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IMMANUEL KANT'S HARMONIZATION OF EMPIRICISM AND RATIONALISM IN HIS SYNTHETIC A PRIORI AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Immanuel Kant's philosophy of synthetic a priori is a major component of the enlightenment legacy that has and continues to influence contemporary philosophical thought. Its application in the knowledge building process of Nigerian universities is the crux of this study. In spite of the large number of university graduates produced annually, university education is yet to create the expected impact on Nigerians. The perennial technological underdevelopment, reliance on importation for quality products and services, corruption, imitation or production of fake products, inability to solve Nigerian challenges like unemployment, insurgency, unavailability of basic amenities like good water supply and electricity unequivocally demonstrates that the goals of university education categorically stated in Nigerian Policy on Education have not been realized. This paper examines the notion of Kant's synthetic a priori and its implications for contemporary university education in Nigeria. The methodology employed in this study includes exposition, analysis, speculation, application, criticism and phenomenology. Immanuel Kant's harmonization of empiricism and rationalism in his synthetic a priori postulates that neither empirical nor rational knowledge alone can lead to a holistic understanding of reality; rather both types of knowledge are necessary for a complete knowledge of reality. This is because Kant's synthetic a priori bridges the gap between innate knowledge and experience-based knowledge. The paper recommends among other things that Nigerian educators should pursue a balanced view of knowledge that is based on both rational and empirical evidence, which can help them better prepare their students to be successful in the globalized world.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Empiricism, Harmonization, Rationalism, Implications, University

Introduction

The technical nature of university education makes it naturally empirical thereby deliberately or otherwise leading to undermining the necessity of its rational dimension in its acquisition and application. This methodological shortfall makes it incapable of achieving objectives assigned to it in the Nigerian Policy of Education. The deficiency of rational knowledge in university education can be eliminated by the application of Immanuel Kant's harmonization of empiricism and rationalism in his synthetic a priori. This unequivocally will emerge as the roadmap to the realization of the expectation of university education in Nigeria. This is the noble of this paper, and to achieve this laudable feat, the paper embarks on the following outline: exposition and criticism of the philosophies of empiricism and rationalism; definition of university education; exposition of Immanuel Kant's philosophy of synthetic a priori; application of Immanuel Kant's synthetic a priori to university education in Nigeria; conclusion; and recommendation.

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Biography of Immanuel Kant

According to Omoregbe (1991), Kant the great German philosopher, was born in Konigsberg in 1724. After his university studies he was for a while a family tutor before eventually became a professor in his home town university, Konigsberg in which he did his studies. Kant's interest and knowledge were by no means limited to philosophy. At the university he taught not only philosophy, but also physics, anthropology, pedagogy, mathematics, geography, and mineralogy. However, he was primarily a philosopher and it is in the field of philosophy that his fame lies. He died in Konigsberg in 1804. His philosophical works include the three famous critiques-Critiques of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of Judgment, Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, Metaphysics of Morals, The Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals, The Metaphysical First Principles of Natural Science, and Religion within the bounds Reason Alone. Kant's philosophy is critical philosophy. It is essentially a critical investigation into the nature, i.e., the phenomenology of both inorganic and organic nature; the function, and the limits of human reason as a faculty for acquiring knowledge. But it was only at the latter period of his life that Kant developed this critical philosophy which has given him his fame.

Empiricism

For Omoregbe (1991), empiricism is theory which states that all human knowledge emanates from experience or perception. This kind of knowledge is referred to as a posteriori knowledge or synthetic knowledge. Empiricism, according to Blackburn (1996) is seen as the permanent strand in philosophy that attempts to tie knowledge to experience. Experience is thought of as the sensory contents of consciousness, or as whatever is expressed in some designated class of statements that can be observed to be true by the use of the senses. For him, empiricism denies that there is any knowledge outside this class, or at least outside whatever is given by legitimate theorizing on the basis of this class. It may take the form of denying that there is any a priori knowledge, or knowledge of necessary truths, or any innate or intuitive knowledge or general principles gaining credibility simply through the use of reason; it is thus principally contrasted with rationalism. Some proponents of empiricism include John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, etc. James, Thomas Aquinas Immanuel Kant, etc

Criticism of Empiricism

Oroka (1990) opined that empirical knowledge is not without a weakness. Our own senses may sometimes deceive us, as when a driver thinks there is water in front of him, on the road. But more seriously our observations and experiments are often conditioned by our preconceptions. Sampling procedures and methods of data collection usually point to these preconceptions.

Rationalism

Blackburn (1996) defines rationalism as any philosophy magnifying the role played by unaided reason, in the acquisition and justification of knowledge, and for Oroka (1990), rational knowledge is a knowledge we obtain by the exercise of reason alone. It is neither a private imaginative nor a product of observation. The principles of formal logic, grammar and pure mathematics constitute the best example of rational knowledge. Rational knowledge is generally abstract and formal. For him, rational knowledge underlies all great studies in both arts and sciences, nowadays. Omoregbe (1991) also states that this theory of knowledge maintains that reason alone can and does attain knowledge without reference to experience. Such knowledge acquired alone independent of experience is referred to as a priori knowledge or analytic knowledge. Some proponents of rationalism include: the Eleatics, Plato, Plotinus, John Scotus, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, etc.

Criticism of Rationalism

In criticizing rationalism, Oroka (1990), points out that rational knowledge lacks both the emotional state of affairs inherent in intuitive knowledge and the actuality found in empirical knowledge.

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Synthetic Propositions or Statements (a posteriori knowledge)

Empirical knowledge for Omoregbe (1991) is derived from synthetic statements in which what is affirmed in the predicate is not contained in the notion of the subject, that is, the predicate affirms something new about the subject. For instance, the proposition "Oke is a musician" is synthetic. The predicate "musician" says something new about the subject, that is, "Oke" since to be a musician is not contained in the notion of "man", or in the notion of "Oke". Therefore, the proposition can be true or false, and can be confirmed or disapproved by experience. This is a posteriori statement or knowledge. Knowledge that is derived from experience, that is, knowledge that is acquired through sense experience is a posteriori knowledge.

Analytic Proposition or Statement (a priori knowledge)

Analytical statement is a priori knowledge that is based on logical reasoning and deductive observation. This type of knowledge is used to explain, evaluate and predict phenomena allowing for a more thorough understanding of the underlying causes and effects. One key factor component of an analytical proposition or statement is its clear definition of the terms and concepts involved, as well as the logical relationships between them. Hence, an analytical proposition or statement can provide insight into the implications of the knowledge, allowing for a greater appreciation of the subject matter.

According to Omorgbe (1991), this is a rational knowledge which is derived if what the predicate says about the subject is already contained or implied in the very notion of the subject. For instance, the proposition "A lion is an animal" is analytic. It is necessary true and cannot be denied without involving oneself in self-contradiction. But it says nothing new about the lion; the predicate "animal" adds nothing new to the subject "lion" since the notion of "animal" is already contained in the notion of lion. Knowledge that is not derived from experience, that is, knowledge that is acquired independently of experience is a priori knowledge (Omorgbe 1991).

Synthetic a Priori

Kant, according to Omoregbe (1990) argues with the empiricists that all knowledge to be genuine must begin from sense experience and be related to experience, he is however not prepared to go all the way with the empiricists. He does not agree with them that all knowledge derives from experience. Here he parts company with the empiricists and goes with the rationalists. He posited "That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. But although all our knowledge begins with experience it by no means follows that all arise out of experience" (Omoregbe, 1991). In other words, not all knowledge derives from experience. Kant maintains that there are certain truths which are synthetic and at the same time, a priori, that is, truths which though related to experience are not derived from experience and cannot be contradicted by experience. Such truths can be found, according to Kant in the laws of physics, in mathematics, and in ethical principles. The proposition expressing these truths are not analytic and not a posteriori (synthetic) but rather synthetic a priori. They do not derive from experience but from a priori concepts of human understanding imposed on experience, making the object of experience appear to man the way they do, and to conform to the structure of the human mind. The argument of Kant is that there are some synthetic propositions which are a priori; these propositions assert truths which are not derived from experience, and yet are not tautological. Kant, in other words argues that there are synthetic a priori propositions.

Education: Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Its methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, however learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Its purpose is to develop an individual's critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, along with a deeper understanding of subjects such as language, math, science, history, art, and culture. Through education, individuals acquire knowledge and skills that have the potential to increase their quality of life. Education also serves to equip

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individuals with the skills they need to function in society, such as the ability to work in a team, show respect for others, and think creatively.

The term education has been subjected to varied definitions. Hogan (2006) sees education as the transmission of knowledge by either formal or informal methods. Others who have attempted the definition of education include Briggs (1930), Jeffery (1946), Whitehead (1962), Peters (1963), Elliot (1968), Taiwo (1981), Ukeje (1966), Datta (1984), Itedjere (1997), etc. Jeffery(1946) refers to education as "the direct means by which a people seeks to shape its own destiny and to transform itself from what it knows itself to be into it would hope to become. From this understanding, education can defined as the impartation and internalization of values and skills that makes one to be functional in the society, and for self-fulfillment. According to Fazilah I. *et al.* (2012), the "main purpose of education is to educate individuals within society, to prepare and qualify them for work in economy as well as to integrate people into society and teach them values and morals of society". This purpose of education can only be achieved with a balanced knowledge imparted on students.

University Education: University education is a form of post-secondary education, which requires students to complete a series of courses at a college or university. It often involves studying for a degree or diploma and is typically the highest level of formal education available to people in many societies. University education usually includes a wide range of educational disciplines, including science, humanities, social sciences, engineering, technology, and business, as well as the study of professional subjects such as medicine, law, and education. University education may also include research activities, experiential learning, internships, and/or work-study programs.

The aims of university education are to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, creativity, and leadership, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and the preparation for a career or a continuation of education in a higher degree program. The purpose of university education is to develop the intellectual capacity of individuals and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to function in a wide range of professional contexts.

University education is highly valued by many employers as it demonstrates a commitment to learning, an ability to think critically, and a capacity to become an independent problem solver. It is also important for social mobility, and can help people in disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds gain access to better quality employment. By all standards, university education is one of the most significant investments in human capital in any country. Nigeria is no exception, and despite the significant progress made in the last two decades, the country still faces many challenges in providing quality university education. In Nigeria, university education

Goals of University Education

University education has a variety of goals, both individually for students and collectively for society. For individual students, a university education provides them with a wide range of knowledge across different fields, providing them with the skills and experience needed to become an independent and successful adult. At a societal level, universities provide an essential service in preparing the next generation of professionals and leaders, as well as providing a vital source of research and development.

At the individual level, students gain a wide range of knowledge and skills through university education, including: critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration, and technical proficiency. Critical thinking enables students to analyze and evaluate a variety of sources of information, enabling them to come to informed conclusions and make sound decisions. Problem solving helps students to understand the root cause of a problem and work towards finding a solution. Communication and collaboration skills allow students to work effectively in teams and build relationships with others. Technical proficiency ensures students understand the fundamentals of a subject, as well as the technology and tools needed to apply it.

Collectively, university education provides a vital source of research and development. Universities are essential to the development of scientific, technical and medical progress, as well as providing practical solutions to many of the world's most pressing problems. As well as this, universities provide an important

social service in educating the next generation of professionals and leaders. This ensures that the future of the country is able to continue to grow and prosper.

In summary, university education has a wide range of goals that are both individual and collective in nature. As an individual, university education provides students with the skills and knowledge necessary for a successful future. At a collective level, university education provides a vital source of research and development, as well as educating the future generation of professionals and leaders.

Goals of University Education as applicable to Nigeria

According to the 4th Edition of National Policy on Education (2004), university Education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

i. Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation;
ii. Making professional course contents to reflect our national requirements; and
iii. Making all students, as part of a general programme of all-round improvement in university education, to offer general study curses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

The above objectives can better be achieved if university education embraces both the rational and empirical approaches in developing the needed high level manpower that is equipped with a professional knowledge that is backed up with rational thinking to guarantee a sustainable individual and national growth and development.

Immanuel Kant's Synthetic a Priori and the Nigerian University Education

Immanuel Kant's philosophies, including his distinction between analytic and synthetic a priori claims, have long been examined by scholars and philosophers. Kant argued that knowledge of certain truths, such as the laws of logic, could be known independent of experience. This philosophy of Kant concerns the ability of reason to discover certain truths that exist independently of experience. Kant believed that these truths are not discovered through experience or observation, but through the use of our natural cognitive powers. Hence, the synthetic a priori as postulated by Immanuel Kant focuses on what he calls the "transcendental unity of appreciation". This is the idea that the mind must categorize and organize all of our ideas and experiences in order to truly gain knowledge. This is done by synthesizing all of understanding that we already possess. This is so because Kant believes that without the ability to organize and categorize our experience, we would be able to make meaningful judgments about the world around us.

Kant's synthetic a priori also lays out the structure of human knowledge, as he argued that all of our knowledge must be placed within the framework of the categories of understanding in order to be valid. In other words, this framework is necessary to correct our tendency to make mistakes in our reasoning due to our limited understandings of the world around us. To this end, Kant's synthetic a priori is crucial component of modern philosophy, and is still hugely influential in the philosophical discourse today. This is so because it provides an essential conceptual framework for understanding the structure of knowledge and our ability to understand our society.

A critical analysis of the philosophy of the Nigerian university Education would reveal that university education is essentially empirical or acquired empirically i.e., through verification, measurement, demonstration, and experimentation in the laboratory devoid of rational knowledge (appreciation and application of the moral and metaphysical dimensions of a discipline) acquired through reflection, speculation or abstraction with the instrumentality use of reason. Ontologically, university knowledge is empirical or scientific is derived from scientific fields of study such civil engineering, mechanical engineering, electrical/electronic engineering, quantity surveying, science laboratory technology, computer science, food science technology, agricultural science, fisheries, agricultural extension and management, and other social science disciplines such as business administration, banking and finance, office management and technology, accounting, mass

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communication, public administration, legal studies, languages, etc. All these fields or disciplines tend towards technological and social advancement but oblivious or devoid of rational knowledge which leads to moral and metaphysical, spiritual, and psychological advancement of the individual and society. Consequently, contemporary technological and scientific advancement attained due to the acquisition and application of empirical knowledge which is not paralleled with rational knowledge has culminated in progressive evil in all its ramifications and facets. Kant's attempt to reconcile empiricism and rationalism through his synthetic a priori claims and the implications for Nigerian university education is therefore synchronically acceptable and hence can help build balanced society.

Applying Immanuel Kant's synthetic a priori, therefore, university knowledge should, essentially, be empirical and rational. The implication of this is that the acquisition of university knowledge, methodologically, should be a conglomeration of experimentation (sense perception) and reason. This will culminate in the holistic knowledge and application of any field of study in university to societal and even private life. The rational knowledge of any discipline in the university entails the acquisition and the application of the axiological (moral or ethical) and metaphysical dimension of that field of study for overall good of the society. The consideration of the moral and metaphysical dimension of any field of study in conjunction with its scientific understanding in its application to any sector of the society will lead to perfect or holistic development in society.

Following from the above understanding and application of the synthetic a priori of Immanuel Kant, therefore, in addition to the scientific or empirical study of engineering, scientific and the social disciplines, the philosophies, i.e. the ethics, epistemology, and the metaphysics of each of these disciplines should also be studied simultaneously. This will help in knowing and understanding the moral, and the spiritual dimensions and implications of the disciplines. The knowledge of the empirical and the rational dimensions of a field of study is the complete knowledge of that field of study, and the application of this complete knowledge to any facet of the society results in balance development of that society.

Conclusion

The synthetic a priori of Immanuel Kant reveals the psych-somatic nature of man i.e. man is thinking or a rational being. This in other words implies that, man empirically examines the objects of his sensory faculties, namely the eye, nose, ears, mount, and also critically reflects on them through the instrumentality of his faculty of reason. This is very vital in the acquisition of university education. In essence, Kant's synthetic a priori encourages a comprehensive understanding of knowledge as it bridges the gap between intrinsic knowledge and experience-based knowledge. In the context of Nigerian university education, it means that an education system that embraces Kant's philosophy of synthetic a priori could strive to provide students with knowledge that is grounded in both rational and empirical evidence in order to better equip them for life in the 21st century.

This implies therefore that since the knowledge of the fields of study in the university is acquired mostly through the empirical method, it is bound to be imperfect and incomplete, and as such, needs to be complemented with the acquisition of the rational knowledge of the various fields of study in order to have a complete and perfect university education. And of course, the necessary and adequate application of such complete knowledge by graduates of Nigerian universities will unequivocally necessarily create balanced development, i.e. technological and moral development. Hence, Kant's synthetic a priori provides a framework for understanding knowledge that is relevant to Nigerian university education.

Recommendations

In order to initiate and or improve rational knowledge of university fields of study, this paper recommends among other things that:

(i) Nigerian university education traditionally, is focused on imparting rational knowledge. This knowledge is based on the scientific method of experimentation, empirical evidence, and logical conclusions. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that there are benefits to

pursuing a balanced view of knowledge that takes into account the importance of both rational and empirical evidence. Hence, Nigerian university educators should pursue a balanced view of knowledge that is based on both rational and empirical evidence, which can help them better prepare their students to be successful in the globalized world. ;

(ii) Philosophy has been seen as a vital skill necessary for the development of strong critical thinking and analytical skills. In Nigeria, the need for such skills has become even more pertinent as the nation continues its efforts to develop and advance. Hence, metaphysics and moral philosophy should be made compulsory in Nigerian university education to ensure that students gain the necessary knowledge and skills to become successful in the ever-changing world. In other words, metaphysics and moral philosophy provide a strong basis for understanding complex philosophical concepts. By understanding basic concepts such as the nature of reality, the existence of truth, and the nature of free will, students are presented with the opportunity to develop strong reasoning skills that are vital for problem-solving and innovative thinking. Not only that by being exposed to the various ethical theories that exist, students will have opportunities to better understand morality and the implications of moral choices. Such understanding can prove to be immensely beneficial for them as they pursue their professional and personal goals. It is therefore recommended that philosophy, especially metaphysics and moral philosophy should be made compulsory in the Nigerian university education;

(iii) Employment of qualified lecturers is essential to teaching philosophy in an effective and comprehensive. Hence qualified lecturers should be employed to teach philosophy in Nigerian Universities. This can be done by establishing dedicated philosophy departments in all universities in Nigeria, and the adoption of new teaching paradigms, and the enhancement of faculty recruitment processes to ensure the quality of philosophy instruction;

(iv) university philosophy lecturers can engage students and staff through conferences, seminars and workshops as part of their teaching duties in order to foster meaningful dialogue and engagement within the various university communities.

(v) urgent steps must be taken by Nigerian university administrations to review their curriculum in order to provide a comprehensive education that encompasses both empirical and rational knowledge from all fields of study

(vi) Frequent conferences on philosophy should be organized by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for all academics staff of all universities in Nigeria.

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