

The Phenomenology of Haitian/Vilokan Idealism

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Abstract: This article highlights and explores the hermeneutical phenomenology found in Haitian/Vilokan Idealism. The work posits that Haitian ontology, Vodou/Vilokan, gave rise to its epistemology, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism, which subsequently gave rise to the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism and the lakou system as its form of social and system integration, respectively. Within Haitian/Vilokan Idealism, the work concludes, is a hermeneutical phenomenology that parallels Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology.

Keywords: phenomenology, Vodou Ethic, animism

INTRODUCTION

Normally referred to as “animism,” “fetishism,” “paganism,” “heathenism,” and “black magic” in the Western academic literature, Vodou (spelled Vodun, Voodoo, Vodou, Vaudou, or Vodoun) is the oldest monotheistic religion in the world. Commonly interpreted as “Spirits” or “introspection into the unknown,” Vodou is the structuring structure (metaphysics) of the Fon people of Dahomey and other tribes of the continent who would arrive on the island of Haiti/Ayiti as named by the Taino natives [1-5]. Unlike German Idealism whose intellectual development from Kant to Schopenhauer, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt school produced the dialectic, Marxist materialism, Nietzschean antidialectics, phenomenology, and deontological ethics.

Haitian/Vilokan Idealism produces a hermeneutical phenomenology, materialism, and an antidialectical process to history enframed by a reciprocal justice as its normative ethics, which is constantly being invoked by individual social actors to reconcile the noumenal (sacred—ideational) and phenomenal (profane—material) subjective world in order to maintain balance and harmony between the two so that the human actor can live freely and happy with all of being without distinctions or masters. As such, Haitian epistemology as a form of transcendental realism and idealism is phenomenological, in the Heideggerian sense (i.e., hermeneutical), material in the Marxian sense, and antidialectical. It refutes Hegel’s claims for the importance of historical formations and other people to the development of self-consciousness. Instead, Haitian/Vilokan idealism, phenomenologically, emphasizes the things in the consciousness (*lwa* or concepts, ideas, ideals) of the individual as they stem from the noumenal/Vilokan world, and get interpreted according to their level of learning, development, capacity for knowledge, and modality, i.e., the way they know more profoundly—kinesthetically, visually, etc., as they antidialectically seek to reproduce them in the phenomenal world as their practical consciousness against other interpretive (individual and social) formations of these same concepts in the material world.

Background of the Problem, Haitian Ontology, i.e., Vodou/Vilokan

Ontologically speaking, within the Haitian metaphysical worldview, Vilokan/Vodou, the world is a unitary (energy) material world created out of Bondye. The world is a creation of a good God, *Bondye Bon*, which created the world and humanity out of itself composed of two intersecting spheres, the profane (the phenomenal world) and sacred (noumenal/Vilokanic, mirrored world of the profane). Embedded in that pantheistic material world are concepts, *lwa yo* in Haitian metaphysics, from the parallel mirrored (Vilokanic) world, that humanity can ascertain via experience and the structure of its being, form of understanding and sensibility (dreams, reason and rationality, extrasensory perceptions), to help make sense of their experience and live in the world, which is Bondye, and therefore sacred, as they (via their *nanm*) seek perfection and reunification (reintegration) with God, the energy force/source.

That is to say, it, Bondye, provided humanity with objects, concepts, ideas, ideals, and practices, i.e., *lwa yo* of Vodou, proverbs, rituals, dance, geometry, knowledge of herbal medicine, trades, and skills, by which they ought to

know, interpret, and make sense of the external (phenomenal profane) world and live in it comfortably. These transcendently real objects, concepts, ideas, ideals, and practices can either be known through dreams, divinations, experience or rationality, and becomes the structure (once reified and institutionalized as proverbs, husbandry, dance, rituals, institutions, etc.), form of sensibility and understanding, through which humanity come to know, hold beliefs and truth-claims. So Bondye, a powerful energy force that always existed created the world and humanity out of itself using four hundred and one transcendently real concepts (God and four-hundred lwa), ideas, and ideals (geometric principles, mathematics, etc.). Humanity and the world around it is an aggregation of bondye's material energy, the energy of God, which constitutes its existence. In humanity this existence is composed of three distinct aggregation of energy (*ti bon anj*; *gwo bon anj*; *ko*, the body), all of which are material stuff, which constitute our *nanm* (souls) where personality, truth-claims, knowledge, and beliefs are deposited, via dreams, revelations, extrasensory perceptions, divinations, experience, reason, the energy source of a God as manifested via a lwa, and can be examined and explored as the synthetic a priori of the human agent.

For humanity to constitute its existence and be in the world according to the will of God or Bondye, in other words, transcendently real concepts stemming from God's will (the mirrored world of the profane, Vilokan) are embedded in the material world, which is God, and can be ascertain and embodied by humanity via their constituted being as a material being with extrasensory perceptions, reason and rationality, and or through experience. As these transcendently real concepts are ascertain, they are constituted and institutionalized, and passed on through humanity via priests/priestesses and early ancestors who institutionalized (reify)/ institutionalize them in the natural world via religious ceremonies, dance, rituals, herbal medicine, trades, concepts, and proverbs. These trades, ideals, proverbs, and or concepts are truisms, mechanisms to ascertain and constitute knowledge and practical activity, which although they are deduced from the constituted make-up (i.e., consciousness) of the human being, in Haitian metaphysics they are attributed to God and the ancestors who institutionalized (reified) them in order to be applied (by human beings who embody them) in the material world so that their descendants can live freely in the world, satisfy their needs, be happy, and achieve perfection in order to reunite with God after their sixteen life cycles.

Theory: Haitian Epistemology, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism

The Haitian epistemological position that would emerge out of the metaphysical worldview, Vodou, of the African people of Haiti and their form of system and social integration is a strong form of Kantian transcendental idealism and realism, which would be institutionalized throughout the provinces and mountains of the island [4, 6]. This position suggests that Haitian epistemology is not a synthesis between modernity and Vodou magic and spiritualism as proposed by many scholars such as Susan Buck-Morss [7], for example. On the contrary, my argument is that the process of demystification and rationalization of Vodou metaphysics, and only Vodou metaphysics, reveals an epistemological position, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism, which parallels Kantian transcendental idealism coupled with a transcendental realism found in Haitian Vodou with its emphasis on the knowability of the noumenal world via trances, revelations, and extrasensory perceptions.

Kantian transcendental idealism "attempts to combine empirical realism, preserving the ordinary independence and reality of objects of the world, with transcendental idealism, which allows that in some sense the objects have their ordinary properties (their causal powers, and their spatial and temporal position) only because our minds are so structured that these are the categories we impose upon the manifold of experience" [8]. Haitian epistemological transcendental idealism, Haitian Idealism or Vilokan Idealism, is a form of transcendental idealism in the Kantian sense in that it attempts to synthesize empiricism, idealism (rationalism), and realism via synthetic a priori concepts/ideals the Haitians believe can be applied not only to the phenomenal but also the noumenal (Vilokanic) world in order to ascertain the latter's transcendently real absolute knowledges they call, *lwa*, gods/goddesses (401 concepts, ideas, and ideals represented as gods/goddesses), of Vilokan/Vodou. So like Kant, Haitian epistemological transcendental idealism, holds on to analytic truths, truths of reasons or definitions, as outlined in their proverbs (*pwoveb*); a posteriori truth, truths of experience or experiments, also embedded in their proverbs, geometry (*veves*), rituals, magic, sorcery, and herbal medicine; and synthetic a priori concepts (categories in Kantian epistemology supplemented with trances, dream-states, extrasensory perceptions), truths stemming from the form of the understanding and sensibility of the mind and apparatuses of experience embedded not only in their proverbs and Vodou rituals, beliefs, and magic, but also their understanding of trances, dream-states, and extrasensory perceptions as categories of the mind applicable to the noumenal or Vilokanic realm where transcendental real concepts, *lwa yo*, exist (as Platonic forms) which they must ascertain in order to live life happily in the phenomenal world without masters or owners of production. The latter (trances, dream-states, and extrasensory perceptions) they believe, in other words, can be applied to the noumenal or Vilokanic world in order to know gods/goddesses, *lwa yo*, which are immutable/absolute concepts, ideas, and ideals God has created and imposed upon and in the material world, from the mirrored world of the earth (Vilokan), which the people, who embody these concepts, ideas, and ideals, should utilize to recursively reorganize and reproduce their being-in-and-as-the-world in order to achieve perfection over sixteen life cycles [4, 9, 6]. Hence, unlike Kantian transcendental idealism, which removes God out of the equation via the categories, which imposes the order we see in the phenomenal

world, Haitian epistemological transcendental idealism and realism, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism, holds on to the concept of God, supernatural, and the paranormal to continue to make sense of the plural tensions between the natural (material) world, i.e., the world of phenomenon, and the world as such, ideational, noumena, i.e., the supernatural and paranormal world, transcendental real world, which is knowable as truth-claims, knowledge, and beliefs, through dreams, divininations, revelations, experience, reason and rationality, and the synthetic a priori, for pure (development of science, i.e., herbal medicine, etc.) and practical reason (i.e., morals and values). Thus Haitian/Vilokan Idealism, unlike Kantian Transcendental Idealism, implies that the objects, concepts, ideals, ideas, etc., of the (ideational) noumenal world are transcendently real and the form of sensibilities and understandings, which include dream states, trances, and extrasensory perceptions are other categories of the understanding, which can be applied beyond the phenomenal world, where the objects are really subjective (interpretive) ideas, in order to ascertain the nature of the absolute concepts of the Vilokanic/noumenal world in order to achieve balance and harmony with it in the phenomenal.

Within this pantheistic (Spinozian) conception of the multiverse and material world, knowledge, truth-claims, and beliefs arise from transcendently real ideational concepts (*lwa yo*) of *bondye*/God as embedded in the earth's mirrored world (Vilokan) and gets deposited in our *nanm* (souls) intuitively, in dreams, revelations, divininations, extrasensory perceptions, reason, rituals, and or experiences which in turn constitutes and structures the form of the understanding of our minds and bodies (senses) so that we can experience the material world according to our interpretations of these concepts in consciousness and developmental track over sixteen reincarnated life cycles [9, 6]. The human being recursively (re) organize and reproduce these (Platonic) transcendently real ideational concepts as their practical consciousness in the phenomenal material world not always in its absolute form as defined noumenally (the sacred mirrored world of Vilokan), but according to their level of learning, development, capacity for knowledge, and modality, i.e., the way they know more profoundly—kinesthetically, visually, etc.

As defined, Haitian epistemology is an epistemological transcendental idealism and realism, Haitian Idealism or Vilokan Idealism, which posits that both phenomena (the profane world) and noumena (its mirror image where wisdom, ideals, and ancestors reside) are knowable through experience and the form of human sensibility and understanding (the categories of Kantian epistemology supplemented with, dreams, divininations, extrasensory perceptions, and trance states), which stems from the energy force of a God, which constitutes our *nanm* (a material thing), and used to recursively organize and reproduce their being-in-and-as-the-world.

So on top of the twelve Kantian schematized categories of the understanding, divided into four groups of three (1. The axioms of intuition, i.e., unity, plurality, and totality; 2. The anticipations of perception, i.e., reality, limitation, and negation; 3. The postulates of empirical thought, i.e., necessary, actual, and possible; 4. The analogies, i.e., substance, cause, and reciprocity), necessary for experience by making objective space and time possible, Vilokanic/Haitian idealism adds dream states, trances, and extrasensory perceptions as a fifth group of three to make known the concepts, *lwa*, of the Vilokanic world knowable so that human actors can achieve balance between the phenomenal world and the former (Vilokanic/noumenal).

For Kant experience requires both the senses, the a priori forms of sensibility, i.e., space and time, and the understanding, i.e. the twelve categories. A unified consciousness (not a self or the Cartesian "I"), which is a structural feature of experience necessary to provide the unity to our experience, what Kant calls, "the transcendental unity of apperception," rule-governed and connected by the categories, experiences real objects that we perceive and exist independently of our perception of them. Thus, the spatio-temporal objects are necessarily relative to and subject to the a priori forms of experience, i.e., forms of sensibility and the understanding. In this sense, Kant does away with the noumenal world of absolutes, which is unknowable as the independent objects are phenomenal, relative to the a priori forms of experience. Unlike Kant, however, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism posits that the *nanm*, which provides unity to our experiences is a material thing, a Cartesian material "I" composed of three distinct entities (sometimes more as Haitian metaphysics suggests that a fourth entity, *lwa met tet*, may constitute the *nanm* of serviteurs in order to guide them in their decision-making) that are also tied to the natural world and can be manipulated in life as well as death. On top of it's a priori forms of sensibility and Kantian categories are dream-states, trances, and extrasensory perceptions, which allows the *nanm* to have access to the world of Vilokan/noumenal world where we can perceive the things that are phenomenal, relative to our a priori forms of experience, as they are in-themselves in order to achieve balance between the world as it appears to us and how it ought to be so that we can live abundantly as individual masters of our own destiny.

Hence Haitian epistemological transcendental idealism (Haitian Idealism, Vilokanism, Vodouism, or Vilokan Idealism) and realism is not only natural, but supernatural and paranormal to the extent that it supplements the synthetic a priori concepts Kant attributes to the categories of the mind with divininations, revelations, dream states, and extrasensory perceptions in order to ascertain the absolute (transcendently real) concepts, ideals, ideas, etc., (*lwa*) of God as embedded in the noumenal (Vilokanic) world. Moreover, it posits that these absolute *lwa yo*, transcendently real

concepts, ideas, ideals, etc., are part of the noumenal world (sacred world of Vilokan), which is not a plural world as plurality, in keeping with the logic of Arthur Schopenhauer, belongs to the world of phenomenon, and can eventually be known by extrasensory perceptions, human reason, understanding, and experience. However, in the human sphere the world of phenomenon and its plurality is a result of interpretations and the different levels of development (reason, experience, capacity, and modality) of the consciousness of the human subjects (not all humans develop their form of sensibilities and understanding at the same rate or in the same life cycle) where the concepts of lwa yo are embedded and embodied and recursively organized and reproduced as the practical consciousness of the human actor. Albeit humanity is reincarnated until they have ascertained all of the true concepts of the unitary world, which can be done so through experience and a priori, and will seize to exist (will seize to experience reincarnation) once they do so.

Haitian/Vilokan Idealism and Realism as such indicates a condition of transcendently real absolutes on the one hand as it pertains to the Vilokanic or noumenal world; and relativity in our notions of objects and reality on the other as it pertains to the transcendently ideal phenomenal world. In terms of the latter, the phenomenal world, in other words, is simply the world of plurality constituted by imperfect beings, anti-dialectically (constantly fighting against the praxis of others for their own understanding and praxis), living through their aggregated material bodies and imperfections according to their interpretations of the concepts and level of learning, development, capacity for knowledge, and modality, i.e., the way they know more profoundly—kinesthetically, visually, etc.

This is why, epistemologically speaking, the phenomenal world in Haiti, looks like an epistemological anarchic world where everyone, antidialectically, exists for their own liberty and existence according to their own developmental track, capacities, modalities, belief systems, and methods governed by an eye for an eye normative worldview, which prevents others from encroaching on an individual's (regardless of their level of development) method and right to exist.

CONCLUSION

The Phenomenology of Haitian/Vilokan Idealism

Hence Haitian/Vilokan Idealism is phenomenological, material, and antidialectical in the sense that the emphasis is on the things (concepts, ideas, ideals) of consciousness as revealed to, and interpreted by, human individuals (via the form of sensibility and understanding) from the noumenal world of Vilokan. These things (concepts, ideas, and ideals) of consciousness they in-turn recursively reorganize and reproduce as their practical consciousness in the material world antidialectically against the interpretive practical consciousnesses of others within a normative ethic of reciprocal justice of the socioeconomic/political structure of the Lakou as organized in a material resource framework. The human actor, in other words, encounter contents in their consciousness, which, with the aid of an elder, priest, or priestess, of a lakou, they must interpret in the material world as their practical consciousness, when things in their lives go awry, in order to have balance within themselves, nature, and their social interactions within the lakou system. The lakou is a community of people and houses organized and gathered around a common yard under the directions of a oungan (Vodou priest), manbo (Vodou priestess), or family elder that promoted and promotes an egalitarian existence rooted in the Vodou religion and ancestor worship, land ownership arrangements, and working the soil. Within the lakou system, each individual or nuclear family owned/own their own land, through which they provided/provide for basic necessities by growing food and raising livestock for their own consumption and for sale in local markets. They also grew and grow export crops, such as coffee, in order to buy imported consumer goods such as clothes and tools. The lakou thus divided/divides power in a way that allowed rural residents to live and work as they wished (through land and garden ownership to provide for their own subsistence), while preventing the consolidation of wealth, and therefore control and inhibitor of equality, in the hands of any one person within the community through a set of customs and secret societies of the Vodou religion that regulate (d) land ownership, land transfers, family relationships, and community affairs. Communal assistance and exchange, via food sharing, harvesting, house building, religious life, and ancestral worship, under the leadership of women also characterized and characterizes lakou life. In essence, the purpose of lakou life is to promote total liberty and equality, via land ownership and self-sufficiency, for all without distinctions and economic differentiation. Hence the lakou system helps to institutionalize the antihumanism that would come to constitute Haitian rural life in that the emphasis is not on promoting the universality of the autonomous rational individual as the purpose of socialization. Instead, the emphasis is on allowing total liberty and equality so that the individual actor can experience Being or existence as they interpret the concepts of the noumenal/Vilokanic world as their practical consciousness. The autonomous rational self is simply one aspect (analytics) of being amongst a plethora of other forms and agential moments by which the individual social actor can choose (based on their analytics in consciousness) to recursively reorganize and reproduce their existence without facing marginalization from their community unless their choice harms other individuals. Hence, like Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, the phenomenology of Haitian/Vilokan Idealism highlights the things of consciousness as they are interpreted by a human actor as their practical consciousness vis-à-vis their analytics, i.e., their conscious awareness or not of these concepts, lwa yo, as they experience being-in-the-world with others who may inhibit their existence.

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