inferred from the above that he rejects the supernatural. However, his heavy reliance on Western standards and his unwillingness to accept any traditional culture's justifications for its own beliefs raise two main concerns: first, his idea that a culture's (in this case, Western) standard can determine rationality, and secondly, his insistence on using Western standards to judge traditional cultures even after learning about the standards of the latter. (A response to the first concern is found in the next section.) One can however remark, with regard to the second concern, that if MacIntyre cannot help invoking his own culture's criteria to determine whether or not African beliefs, concepts, behaviour and criteria of rationality governing belief and behavior are truly rationally acceptable, then he implies that a person may not avoid the influence of his culture when judging the rationality of issues. The correctness of this exposition is confirmed in the summary of MacIntyre's thesis, made by Winch (1977: 97) as follows: "The explanation of why, in culture S, certain actions are taken to be rational, has got to be an explanation for us; so it must be in concepts intelligible to us. If then, in the explanation, we say that in fact those criteria are rational, we must be using the word '*rational*' in our sense."

MacIntyre (op cit: 67) does not seem to exalt Western "standards" merely because he belongs to that culture, but mainly because he thinks the West has superior standards. For instance, in addition to his view that the Westerner must detect incoherence in standards of intelligibility in non-Western cultures, his reflection on the statement: "the Azande believe that the performance of certain rites in due form affects their common welfare," leads him to the erroneous conclusion that "...one could only hold the belief of the Azande rationally *in the absence of* any practice of science and technology..." which, he would say, is undeniably identifiable with the West.

As MacIntyre's "perspectival" view on rationality develops, however, his seemingly pitiful state of dilemma begins to give way to his affirmation of Western criteria. One could understand the difficulty he finds himself

in, having to realize that in the study of what he sees as a completely alien culture, understanding is “both necessary and impossible.” But this apparent dilemma does not seem to hold when the basis for its construction is carefully examined. The main reason, we may argue, is the issue of “perspective”, the Western perspective which alone he recognizes. For instance, since, as he implies, Western “anthropologists and sociologists” must form their judgments based on “the established criteria” of their scientific culture, their understanding of traditional cultures becomes at once impossible. This, he notes, is the case in spite of the claim by “anthropologists and sociologists ...to understand concepts which they do not share” (1977: 64). Claiming to understand what one does not share appears to MacIntyre to be tantamount to claiming falsely that two completely distinct paradigms are similar. The impossibility aspect of the apparent dilemma is, therefore, founded on the supposition that one cannot understand concepts that one does not share (ibid: 63, 64). This point is noteworthy.

Even when MacIntyre comes to make some sense of the practices of traditional cultures, he still holds that the people cannot be taken to be doing what is right and sensible. He asserts, “what I am quarrelling with ultimately is the suggestion that agreement in following a rule is sufficient to guarantee making sense” (ibid: 68). This statement is conceptually true. The only problem here is that MacIntyre expresses it only in connection with cultures he views as non-scientific. He fails to notice that the assertion applies as well to scientific cultures and, also, he does not assess the impact of the statement on the conclusions that he draws in his work. By this remark, I do not mean that we are guaranteed any “sense making” if we adopt scientific rules as a means of explaining metaphysical events (or vice versa), but that it is possible for some explanations purported to be based on science not to make sense. Indeed, the majority of people in a culture who hold a rule or engage in a practice based on the rule could be wrong, especially when the rule itself is flawed. And this applies to the rule, *science is the sole determinant of reality*.

Two crucial questions relating to understanding still remain. Is understanding the Other really impossible? And, must a person necessarily adopt what his culture offers him in the form of standards? With regard

to the first – which we noted of MacIntyre above – I would make just one point. It appears quite possible that one can understand the Other (or his explanations), if by the verb “understand” it is meant to gain some insight into or knowledge of the practices or beliefs of the Other. This, in any case, should be what it means to “understand” the Other. It is a different thing, I concede, to say that one shares the belief or practice explained. For instance, one might not share the belief that there are “ancestral” spirits, but one can still *understand* a people who address the dead in present and personal terms as holding the notion of human survival. For, they could be said to conceive of those spirits as being alive, in some form, even though their bodies have been buried. Yet it is also worthy of note that the issues of sharing and convincing explanations are problematic even intra-culturally, although it is often suggested that such problems only arise in cross-cultural relations. Intra-culturally, we do not always share each other’s beliefs, neither do we always find each other’s explanations convincing. Thus, if these problems were insuperable, then, it is not only cross-cultural understanding that would be impossible, but also several aspects of intra-cultural encounters.

Understanding the Other becomes impossible only when “understanding” is interchanged with “sharing”, as Lévy-Bruhl did in the past. In his *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, he seemed to have equated understanding with the capacity to share a concept. But with the meaning I attribute above to the word “understand”, a person is able to present or assess fairly the worldview of the Other, without either sharing them or imposing his own beliefs. Based on this line of reasoning, it is plausible to argue that Lévy-Bruhl’s approach was wrong. From his erroneous position, he made some claims about traditional cultures which need to be mentioned here, even if briefly. Bent on showing the radical alterity between traditional ways of life and those of the “rationalistic” West, Lévy-Bruhl singled out language for analysis. His preference for language was strategic because the reasons behind what a people do, the sense or pointlessness of their practices are mainly expressed through their language. If their language is not able to convey their beliefs in a relevant manner, we cannot claim to share their beliefs. Thus, he wrote, “although we can describe what primitives say, we cannot grasp their

concepts. For they do not possess concepts in the sense of recognizing that some uses of expression conform to and others break with rules for the use of such expressions” (quoted in MacIntyre, *ibid.*, 64). What Lévy-Bruhl sought to do was to make difficult any chance of understanding the primitives in a serious sense, lest any of their practices or beliefs could be deemed rational. This way, any talk of “understanding” them would make sense in a derisive way, so that “we might by a kind of empathy imagine ourselves to be primitives and in this sense ‘understand’; but we might equally understand by imaginative sympathy what it is to be a bear or a squirrel” (*ibid.*: 64).

Several philosophers, including MacIntyre, have criticized this view in the past. But one more point can be made. The fundamental mistake regarding the view is that, granted for the sake of argumentation that there was no possible way of knowing what reasons were offered by traditional cultures for their practices, it would not be fruitful to play down the fact that traditional peoples, unlike bears and squirrels, have language. The claim that no rules govern the use of expressions in traditional language is not even supported by empirical evidence. The claim that the (spoken) languages of traditional peoples lack rules could not have been true given, for instance, the successful centuries-old translation of the Bible into these languages. Again, as Winch rightly notes, rationality “is a concept necessary to the existence of any language: to say of a society that it has a language is also to say that it has a concept of rationality” (1977: 99). Therefore, what is expected of a researcher of language is at least to find out the aspects of rationality conveyed through the use of language by the people studied. But the success of any such researcher in this exercise, especially if he or she is from a culture different from the one studied, would certainly depend on the depth of probing and accurate portrayal of the specific worldview of the culture studied. These points did not reflect clearly in Lévy-Bruhl’s position.

Now, to the second crucial question relating to understanding: MacIntyre makes certain remarks that appear to imply that one must necessarily accept what pertains in one’s culture even after one has come into contact with other cultures. For instance, he states of traditional cultures that we cannot expect that their standards “will always be internally coherent...

But in detecting incoherence of this kind we have already invoked our standards. [And] since we cannot avoid doing this it is better to do it self-consciously” (ibid: 71).

MacIntyre once again seems to be in a dilemma here. He cannot help but invoke his own standards, so he would do so self-consciously. Here too, the self-consciousness aspect is refreshing. But first, the desideratum to maintain Western standards suffers the same fate as his similar pursuit earlier on. Secondly, his view that “we cannot avoid” using “our own standard” to judge the rationality of actions is questionable, if by “our own standard” he means what we are culturally accustomed to. It is always possible to question or even abandon one’s cultural perspective, and develop personal principles or adopt the perspective of another. Since, for instance, one’s perspective cannot be said to have changed if one does not move away from an earlier position, it is to be expected that the perspectives of some people who grew up with the notion of the divine right of kings to rule actually changed at the dawn of modern democracy. In the same way, the views of some brought up to support the then massive (almost unbridled) exploitation of natural resources that accompanied the industrial revolution in Europe did, conceivably, gradually change in favour of environmentally friendlier technologies. We can say the same of traditional cultures. For instance, the Dipo festival which is celebrated by the Krobo people of Ghana marks the transition of girls into adulthood. Previously, the girls went through the rites bare-chested; but that is now beginning to change. Currently, the exposure of their breasts is regarded as indecent by some of the people – including elderly women (initiators) who themselves were paraded bare-chested in their adolescent days. Breasts are now sometimes covered during initiations.

As a result of MacIntyre’s inability to see that one does not necessarily have to judge the Other through the prism of one’s own culture, he was faced with the self-imposed option of affirming only his. If he had not done so, it would have meant, to his displeasure, that he had no concept of rationality or that he did not know the meaning of the term “rationality” at all. With this posture, the question of rationality wrongly took on the form of “we against the other(s)”. The fact, then, that something was identifiable with “us” appeared somehow enough to guarantee its rationality. For

instance, in his attempt to reject Winch's notion of the "conceptual self-sufficiency" of primitive ways of life, MacIntyre declares what must inform his rejection of Winch's position. He states, even without supplying any reason why that must be right, that "we do want to reject magic, and we want to reject it ... as illogical because it fails to come up to our criteria of rationality" (ibid: 67).

In sum, MacIntyre's interpretation of rationality seemed to misidentify (perhaps inadvertently) "differences of perspective" of rationality as "differences of standard" of rationality. This led him to uphold just one perspective (or, to him, "standard") of rationality, and classify others as unacceptable or inappropriate. I know, for instance, that any standards that are internally incoherent cannot be rational. Thus, if what traditional African cultures take to be their "standards" of intelligibility (or rationality) themselves could be expected by MacIntyre to be incoherent, then, wherein lies their capacity to truly determine rationality? Can anybody, thus, have any point in challenging MacIntyre's earlier view that the rationality of beliefs and concepts of traditional cultures is not to be evaluated *merely* by the criteria existent in those cultures? And, will MacIntyre not be right to claim that Western thinkers are to detect with *their* "standards" of rationality the incoherence of what Africans can only see as intelligible, the incoherence of the African standards of intelligibility? As I will explain, there is just one concept of rationality, and that rationality is not for any culture to determine exclusively.

The Impossibility Argument

The impossibility argument seeks to establish that traditional cultures cannot determine the rationality of actions that pertain to scientific cultures. It is suggested that belief in the supernatural limits the rational capacity of the (traditional) African thinker. A little background to this view is appropriate: in showing why the Azande people of Africa apparently "do not see that their oracles tell them nothing", Evans-Pritchard (1937: 338) explained that it was due to "...the fact that their intellectual ingenuity and experimental keenness [were] conditioned by patterns of ritual behaviour and mystical belief. Within the limits set by these patterns, they [showed] great intelligence, but it [could not] operate beyond [those] limits." Or as

deduced by Horton (1977: 154), “they [reasoned] excellently in the idiom of their beliefs, but they [could not] reason outside, or against their beliefs because they [had] no other idiom in which to express their thoughts.”

There appear to be traces of this position of Evans-Pritchard’s in African philosophy. To buttress my point, let me explain how Horton (ibid: 154) appears to profit from the expressed opinion of Evans-Pritchard in the development of his philosophy of culture. In contrasting Western and traditional African cultures, Horton argues that in the latter, the “absence of any awareness of alternatives makes for an absolute acceptance of the established theoretical tenets and removes any possibility of questioning them.” These tenets, he adds, “invest the believer with a compelling force. It is this force which we refer to when we talk of such tenets as sacred.” His view is an example of how anthropology creeps into philosophy. That view cannot be right because within all cultural boundaries (or within the context of “bounded reasoning”, to borrow Ramose’s words²), there are some who are trapped in their preconceptions, and others who break free from them. Besides, the same person can be trapped in some preconceptions but freed from others. Therefore it would be incorrect to presume that it was mostly African thinkers who were trapped and that Westerners were not.

Quite recently, Gyekye (1995: 3, 7) has rightly criticized Horton for urging “a distinction between philosophy and traditional African thought”. Gyekye points out that “thought” (as a generic term) and philosophy are not mutually exclusive. He adds that by allowing the traditional culture a *thought system* and *restricting philosophy* – understood narrowly by Horton to consist in epistemology – to the West, Horton cannot be said to have proven the absence of philosophy in traditional thought because metaphysics is not just the core of philosophy in general, but also it “lies at the heart of African thought.” Thus, one can observe, belief in the supernatural or the metaphysical is neither a hindrance nor antithetical to the art of philosophizing.

Even though Hountondji (1983: 60) does not quite argue that the traditional African thinker has rational limitation, he has also affirmed the notion of “collective thought” in the African culture, and thus characterized

traditional thought as “ethno-philosophy”, but not as “philosophy.” In Africa, he notes, there is “...merely a collective world-view, an implicit, spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans are supposed to adhere”. This implies that “everybody always agrees with everybody else.” “It follows,” he argues “that in such cultures there can never be individual beliefs ...but only collective systems of belief.” While not denying the visibility of general, cultural world-views in the traditional system, it is not right even on factual grounds (such as on the evidence of anthropology) to say that “there can never be individual beliefs.” But Appiah (1992: 146) rightly points out that anthropologists and missionaries have met many traditional thinkers who have rejected widely held beliefs.

Horton’s theses of “absolute acceptance” and “sacredness” of traditional beliefs, and Hountondji’s idea of communal group-think cannot be right because contrary to the homogeneous, pro-supernaturalism outlook often ascribed to traditional African thinkers, the critical individuals are also visible. Among the Akans of Ghana, “one not infrequently encounters variations in belief among the branches of the Akan tribe and sometimes even among the inhabitants of a single village,” but “if one talks with the real philosophers among our traditional elders ... one is soon impressed with their capacity to dissent from received conceptions and to break new ground” (Wiredu 1983: 114). A good example is the Akan traditional elder, Nana Boafo-Ansah who “thought that Onyame (Supreme Being, God), the ancestors, and the *abosom* (lesser spirits) were all ‘figments of the imagination’...” (Gyekye 1995: 48).

The existence of people with dissenting views, or more appropriately, of thinkers with the capacity to make critical analysis from non-supernaturalistic points of view in traditional cultures, unknits all arguments that make uncritical attitude an inescapable characteristic of the denizens of traditional African cultures. And, since “uncriticality” seems to be the right conclusion to be drawn from the perception that the traditional thinker exhibits intelligence only within his generally-held supernatural beliefs, attention has now been drawn to the fact that, indeed, the African sage is capable of advancing and defending antisupernaturalistic views. However, if such antisupernaturalistic views

could be said to be expressive of an attitude which falls outside what would normally be considered as consistent with the “African idiom” or “African pattern of belief,” but with that of the scientific, then, the corollaries are that:

- (i) the traditional African intellectual community has always been receptive of, and included, critics of widely-held beliefs, indicating the presence of alternative patterns of thought;
- (ii) the traditional African thinker can function intelligently or reason beyond the sphere of mystical belief, because he is capable of analyzing, advancing and defending arguments from both natural and supernatural outlooks; and, thus,
- (iii) he is not only capable of criticizing the Western culture, should the need arise, but also is in a position to judge the rationality of Western beliefs and practices.

Objective Rationality: The Traditional Akan Position

Following the shortcomings of the inappropriateness and impossibility arguments about the nature of rationality, the next alternative – especially to the perspectival frame of MacIntyre – would normally be a suggestion that rationality should be relative. But, relativism (which is not the focus of this paper) would also be problematic because, as we are about to see, it is quite inconsistent with some African positions on rationality. It is therefore appropriate that we attempt to go beyond these usual conceptions of rationality. In this direction, some basic ideas of Akan cultural philosophy would be useful.

In traditional Akan thought, that which is rational to do or believe in is not necessarily determined by the fact that one lives in a specific culture, nor is it seen as reasonable to some human minds (but not to others). It is neither culture-specific nor relative. When the reasons for a belief or action are coherent (and thus rational), the traditional Akan thinker expects every mind to comprehend it as such. Therefore, rationality is conceived of as not just a natural requirement of every human mind, but as determinable by every mind. The reason seems to be that the human mind, using the principles of logic, would affirm the truth or reasonableness of a concept,

irrespective of the person or culture whose concept it is. The Akan maxim *nokware ye baako* (literally, “there is only one truth”) underscores this point. This maxim may also be taken to imply that the truth or logical acceptability of a concept or proposition determined in one culture should not metamorphose into falsehood when it is being considered in a different human setting³.

Philosophical Implications of the Traditional Akan Position

- (i) If it is assumed, for instance, that cultures in which supernaturalism is widespread would rationalize ritual practices, while cultures in which antisupernaturalism is prevalent rationalize laboratory investigations, the Akan position would deem it wrong to claim that rationality is made *relative* here. The truth, the traditional Akan thinker would argue, is that: (i) either a ritual practice – and to some extent, supernaturalism – is rationalizable or it is not; and, (ii) either a laboratory investigation is capable of being rational or it is not. Thus, if a particular ritual practice and a laboratory investigation are said to be rational, it should not be just because the cultures which engage in them claim they are, but because these actions are performed for reasons that conform to the dictates of the logical mind. One such dictate is the coherence of the methods or beliefs underlying the practices.
- (ii) The Akan concept is similar to the Platonic “forms” (or ideas), according to which theory the truth or “real nature” of things lies beyond the physical world, and is rather grasped by the human mind.⁴ In our case also, cultural peculiarities of the physical world do not determine rationality; rather, that which is rational is expected to be appealing to, and recognized as such by every logical mind. In terms of rationality, then, traditional arguments and practices related to belief in spirits can be assessed by any human being, without subjecting them to the popular opinions of one’s culture.
- (iii) Therefore, rationality is not a cultural construct as such, for the mind is capable of grasping that which is logical and reasonable without necessarily resorting to cultural biases. Consequently, the question of rationality, according to the Akan position, can be addressed from non-cultural points of view, making rationality conceptually objective.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the concepts of supernaturalism and rationality mainly from a practical point of view. As a result of the perception of some philosophers and social scientists that supernaturalism and rationality are opposite concepts, belief in the supernatural is used by such scholars to characterize traditional cultures as irrational – i.e., as lacking the capacity to determine rationality properly – or as limited in terms of rational capacity. However, these positions (respectively named the inappropriateness and impossibility arguments) have been shown to be flawed in several respects. Using the traditional Akan position, rationality has been explained to be not just a noncultural concept, but also one that is capable of being exhibited or determined by any individual of any culture.

Notes

1. Peter Winch (1977: 99) is one of such philosophers. He, however, argues from a relativistic angle.
2. He uses this expression in the essay ‘The Question of Identity in Intercultural Philosophy.’
3. Some might suppose that the Akan position “*nokware ye baako*” is a culturally specific belief in absolute truth, and then claim that relativism recognizes such truths, except that it regards them as false. But this only means that relativism is still not accommodative of the Akan perspective that some truths are noncultural.
4. *Meno* (82b-85b). As Cloete also observes, Plato recognizes that “the ‘logical’ element” is “foundational to the possibility of “making sense” of our heterogeneous experiences in the world” (2011: 10).

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