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Adekunle A. Ibrahim, Samuel Otu Ishaya & George E. Udoh: **The epistemology of experts’ disagreement in Afroca**

Abstract

Disagreement among experts in the pursuit of knowledge or truth is a phenomenon that continues to rock the boat of human survival. The reality of disagreement among experts is usually explained from two perspectives: on the one hand is the claim that knowledge is dynamic in nature. This dynamism is an offshoot of the fact that knowledge is a process that is context-dependent and therefore coloured by individual differences. This makes disagreement among experts inevitable. On the other hand, it is believed that knowledge is objective and accessible to all; there may be differences in the approach to it but knowledge in itself is objectivity personified. Hence, experts do not have any reason whatsoever to disagree if there is an objective search for knowledge in each area of specialty. Against this backdrop, this paper examined disagreements amongst experts from the standpoints of its epistemological foundations in skepticism, subjectivism, objectivism, and pragmatism. In order to achieve this objective, the paper critically analyzed the concepts of expert and experts’ disagreement. It substantiates the nature of expert’s disagreement with an allusion to selected cases of disagreements amongst experts with particular interest in the practice of medicine in Africa. Finally, the paper submits that although experts’ disagreement may breed epistemic indecisiveness and intolerance, it however enhances the morale for persistent research which is indispensable for the survival of scholarship in particular and humanity in general.

Key words: Expert, expert disagreement, subjectivity, scepticism, objectivity, pragmatism

L'épistémologie du désaccord d'experts

Résumé

Le désaccord entre les experts dans la poursuite de la connaissance ou de la vérité est un phénomène qui continue de menacer la vie de l'humaine. La réalité du désaccord entre experts est généralement expliquée sous deux angles: d'une part, l'affirmation selon laquelle la connaissance est de nature dynamique. Ce dynamisme découle du fait que la connaissance est un processus contextuel et donc teinté par des concepts individuels. Cela crée des désaccords inévitables entre les experts. D'autre part, on considère que la connaissance est objective et accessible à tous ; il peut y avoir des différences dans l'approche mais la connaissance en elle-même est l'objectivité personnifiée. Ainsi, les experts n'ont aucune raison d'être en désaccord s'il existe une recherche objective de connaissances dans chaque domaine de spécialité. Dans ce contexte, cet article a examiné les désaccords entre experts du point de vue de ses fondements épistémologiques dans le scepticisme, le subjectivisme, l'objectivisme et le pragmatisme. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif, l'article a analysé de manière critique les concepts de désaccord entre les experts. Il justifie la nature du désaccord d'experts avec une allusion à des cas sélectionnés de désaccords entre experts ayant un intérêt particulier pour la pratique de la médecine en Afrique. Enfin, l'article soutient que bien que le désaccord des experts puisse engendrer l'indécision épistémique et l'intolérance, il renforce cependant le moral des recherches persistantes qui sont indispensables à la survie de l'érudition en particulier et de l'humanité en général.

Mots clés: *Expert, Désaccord d'expert, subjectivité, scepticisme*

Introduction

Surely, it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know. (Plato - The Apology. 29b). The above quotation in its simplicity shows the importance of examining any knowledge claim as an unexamined claim to knowledge is a threat to human well-being and survival. This explains the rationale for the epistemology of expertise as hinted by Plato in the above quotation. In contemporary society expertise prevails in all aspects of life as they are either seen as authorities or advisors whose counsel is deemed sacrosanct. The well-being and survival of humanity is anchored on various kinds of expertise such as: medical, legal, educational, sociological, scientific, technical, religious and so on. In fact, it is a given that for a society to develop and advance, specialization and expertise must be encouraged and emphasized.

In other words, experts must be sort to proffer specific solutions to specific human diverse problems, each according to their area of expertise. This thinking is perhaps traceable to Plato's argument in the Republic that justice in the society is achieved only where specialization is emphasized and harmonized. This may probably explain why countries in the Western world appear to be more advanced and developed as they pay close attention to Plato's counsel. However, it seems the case that more often than not experts do disagree among themselves over several issues. Such disagreements not only breed scepticism about the expertise of the experts but, also propel indecisiveness in decision making and uncertainty in knowledge acquisition. These problems undoubtedly constitute a clog in the wheel of the well-being and survival of humanity.

In view of the above, various explanatory models have been put forth to understand the nature of expert disagreement and howbest to deal with it in order to save humanity. In his paper Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy, David Christensen observes that disagreement among experts may

have been caused by negligence during investigation or difference in perception. He contends that a careful scrutiny of these differing claims will culminate in conciliation. He concludes that experts do not have reasons to disagree where negligence and perceptual differences are avoided. The question then is, how do we as humans, totally eradicate negligence and variation in perceptions?

Micheal A. Stoto in his paper *What to Do When the Experts Disagree* addresses the question. –*Why do Experts Disagree?* According to him, when several experts are asked to provide information for policymakers, different experts often provide different information (7) He argues that the differences arise from lack of agreement about what the problem is and the presence of bias which beclouds the sense of judgment of the experts. He argues that these problems become less potent when there is proper coordination and the avoidance of bias. He submits that to ensure proper coordination in the identification of a problem and avoidance of bias, there is the need for a technically trained –expert coordinator who may be a person or committee whose duty is to both coordinate the work of experts in advance, and to combine and compare their conclusions in the end (42). However, what Stoto fails to note is that the technically trained expert coordinator or committee just like the other experts, are equally not immune against biases. The appointment of such coordinator or committee may result into an –expert leviathan with the enthronement of expert hegemony.

In his paper *Human Judgment and Social Policy: Irreducible Uncertainty, Inevitable Error, Unavoidable Injustice* K. R. Hammond identified three traditional explanations for expert disputes and disagreements – incompetence, venality, and ideology. The incompetence explanation questions the qualifications, credentials, or intelligence of purported experts. According to this view, disagreements occur because at least one disputant is not an expert in the real sense of the word. The

venality thesis attributes expert disagreement to differences in personal interests. According to this view, experts take positions that serve their immediate self-interests, or the interests of others who have the power to reward them. The ideology explanation holds that experts' position on policy-relevant issues within their field are determined by their political, religious, racial or ethical inclinations.

Jeryl L. Mumpower and Thomas R. Stewart in their paper *Expert Judgment and Expert Disagreement* argues that expert disagreements may be attributable to the character and fallibilities of human judgment itself, rather than to incompetence, self-interest, or personal values^{||} (194). They point out that expert may disagree because they think about the problem differently. This according to them may be as a result of either systematic or non-systematic differences in judgment processes. Systematic differences refer to differences in how people integrate information into a judgment. Non-systematic differences refer to inconsistency or unreliability that introduces a random component into the process. They conclude that judgment processes as a source of expert disagreement can be understood and resolved through an agreement on problem structure and organizing principle within an area of inquiry.

In a different perspective, James Shanteau in his article *Why Do Experts Disagree?* argues for the necessity of experts' disagreement. He maintains that historically, experts' disagreement is unavoidable because the history of scholarship is simply a record of disagreements. He argues that expert disagreement is needlessly perceived as a problem due to researchers' view of experts. According to him –investigators have overlooked the fact that in most real-world problems, unique solutions do not exist. Instead, there are multiple solution paths.^{||} (192). He therefore concludes that one should not see disagreement as evidence of incompetence on the part of the experts rather as normal and inevitable part of expertise.

The foregoing literature review reveals that expert disagreement is a topical issue that elicits different opinions as to what it is and how it should be handled for the benefit of humanity. It also shows that there has been no conscious effort to situate expert disagreement within the traditional epistemological positions so as to provide a foundational explanatory model. In view of this, this paper examines expert disagreement within the purview of skepticism, subjectivism, objectivism and pragmatism. By so doing we are placed at a vantage position to discern the epistemological and scientific implications of expert disagreement, develop the epistemic safe-nets for the acceptance of claims in the face of disagreement among experts, as well as determine whether expert disagreement stultify or promote the advancement of human knowledge.

Who is an Expert?

An expert is someone who has a special skill or knowledge of a subject gained as a result of training or experience. The person is very knowledgeable about or skillful in a particular area of specialty. In other words, it is a person with extensive knowledge or ability in a given subject or area of study, or one who is regarded as such by others within the field. According to the online Business Dictionary an expert is a: Professional who has acquired knowledge and skills through study and practice over the years, in a particular field or subject, to the extent that his/her opinion may be helpful in fact finding, problem solving, or understanding of a situation ([www.businessdictionary .com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)). The above simply suggests that an expert possess a broad and deep competence in the form of knowledge, experience, skill and capacity in a particular area or discipline. An expert is usually distinguished from a non-expert or novice by virtue of credential, training, education, profession, practice or experience.

The expert is seen to have special knowledge of a given subject matter beyond that of an average person. In this sense, an expert is someone who is officially and widely recognized as a reliable source of information, technique or skill; whose faculty of

judgment is accorded authority and respect in a specific, well-distinguished domain.

A critical look at Plato's Socratic dialogues reveals the attributes of expertise. Hardy and Kaizer outline the Socratic characterization of expertise as follows: An expert

Is always seeking the truth and wants to be –free from error|| (Charmides 171d-172a, Theaetetus 170a-179b),

Makes caring for common good the priority in practicing her expertise (Gorgias 464c-465a, 513d-e, Alkibiades I 126a-c)

Brings about success in practicing her expertise and provides evidence of her expertise (Laches 185a-186e, Charmides 171d-172a, Gorgia 514d-e, Euthydemus 280a),

Has a holistic understanding of a certain domain of expertise – D, such that she is able to give an account of the particular things that belong to – D (Theaetetus 145d-c, 147c- 148e, 201c-d, Gorgias 464e-465a, Phaedrus 270a-272b),

Is able to make reliable prognostic statements about the particular things that belong to - D (Theaetetus 178b-e)

Is able to teach her or his expert knowledge (Laches 185a-186c, Meno 87c, Gorgias 514a-515a, Alkibiades I 188c-d), and finally she

Recognizes other experts in the same domain of expertise and agrees with them on the facts of her expertise (Ion 531d, Meno 95b, Alkibiades I IIIb-d). From the foregoing, and in line with the above Socratic characterization, an expert is seen here as a person who always seek the truth, make caring for common good the supreme goal of practicing his/her expertise; is able to bring about success in practicing his/her expertise, be certified in recognition with other experts and has an holistic understanding of the domain of his/her expertise.

Types of Experts

There are two kinds of experts: those whose expertise is a function of what they know (epistemic expertise), and those

whose expertise is a function of what they do (performative expertise). Epistemic expertise is the capacity to provide strong justifications for a range of propositions in a domain, while performative expertise is the capacity to perform a skill very well according to the rules and virtues of a practice' (Weinstein 570). These two kinds of expertise may simultaneously be expressive by an individual at the same time or be manifested in different individuals. In whichever case it may occur, both epistemic and performative experts may legitimately disagree with one another. This is what is usually characterized as expert disagreement.

Expert Disagreement: Meaning and Nature

When two or more experts in the same field give contrary opinion concerning a particular issue within their area of expertise, there is said to be expert disagreement. Expert disagreement therefore refers to disputes between experts on specific issues within a discipline. These disputes are usually between two diametrically opposed viewpoints that become more problematic whenever there is an attempt to resolve the differences. This brings to mind the question: why would experts disagree when the truth they claim to seek is one and not many? If they are indeed experts (in the same area of specialty) who seek knowledge objectively, why should they disagree? In response to these questions, Kenneth Hammond's opinion about the three traditional explanations for experts' disagreement -incompetence, venality and ideology| becomes imperative and worthy of analysis (14-15).

The incompetence explanation calls into question the qualifications, credentials, or intelligence of purported experts. According to this view, disagreement results because at least one disputant is not really considered an expert by virtue of questionable qualification or training required in the practice of such a profession. For example, in medical practice, many physicians discountenance Chiropractor's advice on medical matters on the ground that they lack the requisite training in medicine. Chiropractic is a pseudoscientific complementary and

alternative medicine that is concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system, especially the spine (Wikipedia). In this sense, what disqualifies the Chiropractor as a medical expert is the lack of credentials to attest to his/her knowledge in medical practice.

The venality explanations contend that experts take position based on their personal interest or the interest of their ally or benefactors who have power to reward them. The ideology explanation submits that expert claims are based on and determined by political, religious or ethical values or beliefs. Put differently, experts may disagree because they think and see the same issue from different perspectives. There may be many contributing factors to expert disagreement. Nevertheless, Egon Brunswik (46) has identified three factors as follows;

Difference in organizing principles. Two experts may disagree due to different approach or nature of investigation employed by them.

Difference in weight. Priority to some information may differ, giving rise to difference in value and interpretation of data; and

Difference in bias. Since humans are different in their inclination and disposition towards things, this may influence their investigation and subsequent submission.

On their part, Mumpower and Stewart opine that the possible cause of expert disagreement include the fact that expert may define the issue differently given the fact that some issues are entangled with values; they may also disagree due to different information at their disposal. An instance is the fact that new data may not necessarily be disseminated instantaneously. In other words, some experts may have access to the most recent information and others may not.

Conversely, some thinkers argue that expert have no reason to disagree if they are really experts in that particular field or subject. These thinkers subscribe to what is known as Experts- Should-Coverage Hypothesis (E.S.C). It follows for these thinkers

that agreement is a necessary condition for expertise as surmised by Shanteau's *Why Do Experts Disagree?* They base their claim on arguments as follows:

For most task performed by expert, there is assumed to be a *'gold standard'* or unique *'ground truth'* that can be identified, if this truth was easy to access, we would get it directly, hence, there should be no disagreement among experts in grasping this gold standard.

Since by definition there can be only one ground truth, all experts should use the same answer. These special abilities of expert should allow them to obtain a single truth.

If experts disagree, then someone is wrong, they cannot all be correct some or all of them must not be experts, that is, disagreement is a reflection of ignorance or incompetence.

Since non expert do not know which of the so called *'experts'* are correct, the only safe course of action is to distrust all of them. According to Shanteau, disagreement between experts implies that we should be suspicious of their claim to special abilities (www.academia.edu).

For ESC, disagreement between experts is a sign that something is wrong. However, Shanteau proposes an alternative hypothesis that seems closer to the view of how experts see themselves. This alternative hypothesis is what he calls *Multi-Solution-Hypothesis*. The arguments behind this hypothesis is that; firstly, experts do not really give answer; they only guide and paint the picture clearly. Secondly, experts do not just give simple answer, their approach is complex; thirdly, experts are more interested in explaining seemingly complex situation; lastly, experts do not really make decision or claims (www.academia.edu).

In line with this reasoning is the view that disagreement is necessary and unavoidable among experts. Some of the justification for this stand is that; disagreements between experts help stretch and expand the knowledge of those involved. Most times, experts derive joy and satisfaction from disagreement. And

agreement among expert may indicate that those experts no longer have roles to play. Be that as it may, experts' disagreement may breed indecisiveness, intolerance and suspension of judgment especially among non-experts.

Selected Cases of Experts' Disagreement

The problem of expert disagreement is not unexpected when it comes to what Jennifer Lackey calls –controversial areas, such as philosophy, politics, and religion (Lackey 229)

This is because it is not out of place to argue that expert opinions in these areas are greatly dependent on varying degrees of variables such as perceptions, ideologies, beliefs and personal convictions. However, against perceived objectivity of science, fundamental disagreements rock the boat of natural sciences as well. This unfortunately questions our common and unquestionable acceptance or treatment of experts as authority and counsel. In view of this, here are three cases of expert disagreement as they affect our understanding and well-being.

Experts' Disagreement on Mathematical Calculations

In a viral video on the internet, three mathematicians were shown to vehemently disagree on a particular mathematical calculation. The subject of disagreement is on the appropriate interpretation and outcome of the mathematical proposition 5×5 . In order to have a clear picture of this disagreement, let's say the three mathematicians are A, B and C with their cases presented respectively as follows:

Case I: Mathematician A

Thesis: $25 \div 5 = 5$

Interpretation: 5 into 5 places give 25, that is,

$$5 + 5 + 5 + 5 + 5 = 25$$

Symbolized as:

Conclusion: If 5 goes into 25 five times

Then, 5 times 5 equal 25

Therefore, $25 \div 5 = 5$

Case II: Mathematician B

Thesis: $25 \div 5 = 15$

Interpretation: Here, the first digit in 25 '2' is treated as the antecedent while the second digit in 25 '5' is the consequent. To divide 25 by 5 is to place 5 into each of the digits. By so doing, 5 won't go into 2, but 5 goes into 5 once. In effect, the first digit '2' was not used earlier, so, it comes down the division table to form the antecedent of the '0' value left after 5 has gone into 5 once. This is captured in a mathematical form as follows:

In the above mathematical expression, after 5 have gone into 5 once, the new value created for consideration is 20.

Then, 5 into 20 go four times.

Thus, 5 into 25 give 14 as follows:

Conclusion: In division of double-digit number, if the divisor cannot go into the first digit, it is dropped to form a second value with the value left in the division of the second digit. So, 25 divided by 5 equals 14. That is, $25 \div 5 = 14$

Case III: Mathematician C

Thesis: In support of case II, if $25 \div 5 = 14$, then,

$$14 \times 5 = 25$$

Interpretation: To multiply '14' and '5' is to multiply each digit in '14' by '5' to give a whole value by the addition of the outcome of each multiplication. This in a mathematical form is a follows:

$$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ x 5 \\ \hline (5 \times 4) \\ (5 \times 1) 5 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$$

Conclusion: If $5 \times 4 = 20$ and $5 \times 1 = 5$, Then, the addition of the two multiplication values, that is, $20 + 5 = 25$. So, $-25 \div 5$ is equivalent to -14×5

In a bid to prove B and C wrong, A sets out 14 into 5 places vertically to show that 14 into 5 places is not 25. However, this plays into the hand of B and C to prove that 14 into 5 places give 25 as follows:

In the above situation, one begins to wonder which of the calculations captures the real state of mathematical reality. In line with generally accepted standard, one tends to think that mathematician A seems correct. However, Kuhn's notion of paradigm counsels that generally accepted standard in a scientific community is nothing but a mere convention. He notes that advocate of different paradigms (sets of theories, standards or methods) holds fast to theirs as the basis for any scientific claim. In his words: –When paradigms enter into a battle about paradigms choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigms defence (94). The implication of Kuhn's position here is that the rival mathematical paradigms as presented earlier assail the world with different standards, different assumptions and procedures. In effect, the most acceptable is not necessarily the most truthful. In this way, we are thrown into an epistemic conundrum as to which of the three cases is the true picture of the mathematical reality under scrutiny.

Expert Disagreement in Medical Practice

In his article, *The Epistemology of everyday life*, Adekunle Ibrahim narrates two cases of experts' disagreements as it affects the life of two famous sport personalities. The two sport personalities according to him were diagnosed with similar health conditions with each facing conflicting medical advice from teams of experts. In his words:

Reggie Lewis, an American basketball star and Kanu Nwankwor, a Nigerian football star... in the prime of their careers were diagnosed with career threatening heart conditions. On the one hand, confronted with conflicting medical advice regarding his heart condition and the continuation of his NBA career, Reggie Lewis chose the recommendation of these experts who cleared him to continue playing basketball as against those who had fears over the safety of his life. The consequence of this choice ... was his death few months later while practicing. On the other hand, Kanu Nwankwor faced with same conflicting medical advice as Reggie Lewis, decided also to toe the line of optimism in continuation of his career. The outcome of this choice was a successful completion of his football career and a stable heart condition after retirement. (128-129)

The above case depicts the thinking and emotional dilemmas we constantly face in daily living orchestrated by conflicting experts' advice. Today, humanity is faced with a litany of advises from medical experts to the extent that we no longer feel safe in the hands of those we see as experts in the medical field. The implication of this is that human life hangs in the balance whenever there is a serious life-threatening ailment and the fact that the chance of survival in any major medical intervention is a 50:50 ratio. No thanks to the phenomenon of experts' disagreement in the medical profession.

Experts' Disagreement on Covid-19 Pandemic

In the first half of the year 2020, the world was brought to a standstill with the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic. This outbreak resulted into what could be termed an –epistemic hullabaloo as scientists were thrown into an epistemic quagmire as the nature and the modus operandi of the virus was at that early stage incomprehensible. In view of this, there exists a fundamental disagreement among experts as to the reality of the existence of the covid-19 virus. This resulted into two major camps. On the one hand is the affirmative group of experts who affirms the

existence of the virus and its deadly nature capable of wiping out a large percentage of the world's population. On the other hand is the denial group who either outrightly denies the existence of the virus by postulating a possible conspiracy theory against the World Health Organization (W.H.O) or denies any debilitating effect on the world's population which may warrant stringent safeguard measures. This expert disagreement of the reality of covid-19 virus is exemplified by the face-off between two prominent Nigerian Scientists; Dr. Akyala Ishaku and Prof. Cyril Otoikhian. This disagreement is documented in an article published in the July 10, 2020 edition of the Nation newspaper entitled *'Science versus pseudoscience: case of two dons'*, Shafi Hamidu narrates a short debate on Channels' TV, Sunrise Daily programme, between the two Nigerian academics: Dr. Akyala Ishaku, who came to the programme to establish the existence of the COVID-19 virus in Nigeria, and Professor Cyril Otoikhian, who was there to disprove the existence of the virus altogether. Akyala, according to Hamidu, is a lecturer and a virologist at the Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State while Cyril is a professor of genetics at the Novena University, Kwale, Delta State.

To begin his defence, Akyala laid out how a scientific debate is done,- hypothesis are proved with empirical evidence, and a counter argument is put forward to disprove existing order or hypothesis. He then reeled out established scientific evidences as published by reputable first quartile high impact factor scientific journals like the Lancet and Nature that established the existence, origin, and evolution of the Coronavirus in over 700 published journal articles. He later narrowed down his arguments to Nigeria and cited the results of a recent research conducted by African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases headed by Prof. Christian Happi at the Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State. The research was able to establish the existence of COVID-19 in Nigeria with over 20 clusters spread around the country.

Cyril on the other hand started his defence by arguing against the scientific method as presented by Akyala. In his words: —whatever they are doing inside (the Lab), let them bring it outside and put it on the table. Let every scientist be available, let all samples be available, let all reagents be on the table, the cameras be available and let them show us what they are calling COVID-19.‖ He added: —but all I saw was a funny attempt that would not yield any results‖. He mentioned the name of the American immunologist Anthony Fauci, but did not make reference to any of his published works and then concluded that COVID-19 is not even real at all.

In his second outing on the same TV programme, Akyala said that he did a little background check on Cyril by searching for his contributions in Google Scholar and he found out that he has never published any work in virology in any impact factor journal. But when the professor was given a chance to defend himself on why he has no published contribution in an impact factor journal, he said ... that he has more than 121 publications across different areas of specializations that he has studied (nationonlineng.net).

This disagreement is replicated in different kinds of knowledge claims and in some cases countries are caught up in the disagreements which sometimes lead to diplomatic brawls between them. Example is the disagreement between U.S.A and China on the origin of the Corona virus. The disagreement is on whether Covid-19 is a natural occurrence or a laboratory creation. On the whole, the implication is that due to the lack of agreement among experts on the nature and cause of the covid-19 virus, there is a frenzy of political indecisiveness amongst governments of the world which has resulted in unimaginable losses in human and economic fortunes.

Disagreement between Western-trained medical experts and African traditional medical experts

In Africa, a classic case of expert's disagreement is manifested in the distrust and friction between Western medicine practitioners and African traditional medicine practitioners. On the one hand, the Western trained medical experts, in dealing with a particular ailment looks at the material cause to understand and prescribe a treatment. This is based on the perception of illness as a malfunction of the body's biological mechanisms which is subject to diagnosis and explanation. This approach is basically based on empirical materialistic model of medicine. On the other the hand, the traditional or 'native' African medicine perceives illness from its spiritual and social perspective. According to Etim –the African believes that every event is caused. Sickness too is not a fortuitous phenomenon, but part of the causal link caused either by the gods or other spiritual agencies. For the African, causality is ruled by supernatural beings and gods; whereas, the West sought theirs in inductive and statistical formulae (81). For Etim, health among Africans is not an isolated phenomena but a reflection of the integrative nature of the community. It is not the absence of disease but a sign that a person is living in peace and harmony with neighbours; that he is keeping the laws of the gods and the tribe (Etim 98). In essence, whereas the Western model of medicine simply sees health as a purely biological phenomenon, the traditional African model of medicine sees health as both a spiritual and social phenomenon.

Until recently, those trained in the Western model of medicine never agreed with the practice and methods of traditional African model and method of practice. In fact, African traditional medical practitioners were derogatorily referred to as 'native doctors' and were seen as a nuisance to national health development. The Western-trained doctors never agreed with their traditional practitioners' counterparts. The story is however changing; the area of disagreement seems now to center on methodology rather than acceptance. Empirical evidence has shown that there are sicknesses and ailment that has spiritual dimensions and so can only be accurately diagnosed and treated by an appeal to the

supernatural or the gods. The point however, is that many Western-trained medical practitioners do not still agree to spiritual diagnosis of ailments and disease; for them, there is a cause for every sickness or disease.

The Epistemological Foundations of Experts“ Disagreement

The search for knowledge is one of the most fundamental engagements of man right from the dawn of history. Man has endlessly strived to understand the world and his place in it. This is because his survival is dependent on the extent of his knowledge about himself and his environment. This is why Nicholas Rescher (xvii) is of the opinion that the need for knowing one’s way about, is one of the most fundamental demands of human condition. In view of the fact that the makeup of man and his environment is so vast and complex that it requires specialized study of each components, the idea of specialization and of course expertise for deep study and understanding became reasonable and an acceptable practice in human society. In this way, specialized knowledge becomes an existential instrument for guidance and direction in life. However, it is also common for people to confuse –information with –knowledge. But information is not knowledge. Information by itself is inert, discrete, disconnected. It is not knowledge until the human mind acts on it: analyzing, synthesizing, applying, evaluating, and integrating it into a dynamic system of ideas. It is therefore the function of experts to create a template with which we can profitably engage the world and our place in it.

In view of the importance of knowledge to human life, epistemology according to Ibrahim (Essentials of Epistemology, 10) as a normative discipline aims at providing standards for examining... how justified are our claims to knowledge. In relation to expertise, Ibrahim says that epistemology aims at providing a platform for assessing expert decision on critical aspects of our life. In this connection, epistemology over the yearshave provided four basic foundations upon which we may

examine expert knowledge and of course to understand the discrepancies in their claims. This is exactly what this paper sees as the epistemology of experts' disagreement. That is, examining experts disagreement from the purview of foundational theories in epistemology. Here, we shall show how skepticism, subjectivism, objectivism and pragmatism give meaning to expert disagreement and how we need to relate to it.

Skepticism as a foundation of experts' disagreement

The belief that there is no certainty in knowledge is known as Skepticism. Skepticism often arises as a result of opposing thoughts on a particular issue as it is the case with experts' disagreement. According to Ozumba:

The skeptics in their search discovered that in every proposition there is an equivalent opposition. Every claim has a counter claim. For every apparent possibility of knowledge, there is counter evidence to disannul it as true (43).

The consequent of this discovery (that every proposition has equivalent opposition) is that either the researchers keep searching or suspend judgment or doubt the veracity of the proposition. Consequently, it calls to question the authenticity of both the senses and reason as sources of knowledge. Central to skepticism are the claim (1) that absolute knowledge is unattainable (2) That judgments must be continually questioned and doubted. (3) That certainty is an approximation or relative. By implication, experts' disagreement is not an abnormality as their knowledge or judgment is not absolute; their judgment must be continually subjected to scrutiny and their decisions taken as temporary approximation and relative as situations may render it ineffective at different moments.

Subjectivism as foundation of experts' disagreement

Experts' disagreement seems to prove Protagoras and other sophists right about the claim that there can be no consensus

about knowledge. Protagoras is noted for asserting that man is the measure of all things. This position –amounted to some form of epistemological subjectivism which implied that one determines what he knows or does not know or what there is, or there is not (Ojong 5). The implication of the above reasoning is that one person may have different knowledge from another about a particular issue and therefore inclined to disagree with another expert as revealed in the debate the two dons. It also means as Ozumba would say that knowledge is not –infallible, inviolable, certain and incorrigible (21) as Plato would want us to believe. In the same vein, disagreement among experts seems to show uncertainty in knowledge.

Objectivism as foundation of experts' disagreement

Objectivity is the claim that certain things, especially truth exist independently of human knowledge or perception of them. It is a philosophical concept of being independently true from individual subjectivity caused by perception, emotions, or imagination. It is the quality of being able to make a decision or judgment in a manner that is not influenced by personal feelings or beliefs. A proposition is considered to have objective truth when its truth conditions are without bias caused by emotional or psychological attachments. Objectivity in collaborative platforms requires that content (meaning and attribution) be the same regardless of who reports it, and that different reports contain no notable omissions or elaborations. Therefore, one of the important measures related to objectivity should be seen in the number of authors who can present a subject from different perspectives but without disagreement to its objective fact or facts.

Since it is taken for granted that truth is objective as exemplified by most scientific discoveries, there is absolutely no reason why experts should disagree but still they do. Why is that? Because according to objectivism, truth exists independently of human perception. However, our inter-subjectivity is supposed to place us at a vantage point to assess truth, but our epistemic intolerance

occasioned by individual idiosyncrasy and interest constantly frustrates our progress in this regard.

Pragmatism as a foundation of experts' disagreement

Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works. For them, the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it and that ideas that are not practical should be rejected. From the arguments of the two dons, one will quickly notice the insistence of Prof. Cyril for a practical and public presentation of the claims of Dr. Akyala to determine the veracity of his claims. The implication here is that experts tend to disagree when the expected outcome of a claim vary from individual or group expectations. Also to examine expert knowledge, pragmatism upholds assessment based on the practical benefits that may be derivable therefrom.

Conclusion

It is a generally held belief that philosophy thrives in controversy. Some thinkers would go as far as saying that an issue stops being philosophical when there is agreement among scholars involved. If this argument is the case, then experts' disagreement is of great relevance to the development and sustainability of philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. This explains the uniqueness of the discipline, its force and influence, tenacity and sustainability despite the attacks about its relevance to development of man over many centuries. Epistemology and indeed philosophy have retained its flavor and monopoly. This may be counted as argument for the necessity of experts' disagreement.

While epistemology is the rational quest to establishing the meaning, conditions, nature, sources and limit of human knowledge; experts' disagreement on the other hand is viewed as a situation where persons considered having insight and special ability about a subject or field, hold contrary views. The reason

for holding different views may be based on subjectivism, objectivism, skepticism or pragmatism. On the other hand, incompetence, venality and ideology may equally turn out to be some of the reasons why experts disagree. However, while some thinkers have argued for harmonization and reconciliation of opposing thoughts, others maintain that everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. Either way, experts' disagreement has a far-reaching effect on the society and the enterprise of epistemology. On the society, a disagreement amongst experts breeds intellectual confusion because it tends to make people indifferent and indecisive and this can deter advancement. For the theory of knowledge, this paper concedes that experts' disagreement act as propellant to continuous research and intellectual activities and like Shanteau puts it, *'one should not see disagreement as evidence of incompetence on the part of the experts, rather as a normal and inevitable part of expertise'* (192).

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