

Ubuntu' Ethical Perspective and the Global Order

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Abstract: The world is increasingly becoming a global village and so distance and culture as markers of boundaries do not seem to be as distinctive and effective as before. Should this be a source of worry? Most human races at different times made efforts to bring humanity together with varying degrees of success. This paper tries to develop a tenable idea of Ubuntu ethical perspective for global order. As an endogenous construct for world peace, Ubuntu theory and practice requires a less emotive, politicized and more inclusive, interdependent conceptual and theoretical articulation so as to be more acceptable and defensible to friend and foe alike. To start with, antagonism from related foreign dominating worldviews raises relational and dialogical issues about the meaning of humane global order from an African viewpoint. The search for a paradigm for World Development is urgent given the real consequences of a (neo)colonial tendency has threatened the development of most countries due dominant lopsided paradigms of alienation, exploitation and marginalization within Global North- South relations. A development paradigm or philosophy of development for the world at large requires an ethical basis for human existence in political and social order. Presently, our world is beset by the problem of a negative dominant social paradigm (DSP) or core social values of hatred, intolerance, the abuse of human rights, dehumanization, exploitation, authoritarianism, poverty and oppression. So, to build a viable and stable endogenous paradigm for development we use the main pillar of interconnectedness among human beings which is central to Ubuntu as a social system and value system to underscore some desirable key moral and democratic values generally required for human liberation and transformation. The research question is: What concrete elements or values of Ubuntu can be useful as paradigms of a stable, viable and progressive world order? Specifically, our findings suggest that Ubuntu ethics is defined by a set of human values or qualitative correlates central among which are reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity and the value of human life

as well as consensus, tolerance and mutual respect. Thus, the paper argues for a possibility utilizing ubuntu ethical correlates as materials for establishing humane sociopolitical orders worldwide.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Ethics, Communalism, Community, Human Person, Human Dignity, Moral Values

Problematising Human Nature and our common Humanity

The questions of the proper way that human beings should behave in society and how to bring humanity together remain two key issues in philosophy and have been an ancestral challenge for human society all through the ages. Philosophers, social studies scholars and governments variously tried to tackle these concerns. Humanity faces a continued struggle with human nature that reveals ancestrally negative elements such as hate, racism, colonialism, crimes, slavery, tribalism, corruption, greed, genocide, wars and other vices. These negative features of human nature oppose and contest with the positive values of man (Imagination, Virtue, Intelligence, Kindness, Choice, Will, Creativity, Humanitarianism, and so on). So, there is a struggle about the role of the human being as the primary material of the universe. Given the above situation, why ought human beings to desire a humane, cooperative and humanistic social and political order? An answer could be that in every generation men struggled with control or strength versus helplessness or weakness and so human beings sought to work together to accomplish the insurmountable or what one person found unattainable. Like the philosophers of security will say security is beauty; beauty is harmony. So family, village, clan, association, institution, city, state, amalgam, conglomerate, merger, partnership, commonwealth, country, world, and so on, were essentially efforts to identify, recognize, congregate, integrate and organize people for a higher purpose of our common humanity.

Today as always, our living together purposively in view of our common humanity is threatened by a wave of divisions, instability, disorder and insecurity arising from the fact that some negative attributes of an individual or group human nature (greed, ignorance, violence, hate, discrimination, unfair treatment, impunity, intolerance, authoritarianism and so on) can be projected into society as (corruption and bad governance, anachronism and irrational fear of the 'other', wars, hate speech, racism and ultra-ethnicity, genocide and crimes against humanity, apartheid, xenophobia, sectarianism and dictatorship, disobedience to the rule

of law, inequity in resource distribution, lack of social justice, Nazism, jihadist extremism, tyranny, siege mentality, cult of personality and abuse of power and so on).

This is life-threatening. So to curb these human excesses we beam our searchlight on some binding forces of our common humanity which promote sharing and learning of common global experiences and threats. We push an argument for a conception of cross-cultural communication, extended conversational circumstances that promote mutual cooperation. This effort in part, requires a dialogical approach that applies human relational interaction to safeguard our collective human values, survival and humanity. The modern world is increasingly becoming a global village where experiences are communicable and interactive such that an event in one region can inevitably affect other regions several thousands of kilometres away. Given such interconnections and the ensuing diversity it is clear that basic social values of mutual respect, cooperation and social justice cannot be overstated in nurturing responsible human persons and building stable viable human societies.

What is the logic or causality that drives the above analysis? The main point here is that human nature is capable of struggle and passivity, good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice. Is this paradoxical? Should we be bothered about this? Where is the value of social order or social control? We may argue that moderating the individual human nature is an arduous task that man seems equipped for using corrective mechanisms such as conscience, family values, education, laws, culture and tradition, even critical intelligence and rationality. Despite these variables why does it seem that a human being still exhibits some unwholesome traits? What is the solution to this problem? Why should the Africans take this issue seriously? There is a concern for establishing and sustaining higher ideals of moral life, stronger value systems and more inclusive social or human values for moderating human beings in society. In the society human beings are moderated by ethics or the science of human behavior which may be descriptive or normative. Other instruments of moderation or social control include; statutes and rules, natural or positive laws, ethnic or religious practices, technology and technological styles, conventional customary or cultural ways of life as well as moral suasion and public opinion. It means then that human nature can be the subject of human nurture such that certain natural and social traits can be carried over into the human society through

social life, politics, culture, laws, and other developmental behavioral value systems.

There are two traditional ways of maintaining order in a human community; the social and the political. First is the political order. This is a means of social control based on the obedience to law and order as well as adherence to the rule of law by government and citizens of larger societies or countries. In such a society laws are central to peace and development because these embody properly laid down rules by the political and legal authorities, which are binding on all members of society without exception. In the political order, affairs are conducted formally or officially and the focus is on statecraft for the common good as well as political authority for the collective security of all. However, the political order is always under attack by subversive and insidious forces of deception, manipulation, terrorism, fraud, ethnicity, impunity, mistrust, nepotism among the rulers and the ruled. This truncates efforts to attain the public good within the political order.

Secondly, the social order presumes regularity, stability, predictability and organisation arising from kinship ties, associations and friendly relations. Organization and control of social life are central to social order using the tool of negotiation and bargaining arising from balancing the conflicts of interests existing among individuals and the society. The social order operates within smaller groups such as ethnicities, tribes, family as a system of control. When the social order is expanded into a social system or scheme of social relations then it can also be applied to larger human formations such as countries using rules, regulations, laws, moral codes and cultural practices. In this manner, a social order defines the political, economic and social roles, rights and duties of people. Unfortunately, a social order is easily threatened by the antagonism and restiveness of dominant or provincial ethnic and religious groups that have put their directing principles and values of egoism, hate speech, intolerance and injustice ahead of human values. So despite these mechanisms or strategies for managing humanity there are still problems hence the need for a continuous search for an ethical or political principle or value for dealing with the tendencies in human behaviour.

Can there be an African philosophical input to this conversation? What connects human thoughts to theory formulation and then to practice or social life? Can the Africans survive without strong endogenous analytical reasoning, theoretical analysis and conceptual frameworks for conceptualizing and explaining reality? Thought or thinking is essential to human

life anywhere. A human being that exhibits problems with thinking deeply and properly can pose a danger to himself and others. This is a clear evidence of the value of logic which theoretically and scientifically separates good from bad thinking using arguments, rules, axioms, formal systems, meta-logic and so on. Logic is important to human life, because just as an athlete trains the body rigorously to excel in the mental and physical aspects of sports, most academic disciplines and their sub-branches train the human mind mostly, to become calculative, systematic, adept and rigorous in processing ideas and mental categories. Specifically, the Africans are now challenged on the need to think right; allow their thought to dwell on posterity using adaptable and ingenious basic human values that promote life and well-being such as consensus, fair treatment, critical appraisal, respect for others and knowledge, lawful behavior and tolerance of diversity of human experience for building stable and viable social and political order on the continent. Global modernity and civilization in so far as it relates to contemporary Africa shows that some knowledge and practices considered anachronistic are still being practiced.

In this contemporary era, we notice that some people in social and public life across Africa face a very serious problem of separating right and wrong behaviour in the public domain. This is particularly seen in a local case study of Nigeria, where poor public ethics and public trust has triggered corruption, abuse of power, disruption, instability and disorder, disrespect for human dignity and well-being of the people at different levels of society. We are challenged to seek better ways of improving the way people behave in public arena, hence, an urgent need to improve the ethical quality of performance in social and public and professional life, to promote security, communal living, and ethics among professionals. One effective way of addressing this problem is to evolve an alternate progressive ethical culture, by pursuing domestic policy that conceptually and evidentially elevates the pedestals and domains of moral conscience or consciousness among those who formulate, implement or influence social policies in different areas of public life- in Government, Business, Education, Law, Medicine, Science and Technology as well as Communication using more inclusive or integration oriented human values of Ubuntu.

So the problem under study is clear. Human behaviour is critical to the survival of the human race. The question arises: How can human behavior be managed or controlled politically or ethically? An examination of the idea of Ubuntu dwells significantly on its social and ethical dimensions. The African continent by and

large, faces development challenges in the technological, economic and socio-political aspects that are defined and tackled taxonomically and restrictively thus leading to conflict and dislocation in the economic, social and political orders. On the one hand, conceptualizing development traditionally compels us to see it specifically in terms of the technological, economic or political advancement of a country or race. Yet, there is the imperative of construing the development question holistically so as to highlight the concern for humanity. Here, the holistic approach suggests on the one hand, the pooling together of concomitant aspects of development such as we have in the core values combined to form the Millennium Development Goals or Sustainable Development Goals [MDG or SDG]. On the other hand, a holistic view, in a more important way, highlights a man centered ethical view of development, without which even the technological and physical could be contradicted and compromised. This man-centered view, in turn, accommodates major humanistic and ethical elements or dimensions that define and promote human survival. So the ethical and humanistic approach, in turn, also converges with the concept of Ubuntu to emphasize on the human condition and the human interest.

Over the ages the apparent low rate of success in answering the question of proper human conduct in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust behavior is easily seen in the diverse threats facing our world today. Some of the main threats to peace and progress are; socially disruptive man-made worldviews as (ethno-religious conflicts, terrorism, world wars, proxy wars, racism, class antagonism, sex discrimination, racism, hate speech, injustice, inequity, corruption, poverty), medical/ health challenges as (epidemic and pandemic diseases such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, avian flu, polio, Malaria, Corona virus), natural evils and environmental hazards as (desertification, floods, erosion, refugee crisis, pollutions from mineral explorations, natural disasters-earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tornadoes), political ideologies as (Nazism, expansionist radical Islamic theocracy-‘Wahabism’ or ‘Salafism,’ right-wing extremism, colonialism, fascism, tyranny, communism, dictatorship, authoritarianism), cultural predispositions (ignorance, tribalism, intolerance, corruption, disregard for the rule of law, segregation, fundamentalism, refusal to accept modernity, anachronism, impunity, uncritical and unscientific rationality or thinking and exploitative value systems as individualism, feudalism, capitalism), among others.

Philosophical Views on Human Nature and the Human Person in Hobbes, Kant and Ghandi

What, if at all, is human nature? What is the link between human nature and Ubuntu if at all? We must share the view of Berry who insists that “social and political organization has to accommodate itself to the human nature and not vice versa.”¹ In other words, human nature is a primal symbol in the quest for security in human existence. Human nature has to do with certain physical and non-physical elements of man. According to Dewey human nature can be defined by the innate needs of human beings and he says:

I do not think it can be shown that the innate needs of men have changed since man became man or that there is any evidence that they will change as long as man is on the earth. Needs for food and drink and for moving about, need for bringing one's power to bear upon surrounding conditions, the need for some sort of aesthetic expression and satisfaction, are so much part of our being.²

Furthermore, Dewey points out that “pugnacity and fear are native elements of human nature. But so are pity and sympathy.”³ From the above analysis, there is a natural dimension of security as embodied in human nature and its operations. So human beings can act as individuals, but a lot of things are beyond the individual as so require the formation of large groups of human beings living together for the greater good, such as the family, village, county, town, tribe, nation, State and so on, to accomplish what is beyond an individual man. So human nature has to do mainly with the social nature of man. According to Mackenzie, “human association, societies are first formed for the sake of life; though it is for the sake of good life that they are subsequently maintained. The care of the young, the preservation of food and drink, the provision of adequate shelter and protection would suffice to account for the existence of

¹ Christopher Berry, *Human Nature* (London: Macmillan Educational Limited, 1986), xiii.

² John Dewey, “Does Human Nature Change?” in *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 3rd edition, eds. Daniel Bronstein, Yervant Kirkorian, Philip Wiener (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Incorporation, 1974), 116.

³ *Ibid.*, 118.

human societies.”⁴ These natural feelings and instincts of humanity are themselves again constrained by some other natural factors. According to McShea, “men need what other animals do not, a method for the restoration of the functionality of feelings. Their freedom to imagine all possible things cannot, consistently with survival, entail enslavement to the necessity of action on the basis of an emotional reaction to each imagination.”⁵

The analysis of human nature takes a different dimension when an attempt is made to separate the individual aspect from the universal aspect as we see when Bacon sets the pedestals of the operations of human nature at two distinct but important levels. This, he does through the theory of idols. According to Bacon human nature is captured by the idols. The idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. The idols of the Cave are the idols of the individual man. For everyone (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has a cave or den of his own, which refracts or discolours the light of nature; owing to his own proper and peculiar nature.⁶

The individual and the universal aspects of human nature make sense when we situate human nature theoretically starting with Hobbes view. Hobbes basic argument is that after all said and done, human beings who are essentially egoists seem to get along better with one another⁷ when they aim at justice construed as the pursuit of individual advantage with a cooperative setting. In other words, given that limited resources and conflicting interests characterize human life then people can expect to further or promote their interests, if they live harmoniously with others in the society.⁸ Thomas Hobbes views the human person within the ambits of the idea of the Leviathan. The leviathan retains immense and illimitable powers over men and materials and is thus capable of guaranteeing justice. Hobbes made it clear that the conception of justice and security offered by the leviathan became imperative due to the low life expectancy, ominous danger and insecurity of life and

⁴ John Mackenzie, *Outlines of Social Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 35.

⁵ Robert McShea, “Human Nature Ethical Theory,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* xxxix, no. 3 (March 1979): 389.

⁶ Francis Bacon, “The Four Idols,” in *Readings in Philosophy*, eds. John Randall Jr., Justus Buchler, and Evelyn Shirk (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 92.

⁷ Kai Nielsen, “Conceptions of Justice,” in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics* 1, ed. Mary Hawkesworth (London: Routledge, 1996), 86-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*

possessions in the state of nature. Central to the imperative of security, survival and justice in Hobbes is the appreciation of the circumstances prevailing in the state of nature. Hobbes traces the emergence of the Leviathan to the nature of man and the conditions of the state of nature. He says that nature has made men equal in the faculties of the body and mind. Despite that there are differences in the way men are endowed with such faculties, these differences are not so considerable as to allow one man certain qualities that others do not have. For him, this equality of ability among men gives rise to the equality of hope or the belief that all have the same chances of attaining their ends. This equality gives rise to disputes over the resources of nature, in which people exercise their powers in order to conquer, dispossess or deprive weaker ones of their lives, liberties and properties. Therefore, Hobbes contends that the equality of men gives rise to a condition of mutual destruction in which no man can be sure of emerging victorious or subsisting for a reasonable length of time.⁹

According to Hobbes, that period of human existence when men live without a common power to control them all or arbitrate among them is called “the state of war.”¹⁰ In this state, every man is against every man. Hobbes takes care to point out that this state of war encompasses not just conditions of actual conflict, but also the state of existence in which men are disposed to behave as if they are in a state of war. Furthermore, in the state of nature or war where every man is every man’s enemy and the security and protection of life and property is not assured, there is no industry or fruitful labour. And other human activities like culture, art and society do not exist. For Hobbes, the state of nature is the state of war. It is the state of the violence and anarchy of every one against the other. This condition of life is typified by the inability to guarantee survival and peace for any reasonable length of time. One of the most distinctive features of the state of nature is the fact that it does not guarantee the individual or aggregate of interests except there is a normative exit using the facilities of a contract. Hobbes informs us that it is absolutely important to note that, “to this warre of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. J. Somerville (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 142.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice.”¹¹

The outright repercussion of this is that, “in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; and therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be).”¹² This is not all about the state of nature. Hobbes informs us that “worst of all, there is a continual fear and danger of violent death. Put simply, the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”¹³ Against the background of the absence of a common power, law, notions of justice and injustice, right and wrong in the state of nature, Hobbes says that the passions and the reason of man lead him to search for peace. Man’s quest for peace arises from his fear of death, and his desire for those resources necessary for adequate living. By desiring peace and co-operation, man uses reason to fashion some convenient articles of peace out of the right and law of nature. According to Hobbes, the right of nature is the liberty that all men have to use their powers to preserve their lives, while the law of nature is a general rule derived from reason, which forbids a man to destroy his life or the means of preserving his life. For Hobbes, the first and basic law of nature is to seek peace, while the second laws of nature enjoins a man to readily give up his right to self-defence if others show a willingness to do likewise.

He notes that a man gives up his right to self-preservation either by renouncing or transferring it. A right is renounced when one does not care to whom the benefit goes, while a right is transferred when one intends that the benefit goes to some specified persons. Hobbes maintains that the acts of rights renunciation or transfer are conducted through declarations and transactions binding the participants to a term of agreement. The goal of rights transfer is the guarantee of security of life and the means of preserving life. In effect, the realization of the shortfalls of the state of nature would pave the way for the emergence of the commonwealth. According to Hobbes, social order as the great Leviathan, commonwealth, state is an artificial man created to protect and defend the natural man. He says that “the sovereignty of the leviathan is its artificial soul which gives life and animation to the whole body.”¹⁴ In his view, the Leviathan’s strength lies in

¹¹ Ibid., 188.

¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, 110.

¹³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴ Ibid., 139.

the wealth and riches of all its members. And every part or member of the Leviathan is induced to perform his duties by the sovereign who has the power to punish or reward.

For Hobbes, contract is the name given to the mutual transfer of rights among men. It is the basis of the commonwealth, which exists in order to ensure that lives are preserved and made happy. The protection of life and property is guaranteed in the commonwealth, only when men erect a common power on whom they confer all their powers and strengths. Hobbes notes that “this common power can be one man or an assembly of men.”¹⁵ The commonwealth is attained through the processes of the transfer and renunciation of the rights of man and the laws of nature. The commonwealth emerges from the debris of the state of nature that was defeated by the superior logic and opportunistic inclination of men. The commonwealth, according to Hobbes, is the only source of security both from human nature, natural forces and other material creations of men. The commonwealth is the aggregation of an institutional arrangement of a multitude that has covenanted through the social contract to form and live in the society in order to assure themselves of mutual defense, peace, progress and protection from internal and external dangers. The power of the sovereign, conceived as either the ruler or the society, is central to attaining justice and security.

The appealing, systematic and well-articulated justice theory of Hobbes suffered from certain internal contradictions that paved the way for the emergence of other views. Hobbes theory of justice and security did not fully account for the dangers arising from the illimitable powers that were bestowed on the sovereign as ruler. Hobbes did not reckon with the fact that these powers would pave the way for dictatorship, primitive accumulation, misappropriation, authoritarianism and the eventual denial of the same justice and security of lives and property as we find in Africa. It was this unresolved paradox of justice and security that other theoreticians tried to address.

What is human nature devoid of fair treatment and rule guided behavior? Kant offers a conception of the human being that thrives in an atmosphere guided by rules, neutrality and fairness. Kant's impartiality theory as explained by Nielsen calls for some basis for respectful, fair and equal treatment of all. The impartiality theory of justice holds that “the function of justice is to provide a reasonable basis of agreement among people who seek to take due

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan in Social and Political Philosophy*, 148.

account of the interests of all.”¹⁶ The reason for behaving justly is that whatever happens to a person matters in and of itself. As such, people should not look at things from their own points of view alone, but they should seek a basis for considering the views of others.¹⁷ In other words, the concept of a person, which is operational in the impartiality theory of justice, is that a person is a self-originating source of valid claims. And we accept the claims of that person because we feel that his interest is equally important as ours.

Kant contents that justice is that relation of men to one another which contains the conditions under which it is alone possible for everyone to obtain the right that is his due.¹⁸ This implies that given the essence of justice as “the aggregate of those conditions under which the will of one person can be co-joined with the will of another in accordance with a universal law.”¹⁹ This means that one’s act is just only if it exhibits the character of being amenable to the acts and freedoms of others under a universal ordinance. The highlight of Kant’s justice is the most striking point that “a man realizes his true self when he acts from the moral law.”²⁰ The moral imperative concerns or affects every being that is capable of being subject to obligation. And only those actions that are done from the motivation of duty can be said to retain moral worth. Duty is the nothing other than ensuring that our actions necessarily derive from acting out of reverence for the law.²¹ As Korsgaard insists “the essential character of law is universality. Therefore, the person who acts from duty attends to the universality of his or her principle.”²² Thus, according to Kant the vital law of justice is the categorical imperative. Evidently, “the categorical imperative only expresses generally what constitutes obligation. It may be rendered by the following formula: Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law.”²³ As

¹⁶ Nielsen, “Conceptions of Justice,” 86-7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice: Part I of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1990), 143.

¹⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 254.

²¹ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 104-10.

²² Christine Korsgaard, “Kant,” in *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy*, eds. Robert Cavalier, James Gouinlock, and James Sterba (London: Macmillan, 1989), 211.

²³ Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, 241.

Ebbinghaus rightly notes, “the categorical imperative determines the concept of duty solely as regards its form. It states only what duty as such is and consequently what all duties have in common.”²⁴ However, Wiredu has argued that rules especially rules of morality make sense to us not merely on the basis of Universalizability but more importantly on the basis of the connection between morality and human interests.²⁵ Rules do not make sense as rules rather they retain significance as rules intended to achieve specific purposes. Apart from those purposes there is the question of the context and effectiveness of such rules. What happens when a rule works in some place or time, and not in another?

The belief that human beings can be decent, reasonable, responsible and good if properly formed is not exclusive to any culture or race. But one major exponent of this view is Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi revered leader of India who brought a new idea to the quest for human nature. Gandhi preached love for all human beings and mutual respect for each other. He believed that humanity takes a centre stage as children of God and there should be no discrimination or unfair treatment of others on the basis of belief colour, creed, caste or religion. There needs to be respect for others' feelings. Essentially, Gandhi despised prejudice, hate, selfishness and colonialism of any sort. In a sense he preached the universality of human nature and by so doing a better world where all human beings can live together in peace and develop their respective humanity without fear or favour. His target was to make human life better by upholding human dignity through the promotion of human and social values.²⁶ From the above we see clearly that the search for humane and orderly social living and mutual respect among human beings in society has been an age long issue throughout the history of philosophy of society. Let us examine some pitfalls of an African human nature.

²⁴ Julius Ebbinghaus, “Interpretation and Misinterpretation of the Categorical Imperative,” in *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Wolff (London: Macmillan, 1968), 214.

²⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, “Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of Some African and Western Conceptions of Morals,” in *Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy, Four Essays*, ed. Olusegun Oladipo (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995), 36.

²⁶ Y. Kesavulu, “Ghandian Trusteeship as an Instrument of Human Dignity,” *Gandhi Marg* 25, no. 4 (Jan-March 2004): 1.

Ubuntu as a Philosophical Concept for Collective Security

To start with, what is a philosophical idea? Philosophical ideas are the intellectual materials or mental entities used by philosophers to do their conceptual and analytical jobs. The conceptual work of the philosopher involves simplifying and clarifying fundamental ideas that guide human life. Simplifying is about analyzing and analysis has to do with evaluation and study of the meanings of concepts and asking questions about them. Philosophers like to ask perennial and fundamental questions and seek answers to them, where possible. The way a human being or race asks questions, reasons or thinks is crucial to security and survival. Philosophers critically and argumentatively attempt to answer these questions because ultimately, philosophical thinking aims at breaking down a lot of bad reasoning, stereotypes and prejudices that arise from our living in this world. Some of these prejudices and stereotypes are not delivered to us deliberately or with the desire to mislead us, rather we may have been born with them. Philosophy also encourages openness and tolerance as well as the need for us to allow alternative ways of viewing the world. These are ideas and ideals that are not easily attained or even conceptualized among humans and even more so among philosophers. It seems that we ought to key into the quest to alter or change the behavior and experience of man from the natural tendencies of human nature. Human nature in most evidential cases seeks to be primitively egoistic, harmful to others, intolerant, anachronistic, oppressive, disobedient to the rule of law, emotional and disdainful of the rules of logic, human achievement, objectivity and sound reasoning. This is the truth about human beings. This is one reason why there is a need for Ubuntu.

Ubuntu as a cosmology or a view of the universe or specifically a conception of human society needs to be examined seriously as an indigenous ethical or social alternative to the *status quo* due to certain gaps noticed in the modern world as a whole. Such gaps are prevalent in both the developed and developing societies. The above shortfalls can be summarized this way: In most societies in the world today, we currently experience a conflict between the affirmation of formal political freedom and its tolerance of racial, religious, tribal and socioeconomic inequalities which breeds alienation and contradicts the human dignity and freedom. This makes us to question the inequality and imposition of selective humanism and exclusion strategies that pervade most parts of the world today. The reality of dehumanization and disempowerment

focuses on a dominant value-system that pursues exploitation, lack of rule of law and structural discrimination as core values. These features are easily seen for instance, in the hegemonic domination or might is right in international politics, bad governance of African rulers arising from a political culture of neo-colonial state-centralism, foreign imposed top-down social engineering and other strategies of marginalization. Marginality and marginalization reflect a faulty existential belief in political and economic discrimination that causes problems for vulnerable peoples.

More specifically, there is a need to clarify, in what way(s) if at all, can a philosophical study of Ubuntu contribute to the theoretical and practical quest for development in Africa? What are the logical and empirical properties of a philosophical view of development? The material dimension of development calls for a careful application of the dividends of science and technology to exploit and control the physical environment, while the moral aspect of development is made up of the consistent endeavor in regulating, as well as improving human relationships via the promotion of equality and mutual cooperation.²⁷ As such philosophical view of development basically examines the idea of agency or the human factor and the role of ideas in fostering development. Ubuntu and development share the quest for human dignity and cooperation in common. Dignity and cooperation require a sense of fairness, negotiation and dialogue as ingredients of a developmental social order built on human, humanistic and humane values. Let us look at a few of these viewpoints as a backdrop to Ubuntu.

The Need for Ubuntu as a Construct for our common Humanity

This effort has both the theoretical and practical dimensions that are required for the society to enjoy peace, order, security and development. All stakeholders and social actors need to revise the ethical dimension of their lives, focusing on the foundations of society and the development of moral principles in the practical cultural situations of African public affairs. A theoretical and practical study of ethics fulfils the need to make philosophy more down to earth, by making professionals more intellectually responsive to ethical and social challenges in the environment and ethically guided decision-making in key areas of

²⁷ Monday Igbafen, *Basic Issues and Theories in Philosophy of Development* (Ekpoma: Inno Printing Press, 2003), 2-3.

public life. The idea is to develop in decision-makers and administrators a high degree of sensitivity to questions of right and wrong, and of moral obligation in policy matters. Also, some effort will be made to address public ethics shortfalls and citizenship/trust issues that have compromised national development, civility among the citizens and governmental efficiency. Lastly, there will be a desire to strengthen the intellectual foundations of our private and public lives by building a social and ethical system that will reinforce our main institutions, and engender feelings of tolerance, justice, equity and fairness in a multi-ethnic and multi religious society such as Nigeria.

At one level, Ubuntu can be said to be an idea or a belief about the way the good life should be so it is normative or prescriptive. The concern about how one ought to live his life in the society remains one of the fundamental topics of philosophical investigation all through human history. A number of scholars have offered different responses to this question with varying degrees of success. Elements of the ubuntu ideal could be located in the works of scholars of different eras from all around the world;²⁸ thus, in our view endorsing its global inclinations and acceptability. Such personalities, Mwase says include; John Rawls, Desmond Tutu, Martin Buber, Mohandas Ghandi, Immanuel Kant among others. Other prominent exponents of Ubuntu include Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela. One immediate implication of this is that the primitive elements that comprise ubuntu as a cultural and historical experience can be universalized and so can be found within and across nations and tribes.

Ubuntu is in a more important sense, a value system, a scheme of social relations or a way of life that determines human personal and social actions in the cultural, political and economic domains of life in a society. It can be seen as a principle for guiding and underwriting human behavior at the individual, group, national and even possibly the international level. The absence of the human values of Ubuntu poses a threat to social life at the national and international levels, and thus becomes a problem for urgent attention. Accordingly, our argument is in stages and is quite simple: firstly, no human being or institution or race or country will remain in this world forever, at least not as a physical living being. Time is short and physical and

²⁸ Isaac Mwase, “Aspects of Ubuntu for International Research Ethics,” *Fifth Annual Teaching Skills in International Research Ethics Workshop* (Indiana University: Centre for Bioethics, April 17- 19, 2013).

institutional death is inevitable. Even this earth has an expiry date. No man or race or country is perfect that is why we are called human beings or human society- fallible, finite and often fickle. So if no human being or race or institution or society will remain in this world forever, then time is short and demise is inevitable.

As a result therefore, no idea can be absolute or perennial in a complex, temporal, relative and finite world. Given this fact, it follows that we need to be critical of any position that imposes on others, a unitary or mono-logical way of living in the world; of doing philosophy. Any such effort to deliver a one-sided view of the universe, as the gospel truth especially from a metropolitan and hegemonic viewpoint, undermines the very core value of tolerance, openness and criticism that the diversity of humanity points us to, and perhaps philosophy too points us to variety, despite its many weak points. In every generation, humans were faced with the reality of struggle against an exaggerated dualism, arrogance, hypocrisy, derision and fear of the unknown and the inability to genuinely respect 'difference,' that ensures that people find it very hard to uphold the core ideals and values of freedom and fairness so as to transcend existing barriers imposed by culturally-bound knowledge, rise above prejudices and pettiness in human nature. Such haughtiness made it difficult to affirm the intrinsic value of mutual and sincere recognition, accommodation and tolerance of other views different from one's own. This quest for fairness and justice across the world is what defines the imperative of African philosophy as a field of study. The focus here is to bring to the awareness of the Africans like other races, the need to work harder and attain human dignity and self-definition as well as establish well-ordered and self-reliant societies in most parts of the continent. This is one sure pathway to dignity and freedom. We seek a critical and conscious construction of an endogenous idea or basis of social and political order that can form the bedrock of liberation and transformation on the continent by putting our African humanity first in all we do. Every politics, religions, corruption, racism, tribalism, crimes, oppression will die if our humanity fizzles out physically- as a species or ontologically- in our unique human essence.

The great paradox here is that without human nature and the struggle to contain its excesses, the ultimate pursuit of the four H or 4Hs; humanization, humanitarianism, humanity, humanism will be impossible to attain. Accordingly, if a diversity of humanity is central to even the survival of man and the world, then one of the primary arguments that may be quite an uphill task to accomplish here is the demand that; all efforts should be directed at the good of

all or majority of human beings. The above is one way that the endogenous ethical variant of Ubuntu emerges as a solution to the problem of community which deals with power relations among human beings and their living together peacefully for a common purpose. Hence, are we challenged to seek better ways of improving the way people behave in the public arena? Is there an urgent need to improve the ethical quality of performance in social and public and professional life, to promote peace, security and communal living? For the society to enjoy peace, order, security and development, all stakeholders and social actors need to revise the ethical dimension of their lives, along Ubuntu lines, focusing on the foundations of society and the development of moral principles in the practical cultural situations of African public affairs. There are two issues that require conceptual clarification here. First is whether tradition and modernity have vitiated Ubuntu and second is if the political idea of democracy is in harmony with Ubuntu ethos? Let us start with the first one. Ubuntu in the traditional society would not have been a major problem due to the unanimity, communalism and homogeneity of the traditional society of pre-colonial Africa based on kinship ties and other shared values such as common blood, language, culture and history that promote some prominent African values as hospitality respect for elders, conscious search for consensus and inclusive social order, etc. So, in this sense the nature and practices of a traditional society would in fact uphold and encourage Ubuntu human values as a basis for improving humanity.

Put simply, we may argue further for the place of man in the cosmos or existence. Understood from the point of existence or cosmology, human beings have only this planet- earth to call their own for now. Even the concerted efforts of the space explorers, trans-humanists and post-humanists to interface machines and man, to use science to seek habitable planets outside earth have encountered challenges. Their scientific and technological efforts have struggled with the problems of managing space-time, distance, gravity, microgravity and biological and technological issues and limitations arising from man's projection of himself and even his machines into space. These (present) obstacles show that human beings should treat our earth with caution because it is the only single place that is currently known to habitable for man. Any major problem here on earth will most likely spell extinction level crisis for humanity. So, the oppressive, one-sided, reckless and careless use of the world's resources that have led to climate change and global warming have the prospect of extreme consequences that

bring to the forefront once again the need for human beings to live together for mutual cooperation and the common good. The quest for the common good has been an ancestral quest since man appeared on earth and in this era we are looking at the prospects of Ubuntu ethical and political values for fulfilling this desire or agenda of peaceful and progressive human interconnectedness, cooperation, respect and interaction.

The Quest for a Community of Humanity through key Socio-Political and Moral Essence and Essentials of Ubuntu

There are two issues that require clarification here. First is whether tradition and modernity have vitiated Ubuntu and second is if the political idea of democracy is in harmony with Ubuntu ethos? Let us start with the first one. In a modern era or era of modernity Ubuntu is more difficult to attain given some very alienating, anonymous and universal features attached to modernity such as urbanization, education, larger populations, Westphalia Statism, complex social laws and behavior, etc. Yet some features of modernity also promote Ubuntu especially in societies that try to allow key elements of technology, socio-economic order and institutionalization to work efficiently. So, in this present day what is CCTV, biometrics, internet, social media, etc? Whatever else these innovations exemplify, they are still basically technologically driven attempts to interconnect people; for them to 'see' one another, more properly for security or citizenship reasons. In the past we have the traditional African value of respect for the elders which is intrinsically good as all would become elders and expect to be accorded respect due. But the point is that today modernity promotes respect but it is now broader to be seen as respect for human dignity and human rights, as well as human achievement. As such elements of Ubuntu can still be seen in an era of modernity although it may not express itself in the old way when there were small tightly knit tribes. Today we talk about e-communities driven by shared experiences and beliefs such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. So, Ubuntu is evolving and is a subject of social change while it is changing constantly. Our purpose in this paper is to abstract the essentials of Ubuntu in a way that is acceptable to all. This is the dialectics of Ubuntu; the coming in and out of existence; manifesting differently in every generation. For example, most recent agitations around the world were planned online and took governments and societies unaware until execution. Recall the Arab Spring in North Africa and Nigerian END SARS

protests. So, Ubuntu is evolving and is a subject of social change while it is changing constantly. Our purpose in this paper is to abstract the essentials of Ubuntu in a way that is acceptable to all. This is the dialectics of Ubuntu; the coming in and out of existence; manifesting differently in every generation.

Next is the issue of democracy and Ubuntu. The truth is that Africa has faced an ancestral problem of foreign domination both physically and at the level of ideas. Colonialism, which expropriated African lands, resources, value systems and populations, is a ready example among others. So how do we develop endogenous ideas and human values for cultural identity, developmental social order and security on the continent and even for Africans in the diaspora? Let us admit that democracy at least in its ancient form started with the ancient Greeks who in fact also modified it to give pride of place to public debates and conversations, egalitarianism or ‘Doctrine of the Peers’ as well as separation of powers. So, it is the human values embedded in democracy that we are interested in primarily. This value addition or value chain is especially important for a philosopher. So even in the modern era current trends in democracy that have been passed down or exported to other parts of the world from modern United Kingdom and United States of America need to be seen in terms of the values they embody and not the particularities of their application in those specific societies. So even multiparty variants, opposition, elections, media, and so on, all of these are still about involvement and interconnection of human beings.

The key human values of democracy include; giving people a voice and choice through participation and consent at least politically. Also, there are values of tolerance, accommodation and respect for others through freedoms, dialogue, and rule of law, negotiation through lobbying, interaction, consensus, litigation and public enlightenment, as a well as the belief that a human being gives his best as an individual and a group member, when he is a stakeholder or contributor to social life through ethical behavior, trust, compassion, commitment and living together for the common good. This constellation of human values that puts humanity first; agrees that self-perseveration and life-promoting behavior is primary to the survival of all societies, are easily seen as the basis of the link between Ubuntu and democracy.

We are obliged to pose the following questions in order to apprehend the concept of Ubuntu:

- i. What is Ubuntu?

- ii. What constitutes the logical and empirical properties Ubuntu?
- iii. Why should Ubuntu be taken seriously as a philosophical idea?
- iv. Can there be an African theory of Ubuntu as an indigenous ethical perspective?

The essence of Ubuntu is the focus or reference to the interdependency of human beings; the idea that a human being is a complete person to the extent that the society gives him or her recognition as a person and allows him or her to realize the full potentials and benefits of being a human person.²⁹ Also Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of other people or the society in the life of a human being. It highlights the fact that a person cannot do without others. Our individual lives are intricately and inextricably tied to the lives of others and we all need to cherish these interrelations and interconnections. The essentials of Ubuntu remain the emphasis on the fact that such interconnection should be guided by kindness, respect, cooperation, openness, accommodation and willingness to work for others' interest. The difficulties that human beings encounter when pursuing the above goals and behavior illustrate clearly why Ubuntu is required. So, the philosophical basis of Ubuntu rests on the belief in, and realization of our common humanity; our sense or perception of being part of the whole human family.

Thus, the idea of ubuntu retains a cocktail of features or values. Notable among such values or elements are respect for human dignity, the value of the human person, an ethic of care and compassion, as well as a push for key moral and democratic values such as consensus, dialogue and tolerance among others. What is at the heart of ubuntu is a moral norm; a directing principle for governing human action; a pattern or principle of human relations; a system of interaction by which human beings can positively develop themselves individually and collectively. More importantly, ubuntu is meant to foster a means of probable escape from, or mitigation of certain egoistic, oppressive, denigrating and conflictive elements inherent in human behavior as a result of his nature or nurture. Put simply, ubuntu promotes the desire to establish an ethical basis for human existence. Human existence may not make much sense unless there is a room for an ethical dimension. What then is ethics? Ethics is the normative science of

²⁹ Mwase, "Aspects of Ubuntu for International Research Ethics," 1-2.

human behavior. It is the study of the way that human beings ought to behave and conduct their affairs in order to live properly, responsibly and productively.

Ethical Dimensions of Ubuntu

Understood philosophically (normatively and prescriptively) a more important question is: Why is ethics needed by human beings? What is the ethical dimension of ubuntu? Ethics is one of the social structures for moderating human actions so as to live a meaningful and productive life. Other social instruments for managing human behavior include law and social conventions. In any case, ethics is useful to human beings because it studies the rules and parameters of right, good, proper conduct in human personal, social and professional life. Scholars have also constructed some ethical theories to be used for understanding the moral foundations of the human experience. For some Africans, human experience at the social level can be promoted positively through the philosophy and ethics of ubuntu. Now what is ubuntu ethics? Ubuntu could then be conceived as an ethical system or a moral way of life because it seeks to promote the social nature of human beings. Human beings are social because they need to, or desire to, live together. Human beings are also social because, they need to cooperate with each other, in order to attain the common good or purpose. Pursuing the common good is a central element of the social, ethical or moral life. Morality and moral values are necessary for human beings. The ubuntu principle emphasizes some of these elements.

What is morality? Why is it important for human existence? Morality has to do with a set of rules for guiding human behavior and a set of reasons or grounds of moral obligation. Why are we obliged to be moral or behave morally? Morality is needed because it does not only harmonise interests, it also affirms the importance of the human person as an end. To say that man is an end in himself is to say that man is a being who has intrinsic worth or value as an end and, therefore, whose interests have to be given sympathetic consideration. Morality also tries to cultivate in people, certain desired traits of character such as honesty, fairness, truth, justice, kindness, compassion and the respect for human dignity.³⁰ The

³⁰ Philip Ujomu, "Morality, Democracy and Social Order: Conceptual Issues in the Search for Community" (PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2001), 94-105.

feeling of consideration and sympathy for others remains key values of morality. These values explain why the human person as a moral agent ought to be viewed as a being endowed with dignity, freedom and responsibility.

What is the logical relationship between these under listed allied ubuntu concepts? The ideas include: the respect for human dignity, the value of the life of the human person, an ethic of care and compassion, as well as a push for key moral and democratic values such as consensus, dialogue and tolerance. The unique conception of the human person or being that ubuntu defends rests on the belief that a human being or human person has a worth that is not quantifiable in instrumental or extrinsic terms. The worth of the human being is seen in his self worth or dignity. This dignity is a priceless item or quality that gives rise to all other claims that we make in regard of being human. Dignity is intrinsic to the human being by virtue of his being human, and dignity requires that human beings be addressed and treated in ways that demonstrate their intrinsic worth, freewill, freedom and responsibility to themselves and others.

Such qualities are significant and valuable because of the opportunity they provide for human beings to live in a productive, peaceful and purposeful manner. These qualities compel us to uphold the value of human life as an inalienable right, deserving of respect and protection under the law, morality and customs. This claim does not detract from the fact that actual human societies have fallen far short of these ideals and values. Such deficits and shortfalls serve as impetus for the principle or values of Ubuntu to be proposed as a way out of the human predicament. The value of human life is the more appreciated and regarded when human beings show humaneness and compassion to one another as members of a species or mankind. Compassion is a moral virtue and a moral value. Respect for others and compassion to them combine together to foster consensus. Consensus is important because it fosters interaction and reconciliation.

Consensus is based on recognition, consultation and agreement. These values emphasize the need to ask and receive the consent of others in decision making. We get peoples' consent, not merely out of courtesy, but because such consent understood as choice and voice, are required for inclusive and socially responsible and responsive decision making. When we have the urge to seek consensus or mutual accord then we are more disposed to pursue dialogue construed as conversation, negotiation or reconciliation. The end result of dialogue is to have an agreement or settlement.

As such dialogue presupposes some sort of positive communication, sincerity, openness and accommodation of others. These values are the bedrock of what is referred to as tolerance. Tolerance is the opportunity we allow for others around us especially those who do not share our beliefs, ancestry, language and ways of life, to thrive and survive without undue obstruction or hindrance from the rest of us. The whole idea is to create a world whereby all parties or members can aspire to attain their fullest personal and social development unfettered by petty prejudices typical of human nature and discrimination occasioned by inimical institutionalized injustices.

As some African tribes will posit that 'he who is alive can do a thousand things.' Life is paramount for existence and so much is built around the value of human life. Interestingly, Ubuntu which seeks the interaction and interdependence of human beings upholds the principle of the value of human life, as a something that needs to be made a priority within the society. The aim is to increase the chances of comfort, well-being and progress among the generality of the people or the greater number of people in the society through cooperation and consideration for others. The concrete impact of this principle is easily seen in the level of human dignity, quality of life and standard of life of the citizens across the classes. The value of human life could be that core value that can counter marginality and marginalization in the polity, depoliticize the different domains of social life to the extent that some elements can drive all our activities.

The value of human life embraces other notions such as: the respect for the rule of law, obedience to covenants or conventions, respect for the contributions of others as stakeholders, respect for fair treatment and fair play in social interaction, respect for human talent and attainment and a respect for logical thinking and superior ideas as the driving force of social progress. So we place a value on human life when we define a set of operative principles that determine our estimation of the human being as constitutive of certain features that earn him a particular treatment or consideration.

Ubuntu Humanism and the Search for Moral and Democratic Values

How is Ubuntu tied to human values? Human beings live by values or things that are important or desirable to them. Such things or values may not always be beneficial. But when something

or a value is altogether of benefit, desirable and important to man then it becomes a human value. Given that human behaviour is critical to the survival of the species or the human race, Ubuntu as a cosmology or conception of human society, needs to be discussed seriously as an ethical alternative to the *status quo* due to certain gaps noticed in the modern society as a whole. Such gaps are prevalent in both the developed and developing worlds. Marginality is an ideologically false humanism that privileges a few over the many, affirms the domination of superior ability and power that yields immense gains in control and wealth that is disdainful and adverse in its teleology on other human beings. Certain globally pervasive yet problematic ideologies such as, capitalism and colonialism, basically promote marginality due to their established values of alienation, exploitation, repression, dehumanization and inequality of workers and aborigines. Essentially inequality and inequity breed a group of aggrieved, frustrated and vulnerable people who may become a threat to themselves and others. These include rural dwellers, the low income earners, politicians and business people disfavored by the current government in power, medium and low level government workers, women, pensioners or retired workers, rural peoples, uneducated people, physically challenged persons, destitute children, and the mass of unemployed and underemployed youth largely outside the coverage of human dignity and social welfare.

What sort of ethical correlates or moral values can emerge from the ubuntu principle to mitigate or slow down this surge of discrimination, inequity and loss of human dignity at the national and international levels? It seems that the ethics or ethos of ubuntu avails us the opportunity to seek life promoting or life enhancing values. Values in themselves are things we desire, our choices, things that are of interest to us. We require moral and democratic values that facilitate the realisation of a better quality or standard of life in the society. Certain positive moral and democratic values are aimed at promoting peace, justice, harmony, co-operation, consideration, compassion, honesty and transparency among human beings. The three moral values crucial to the establishment of ubuntu in social order are the respect for human dignity, compassion and justice.

Of particular importance is the value of respect for human dignity as a major element of ubuntu ethics. The dignity of the human person is maintained by imposing freedom, choice and responsibility upon him. Responsibility is assured by the allocation of rights and corresponding duties. Rights and duties are ordained

in order to ensure human dignity and respect. Some of the basic rights of man are inalienable; such as the right to life and protection of property, the right to be free, self-determining and responsible. Such rights are more easily defended in some types of society rather than others. For instance, what are the key principles, features, institutions, values of a democratic society that facilitate ubuntu ethics? The primary democratic values are freedom, equality and justice. However, we may include tolerance, participation, dialogue and fair treatment among others. What is the link between ubuntu and such democratic values?

The idea is that there are certain ways of doing things that human beings ought to embrace because these promote human wellbeing, peace, stability, security, inclusiveness, actualization of individual human potential, consensus, participation and prosperity in the social system. Democracy ought to be encouraged due to some reasons outlined below. Democracy as a political or social system promotes certain values. Some of the key values of democracy affirm the basic fact that, despite the differences in human talents, gifts, strengths and endowments, the similarities between men are more profound and significant than the differences between them. Such talents and diverse qualities can be used for the benefit of the human person and society.

More importantly, every man is recognised as a being that possesses equal moral worth, human dignity, moral responsibility and freedom, just like any other man.³¹ Some of the equalities which democracy upholds may be social, economic, political and legal. For instance, politically, a democracy allows each man the right to vote, and be voted for, and the right to engage in other forms of legitimate political association. Also, democracy affirms legal equality of every man before the law and the provision of equal opportunities for all. Democracy nurtures a sense of participation in social life and ensures that everyone retains a stake in the society and its resources, through socially just policies, opportunities and actions. In this way, democracy ensures that everyone participates in promoting the social goods he has participated in producing. Democracy, by allowing each person to exercise his intelligence, talents and creativity, ensures that he is accountable as a stakeholder in the society. The individual can be seen to be valuable. He can add value and make a contribution to the social

³¹ Dewey, "Does Human Nature Change?" 475.
John Dewey, "A Defense of Democracy," in *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, ed. J. Burr (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 321-22.

system. More so, by allowing popular elections, debate on issues of collective concern, freedoms of worship, speech and association, and equality before the law, democracy offers individuals greater opportunity to realise their human potentials. Ubuntu simply put is that principle that seems to allow the human being to attain his fullest potential in a manner coterminous with other human interests.

Ubuntu and cross-cultural Relations

In what way is ubuntu connected to the quest for mutually respectful cross-cultural relations? Culture understood as a way of life is a given of human existence. The world is so large that a lot of cultures exist, and there ought to be ways and principles for guiding intercultural relations. The reality of cultural relations in the recent centuries, have tilted towards colonization and domination. This raises serious issues in African philosophical discourses. Whatever constitutes the merit or demerit of the above issue in African philosophy, the point is that there was a central assumption that the Africans were different from other races, that the African ways of life were different from other ways of life, in a way that implied that the Africans were sub-human or inferior. The question is: is this really true? The theory of ubuntu leverages on a new ethical approach that attempts to tie human beings together rather than divide them; reconciles human beings rather than segregate them physically and intellectually.

Granted that cultural universals such as the ability to learn language, a moral sense, a sense of aesthetic appreciation and a common biological foundation, exist as the important basis of providing room for objective meanings such as can underwrite human communication;³² it is vital to note that human beings still make very conscious and deliberate efforts to interact and communicate effectively and productively with others. This point simply shows that despite the universals of culture, the differences between cultures are real and consequential. If intercultural communication was actually very easy to achieve why then do we experience so much intolerance, oppression, marginalization and racism in the different parts of the world today. Hence, it is clear

³² Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 14-20.

Kwasi Wiredu, "Are there Cultural Universals," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, eds. Pieter Coetzee, and A. P. Roux (London: Routledge, 1998), 31-2.

that cultural particularities cannot be overlooked, in the question of human communication, merely on the ground that we all are human beings on the basis of evidence from biology. Cultural particularities are not accidental in nature rather they are products of ages of formation and reformation within the human constitution, as he or she relates to others and the environment. Thus, cultural particularities are indeed realities which sometimes can exert the force of life and death on persons and properties, individuals and societies.³³ This point is especially significant when we examine the conditions of those groups all over the world who are suffering some form of oppression, marginalization or deprivation. Ubuntu offers a probable sustainable pathway for humans to relate with each other more respectfully and productively.

The process of recognising difference(s) between cultures around the world, allows us to seek more viable and enduring ways of establishing and sustaining dialogue between cultures, on a platform of mutual recognition. The idea of dialogue in intellectual and social relations actually suggests the need for conversation, which in this context implies a conscious and systematic effort to foster a dialogue or exchange, leading to a peaceful reconciliation and harmonization of divergent interests.³⁴ Only the establishment of a social atmosphere of peace, justice, cooperation and mutual recognition can bring about enduring communication between human beings. Ubuntu reveals its ethical quotient by recommending specific rules and principles that ought to guide human behaviour.

Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and other Orientations to the Quest for a Global Human Family: any Role for Ubuntu Ethics?

To understand why we are asking about the possibility of a global Ubuntu, we need to understand the idea of “Realism” as a driver of the modern national and international State system as established by Westphalia in the 1600’s. Understood philosophically, Westphalia was nothing other than a system of social and political control of society; a way of governing of human beings that was not always primordial, free and fair in its design

³³ Philip Ujomu, “Cultural Relations, Human Communication and the Conditions for Intercultural Relations: A Critique of Anta Diop and Kwasi Wiredu,” in *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*, ed. H. Igboanusi (Ibadan: Enicrownfit, 2001), 165-88.

³⁴ Ibid.

and experience due to its organic nature. This nature allows conformity to the Will of Sovereignty understood as the core value of the State or conformity to the Will of a Sovereign or the distinctive character of the individual ruler as a vector of the State's core value. So why is this notion of realism important? Realism means different things in different fields such as logic, epistemology, international relations art and film among others. We are interested in realism in politics. A realist view basically asks us to see things or people the way they are actually, the way they appear to us or present themselves to us in this real life of individual experience. According to Roscoe Pound, realism means: "fidelity to nature, according to the accurate recording of things as they are as contrasted with things as they are imagined to be or as one feels they ought to be."³⁵ Realism describes what people are actually doing. For instance, human nature is the way it is; egoistic, difficult and unpredictable at best. Also, the world is a tough, gruelling, cruel and challenging place to exist in. So, we need to manage it that way and make the best of the situation by looking for pragmatic or practical solutions that can work in real life. In the Westphalia State system, the statist viewpoint sees the State as the centre of the universe; rights, burdens and benefits are to be defined and distributed by the state and its agencies. The state retains control over all the domains of life political, economic, military and educational. It exercises a prominent majority power in quantity and quality over all other sectors in the society; private or civil society. Any country like Nigeria that runs this system of government runs the Statist society or statist- corporatism. Statism and realism are two sides of one coin.

The Statist-Realist militarist system or the state-centric realist view of security is the dominant idea of security since after Westphalia. It is explained by Ayoob, "the term security has traditionally been defined to mean immunity (to varying degrees) of a state or nation to threats emanating from outside its boundaries or individuality or sovereignty. A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values. By security we mean the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity."³⁶ It means that "nations like individuals must predicate

³⁵ Roscoe Pound, "The Call for Realist Jurisprudence," *Harvard Law Review* 44, no. 5 (Mar. 1931): 697.

³⁶ Mohammed Ayoob, "Security in the Third World: The Worm about to Turn," in *International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (1984): 41.

their relationships on given well-conceived and properly defined precepts and norms. Such values and value-systems are the ground norm for rallying all sections of the peoples.”³⁷ This is the most common and prevalent view of security in the modern era. Militarist-Realism or the insistence upon raw military power as a political theory or instrument of security suffered a two-pronged defeat: firstly, the problem of the ascendancy of a greater military power over another leading to spiralling conflict, arms races, genocide, violence and eventually the mutual decline or expiration of the combatants. This is what we mean by a security dilemma, a process by which “states are permanently arming themselves in order to protect their borders. Through this, the unintended consequence of pursuing such a policy is to create a feeling of insecurity among one’s neighbors. Thus, one state’s effort to ensure its own security becomes a source of insecurity for other states.”³⁸ However, Hoogensen and Rottem have offered the clearest possible reason why we must move away from the realist view of security. They observe that, “state security is essential but does not necessarily ensure the safety of individuals and communities.”³⁹ The world has grown so complex and some problems so global that crude statist-realism can no longer cope with present day global security and environmental challenges. So to respond to worldwide security concerns, the entire world has moved on to regional and global level solutions that are beyond and individual state(s). So what is possible the way forward?

Plato, the teacher and master of philosophers, will say that security is beauty; beauty is harmony; harmony is when all things are doing what they are best suited for by nature and or nurture. So the power of combined action or energy for peace and unity is needed for natural justice and social justice. This is how Ubuntu can become a way of integrating and socializing human beings. From the above, a question or issue to be addressed is to find out the extent to which ubuntu can apply itself to the global condition. In what way(s) can ubuntu manifest in the context of the problems and prospects of cosmopolitanism and globalization. To start with globalization; it has to with two related ideas: the interconnectedness of the human beings and locations of the world

³⁷ Chris Alli, *The Federal Republic of Nigeria Army: The Siege of a Nation* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2001), 101.

³⁸ Nizar Messari, “The State and Dilemmas of Security: The Middle east and the Balkans,” *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 4 (2002): 416-17.

³⁹ Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Rotten, “Gender Identity and the Subject of Security,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 2 (2004): 158.

and the interdependency of human beings on one another due to the almost seamless flow of information via technology, migration, telecommunication, people, products, values and ideas all around the world. For Kearney, “globalization describes social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that not only take place within nations, but also transcend them. Globalisation deals with the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles ways and vice versa.”⁴⁰

On its part, cosmopolitanism refers to the idea that contemporary trends and processes in the global order are increasingly giving rise to a more physically compact world where human beings share a universal or global membership of the world. This universality and an inherent rejection of any exclusionist tendency is presumed to rest on the idea of our common humanity as a community of mankind and the possibility of a world citizenship or individuals becoming citizens of the world or earth. According to Pogge, a person who adopts the cosmopolitan idea can be seen as citizen of the world. The world at large is the focus of cosmopolitanism. A human being may be referred to as cosmopolitan, when he is well travelled, understands and respects other societies and cultures, interacts and inter-relates easily and properly with other races and peoples. A town or group can also be cosmopolitan to the extent that it is inclusive and accommodating of diverse languages, religions, ethnicities, cultures and lifestyles. Cosmopolitanism refers to a commitment to the above idea and ideal of citizenship of the world.⁴¹

Ordinarily these two concepts of globalization and cosmopolitanism are sufficiently clear conceptually and well discussed intellectually. Both concepts are consequential for the theory and knowledge of ubuntu because of the current reality of social discrimination and political inequities and economic inequalities in the form and character of our human experiences worldwide. Consequently, such imbalances and turbulence pose a challenge to the positive manifestation of both ideas as directing principles of human interrelations and progress. This simply means that in concrete terms, globalization can be unfair due to power

⁴⁰ M. Kearney, “The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalisation and Transnationalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, (October 1995): 548.

⁴¹ Thomas Pogge, “Cosmopolitanism,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy 1*, 2nd edition, eds. Robert Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2007), 312.

tussles and hegemony, class distinctions, trade and financial imbalances and social justice deficits across the world, while cosmopolitanism may be hypocritical due to cultural discrimination and racism, tribalism, as well as prejudicial and oppressive immigration laws and practices currently prevalent worldwide. The successful application of these two concepts entails a maturity of mind, civilization, and liberality that is in really short supply around the world today. Hence there is a need to revisit the prospect of ubuntu with regard to global peace and security.

It is clear, therefore, from the above analysis that, the two concepts of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, in fact, problematise; rather, than serve as a solution to queries about the basis of our common humanity. As such the idea of ubuntu (re)emerges to define and establish the key concepts required for the effective and responsible operation of values at the international level. The way ubuntu can lend itself to reforming the global order or human behaviour at the international level is to transpose the localized values of tolerance, human dignity, consensus, respect for others, compassion and the pursuit of the common good to the activities of nations within the international system. This is a tall order indeed, not merely in the conceptualization, but also in the application of the ubuntu ethic to the international spaces. Our courage or confidence to take on this challenge, rests on the possibility ubuntu offers to have a fresh and innovative look at the global dynamics of human relations.

Another way to understand the discourse is to argue that there is a sense in which the idea of ubuntu foreshadows the notions of globalization and cosmopolitanism. The three concepts are easily linked by their common vision and mission of seeking and explaining the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings and human creations. The quest for a common fate and unity of humanity is not a negative thing in itself. This is a significant point to note because even though cosmopolitanism and globalization are not originally African concepts or constructs, yet they emerge as a result of the search for strategies to mitigate selective humanism, exclusion and intolerance among human beings. In fact globalization and cosmopolitanism have significant impacts on the African world. When we include the idea of ubuntu as refinement of the vision of global human interdependence, we notice that the three concepts in a sense aspire or end up with the same goal to bring humanity together. Despite the common thrust that the three principles possess, they actually reveal different logical designs and causality. The challenge that they have in

common is that agency or human nature plays a role in human institutions in a way that ends up working at cross purposes from the original aim. Therefore, ubuntu as an African contribution to the quest for our common humanity and the mitigation of the ancestral predicaments of humanity is a continuation of the tendency towards enlightenment or modernity in the way that human beings deal each other. These three ideas reflect overlapping shades on the continuum of humanization and development of our sense of humanity at the local and global levels.

From the above, therefore, a second point emerges. This is that in emphasizing these areas of convergence between the three notions we can then observe the way that ubuntu definitively contributes to the clarification of the quest for a global ethics of change and development. Ubuntu pursues change in human nature by distilling the key values required for personal and social liberation and transformation. The ethics of ubuntu whether it operates at the local, national or international levels rests on the following philosophical foundations. We may pose the question of moral obligation afresh: What, if at all, ought to be the ground of moral obligation? Why ought we to embrace the values of ubuntu as ethical imperatives? How do the ethical features of ubuntu accommodate the concerns about moral autonomy of agency? The answer lies in the following argument below: First, let us reframe the above questions more simply and generally as: What ought to be the basis of man's ethical behaviour? How does ubuntu qualify in this regard?

Ubuntu as a Philosophy of Man or a philosophical Anthropology

Human beings are required to exercise freedom and responsibility as morally sensible and autonomous agents in private and public life. This is the basis of human dignity and moral sense. However, the exercise of freedom and responsibility among humans also depends on man's activities as a social being within a culture and society. Human beings as social creatures need to live together by having a sense of belonging and working for a common purpose. Peace and cooperation are, or at least, ought to be, the two major ends of social life in a human society. Social life is made interesting through the establishment of laws, morality and conventions that promote the life of individuals and the society. The tussle between life-promoting values and life-threatening values illustrate the dynamics of the contest for dominance between self-regarding values and other regarding values.

Put simply, man survives and thrives because he can separate life-promoting actions from life-threatening actions in terms of their deontology or rules and even more importantly their consequences or teleology. The former, acts that promote life, are approved, desired and considered desirable. The latter, which are acts that undermine life, are prohibited, punished and undesirable. The desirable or desired is defended by rules and positive rewards while the undesirable is deterred by punishment and disapproval. To a large extent we may ask individuals, groups, nations and the world at large to behave in a morally and socially responsible and responsive manner due to the fact that it is right to do so also. Put simply we encourage or promote moral norms and moral values due to reasons behind and consequences of actions. This is the approach or understanding that had been defended by ethical universalism and utilitarianism.

We could introduce some extra justification here. Viscount Samuel is correct when he declares that “men’s actions are governed by their ideas: right ideas lead to good actions and good actions bring welfare: wrong ideas lead to bad actions and bad actions bring suffering and disaster.”⁴² Our point is that ubuntu demands ethically or morally sound behaviour due to the fact that human beings are related to each other in time, space and history, by virtue of their direct interrelations and their common humanity. Human beings are interrelated because of the social necessity of mutual cooperation with the fellow human beings. Mutual cooperation is an imperative due to the presence and reality of forces and elements that are greater than and far beyond human powers and comprehension. Such elements are for instance, God, nature, providence, destiny and history.

If the above is the case then individuals can be useful to themselves and to others on the ground that they are provided the right human values as directing principles of human behaviour as well as the enabling social opportunities and conditions in order to develop and be productive for the good of the self and of humanity. Interestingly the deep and foundational consequence of human interaction suggests that people in fact do actually work for themselves when they work for others or they feel that they are working for others. Much of the time, the things you do to or for others have a way of returning to you as positive or negative reward. This is so due to the interrelationship between human beings and

⁴² Samuel Viscount, “Philosophy and the Life of the Nation,” *Philosophy* xxxi, no. 118 (1956): 199.

societies. Therefore, the reason for adopting the human values of ubuntu rests on the concept of purpose. This is the idea that; in applying the ubuntu principles or values to the life of the individual or humanity at large, we are working for a lower and higher purpose or end.

Every human being we may argue requires or even deserves this opportunity of the human, humane and humanistic values of ubuntu, to fulfil himself and benefit the self and the rest of humanity. Individuals and groups grow and progress because people make sacrifices for others within families, communities, countries and the world at large. Thus, the need for humans to be hurtful, hateful, wicked, cruel, and destructive of good and productive things, can be viewed or queried as an inimical action that is needless and perhaps ineffectual in the existential scheme of things. Ubuntu in its ethical dimension offers us a prospect for change in human nature as well as social and political life that can be positively consequential for the security, peace and progress of humanity. Ubuntu seems to offer the interesting possibility of an ethical notion or concept that could be both teleological and deontological; it upholds a rule of interconnecting human beings using values such as humaneness, compassion and the dignity of life. It also focuses on the positive outcome or goal of bringing different races and classes of people together for peace, progress and survival.

Conclusion

Ubuntu remains an endogenous paradigm of development in Africa. We utilized Ubuntu ethics to countermand the current dominant social paradigm (DSP) of hatred, intolerance, abuse of human rights, internal and external colonialism, dehumanization, exploitation, authoritarianism, poverty and oppression that plagued the world and Africa specifically. Ubuntu as a value system or construct relied on the template of some key moral and democratic values for African liberation and transformation. Ubuntu ethics established a set of values whereby human beings lived according to certain human and humane principles such as reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity and the value of human life as well as consensus, tolerance and mutual respect. Ubuntu ethical correlates served as materials that established stable and viable human relations in the national and even the international system. Ubuntu conceptualized as an ethical idea and praxis, was a powerful tool that made Africans

more capable of tackling their natural and man-made existential predicaments.

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