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What can the socio-political ethic of ubuntu contribute to contemporary conceptions of "development"?

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Introduction

We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face (Biko, 1978:46).

In what follows the reader will be given a broad overview of the project at large. This overview will take the following structure: 1) It will give an explanation of the method to be employed in discussing and investigating possible answers to the research question; 2) The focus, here, shall be to explicate the research question so as to ensure that the reader is clear about the scope of our focus and what is it that is at stake in this research; 3) As this project will prove to be ethical in its enquiry, a brief discussion explaining how ethics will be understood and approached shall be offered; in the same footing a brief discussion of what *ubuntu* is about will be offered so that the reader may have an understanding of what *ubuntu* is and is about; lastly, we will conclude by way of giving the reader a breakdown of the research in terms of chapters, and what each chapter will be discussing. There are other issues that do not feature in the above breakdown of this overview, which will however feature in what follows which will prove helpful in the research as it will be unfolding, in one way or another.

This research will take a philosophical approach to dealing with the research task at hand. Specifically, it will employ methods common in the analytic philosophy[i] tradition. How analytic philosophy, generally speaking, functions is succinctly expressed by an African Philosopher Gyekye (1992: 239) when he argues that, "In times of wonder and uncertainty, in times when the definition and articulation of values and goals become most urgent, in times when the search for fundamental principles of human activity becomes most pressing and is seen as the way to dispel confusions and unclarities, the services of the intellectual enterprise called philosophy become indispensable. For philosophy is a conceptual response to the problems posed in any given epoch for a given society. It is therefore appropriate, even imperative, for contemporary African philosophers to grapple at the conceptual level with the problems and issues of their times, not least of which are the problems of government and political stability".

As Gyekye has rightly observed, philosophy is a conceptual response and approach, through which conceptual analysis is used to achieve clarity of concepts and the subject matter at hand. This analysis of concepts is informed by the understanding that concepts may serve as tools in

helping us to understand the world or develop more plausible worldviews. Dower in a similar vein of thought argues that "philosophy can contribute to the discussion of development, both through conceptual analysis and through ethical investigation into the value component in development thinking … Philosophy has a crucial contribution to make: both in clarifying what the issues are and in defending particular answers to the value questions" (Dower, 1998). As such, conceptual analysis seems to be central to philosophizing, and it will also be central in this project. Dower adds another important aspect about philosophizing (in the previous quote), when he writes that philosophy also involves *defending particular answers to value questions.*

What does the phrase - *defending particular answers* – mean (about philosophizing) as employed by Dower in the above quotation? Dower proves helpful in answering this question. He suggests that philosophy has two functions or functions at two levels, that is, at the *disengaged* and at an *engaged* level. *Disengaged* level corresponds to what has been described as conceptual analysis, which enquires into the meaning of concepts and linguistic analysis. The *engaged* level is concerned with articulating, developing and defending particular substantive views about the world - arguments (Dower, 1998). To answer the question more precisely, it can be stated that - *defending particular answers* - means advancing arguments that advocate or negate other competing or supporting views. Analytic philosophy as a method of study as will be used in this research entails doing two things: analysis of concepts and employment of arguments to challenge or defend claims.

With the above information, it is safe then to say that the concepts of *ubuntu* and that of *development* will be subjected to the treatment of analytic method. These concepts will be investigated thoroughly with a hope of giving an 'African'[ii] view of 'development'. This choice of method is influenced by two important facts: the current author's training in analytical philosophy and his reading of a paradigm called 'Development Ethics'. On latter aspect of the influence, it is crucial to note that, in the past 30 or so years, there has been a concern that 'development' must begin to focus on human beings as ends and on improving the quality of their life; in other words, the concern must be with what is good for human beings, rather than prioritizing the processes and mechanisms that bring about 'development' over and above the good of the individual and societies. The concern about the human *good* essentially implicates a call for considering values when there is talk about 'development', and if this is the case, it

means that talk of 'development' is essentially value laden or ethical. If, indeed, talk of development is value laden, then this begins to suggest that Philosophers have space to contribute in 'development' concerns, as a field of study. It is this space that 'Development Ethics' has brought to the fore and attention. So much that Astroulakis points out that, "the notion of 'development' is redefined on normative and philosophical foundations (Astroulakis, 2008: 1) - in this paradigm (of 'Development Ethics'). More is yet to be said about 'Development Ethics' in this study. Hence, analytic philosophy was chosen as the method of study for this research.

The question that is central in this project is that of: *What can the Socio-Political ethic of ubuntu Contribute to Contemporary Conceptions of Development?*

Central to this question are two concepts, that of 'development' and of *ubuntu*. The concept of 'development', it may be argued, historically is an emergence of the vision of modernity: 'Africa', and other former colonial possessions were considered as underdeveloped, and the countries in the North, were generally considered, developed. 'Development' concerns as they emerged after the Second World War were generally focused on technical aspects of development, such as: getting the right technology in place, right kind of political organization and state involvement, right kind of investment and saving levels, introducing industrialization and a host of other related aspects. All these endeavors were aimed at solving and salvaging what was commonly known as underdevelopment. If development is a *modernist* project then this study may be conceived as a critique influenced by a particular *African vision* (Shutte, 2001: 16) of the notion and project of 'development'. Insofar as it is calling for the inclusion of the community to be valued in the conception of 'development'; contrary to the disruptive nature that much of 'development' has assumed.

This project may *also* be considered as a contribution to this *very (modernist)* project, insofar as this project attaches and aligns itself with concerns of a *new wave* of 'development' with a 'human adjustment' (Fine, 2010: 896), Ethical Development (Qizilbash, 1996: 1209 - 1221), 'Development Ethics' (Goulet, 1995, 1996, 2005), the Capability Approach, (Sen, 1986: 22 - 64) and Sustainable Development (Ingham, 1993: 1815 - 1816). The argument to be developed in this research is that; taking the notion of community as proffered by *ubuntu* as a normative basis to understanding 'development' may enrich our conceptions of what the proper ends and means

of development ought to be; as such, enrich our conceptions of what is the good that befits humanity. This begins suggests how *ubuntu* might add an often neglected layer – that of community - to thin conceptions of 'development' that are grounded upon socio-metaphysics that are generally individualist in orientation.

When the research question makes reference to *contemporary conceptions* of 'development', it is specifically referring to the above mentioned concerns and approaches to development – Sustainable Development, Development Ethics, Capability Approach and many others. A common thread runs through all of these approaches, that is, they are normative – assume that a particular vision of 'the good' ought to characterize the condition of human being for them to be considered to be 'developed' or developing. In this approach, human beings are conceived as ends rather than means in the process of 'development'. As cited above, the history of this wave is roughly datable from the late 1970s and the early 80s. Thinkers like Amartya Sen, Barbara Nussbaum, David Seers, Denis Goulet, David Crocker, Nigel Dower, and Paul Streeten among others are associable with this wave. Interestingly, the UNDP has also taken quite seriously concerns that emerge from this influence and thinking, this is indicated by the adoption of a Human Approach to development by the United Nations.

As may have been observed above, the *new wave (contemporary conceptions of development)* is characterized by a variety and heterogeneity which we do not have time to explore. This research will limit itself to 'Development Ethics'- DE from henceforth – as a theoretical framework through which the contribution that *ubuntu* can make will be investigated. By that I mean DE will serve a model through which *ubuntu's* theoretical potential with respect to concerns of 'development' will find expression. DE has its ancestors in the works of Mohandas Gandhi in India, Gunnar Myrdal a Swedish Economist and Joseph Lebret (Goulet, 1961: 64). Central to the concerns of the ancestors of DE was the idea that 'development' must be construed "as the basic question of values and the creation of new civilizations (cited in, Goulet, 1995: 6). Goulet is acclaimed and acknowledged as the pioneer of DE by many thinkers, and as having made a huge contribution in the area of 'development' (Astroulakis, 2008: 6).

DE begins by rejecting a purely economic approach to development, or, what has been called an "engineering approach"[iii] to development. It makes its entry in the dialogues and debates in this study by arguing that 'development' is thoroughly a value laden concept. Goulet observes an

ambiguity over the usage of the notion of 'development', insofar as it may be used either descriptively or normatively. It is the normative or evaluative aspect of this notion of 'development' that is of concern for DE. Crocker (1991: 458) for example cites Goulet to have argued that "development needs to be redefined, demystified, and thrust into the arena of moral debate". What is the arena of moral debate? The arena of moral debate in this context should be construed to mean that which is central in any talk of 'development', which is: what is the 'chief good' for a human being or society? And, it is this 'chief good' that is an all important question or issue in the study of 'development'.

DE may be defined as "the normative or ethical assessment of the ends and means of development … of development" (Crocker, 1991: 457). DE is defined to be focused on both the means and ends of development, this means that, not only the goals of development are subject to scrutiny, morally speaking and otherwise, but also the very process through which social change takes place must be subjected to moral scrutiny. DE argues that development must be redefined on the normative and philosophical foundations. It must be noted that in this research *ubuntu* will be regarded as this norm that could adequately speak to philosophical foundations as will be elaborated. In relation to philosophical foundations, as cited above, that must feature in the redefinition of 'development'; the following has been suggested by Goulet. For Goulet, philosophical foundations refer to three questions that were of central concern to ancient philosophers. For him these three ancient philosophical questions, value questions, must be answered; these questions constitute what Goulet calls "authentic development" (Goulet, 1997: 1162). These questions are:

1. What is the meaning of a good life or meaningful life?

2. What are the foundations of a just society?

3. What stance ought human beings to take towards nature?

Talking on these three questions Goulet argues that "providing a satisfactory conceptual and institutional answer to these three questions is what constitutes "authentic development" "(Goulet, 1996: 197). In this research these three questions will serve as a conceptual framework through which *ubuntu* will be construed to talk to 'development'. This means that answers that *ubuntu* will provide to these questions will serve as *ubuntu's* contribution to *contemporary*

conceptions of development. This is done because DE has been described … "As a normative framework … to help us define and analyze the nature of … development" (Croker, 1991: 458). As such, these three fundamental questions will be a framework through which the normative richness of *ubuntu* will be investigated so as to begin to note what contributions, if any, could be harvested from this vision of the Sub-Saharan people. Goulet talked about conceptual and institutional answer, the focus in this particular will be largely conceptual rather than institutional. Thus the contribution to be made by *ubuntu* will be assessed qua the answers *ubuntu* will give to the three ancient philosophical questions: 1) what is a good life? 2) What is the foundation of a just society? And, 3) how are human beings to relate to nature?

Ancient Greek philosophy presents us with two ways to approach an ethical investigation and discussions. Ethics may be practiced under the influence of, either, the Platonic or Aristotelian tradition. For the purposes of this study, the Aristotelian approach to ethics will be chosen because it is relevant and largely because it is more philosophically defensible than the Platonic approach. Plato in the Republic gives an account of ethics that is not representative of any existing socio-political reality, but a construction of his imagination. Concerns of ethics or the chief good in his ethical enquiry are not reflective or investigative of any context-related concerns or norms – but are derived purely *a prioro*. It is for this reason that Bujo an African scholar rejects this approach to ethics, he describes African ethics as "radically anti-Platonic" (Bujo, 2001: 8). In this trail, Bujo (2001: 8) aptly avers that "African community ethic involves a "contextualistic" or a "context-sensitive" universalism that is not reduced to a "covering-law" universalism". On the contrary (to Plato), the ethics of Aristotle is situated in the *polis* focused on the political and socio-political conditions of the rational animal as s/he seeks after virtue, by seeking his 'chief good'. Crocker (1991: 465) captures this Aristotelian approach to ethics succinctly (when he quotes Sen) saying

Aristotle holds that any good account of development… will be genuinely rooted in the experiences of the people and genuinely practical, and yet be evaluative in such a way as to help leaders structure things for the best, enabling people to live as good and flourishing a life as possible… we do not enquire in a vacuum. Our conditions and ways, and the hopes, pleasures, pains, and evaluations that are a part of these, cannot be left out of the enquiry without making it

pointless and incoherent… Ethical truth is in and of human life; it cannot be seen only from the point of view of immersion (Crocker, 1991: 465)

The idea of immersion as an approach to ethics seems to demand that people's cultural values and social capital be taken seriously. The idea seems to be that, by getting into the communities and understanding the norms by which they regulate their lives we stand a better chance of understanding the values and moral principles that shape those communities. Hence, in this research, it is assumed that *ubuntu* could actually function as such an immersion into the norms and principles that underlie the socio-political visions of 'African' people. If this is true, then it follows that *ubuntu* should be able to help in contributing to contemporary conceptions of development. As such *ubuntu* is suggested as this value, not to suggest that it is the only value; but this research will posit *ubuntu* as an 'African' norm that could contribute to concerns of development.

DE, as a theoretical framework, is appealing not only because it tallies with this *immersion* approach to the study of ethics but also because it helps us to face an important question that any talk of 'development' may not neglect, sadly, this neglect has in the past been the order of the day. Crocker (1991: 462) elucidates on this question (that may not be neglected) when he argues that "that the most fundamental ethical question in development practice concerns the cultural identity of groups …" This need be construed as a call for ethical relativism, on the part of Crocker – far from it. However, it is a call to realize that the aspiration for 'development' is locally based, though 'development' itself as an ideal is universal. The desire for 'development' may be universal but the aspirations for such a process must be allowed to enjoy the particularity of the cultural context of those for whom 'development' is for; it is in this light that the context-sensitive approach to 'development' is emphasized by Bujo above. Wiredu (1998: 332) also talking about 'development', says, it "… is a cultural enterprise of the highest kind … (as such) … must be reviewed from an African standpoint". Development must not and may not be allowed to be done at the expense of the cultural identity and diversity of those who are in need of it. The cost of development must be balanced against the identities that are also valued by the communities. These considerations strongly call for the sensitivity to the particularity of context and values of the people; as such, particularism will be assumed as an epistemological approach in this study (Coetzee, 2002: 280 - 285). 'Development' will be recast in the mould of *ubuntu* to

see what contributions *ubuntu* can make. What vision/s of 'development' may emerge from this, and simultaneously protect and preserve an identity of Sub-Saharan community, rather than threaten it.

This immersion is important not only as an epistemological approach of doing ethics, but also as a response to a serious charge against African values and cultures. Colonialism represents an offense to the history and identity of Africans. It is a part of history that brings to light the highest kind of denigration and impeachment to the culture of African people. 'Development' for some time had inherited this tendency of undermining the African culture. In fact, Adi captures this point in this way, "In the past, the established position was that African development within its own cultural and historical antecedents is a mission impossible" (Adi, 2005: 1). This reductive motif - Africans can't develop because their cultures are intrinsically inferior and serve instrumentally as an effective internal barrier to 'development' - in terms of explaining why Africans are not developing or are undeveloped. This Colonist approach of Afro-pessimism will in this research, find a critique by way of theoretically demonstrating the potency and relevance of such values as contained in *ubuntu*. This research resonates with Steve Biko's vision that the greatest gift from Africa is yet to come, that gift is in terms of discovering the true human face, "communal-relations" (Biko, 1978: 48). This is the vision of *ubuntu*.

Ubuntu, briefly, may be defined as "a process and philosophy which reflects the African heritage, traditions, culture, customs, beliefs, value systems and the extended family structures" (Makhudu, 1993: 40). It is typically identified with the maxim, in Zulu, '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'* or in SeSotho, '*motho ke motho batho ba bangwe*'; in English, 'a person is a person through other persons'. Talk of "muntu" (person) in African thinking, is generally normative, Menkiti rightly quotes Placide who had observed that talk of"… "Muntu", which stands for human person, implies the idea of an excellence attaching to what it designates" (Menkiti, 2004: 326).

As such in the African thinking, talk of *ubuntu* which declares that for one to be an 'umuntu' the other is required, is not just a descriptive claim; but also a prescriptive or normative claim. This may be articulated to mean that treating or relating with others, community to be specific, in particular ways constitutes a good life or an excellent life. As such the ethic of *ubuntu* seems to be based on the idea that some kind of relating is intrinsically valuable. The idea, in this research,

would be to study how this ethic may furnish answers to the three above questions, as provided by DE.

Friends of *ubuntu* argue that harmony is what is of fundamental value or a basis for moral status. This research will be investigating what this fundamental ethical value may contribute to talk of 'development'. This research will be studying what contribution harmony as a value highly prized by 'African' people will contribute to Human-Centered approaches to development.

This research will be broken down into five chapters. The first chapter will give an extensive philosophical discussion of the ethics of *ubuntu*. The aim in this chapter will be to give the reader what is considered of fundamental value in *ubuntu*, such that the world with this good will is considered better off than in its absence. This chapter will be an attempt to thoroughly explore and investigate the values of Sub-Saharan Africa. The second, third, and fourth chapter will be devoted to giving an answer to three value questions or ancient philosophical questions that are said to capture the essence of what constitutes "authentic development". Chapter 2 will deal specifically with the first question: what is a good life? The third chapter will deal specifically with the question of the ethics of ecology, how ought nature to be treated? So as to clearly evince the kind of contribution *ubuntu* may make will be considered to how it may tally or augment to talk surrounding sustainable development. The fourth chapter, will specifically concern itself with giving a response to the fourth the question relating to concerns of a just society. In this chapter, a normative account of a community or what constitutes a good community will be given, from this chapter we will construe how consensual democracy and fellowship associations, as argued for by Kwasi Wiredu and Wingo will be discussed respectively, and the account will be assessed relative to questions of justice, and how this conception of justice may deal with issues of inequality and issues of representation even of those worse-off in the society, emanating from the notion of harmony. The fifth chapter will be a concluding chapter that will briefly take the reader through the contributions talk of *ubuntu* may make to talks of development.

Chapter 1

Ubuntu as a moral theory

This chapter discusses *ubuntu* as a moral theory. This aims at showing that according to *ubuntu* what is fundamentally valued is social harmony or living harmoniously. The aim of this essay is to give an extensive discussion of this ethical *weltanschauung*. This essay will proceed in the following fashion. The first section will clarify the nature of the exposition that is to follow of *ubuntu*, that is, how *ubuntu* will be studied and what assumptions will undergird this study. The second section will give a brief account of the metaphysics that grounds *ubuntu*. The third section will delve into exposing fully the moral theory of *ubuntu*. In this section, the *Mbitian* and *ubuntuan* maxims will serve as an entry in giving a detailed discussion of *ubuntu*. We will continue by way of noting the normative nature of the notion of "umuntu"/person; we will also continue by observing that moral status is grounded on (harmonious) relationships; the last part will conclude by considering Metz philosophical contribution to talks of *ubuntu* and the intervention made by Lutz and Van Niekerk.

Clarification of this project

In this particular project, I wish to explore and investigate African values, specifically those of Sub-Saharan values which emerge from a talk of *ubuntu*; and try to distil what kind of account of 'development' is entailed in this moral view. But to talk of *African* ethical vision or system, is always attended by both cynicism and skeptical reactions, as such, the notion of *Africa/n* stands in need of elaboration, insofar as it relates to the notion of *ubuntu*. It is obvious that Africa is not characterized by a homogeneity and monolithic system/s of thought and institutions, but Africa houses a variety in content and form; diversity in cultures, contrariness and is a complex society. But this diversity or heterogeneity does not in any way preclude a possibility of a plausible talk of generalities that appear in the African geographical space, the history of ethical values that prevail in this space.

The notion of Africa will be used in this chapter, and throughout, in a way similar to that of other African scholars of *ubuntu*, as will be evinced below. Talk of *ubuntu* is claimed to be *African* because values associated with this talk features in some parts of the continent of Africa, in a way that they do not feature in other parts of the world. They feature over this space, not only in

the present, but also historically. Metz refers to this ethic, "as a sub-Saharan moral perspective" (Metz, 2010: 81). Eze (2005: 79) agrees with this view, as he argues that "Geographically speaking, the term 'ubuntu' comes from among the peoples of southern, central and eastern Africa – what we call the Bantu languages – deriving from the vernacular modes of referring to a person. The Shona call a 'person' in the singular munhu and the plural vanhu. The Zulu, Xhosa, and Isindebele call a 'person' umuntu in the singular and abantu in the plural. The Sotho and Tswana refer to the same as muthu and bathu respectively". Metz (2007: 321) in his ground breaking work on *ubuntu* argues that by ""African ethics" … I mean values associated with largely black and Bantu speaking peoples residing in the Sub-Saharan part of the Continent ..." LenkaBula (2008: 378) in the same light observes that "Similar formulations or conceptions to *ubuntu/botho* can be found in diverse forms in many societies throughout Africa. This is more specifically among the Bantu languages of the East, Central and South Africa". Thus, there is general consensus among *ubuntu* scholars that this concept captures values that characterize Bantu speaking peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In line with Metz (2007: 321 - 323) the following observations are critical to keep in mind. It is not claimed that in the region (conceptually and geographically) specified everyone actually believes or holds these values. It is also not claimed that these values in the geographic space delimited appears in the same ways and have the same nuances. It is also not claimed that these values only appear in this space only, but rather, they appear more so in this space than in others. More importantly, it must be recognized that what is under discussion are social *tendencies* that are dominant in this space and not social *essences*, as such, the account given is not essentialist. The exploration to be made in this chapter as whole is that, if the values associated with African values, specifically with reference to *ubuntu* are to be constructed to a meaningful *development* account, what kind of account may emerge from such a construction?

Ontology that grounds the ethic of Ubuntu

Like Mkhize (2008: 36) it is thought important that before the ethics of *ubuntu* is delved into, some speculative and metaphysical considerations "upon which *ubuntu* is grounded" be roughly presented. This is done not to suggest African ethics is ontological (Mkhize, 2008: 36), but rather, to help readers who may not be familiar with an African worldview. Mkhize as quoted

above brings order to this metaphysic by organizing it into five distinct thematic claims about the nature of reality:

- The hierarchy of beings
- God's essence or life force
- The principle of cosmic unity
- The principle of harmony
- The communal nature of beings

Mkhize continues to argue that, "harmony is the overarching principle that glues all the other elements together" (Mkhize, 2008: 35). The notion of harmony and balance in the African cosmos seems to be ubiquitous. Bujo (2004: internet resource) talking on the metaphysics of African people describes it as "everything in the world is intimately connected. For this reason, humans and the rest of creation have a dialectic relation. All the elements in the universe imply each other and interlock. One cannot touch one of them without causing the whole to vibrate. Humans are not only part of the cosmos, but they are also the summary of its totality, so to speak". Thus, from Bujo's observations of interlocking and intimate connections of all things; a picture of relationality as the fundamental feature of the African cosmology and metaphysics begins to emerge. Here we seem to be seeing that some kind of social systems thinking, in which, everything is interconnected.

Ramose (2002: 230 - 231) elucidates on the metaphysics of *ubuntu* by means of morphological analysis of the concept of *ubuntu*. He begins by suggesting that the best way to understand *ubuntu* is by treating this notion as a hyphenated word, that is, *ubu-ntu*. "*Ubu-* evokes the idea of being in general. It is enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular form. *Ubu-* as enfolded being is always oriented towards enfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being… *Ubu-* as the generalized understanding of being may be said to be distinctly ontological. Whereas – *ntu* is the nodal point in the process of continual enfoldment may be said to be distinctly epistemological". In another place, Ramose attempts to give a more precise rendition of what he means by incessant continual orientation of unfoldment of the enfolded by stating that, "Being is therefore the fundamental oneness. In this sense being is the originary simplicity; an insuperable

indivisibility. Yet, in its incessant unfolding, owing to the principle of motion, this insuperable indivisibility is able to assume plurality and diversity of forms which manifest its character … In this sense life is a wholeness" (2009: 310). The above, seemingly complex expression of the metaphysics of *ubuntu* may be simplified to mean that all things share in the unity (oneness) of life, the multiplicity of forms of being, are a reflection of this underlying wholeness and oneness. As such, the aim of ethics is the manifestation of this harmony in social existence, at least, in the human community. Thus, Mkhize (2008: 39) observes correctly that "the idea of balance (harmony) is the overarching principle that glues all the other elements together"

Ubuntu as a moral account

The current author will understand *ubuntu* like Behrens when he states that it is a "descriptor of African Philosophy, morality and worldviews" (Behrens, 2010). Metz (2007: 323) in a similar vein states that he will "analytically set aside *ubuntu* as a comprehensive worldview, or a description of a way of life as a whole". The word *ubuntu* is generally construed to mean humanity or humanness or personhood (Ramose, 1999: 29; LenkaBula, 2008: 376; Metz, 2010: 83). This notion of *ubuntu* is generally associated with two interesting and arguably related maxims that serve as a basis to expose the normative implications of this worldview.

These may be described as the *Mbitian and ubuntuan* maxim. *Mbitian* maxim*:* "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970: 141). This is called the *Mbitian* maxim after the famous and influential African philosopher, John Mbiti, who came with this expression to account for how a person is understood in Africa, contrary, to the Cartesian formulation - 'I think therefore I am'. Two African philosophers have given very interesting interpretation of this maxim. Bujo (2001: 5) argues that, "this principle articulates the conviction that each one becomes a human being only in a fellowship of life with others". Menkiti (2004: 324) argues that Mbiti's claimed "connection between the individual and the community takes on a particular form, moves in a trajectory not to be confused with others … it speaks of an individual, who recognizes the sources of his or her own humanity, and so realizes, with internal assurance, that in the absence of others, no grounds exists for a claim regarding the individual's own standing as a person. The notion at work here is the notion of an extended self". What seems to emerge from the above is the idea that, the proper normative content of what constitutes (moral) personhood seems to be a context of fellowship characterized by intimate relations or by a thorough going

'other regard'. The existence of the self seems to require a community of fellowship. This community seems to be essential and central in the emergence of the self. Bujo makes reference to the concept of *fellowship*, as if to claim that it is only in the context of communion or communing with others, that one is initially discovered not just as biological entity but more so as a moral being. It is in this context of discovery that moral consciousness and development takes place. Menkiti argues that personal moral *internal assurance* is only possible within a context of a moral community that inclines the individual to cohere with the ideals of the group.

From the above, interesting normative implications emerge, but the most important thing that emerges as central and essential in this ethic, is the idea of the group - community. Normatively this seems to suggest that for an individual to flourish or be of an excellent character, they must enter into the community in some way or another.

The *ubuntuan* maxim entails similar ideals and ideas as those by the *Mbitian* maxim, it proceeds thus: 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' or in English, 'a person is a person through other persons'. (Louw, 1999) indicates that this aphorism has both a prescriptive and descriptive sense. The descriptive sense explains empirically what it means to be a person according to *ubuntu*, that is, a person is born of human parentage, has a body … and all the related details of this *story* but the prescriptive sense expounds on how one ought to conduct themselves in a community. "It not only describes human beings as "being-with-others" but also prescribes how we should relate to others, that is, what "being-with-others" should be all about" (Louw, 1999). Metz agrees with Louw when he construes this "maxim to have a descriptive sense to the effect that one's identity as a human being causally and even metaphysically depends on a community. It is also has prescriptive senses to the effect that one ought to be a *mensch*, in other words, morally should support the community in certain ways" (Metz, 2007: 323). What is important from these two thinkers, at least in this research, is the prescriptive package promised by this ethic. They also point out the importance of the notion of the community or 'other regard' as important. For Louw, *ubuntu* as a moral discourse seems to be based on a structure that construes a moral being as: 'being-with-others'. In this thinking it seems there is no dichotomy between the self and the other. The aim of this moral theory then is to develop an account that would regulate this relation of 'being-with-others'- one is conceived already as in relations with others. Put simply, 'self regard' seems to require 'other regard' intrinsically, in this moral theory. The aim then is to

explain what this actually means. Metz seems to be making a similar observation; since he argues that to be a moral being (*mensch*) one is expected to support the community in certain ways. We may summarize the above by saying: What is the principle that ought to relate self-regard and other regard, and/ or, what is the normative principle that could capture the best way to support the community in a morally relevant way?

The notion of community in the moral reckoning of African ethics is essential (Wiredu, 2008: 333, Mbigi, 2005: 108 - 189, Shutte, 2001: 12 & 25). There has been a raging debate between Gyekye (1992: 121 - 138) and Menkiti (2004: 324 - 327) about the relationship between the individual and the community. The debate was primarily about which, the community or the individual, takes priority in the African moral system. It is not within the interest and the scope of this essay to address this debate. Wiredu's intervention in this regard will be assumed to be correct philosophical position in this regard. Wiredu argues that "to adjust the interests of the individual to those of the community is not to subordinate the one to the other. The relationship is purely symmetrical"… (he continues to clarify what then is the difference between communitarian and individualist thought, by noting that), "communitarianism and individualism is simply a certain contextualization with respect to their locations and perceptions of their interests to those of others. Communitarianism and individualism are both just different ways of arranging pursuit of the interests of the individual. The difference is that there are more issues of human well-being regarding which an individual has obligations and rights in a communitarian society than in an individualistic one" (2008: 334).

From the above, taking Wiredu seriously, whilst agreeing that the community is essential and central in the African ethical system, but it does not follow that the community takes priority over the individual. The relation between the two is symmetrical. Any interpretation of the community as taking priority over the individual is to use language wrongly and to hypostatize the notion of community (Wiredu, 2008: 334). The difference, as noted by Wiredu, is that the individual in the communitarian setting has more duties to others than in the individualist context. There are socially engendered responsibilities that are normally not found in individualist and rights-based societies. This means that in the communitarian setting the individual's scope extends beyond him/herself to include that of the other in his reckoning of his interests and well-being. In the words of Tutu this principles is stated in this fashion, "our

humanity is inextricably bound" (Tutu, 1999: 31). This "inextricable bounded-ness", gives a very interesting understanding of personhood.

It is important to inform the reader to keep in mind that the notion of personhood as used in *ubuntu* ethic are value laden (Metz, 2008: 83, Wiredu, 2008: 336). Metz (2008: 83) opining on the evaluative nature of this notion of personhood observes that one "may be more or less of a person, self or a human being, where the more one is, the better". And Wiredu (2008: 336) argues that, the conception (of personhood) is not just descriptive but normative … "Additionally, a person must meet certain normative standards". In another place Wiredu (2002: 291) argues the same point more poignantly: "… but there is also a distinct normative layer of a profound social significance in that concept (of a person)". Tempels talking on the notion of personhood has this to says, as quoted by Menkiti (2004: 326) ""muntu", which stands for human person, implies the idea of an excellence attaching to what it designates". Menkiti (2004: 326) observes for one to be a human being must grow to become a "moral being or a bearer of norms". Wiredu (2002: 291) opining more forcefully on this conception of personhood states that "there is also a distinct normative layer of a profound social significance in that concept. Thus conceived, a human being is essentially the centre of a thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities …"

It is of interest to note the values or norms associated with being a good person, a full human being or leading a genuine human life, are described as *social,* and are also described in terms *obligations and responsibility*, rather than rights. This observation makes sense when one considers an argument made by Menkiti (2004: 326 & 327) when arguing for a normative conception of personhood, argues that an "approach to persons in traditional thought is generally speaking maximal, or more exacting approach, insofar as it reaches for something beyond minimalist requirements as the presence of consciousness, memory, will, soul, rationality …" Morality in this thinking requires one to relate with others in certain ways: "and to that extent that morality demands a point of view best described as "beingness-with-others". If morality demands being conceived as being-with-others, Metz (2010: 83) is correct to observe that in this thinking "the state of being a *mensch* is entirely constituted by relating to others in a certain manner"; in another place Metz (2009: 240) states that "the only way to develop moral personhood, to become a virtuous agent or lead a genuinely human life, is to interact with others

in certain ways…African ethics imply that morality is possible only through interaction with others". Shutte (2009: 97) is on point when he observes that "Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. This means entering more and more deeply into the community with others" From the above it might be concluded that relationship/s of some sort are bearers of moral status.

Returning to Tutu, who was quoted above saying "our humanity is inextricably bound", entails a particular way of being and relating in the world that entails a very interesting moral account. In the words of Tutu, the central feature of this ethic is expressed in the following manner, "*ubuntu* speaks to the very essence of being human … it … means my humanity is caught up, is inextricable bound up in yours. We belong to a bundle of life … harmony, friendliness, community are the greatest gifts. Social harmony is for us … the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this good is to be avoided like the plague (Tutu, 1999: 34 - 35). Tutu in this passage elucidates the nature of the values and virtues espoused and promoted by *ubuntu*. At this point as his been established that morality in this thinking centrally has to with relating with others/community in a particular way, but had not been specified what this way is or is constituted by what. Tutu, unequivocally states that *ubuntu* prescribes social harmony as the greatest good, that which ought to be fundamentally valued. An epistemic and ethical category through which one may distinguish between what is good and bad, what is moral and immoral. So, in this moral thinking, to be good entails relating with the others, or group, in ways that promote harmony, friendliness or community; or in the words of Tutu, that respects our "boundedness" or "sharing in the bundle of life". This means that being inextricably caught with others demands that we relate with others friendly, caringly and compassionately. Nussbaum (2010: 101) appositely states that *ubuntu* "is the capacity in the African capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony in the interests of building and maintaining the community".

Tutu (1999: 31) elaborating on *ubuntu* prolifically avers that: "When we want to give high praise to someone (of an excellent character) we say: "Yu, u nobuntu"; so-and-so has *ubuntu*. Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly, and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours".

It is clear that *ubuntu* is a quality of character and emerges as a moral theory that prizes relationships that are caring, friendly, and hospitable. So the good is captured in relationships that hold in the community and the community itself. Acts that foster and forge the communities are good and those tending to opposite effect are not. This point is also reflected by the virtues that Tutu invoke as illustrative of a person who possess *ubuntu* as a trait of character- excellent character, he states, s/he is generous (gives others), compassionate (feels in a particular positive way towards others), hospitable (treats others in a particular ways), friendly (relates with others with loyalty and commitment). This ethic seems to extol particular ways of relating as of moral worth. From the above it seems that Metz (2010: 84) is correct to argue that "harmonious relationships or communal relationships are valued for their own sake …" in this moral outlook.

Metz (2007: 321 - 341) argues that in the literature that attempts to capture *ubuntu* as a moral theory of right action, six possible interpretations emerge and he, in turn argues, that only one is plausible from the six[iv]. Then he supports his observation by appeal to the elucidation given by Tutu above, he specifies it, as U6, indicative of the fact that he finds accounts from U1 - U5 as inadequate and unsatisfactory. U6 is construed as a principle of right action in the following fashion: "An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord, and act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community".

Metz argues that what is needed is a broader notion of what morally matters … (and concludes that)…this account of *ubuntu* posits certain relationships as constitutive of the good that a moral agent ought to promote. "What is right is what connects people, what separates people is wrong" (Metz, 2007: 334). Thus, for Metz, what has moral status or intrinsically good is particular kinds of "interpersonal relations" or particular kinds of "communal relations" or "community" (Metz, 2007: 333). He specifies these relations as those that promote harmony. It is common knowledge that harmony is valued in Sub-Saharan ethic, Mkhize (2008: 39) argues that "harmony…is the foundation of African ethics". Onah is quoted by Metz (2007: 329) to have stated that "living harmoniously within a community is therefore a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life". Munyaka & Mothladi (2009: 65) describes *ubuntu* as "a way of life that seeks to promote and manifest itself and is best realized or made more evident in harmonious relations within society". Metz (2010: 83 - 84) in a paper devoted to giving an African conception of dignity argues that "the ultimate goal of a person, self or human in the biological sense should be

to become a *full* person, a *real* self, or a *genuine* human being … (The phrase says that achieving that state of being a *mensch* is entirely constituted by relating to others in a certain manner)… and he adds that … harmonious or communal relations are valued for their own sake … a human being lives a genuinely human way of life insofar as she values harmony when she relates harmoniously with other human beings or "A person becomes a real person through communal relationships" (Metz, 2010: 84).

Thus, it should come as no surprise that *ubuntu* and African ethics is generally construed as relational seems to be justified and true. "Belonging to a community…means that one ought to behave in particular ways notably it entails seeking to promote harmonious relationships within the community" and "What is to be promoted in ethical relationships is harmony, which amounts to: friendly, caring, mutually supportive and nurturing relationships" (Behrens, 2010).

Metz has suggested U6 as the most plausible way to account for *ubuntu*. His understanding of *ubuntu* argues that morality in the African thinking is based on interpersonal relations that are harmonious. The expression, 'I am because we are', is really a call for one to act in ways that promote the "we". The call of 'a person is a person through others' is a call to engage others in a ways that promote nurturing, caring, mutually supportive relationships. Lutz intervenes in a very interesting way to the account developed by Metz; but earlier than Lutz, Jason Van Niekerk had also intervened than Lutz, but emphasis will be put on Lutz' intervention. Contrary to Metz, after observing six principles that emerge on the literature on *ubuntu*, rejects the first 5 and argues that the last one is the most defensible and plausible; Lutz argues that there are good reasons to take seriously also U4. Lutz argues that a combination of both U4 and U6 will give a richer understanding of ubuntu, and also that the reasons given by Metz in rejecting U4 are not satisfactory. Lutz (2010: 313 - 314) argues that *ubuntu* is appealing as a moral account because it is built on the correct understanding of human nature and the idea of common good. He argues that *ubuntu* "correctly understands that we are truly human only in the community with other persons. Moreover, since all human beings share a common human nature … (Lutz, 2010: 314). Then Lutz (2010: 314) argues that in a "true community, the individual does not pursue the common good instead of his or her own goal, but rather pursues his or her own goal through pursuing the common good…can attain their own true good only by promoting the good of

others” . This means that the good of the individual is inextricably bound to that of the community.

Engaging directly with Metz, Lutz (2010: 316) argues, consequently, it is possible to interpret “a person is a person through other persons”. In such a way that both U4 and U6 are true. The actions that produces harmony, reduce discord and develop community are simultaneously the actions that perfect one’s valuable nature as a social being. He also points out that the dichotomy that argues that our basic moral rules are “either "intrinsic and self-regarding” or “relational and other regarding” is false … As human beings only realize themselves only in relation with others…on the contrary we need an account that reconciles self-realization and communalism. In a sense that the promotion of common good, in terms of community building, leads to self-development” (Lutz, 2010: 316). Shutte (2001: 14 & 30) seems to agree with this interpretation of *ubuntu* that, “personal community and personal growth go hand in hand” and also argues that, “the goal of morality is fullness of humanity: the moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. And just as participation in community with others is the essential means to personal growth, so participation in the community with others is the motive and fulfillment of the process”. Bujo (2001: 88) also argues that, “each one who commits to acting in solidarity for the construction of the community allows himself to be brought to completion by this same community, so that he can truly become a person” (Bujo, 2001: 88). Eze (2005: 84) also observes that when the individual is “advancing the good of the community, the individual’s good is concomitantly advanced insofar as the good of the community and that of the individual are intricately connected and not radically opposed. The community is a guarantor of my right, freedom, humanity and liberty whereas I am a guarantor of the survival of the community by advancing its good and sustenance knowing that if the community hurts, it is the individual that hurts”.

The virtue of this move as suggested by Lutz is explained by Van Niekerk (2007: 368) as that it plays an important role in terms of explaining why one ought to be moral. In other words, it answers the concerns of the one who questions why one ought to worry about being moral, in a way that, the account of harmony as given by Metz does not. Van Niekerk notes that the immoralist might ask “why should I be concerned for others unless it is to my self-interest?” Such questions strike me as legitimate…the response to the immoralist, so to speak, up-front. It

seems that the claim that the agent's own good is necessarily related to the moral good is natural to discussions in which *ubuntu* is invoked …"

From the above, that is marrying U4 and U6, we get a deeper understanding of *ubuntu*. We get that the notion of harmony presupposes ways of relating with others that are dualistically *productive*-build both the community and the individual simultaneously. The more the agents act for the ensuring and preservation of the communal good; the more they develop or perfect their social natures and engage in a process of "ingathering excellences" (Menkiti, 2004: 326).

Conclusion

This paper began by giving an overview of the metaphysics that ground the ethics of *ubuntu*. In this regard it was observed that the entire cosmos is characterized by relationality of all of which it is composed off, in sharing and participation in vital force. Then this paper discussed the maxims, that is, the *Mbitian* and *ubuntuan* maxims as starting points to understand the ethics *ubuntu*. Central to these maxims it was observed is the normative standard that for one to be a *mensch* or a good person, one is expected to relate with others *positively* or in ways that are supportive of the community. It was argued that *ubuntu* values harmony as an intrinsic good: relationships of harmony are valued for their own sake, these (harmonious relations) are caring, mutually supportive, friendly and nurturing relationships". Harmony is best identifiable as a norm that should glue the community together. The notion of harmony as promoted by *ubuntu* is a call to live as and in a community; as a community of compassion, care, sharing and solidarity. It was also observed that when individuals live harmoniously they simultaneously self-realize by way of perfecting their social natures.

The next chapter will take us through a philosophical construction of a vision of a meaningful life according to *ubuntu*. This vision should immediately follow from the construction of *ubuntu* as developed in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Ubuntu and the meaning of good life

This chapter is structured so as to answer the first value question in the conceptual framework proffered by DE. This essay will be focusing on expounding on what a good meaningful life is. If development is about enlarging people's choices, and making people's life better off, or about increasing the quality of human life. The challenge then becomes what vision could *ubuntu* offer with respect to such a life. What can *ubuntu* offer in terms of a flourishing, well-being and/ or an excellent life? Thus, the aim in this essay is to show how the notion of harmony may contribute in this regard.

African morality may be characterized as both perfectionist (Metz, 2010: 275) and humanistic in orientation. Perfectionist insofar as it "characterizes the human good in terms of the development of human nature" (Wall, 2007: 1). In perfectionist accounts the best life for human beings may either be conceived in terms of well-being or excellences. It should also be noted that the notion of an excellent life may be broader than that of well-being; this becomes the case, when one may have to sacrifice their well-being for the sake of excellence (Wall, 2007: 2). For one to lead an excellent life they require perfectionist goods. These are goods that that contribute or are components of an excellent human life. The kind of perfectionism promoted by *ubuntu* may be described as "human nature perfectionism" which refer generally to accounts of the human good that relate perfectionist goods to the development of human nature" (Wall, 2007: 2). It is also expected that "proponents of human nature perfectionism must defend an account of human nature. More, precisely, they must give an account of the properties or capacities that are central to human nature and the development of which have value" (Wall, 2007: 3). So we may summarize a human nature perfectionist vision as one that embodies the principle that identifies human good with the development of human nature" and the best life or excellent life is one that maximizes the development of this nature" (Wall, 2007: 3). As such perfectionist theories, generally, are self-realizing accounts.

If our aim is to understand what ought to count as a meaningful life in the African moral system, what better place to start than by investigating the notion of personhood. Wiredu begins by noting that African morality is humanistic, and states that this humanistic tendency is embodied

in the principle: “it is a human being that has value”, and he is quick to remind the reader that this principle as captured in English is limited, a richer meaning in the original language of this expression implies, “all value derives from the human interests and…that human fellowship is the most important of human needs” (Wiredu, 2002: 287 - 288). From the above it seems to follow that goods are goods because human beings would have valued them as such, otherwise they would not be goods. By this assertion, I mean to suggest that it is because these goods are useful or relevant for human survival and thriving, thus are considered as goods or valued. The second part leads to an interesting understanding of human nature; that fellowship is a human need. The question then would be fellowship is a need in what sense? It would be argued in this paper that fellowship or community is a need in a sense that one may not lead a meaningful or self-realizing human life without or outside of a human community. The community is an absolute necessity for one to lead a meaningful life; this suggests that the community is the chief human good that is required for one to life a meaningful, flourishing and a fulfilling life. On a prima facie basis we may argue that ‘development’ requires that people enter more and more into the community, only in such a case, may we properly speak of a meaningful life in the *ubuntu* philosophy.

The expression ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, as an expression of a perfectionist vision, means that, for a person to be excellent they ought to relate with others in a particular way/s. Or, as Metz (2010: 51, emphasis mine) would aver, “The phrases say that achieving the state of being a *mensch*, or having ‘*ubuntu*’ (humanness), as it is known among many in Southern Africa, is *entirely* constituted by positively relating to others in a certain manner. Menkiti (2004: 326) is correct to observe that “in order to transform what was initially biologically given into full personhood, the community, of necessity must step in…the individual … cannot carry the transformation unassisted”. Moral excellence requires the community, one may not be a good person as a loner in the desert or some nice Island in exclusion (Metz, 2009: 340). The idea that emerges, and is common among Africa thinkers, is that “personhood is a sort of thing which has to be achieved, the sort of thing at which individuals could fail… married to the notion of person is the notion of moral arrival …” (Menkiti, 2004: 326). Shutte (2009: 92) also observes that “in the beginning, at the start of my life, I am not really a person … I only become a person to the extent that I am included in relationships with others … So I must see my life as a process of

becoming a person … My life is a progressive increase in vital force. At least if all goes well. But it could be a decrease … disintegration".

It is important that the reader be quickly advised to be cognizant that the notion of personhood as used here, in this talk of *ubuntu*, is normative, rather than metaphysical or descriptive. A baby when is born is a person, descriptively speaking-he is a human being born of human parentage has a sex, these are descriptive facts; but not normatively speaking-insofar as this requires one to be certain normative standards and expectations.

The idea that emerges is that for one to lead a good human life they must develop particular character dispositions that will maximally reflect *ubuntu* - that is to relate with others in ways that promote harmony as the fundamental good of African thinking. Thus what is said here is that human "relationship in the context of community is key in understanding the human person and community in African traditional thought. To become a person involves a proactive participation and engagement of individuals in realizing their potentials and maximizing the community's good. There is no room for passivity. Participation must be understood as essential aspect of the human identity" (Bujo, 2004). The idea that when one is born is not a person and that of moral arrival seem to be important in order for one understand a meaningful life. It seems the process of becoming a person coincides with that of living a meaningful life. It seems that one's life becomes meaningful to the degree that they participate in the process of becoming a person in the community. The more of a person one becomes – the more of community's normative standards they are expected to reach – the more one's life is meaningful or enriched.

The idea of moral arrival seems to suggest that a meaningful life is one that is characterized by manifesting character dispositions that are supportive of the community. Supportive in a sense that one manifests "friendship" and/ "love" towards the community and its members. By way of ensuring that they never bring about discord but always live harmoniously. A meaningful life is that which "connects people together, what separates is wrong" (Metz, 2010: 83). In other words, it may be observed that a "person becomes a real person through communal relations" (Metz, 2010: 83). Communal relations valued here are those that prize friendship (Lutz, 2010: 316), altruistic feelings (Mosolo, 2004: 494), "mutual aid or support" (Wiredu, 2002: 293). "Thus, to be called a "person" does not require an ontological membership but an active participation, not in the Western sense of "performance" but in the sense of mutual, interpersonal relations

("being-with") (Bujo, 2004). In other words, individuals become persons provided and to the extent that they do not isolate themselves in their actions, but act together with all the community's members" .Then we may conclude with Tutu (1999: 31) when he describes a person who has *ubuntu* as one who is "generous … hospitable… friendly… caring… and compassionate".

A good human life, in this *ubuntuan* perfectionist model of "development as harmony" is best captured by Lutz (2010: 316) when he argues: "It is possible to interpret "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", in such a way that both U4 and U6 are true. The actions that produce harmony, reduce discord and develop community are simultaneously the actions that perfects one's valuable nature as a social being" Bujo (2001: 88) seems to support this vision of harmony when he states that "each one who acting in solidarity for the construction of the community allows himself to be brought to completion by this same community, so that he can truly become a person". Shutte (2001: 14) also observes that "the goal of morality is fullness of humanity: the moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. And just as participation in a community in a community with others is the essential means to personal growth, so participation in the community with others is the motive and fulfillment of the process".

Here we have a socio-ethical vision that captures a society as a network of friendships, which is what "harmony" as an ethical promotes. These networks of friendship keep the community together. The interests of all are conceived as intrinsically related. This society is a sharing society. These "networks of friendship" embody what a meaningful life is about. The more one *enters/participates* into these social networks, and promotes harmony, one works towards maintaining and keeping harmony; this in turn entails and ensures that one is simultaneously self-realizing. To this extent: Lutz (2010: 314) is correct to observe that: "In a true community, the individual does not pursue the common good instead of his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good through pursuing the common good. The ethics of a true community does not ask persons to sacrifice their own good in order to promote the good of others, but instead invites them to recognize that they can attain their own true good only by promoting the good of other". Just to run ahead of oneself, what makes this idea of common good more appealing in the African thinking is that, it is a common good that is not established by way of authoritarian ruler or by the elite, but, from the common sphere of interpersonal relations

between capable adults, to the sphere of organized government, the common good is established through consensus (Wiredu, 1996: 182). As a result there is a slim chance that individual may not buy into the common good as thus produced, or, have their interests so divergent from that of the community that they will cause discord, ideally speaking

On the face of it one might object that this limits the freedom of individuals. In a sense that the more one is committed to enter into relationships the more of freedom they *lose*. I wish to observe that even if commitment to relationships, more and more, means that one's time to do other things and other personal project and pursue other projects outside of community is a *loss* of freedom. It a loss of freedom that is not un-intuitively appealing, in a sense that one's life of freedom in the kind of values prized by *ubuntu* does not make one's life worse off rather, persons become more self-realizing. This limit of freedom is not un-intuitively appealing in the sense exampled by loss of freedom in a marriage relationship or friendship as conceived by Aristotle. One definitely *loses* a lot of freedom, all things equal, a person's life would not be considered constrained to a point we would think that his life is worse-off than would not had she not been married; instead people are encouraged to enter such social arrangements as marriage which entail such a *loss* of freedom, if it would but help them to realize their potential and become better people. It is this kind of freedom that is valued by African thinkers one is free or freer to the extent that enables them to develop their positive freedom or capabilities. From this picture it seems that *ubuntu* would allow some loss of negative freedom but would increase one's positive or effective freedoms. A vision of freedom envisaged is one that is called participatory freedom.

The African conception of personhood is one which describable in terms of "being-with", by Bujo, and as "beingness-with-others", by Menkiti seems to reject the kind of freedom conceived in terms of autonomy as popularized by Kant. Bujo (2004) rejects "freedom… as … personal self-determination. This is the whole issue of Kantian morality and its keen sense of autonomy". And he argues (ibid) "since the individual can only exist within the "us," it is impossible for them to fulfill their potential outside, beside, or against the community". Then, he concludes by giving this detailed understanding of the meaningful life in this fashion:

The articulation of community and individual must be seen as a chance for achieving and completing an individual's freedom. In Africa, one cannot fulfill oneself as a person outside of the community; individual freedom is possible only through participation in the community's life within the ethical framework "being-with-the-others": my freedom as an individual can only be real and total if I free the community at the same time – this freeing happens not by exclusion or seclusion by inclusion and active

participation. In the same way, the community as a whole can enjoy true freedom only if it frees me as an individual. Strong and abundant life for all is possible only in this continual interaction. Seen from this angle, African freedom is never conceived to be something that opposes the individual to the community. The golden rule, rather, is *the individual with the community so that all are with all*. In Western societies, one tends to see too much of the negative side of freedom, in the sense of freeing oneself from obstacles that prevent self-fulfillment. Freedom cannot only consist in *being free from*, but it is also *being free for* and *being free with*. This "being for and with" gives a further dimension to freedom, since it implies sharing life with all (Bujo, 2004).

From the above we may observe that a meaningful life is life lived according to "harmony" - the idea that we are inextricably bound in a bundle of shared life, called community. In this understanding the community is not just an artificial social organization, no, not at all; but it is a space in which life is organically shared and pursued with the attitude of togetherness. Harmony is the valuing of friendship, care, mutually support, hospitality and compassion. This entering into the community means that we understand our lives as shared in bond of togetherness. "Being-with" as a condition of being also presupposes that the more I am with others the more I free myself by freeing others. Thus, the call of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' also adds a new dimension to conceptions of freedom, which is, as *being free for* and *being free with*, as such, grounding the idea of living harmoniously. So, from the above the call for development in this research is a call to build community. Development as harmony is a call that people should participate in building and being built by the community. Life is meaningful in this conception of freedom as entailed by the idea of harmony.

Conclusion

In this particular chapter we were specifically answering the question/s: what is a meaningful life or what is a good life? This paper argued that harmony is the ethical category through meaning or the good is realizable in the *ubuntu* philosophy. The idea of harmony is a call for one to enter more into the community, understand oneself as "being with and/or "being-with-others" and also realize that it is only in this framework of being that self-realization, perfection or a flourishing life is possible. Community in the African thinking is a need, in a sense that it discovers the individual, and as such, helps the individual discover themselves morally. This idea of development as harmoniously living with others, has been argued contributes other dimensions to the notion of freedom. Contrary to the dichotomy of negative and positive freedom, that is, freedom *from* and freedom *to*; the idea of *ubuntu* suggests the idea of freedom *for* and *with*-this

is freedom only realizable in being-with others, that is, shared context of relationships of harmony/friendship/love/care.

The next chapter will deal with how *ubuntu* may contribute to the ethics of ecology. It will be responding directly to the question: how ought human beings to relate to nature – as specified in DE? This chapter will show how the metaphysics that grounds *ubuntu* may give interesting account of the responsibility we have towards nature.

Chapter 3

Ubuntu and the environment

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the contribution the ethics of *ubuntu* can make to ecological concerns. Specifically, this chapter, will be answering the value question as raised by DE. Goulet informs us that "the second value question centers on the criteria to adopt towards nature" (Goulet, 1997: 1161). The fundamental concern, then, will be to theoretically unfold what the ethics of *ubuntu* can offer in this regard. Central to this chapter will be the idea that, the human community is a smaller community contained in a bigger community – nature - if this is the case, then the ethics that regulate the smaller community – human community – may give a guiding moral cue of how nature ought to be treated[v]. In other words, it will be argued that that if harmony (friendliness or care) is essential for keeping the human community together, a similar grace, ethically speaking ought to be extended to nature. The contribution that *ubuntu* can make will be discussed insofar as it can enrich concerns that arose with the emergence of Sustainable Development'.

In discussing *ubuntu* ethics as relating to ecological concerns, this essay will proceed in the following fashion. The first section will seek to rethink, challenge and re-interpret the vogue idea that *ubuntu* is anthropocentric. The idea that *ubuntu* is at best anthropocentric seems unattractive as it implies that we have no moral duty or responsibility towards nature. It seems only to promise a prudential and instrumental concern that entails that we must be nice to nature since if we destroy nature we destroy ourselves. But we seek to argue that *ubuntu* has something to offer with respect to ecological concerns and issues. Thus, here, a corrective argument will be given drawn from the metaphysics that grounds *ubuntu* – which will ground the value inherent in nature. The second section of this chapter will begin by pointing how *ubuntu* understands nature as a community, albeit a larger community, "a womb of life in which humans live, move and have their beings …" (Goulet, 1997: 1161). The third section will argue that the best way to relate to nature may be similar to that which is manifested within the human community, that is to say, the "networks of care" that keep the human community intact may be extended to nature. The fourth section will give a brief account of what Sustainable Development is, and also suggest how the ethic *ubuntu* may contribute to concerns of Sustainable Development.

Ubuntu is generally construed as an ethic that is centrally concerned about and only with human-to-human relations. This impression and understanding is largely created by the two maxims that are vogue in the talk of *ubuntu*. These maxims are respectively describable as, the *Mbitian* and *ubuntuan* maxims. The latter, embodies the vision of human excellence and flourishing as, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', in English, "a person is a person through other person'. The former, *Mbitian* maxim, "I am because we are, since we are, therefore we are". These maxims that ground the ethic of ubuntu *seem* to be concerned only with human beings and their existence in a community. It is obvious that from these maxims as they stand and commonly understood, no reference seems to be made to nature or the environment at all.

Talk of "umuntu" (person) and "we" seems to delimit the scope of ethics to human-to-human relations and by so doing implying the exclusion of all other possible relations with other organisms, entities and objects. Most African scholars define the notion of *ubuntu* as humanness, humanity and humanism. All these concepts share one thing in common, they seem to be accentuating the observation that *ubuntu* is fundamentally anthropocentric. Many scholars of *ubuntu* and African ethics have also created the (arguably wrong) impression that talk of *ubuntu* is limited to the human community. Evidence that demonstrates this observation is replete in the literature, as is evidenced in what follows. "African scholars agree that the African Weltanschauung is the interdependence of person for the exercise, development and fulfillment of their potential to be both individuals and community" (Bhengu, 1996: 12). *Ubuntu* is described as a "process and philosophy which reflects the African heritage, tradition, culture and the extended family structure customs, beliefs, value systems" (LenkaBula, 2008: 386). LenkaBula summarizes this anthropocentric tendency in this fashion, "it (*ubuntu*) has been as a concept that and lifestyle which expresses the following:

"Respect, empathy and compassion for other; 'the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of Bantu people' Marker of knowledge and truth in the concrete areas, for example, of politics, religion and law The 'experience' of treating all people with respect, granting them their human dignity…being human encompasses universal brotherhood

for Africans, sharing, treating and respecting other people as human beings" (LenkaBula, 2008: 380).

This summary lucidly evinces that some scholars have presented ubuntu in an anthropocentric fashion. For example, in the above summary LenkaBula summarizes views of three scholars of *ubuntu, namely,* Ramose, Bhengu and Makhudu. Consistently, and insistently, these African thinkers seem to assume that the notion of *ubuntu* is definable only in terms of the welfare of human beings (Ramose, 1999: 23, LenkaBula, 2008: 378). The South African government white paper also presents *ubuntu* in this anthropocentric light: "The principle of caring for each other's well-being … and a spirit of mutual support … each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means people are people through other people …" (Louw, 1999). Metz, an influential analytical philosopher who is deemed as an authority on the subject of *ubuntu* also seems to give an anthropocentric account of *ubuntu* (Metz, 2007: 337).

LenkaBula points out that "it has been common in the writings of many African scholars to limit, deny, or overlook its (*ubuntu*) rootedness in the ecological concerns and the webs of life in which humanity is embedded, and is but a part of" (LenkaBula, 2008:380). This limited view of *ubuntu* has been largely created by a tendency by many scholars to overlook the metaphysics that grounds *ubuntu*. It may not be obvious why there is such a tendency but it seems that this tendency will make these thinkers to lose out on some vital principles that may be gleaned from the metaphysics of *ubuntu*. Du Toit (2004: 30) tells us that "For Africans there are no ontological gaps between existing entities. The Western natural-supernatural dualism is foreign to them. God, humankind, extra-humans and sub-humans are all regarded as integral parts of a single totality of existence. God's actions are not experienced as extra-ordinary. African metaphysical thinking is holistic …" In the same vein Bujo (2004: internet paper) is informative when he argues that "everything in the world is intimately connected … For this reason, humans and the rest of creation have a dialectic relation. All the elements in the universe imply each other and interlock. One cannot touch one of them without causing the whole to vibrate. Humans are not only part of the cosmos, but they are also the summary of its totality, so to speak. It should be observed that the expression - *humans are not only part of the cosmos, but they are also the*

summary of its totality, so to speak - need not be understood anthropocentrically. It should be understood in a way that will be developed latter on in this discussion.

Goulet suggests that the best way to understand the relation that ought to hold towards nature is one which understands nature "as a larger womb of life in which human live, move and have their being, and whose rhythms and laws they must respect … harmony seeking" (Goulet, 1997: 1161). LenkaBula also observes the following about a more precise and complete view of *ubuntu* "human life cannot be full unless it is lived within a web of interactions of life, which include along with human beings also creation" (LenkaBula, 2008: 377). She also insists that *ubuntu* is a call "to acknowledge that one's ontology is tied to that of the earth and humanity" (LenkaBula, 2008: 384). She also argues that *ubuntu* is a call to "realize the inextricable connectedness of humanity to nature" (LenkaBula, 2008: 390). "The African is convinced that all things in the cosmos are interconnected. All natural forces depend on each other, so that human beings can live in harmony only *in* and *with* the whole nature" (Bujo, 1998: 22 - 23). "There is community with nature since man is part of nature and is expected to corporate with it, and this sense of community with nature is often expressed in terms of identity and kinship, friendliness and respect" (Opoku, 1993: 77). Thus, we begin to get a deep sense of community in this understanding of *ubuntu*: the human community emerges as a part of a larger community.

The human community as articulated by the *ubuntuan* maxim is a report about a smaller community, but this community is contained in a bigger community. In this light Shutte (2001: 29) observes that, "If the whole of humanity can be seen as an extended family, then the whole earth must be seen as the family home. Here "earth" must be taken literally, the solid earth from which all things emerge and on which they depend for life … So the earth is the eternal home". From this observation; it may be logically argued that lack of interests in the bigger community – nature - is tantamount to destroying the smaller set, the human community. But what has been said thus far is limited in two important ways: 1) It has not told us in what ways, if any at all, the bigger community has *moral status*, such that, it could deserve a particular moral regard and/or respect, 2) It has just been pointed out that the human community exists within a larger community but it has not been argued beyond mere juxtaposition of nature and human community that there is a moral relationship between these two.

Metz (2007: 333) suggests that there are two ways of thinking about how an entity or object may be a bearer of moral status or moral value. An object or subject might be of moral value "in itself" or insofar as it stands in particular kinds of "relationships". For example an individual might be a bearer of moral value because they have a soul or possess autonomy, put simply, because they possess a particular intrinsic feature that qualifies them as such. On the other hand, it might be because individuals belong to particular groups or relationships. African thinkers also seem to be of the idea that nature is good in itself, that is, it is a bearer of moral value in some sense. In other words, nature as it is worthy of some kind of moral regard. The question might be; what is the feature in virtue of which nature is a bearer of moral status? Two metaphysical ideas will be explored that seek to give an account why nature must be respected.

The answer to the above question about the moral status of nature is found in African metaphysics. The idea of vital force is regarded by many African thinkers as central in the African system of thought - though there are variations about its role and import in ethics (Mkhize, 2008: 38 - 39). But the common idea seems to be that it is a feature that is ubiquitous in all of nature. All beings animate and inanimate possess this vital force, albeit, in different quantities and also gradations in terms of hierarchy. As such, all entities in virtue of their possession of vital force are worthy of moral regard. The promotion of life is the promotion of vital force, and if vital force is ubiquitous, then that means all objects are possessors of moral value, as such, must be respected (Bujo, 2009: 82). Mkhize (2008: 38) argues "because of this shared life force, human beings are expected to live harmoniously with animals and nature". Thus the possession of life force means that everything in nature is a bearer of moral value[vi], as such, worthy of respect.

Ramose also provides a very interesting metaphysical account of concept of *ubuntu* that evinces that all creation is a bearer of moral worth because it stands in a particular all encompassing relationships. He argues that relationality undergirded by an ontological feature of motion is the basis of *ubuntu*. He argues that *ubuntu* is an embodiment of generality of motion in the prefix (*ubu*-) and the manifestation of it is made concrete and particular in the suffix (*-ntu*). "*Ubu*- speaks of wholeness and *–ntu* speaks of a whole that manifests as a particular. "*Ubu*- evokes the

idea of be-ing in general. It is the enfoldment of be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of existence of a particular existence. *Ubu-* as enfolded being is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *–ntu*. *Ubu-* and *–ntu* are not radically separate and irreconcilably opposed realities. On the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as one-ness and indivisible whole-ness" (Ramose, 2002: 230). Augmenting on this metaphysics elsewhere he argues that, "Wholeness is the regulative principle here since what is asserted is that the single individual is incomplete without the other … and also states that "the principle of wholeness applies also to the relation between human beings and physical or objective nature" (Ramose, 2009: 308). From this consideration it follows that wholeness presupposes relations between entities, as such, nature has moral value insofar as stands in particular relations. No entity may stand outside of this wholeness all are connected in one way or another. All of nature stands in need of each other. In this thinking of *ubuntu*, as suggested by Ramose, then it can be agreed that he is correct when he argues that, what at face value seems to be an anthropocentric tendency, is actually not, one needs, however, to understand the metaphysics that grounds the ethics of *ubuntu* as wholeness and motion. With this in mind, then one may re-interpret the *ubuntuan* maxim very broadly to mean, "Humaneness regards being, or the universe, as a complex wholeness involving the multi-layered and incessant interaction of *all* entities. This condition of permanent, multi-directional movement of entities is not by definition chaos. On the contrary, it is both the source and manifestation of the intrinsic order of the universe. Herein lies the ecosophical dimension of the indigenous African concept of Ubuntu" (Ramose, 2009: 309). LenkaBula (2008: 378) is also correct then to observe that *ubuntu* "explains the relationship of humanity, to themselves, as well as embeddedness of human life to the ecological life … the self can never fully be without the ecological system within which it exists … it is an expression of people's dual identity, that is, in relation to themselves as well as in relation to creation other than human beings …." Murove in the same trail of thought also observes that, "The human individual is inextricably linked to the all encompassing universe…there is an … inseparability between human existence and the natural environment (2009: 323). It is also in this light human beings are represented as a summary of the earth as whole, as such, when *ubuntu* refer only to human beings they give a summary of an ethic that is extendable to the entire planet.

From the above, a rough account of the metaphysics that seeks to explain in virtue of what is nature a bearer of moral status, as such worthy of moral regard. The idea of vital force was appealed to as the first explanation and the metaphysics of the concept of *ubuntu* was exposed. Vital force as an intrinsic feature of all objects gives them moral worth and it was also argued that, the notion of wholeness implies some form holism, the idea that relations of some sort have value or bearers of moral status. Something important has also been suggested in line with Ramose's Metaphysics of *ubuntu*; that, talk of *ubuntu* on a *prima facie* observation seems to be anthropocentric, but Ramose has argued that this observation will only prove true if the *ubuntuan* maxim will be taken without regard to the metaphysics that grounds it. It is hoped that the reader is cognizant that there are two ways that grounds the respect for the environment in the above quotations. In this chapter, I wish to limit myself to one aspect – that of vital force. I wish to do so for one simple reason. It seems that the idea of vital force is the very idea that explains why the idea of interdependence or oneness of all things is even possible; if this is true, then it means that the idea of vital force is basic

The idea seems to be that we need to offer an ethical principle that will ground our regard to nature. What argument could be proffered to bolster the idea that we have duty towards nature? We have already made a distinction between the two communities: the smaller and the bigger community. Chapter 1 has given us an ethical principle that regulates human-to-human relations. Then the key questions, then, is, how ought we to relate to nature, the bigger community? Behrens (2010) suggests that "the key to understanding how nature is valued morally lies in understanding how humans are valued morally". The idea suggested here is that the human community might give us cues as to how the relation must be between entities in the cosmos. The strategy is simple understanding how human beings relate to each other ethically might tell us how we ought to relate to the bigger community. Behrens makes an arguments that proceeds like this: if Bujo (2009: 282) is correct that "The African understanding of nature … regards the human person as a microcosm within a macrocosm", and the good of the microcosm is maintained by harmonious relationships - which are characterized as nurturing, caring, friendliness or love - it then follows that the good of the bigger community will be maintained also by friendly relations to nature (Behrens, 2010).

The idea that seems to be emerging is that we have to creatively extrapolate the idea of harmony to the entire planet, specifically, nature. This suggestion is not new; it is common for African scholars to characterize relations to nature in terms of harmony and balance. "Within creation all creatures depend upon one another to ensure the harmony of the whole … All life is relational. This is why Africans consider reconciliation with the cosmos indispensible for physical and psychological harmony to be restored … nature participates in our social interactions, they play the role … as … partners in need of empathetic" concern, which establishes a claim upon our faithful consideration of their demands" (Bujo, 2009: 287; 290 & 294). "Accordingly, caring for one another is the fulfillment of the natural duty to care for physical nature too. The concept of harmony in the African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of balance in terms of totality of the relations that can be maintained between and among human beings, as well between human beings and physical nature" (Ramose, 2009: 309).

This idea seems to be embedded on the vital force thesis which suggests that if we behave harmoniously we increase vital force, as such, are promoting life in totality. As such from the above, the principle of harmony entails an obligation that we need to relate to nature in a friendly way, treat it as our home, rather than something to be degraded and to be exploited. To the extent that nature shares or partakes in vital force, we ought to *respect* it. The fundamental logic of the *respect* emerging from this ethical consideration is not that we respect because it is useful for human beings - though this may be may be the case, but rather, because *ubuntu* grounds this respect on something about nature itself- vital force. To the extent that nature in its totality is an embodiment of this reality (vital force), then it follows that, we have a duty to live harmoniously as that increases the life-worth and vital force of all.

Ubuntu and Sustainable Development

What is Sustainable Development? The question is straightforward but the answered is not as straightforward, as the question is. Scholars of sustainable development are in unison about the fact that sustainable development is an essentially contested notion. So much that it is not surprising when remarks like this are replete: "First, the variety of definitions of sustainable

development … has raised concerns about definitional ambiguity or vagueness. In response, it has been argued that this vagueness may constitute a form of constructive ambiguity that allows different interests to engage in the debate, and the concept to be further refined through implementation … The concept of sustainable development is not unique in this respect, since its conceptual vagueness bears similarities to other norm-based meta-objectives such as 'democracy,' 'freedom,' and 'justice' (Hopwood et al, 2007: 43). It has also been observed that this concept is: "laden with so many definitions that it risks plunging into meaninglessness, at best, and becoming a catchphrase for demagogy, at worst. [It] is used to justify and legitimate a myriad of policies and practices ranging from communal agrarian utopianism to large scale capital-intensive market development" (Hopwood et al, 2005: 40).

In relation to the notion of Sustainable Development, two considerations must also be added. Sustainable Development seems to an ethical concept: insofar as it seeks to communicate how we ought to relate to the world to achieve a certain desirable state of affairs that is evaluated to be better than some other state of affairs. It has also been noted that this concept is anthropocentric. In other words, in its search for justice and wellbeing, this is done for the instrumentality and service of man as the centre and the main beneficiary. For example, it is stated that "This defines needs from a human standpoint … 'Sustainable Development is an unashamedly anthropocentric concept' (Hopwood et al, 2005: 39). This is to suggest that the environment, for example, will not be considered for its own sake but for its instrumentality to the welfare of humanity. These observations no matter how true are not an indication that one is to give up, or one may not have a meaningful talk about Sustainable Development. This need not be the case. This is a challenge for responsible contextualization and definition of the concept so as to avoid confusions and ambiguities.

For the purposes of this research, the definitions as suggested by the Brundtland (Sneddon et al, 2006: 254) would suffice to investigate the contribution that *ubuntu* could make to talks of development. In this light Sustainable Development "is defined development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the abilities of future generations to meet their own needs" (Pawlowski, 2008: 82). (Pawlowski, 2008: 82) observes that two factors emerge from this definition

• that it refers to the existence of a future for humankind at all,
• that it refers to the conditions prevailing in the future (and thereby to the quality of life).

Thus, the fundamental concern is over well-being and how this generation's well-being must not threaten the security of the next generation's well-being. The challenge, then is, if "Brundtland signals the emergence of the environment as a critically important facet", and "development at every scale, that ecological, economic and equity questions are deeply interconnected" (Sneddon et al, 2006: 254), how do we structure an ethic that recognizes this interconnection? It was also a call to embrace "Our Common Future focused on the critical issues of equity and environment and raised important ethical considerations regarding human-environment relationships … that remain highly relevant" (Sneddon et al, 2006: 254). It was also a call to ensure and responsibly safeguard "the security, wellbeing, and very survival of the planet" (Sneddon et al, 2006: 254). With the above we may begin to enquire: what normative principles may interweave and connect all these facets together by a fine thread of defensible moral maxim so as to properly ground our responsibility to nature?

It is in this light that *ubuntu* as an ethic is considered relevant. The three dimensions as proposed and expounded by SD, that is, the social, environmental and economic, must be first and foremost be seen as intertwined - except only for analytical and pedagogical reasons may be considered distinct - but also, must be seen as pervasively infused and has as a foundation an ethic that promotes harmony/community. This is the case because we engage in economic activities in the environment and we also have our societies and institutions in the same environmental space. The idea of harmony as offered by *ubuntu* seems to promise us a lot in terms of capturing this unity and the potential this unity might yield for concerns regarding "Our Common Future".

Ubuntu as a contributor to the idea of the "Our Common Future" seems to have interesting implications for Sustainable Development. The idea of vital force that is to be promoted by living harmoniously begins to shake the foundations of the anthropocentricity of Sustainable Development. This *shaking* is important as it opens a very interesting ecological route for "Our

Common Future". The idea "Our" in the expression –"Our Common Future" – is extended to the entire environment and relations that take place in the environment. The concern and reference ceases to be limited only to human beings but embraces all of creation or nature. Why this? The answer is simple: *ubuntu* is a reminder that we must live together because we share *something* in common, and that when it is promoted and protected the well-being of all will be maximized. This, which *we* share, is vital force which is an ubiquitous feature of all things. Purging Sustainable Development of all its anthropocentric tendencies has interesting results, at least, ethically. It grounds our concerns about the common future outside of the limit and benefits to human beings. It argues that as much as we have a moral duty to human beings, the same, we also need to extend to nature. If the why questions is asked; the answer will simply be, nature is worthy of moral regard since it has a feature that qualifies it as such, that is, vital force. Nature also has a future as much as human beings have a future. "Our Common future" is a judicious realization that there is a lot more at stake; the future at risk is bigger than that of human beings only. In this light, *ubuntu* is a resolute rejection of the cosmetic goody-goody approach to nature because it will be good for us; the moral responsibility enjoined by *ubuntu* is deeper and more demanding than that.

Conclusion

This chapter began by dismantling the idea that the ethic of *ubuntu* is anthropocentric, and suggested that the best way to understand the human focus of *ubuntu* is by reading focus on human beings as a summary of the entire cosmos. The metaphysics of *ubuntu* was appealed to insofar as it could explain in virtue of what is nature a bearer of moral status, as such, as worthy of moral regard. The idea of vital force was demonstrated to have the potency to both explain the basis of the interdependence thesis and also serve as feature in virtue of which all things in nature are bearers of moral status. This idea was applied to concerns of Sustainable Development, insofar as this may broaden the scope of the idea of "Our Common future" as developed in Brendtland, to include not only human beings but the entire planet, and our concern and responsibility towards nature was articulated in a way that grounds it in the value that nature deserves in and of itself, rather than, instrumentally. *Ubuntu* was argued is a call to treat nature in ways that promote harmony in all forms of life. Thus the primacy of the ethical consideration, of

harmony/community/friendship must guide our relations in the economy to preserve human dignity rather pursuit of competition and the profit motif; must direct our society such that it becomes a network.

The next chapter will focus on socio-political issues. This chapter will be answering the question of: what are the foundations of a just society? This chapter will present a normative conception of a community, that is, what are the features of a community? Or, what should count as a good community according to *ubuntu*? This chapter will give a preliminary account of the socio-political vision promised by *ubuntu.*

Chapter 4

Socio-Political vision of *ubuntu*: Harmony as a basis for construing the Society and Politics

This chapter aims to give a preliminary discussion aimed at unveiling the riches that *ubuntu* may contribute to socio-political concerns. This exploratory discussion will be structured around the last value question as provided by DE: "What are the foundations of a just society?" This exploratory discussion as promised here will be divided into three parts. The first part will give a vision that the ethic of *ubuntu* may offer with respect to what is to count as a good society or community – normative account of a community (the concept of community and society would be interchangeably in this chapter). The second part will focus specifically on issues related to how a society ought to be ruled, specifically, what form of government ought to characterize an *ubuntu* based society and what normative virtue ought to regulate the operation of such a sovciety. Consensus democracy as a form of government and consensus is an ethical value that ought to regulate this government will be suggested in this part of the chapter. The last part will examine the strength of the account *ubuntu* that would have been proffered against what tentative theoretical cues it may give with regards to concerns surrounding justice. How can the socio-political theory of *ubuntu*, as would have been articulated here, respond to concerns of justice?

Ubuntu and community

The notion of community has featured abundantly in this research. The aim in this section is to investigate, deriving from *ubuntu*: what would emerge as a normative account of a community? Put simply, the enquiry is into the nature of a good society or what ought to constitute a good community. Without being redundant, the reader may be reminded that the community has been described as the "cornerstone", "foundation", or, "an outstanding feature" of the African societies. These metaphors whatever picture/s they may invite in our minds are philosophically unavailing. These metaphorical expressions and the idea of community seem to be plagued by ethical relativism or an implicit normative principle that remains un-articulated.

Many thinkers, for example (Menkiti: 2004: 324 - 327) asserts how the community is important for the perfecting of an individual's character. But assumes, but never, specifies in virtue of what is this community itself good; such that that it has the moral qualification and capacities to even assume such a central role and position. The talk of the community as is common in African ethics as instrumental to bringing about the achievement of "self-realization"; "ingathering of excellences" or "moral arrival" seems to imply that there is something normatively interesting about such a community. If there is nothing, normatively speaking, interesting about this usage of the notion of the community; then this talk of community strikes one as mere romantic project. It is problematic to assume that the notion of community as it stands against individualism is necessarily good. In fact, there are kinds of communities that are obviously normatively speaking, questionable and unattractive. It is easy to think of a community of gangsters or community of serial killers – and these do not recommend themselves as morally praiseworthy. The bare fact that African ethics is reported to be communitarian or community - based does not render the community of necessity good, this is rather, a descriptive claim that needs elaboration.

The normative question still stands; the challenge still stands: how does one tell the difference between morally appealing community from those that are not? To criticize Western societies as liberal and individualistic, and contrast these against African communitarian societies, is merely to state banalities; and one has not moved an inch or contributed an iota of recommendation on the part of justifying and qualifying the normative status of a community. In this talk of community, the aim is to advocate and defend a conception of a good community, one that is, generally speaking, intuitively attractive and also less relativistic. The notion of a community may be described in terms of "essentially-shared" relations, as opposed, to "contingently-shared" relations. Talk of *shared relations* is intended to shed light upon and about the conceptions of self and how their identities are formed. A ""contingently-shared" relation is a relationship between two or more antecedently defined selves which, however much it may affect their attitudes and behaviors, does not penetrate the identity of the separate selves to the point that the identity of each becomes partially or wholly constituted by the relation itself. An essentially shared penetrates this deeply, when two selves essentially share a relation, the identity of each self is partially or wholly constituted by the relation" (Neal et al 1990: 425). The *Ubuntuan*

conception of the self corresponds with the "essentially shared" conception of the self, both descriptively and normatively. It is the normative account of "essentially - shared" relations that will be elaborated upon in this chapter.

African thinkers and *ubuntu* scholars agree that the notion of community is the hallmark of African ethics and politics (Mbiti, 1970: 141; Shutte, 2002: 13; Menkiti, 2004: 324). The fundamental idea seems to suggest that "the only way to develop moral personhood, to become a virtuous agent or to lead a genuinely human life, is to interact with others in a certain way … from a resolutely Africa perspective … morality … arises only from relationships" (Metz, 2009: 340). Menkiti opines on the same vein that "in the stated journey of the individual toward personhood, let it therefore be noted that the community plays a vital role both as catalyst and prescriber of norms. The idea is that in order to transform what was initially biologically given into full personhood, the community, has to step in, since the individual … cannot carry through the transformation unassisted" (Menkiti, 2004: 327). Menkiti is arguing that moral personhoood requires that the individual recognize that their inextricably bound in and with the community in a process of making them "moral beings or norm bearers" (Menkiti: 2004: 327). The notion of harmony is the gateway to understanding both African ethics and the idea of a community, and it is to this notion that attention will be devoted going forward – in our attempt to elaborate on the normative account of a community.

The community in African thinking is generally construed in terms of friendship (Lutz, 2010: 337; & 2010: 83 & 84), family (Metz, 2007: 337) and "love" (Metz, 2007: 337) as models. Central to these evaluative notions is the idea of "harmony" as the chief good. Metz's (2007: 334 - 338) elaboration will prove helpful in our attempt to give a normative account of a good community. Metz argues that the notion of community may be defined in terms of two concepts, which are, "shared-identity" and "goodwill"/solidarity (these two notions will be used interchangeably). The combination of these two concepts constitutes a community, one that is taken to be morally attractive in this project.

To have a better grasp of what the harmony based conception of community is, we will have to philosophically elaborate on the notions of "shared-identity" and "solidarity". We will begin our

elaboration with the notion of "shared-identity". Metz (2007: 334 - 335) argues that the notion of "shared-identity" is constituted by four elements. The first element is that of "WE": The idea here is that a person refers and understands themselves as part of a group; their self identity is always with reference, not to the "I", but the plurality of individuals to which he is joined with. The "I" is not understood as separate to the relationships of which it is part. Secondly, not only is the individual referring to themselves in terms of "We" to express their identity, this group to which he appeals for his/her identity also recognizes the individual as part of the "We". The two elements together suggest that the recognition and identification of the individual and that of the group must be a symmetrical recognition. The third element is that of having common ends or shared-goals. The fourth element is that of pulling or working together in pursuit of or execution of operations to achieve these shared ends or common goals.

These are four elements that constitute "shared-identity". The literature on African ethics and *ubuntu* seem to agree with this presentation of "shared-identity" as described by Metz. For example, Chichane (2008: 39) states that "'to be' is to belong, an individual exists because of others. Therefore the idea of community occupies a centre stage in the understanding of the person. In the *ubuntu* ethics, "the very notion of person's identity is defined in terms of the relationship to the community". Bujo (2001: 88) states that "one becomes a person only in relationship with others"… The same author argues that "that it is not only membership that constitutes identity: (but also) … common action … (Bujo, 2001: 88). Shutte (2001: 27) observes that "each member sees the community … as one with them in identity". From the above, the four aspects that Metz refers to as constitutive elements of "shared-identity" have been identified, that is, belonging in the "we"; and the reciprocal recognition of this involvement in the "we" by both the individual and the group; the notion of common ends and actions which implies shared goals and coordination of efforts to achieve such commonly conceived and shared ends.

The second constitutive element of a community to be combined with that of "shared-identity" is that of "solidarity"/ "good-will". Metz (2007: 337) describes this aspect to refer to "certain kinds of caring or supportive relationships … One has a relationship of good-will insofar as one: wishes another person well … believes another person is worthy of help … aims to help another

person, acts so as to help another person; … acts for others sake … and, finally, feels good … about benefitting the other and bad upon learning she has harmed". The idea of supportive or caring relationships features very frequently in *ubuntu* ethics and African moral discourse. This notion is generally expressed in terms of solidarity. This is the case, because, the idea of solidarity emerges from the idea that the community is sometimes construed using models or analogies of the family and friendship, as already pointed out (Metz, 2010: 84). It also argued that "family relationships are characterized of a wholesome kind in a sense that nurturing and caring for the other members of the family. As such, we have the sense of solidarity or good-will when people act friendly, caring, mutually supportive and nurturing relationships" (Behrens, 2010). Wiredu (2008: 333) also argues for this kind of understanding, in which he discusses the notion of community in similar kind of fashion as suggested by Metz: kinship relations and emotional bonding. Kinship relations refer to membership in the community or what Metz calls "shared-identity". Emotional bonding is expressed in the following fashion by Wiredu (2008: 333), "feeling and sentiment people are brought up to develop a sense of bonding with large groups … This evolving sense of bonding is a learning process in which the individual comes more and more to see herself as the centre of obligations and rights".

From this understanding a sense is established that the "shared-identity" aspect refers to the psycho-socio-structural implications of the community and the emotional bonding or good-will, refers to a sense of emotional and moral commitment involved in ensuring the well-being and welfare of others. LenkaBula (2008: 382) argues that solidarity "necessitates a community of feelings, interests, and purpose that arise from a shared sense of responsibilities, it leads to action and social cohesion … it moves away from the false notion of disinterested and altruism and beneath and demands a love of the neighbor that is intrinsic to the love of self". Mkhize also captures the solidarity aspect of community when he argues that "the ethics of *ubuntu* … cannot look on the suffering of another and remain unaffected" (Mkhize, 2008: 43).

Metz (2007: 337) argues that bringing together these two notions, that of, "shared identity" and "solidarity"/"good-will", "gives the most attractive sort of harmonious relationships". Indeed, this gives, I argue, a more attractive and less rough account of what constitute a good community, a kind of community that is characterized by a social structure that is pervasive with

the ethos of "we"- a strong sense of belonging together. Belonging together, not cosmetically, but very deeply; in a sense that one recognizes the fact that s/he shares the same human nature with the other, they share the same immediate social space, they share a will to survive, to be preserved and to flourish. There is also the recognition of self insufficiency; the idea of dependency or interdependency, which is accompanied by feelings of mutual support and altruism. Metz observes, correctly, in another instance that "Sub-Saharan Africans think of society should be akin to that of the family" (Metz, 2009: 342). This conception of community then may be summarized in the words of Chichane (2008: 167) when she argues that African community is best definable as characterized by corporative existence and mutual support. The view of community articulated here seems to resonate with Tutu's (1999: 35) observation that "Harmony, friendliness, community, are the greatest goods".

Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* - the greatest good". Biko (2002: 46) seems to be holding such a view of community when he opines that, "we regard our living together … as a deliberate act of God to make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life. Hence … our action is usually joint community oriented …" From the above it seems clear that community is understood as communion of people living together, in a particular shared space and shared identity; and also characterized by feelings of bonding and commitment to one another; these feelings embody an attitude of obligations and rights that must be dispensed reciprocally in the community.

As such, the community may be understood as "network of caring, loving and friendly" relationships. On the face of it, this conception of community seems to be very attractive. We understand that relationships being envisaged here are living and actual relationships. In this thinking the community is understood as a natural, rather than scientific and/or artificial, they conceived as organic. Thus Shutte (2009: 93) quotes Senghor who argues that "'a community based society, (is) communal not collectivist. We are concerned here not with a mere collection of individuals but with people conspiring together, *con-spiring* in the basic Latin sense (Literally "breathing together", united together even to the centre of their being". This idea, as captured in the quotation, vividly evinces the natural and intimate kinds of relations expected in this

community. The idea of breathing together seems to suggest that life is shared and experienced in this togetherness.

This vision of community seems rather idealistic and very far removed from reality. However, from extensive engagement with *ubuntu* literature it seems to be kind of society that is envisaged. This vision is reported to have been thought possible even by ancient philosopher like Plato, "the first, and greatest was Plato, who have maintained that the project is not impossible; all that is needed is a salutary revision of Education and institutional arrangements, whereupon paternal, maternal, filial, fraternal, and sororal affection will become the cement binding together a completely unified and, therefore happy social order in which everyone cares for everyone else" (Matson, 2002: 293).

This second part of this chapter is a search for conceptually justified political thoughts that emerge from the idea of *ubuntu*. African thinkers unanimously, but differently, have argued that the concept of harmony: manifesting in a form of consensus offers a just polity; described as a consensual political system. It has been maintained that this system ought to be considered democratic as it manifests features that are generally characteristic of what democracy is. In this chapter, consensual democracy will be advocated by way of synthesizing suggestion made by Wiredu (1996: 192 - 198) and Wingo (2004: 451 - 457) to offer a more coherent form of consensual democracy. In going about this task, we will begin by discussing concerns surrounding the notion of democracy; and in the same breath we will justify a call made by African thinkers that traditional or indigenous insights might offer something to talks of democracy. This chapter will proceed by outlining Wiredu's (1996: 192 - 198) vision of democracy and that of Wingo (2004: 454) and after that articulate the synthetic vision of the two accounts of democracy. This part will consider how this account of politics may construe the notion of justice.

It is important that it be noted that democracy is an essentially contested concept. A concept is essentially contested when it can take a variety of meanings and function within different models (Whitehead, 2003: 14). As Gray (1977: 332) observes, "an essentially contested concept is a concept such that any use of it in a social or political context presupposes a specific

understandings of a whole range of other contextually related concepts whose proper uses are no less disputed and which lock together so as to compose a single, identifiable conceptual framework". George Orwell is also quoted to have noted that "a word like democracy not only (has) no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defender of every kind of regime claims that it is democracy and fears that they might to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning" (Wingo, 2004: 451). The observation that emerges from the above should not be construed to mean that talk of or about democracy may not be meaningful, but rather, one has to be clear about how they use the notion and also justify the understandings that underlie that specific vision of democracy. In this light Kurki (2010: 362) argues that to move away from a "conceptually impoverished appreciation of the multiple meanings that the idea of democracy" is currently suffering … a need exists that… "a two-fold (approach is assumed): 'pluralization' and 'contextualization' of the conceptions of democracy".

This means that those societies must be open to the fact that there are many ways of being democratic. In this light Teffo (2004: 445) quotes a minister of Governance and Cooperation of Norway arguing that

We must not forget that democracy must grow from the local roots; it cannot be imported, sold or paid for. It cannot be imposed from outside. The people of each nation must take their own fate into their own hands and shape the form of government most suited to their national aspirations. Consequently, we must avoid imposing the pre-defined models of democracy on African countries

It is in this light and context that it is suggested that a call for scrutinizing the notion of democracy and the practice thereof, from an Africa perspective seems urgent and necessary. In line with this suggestion Ramose (2009: 413) argues that, "we must move away from the process of moving away from the traditional society …" Gyekye (1992: 241) also opines that may be "viable political structures can … be forged in the furnace of the African's own furnace of political rule". One must however have the correct understanding of what the African thinkers

have in mind when they talk of returning to traditional African political systems. This does not mean that the African indigenous society was perfect and we must just pack and return to that experience. What is meant however is that "returning to the tradition means the tradition must function as a source from which to extract elements that will help in the construction of an authentic and emancipative epistemological paradigm relevant to the conditions in Africa at this historical moment" (Ramose, 2009: 414). Bujo (2009: 399) argues that in our appreciation and extracting from the African systems the "question is how traditional African political models might be made compatible with the modern state". Thus the suggestion by African political thinkers is not the romantic and cosmetic appreciation of African traditional systems but rather a critical scrutiny of vital socio-cultural and ethical elements that are so *fundamental*, such that, they may never be jettisoned without leaving out important aspects of African heritage that might carry the continent forward out its political morass. The notion of *fundamental* is used very strongly, analogously, with the way the notion of an atom is fundamental for the physicist. This is the idea because there are values that are contingent and may change over time, but other values "are immutably good" (Wiredu, 2008: 336) - consensus as an expression of "harmony" and/or solidarity, is considered fundamental in this sense.

Wiredu (1996: 192) in his exposition of his political vision (1996: 182) begins by noting that "decision-making in the traditional African life and government was, as a rule, by consensus". This rule, he further notes, was a reflection of an African people's "approach … to … social interaction", and was taken to be "axiomatic" (Wiredu, 1996: 182). This approach seems to have been a *natural* choice largely because of the regions communitarian proclivities, which placed much emphasis upon cooperative existence and mutual support. A community characterized by an identity which is based and perpetuated by common ends is most likely to commit consensus as a system of rule. In this light, Wiredu (1996: 183) defines consensus in terms of reconciliation, and defines the latter as "Restoration of goodwill, through a reappraisal of the importance and significance and significance of the initial bones of contention". He adds that this also involves ensuring "that adequate account has been taken of their (temporary minorities) points of view in any proposed scheme of future action and coexistence" (Wiredu, 1996: 183-184). He continues to elaborate that "Consensus … presupposes an original diversity … Sometimes … it produces compromises … and other times … a willing suspension of

disagreement, making possible agreed actions without agreed notions … And must be valued because ... it has a virtue of not "alienating anyone" in its process and principles. This virtue of African systems of the consensual type were not such as to place any one group of persons consistently in the position of a minority" (Wiredu, 1996: 183, 184 & 187).

"Consensus stipulates substantive normative requirements that apply both to the practices of discourses through which a common view is constituted and the content of that view. Consensus, that is to say, requires placing moral agents in a practice informed by a common sense of what their problems are, and a practice that transforms the consciousness of moral agents from particularistic self-concern into a sense of what they share in common" (Jennings, 1991: 460). In this sense consensus refers to a justified principle that espouses a process through which a common view is constructed – note, *not discovered* - this process is not only moral and political but goes to even affect the psychological make-up of participants to a point that moral agents, move from common position of desiring a common end, as such move from their multiplicity of desires that are often opposed and diverse but arrive in a position, not just procedurally, but also psychologically come to realize "what they share in common. It is in this light that I think Wiredu's (1996: 185) seemingly controversial statement – "human beings have the ability to eventually cut through their differences to the rock bottom of their interests" - may be understood.

This observation is not to negate the obvious observation that "competing and divergent interests are characteristic of human nature …" (Matolino, 2009: 40). But the problem with many critiques of Wiredu in this regard, is that they begin from a metaphysics that characterize human beings as essentially desiring differently. This is largely the case because there is a failure to ground this metaphysics in a particular social structure that grounds the identity of an individual as always related and implicated with that of the other (*ubuntu*). From this they define the consensual procedure abstractly without reference to the socio-ontological framework that made consensus as a procedure to be chosen as a political procedure in the first place. The best the way to interpret Wiredu is by understanding him to be meaning that consensus helps moral agents to "develop a common sense of what their shared problems are; members of a community also develop a sense of what it is they have in common. In doing this their identity as moral agents

can be transformed; they can experience their own moral agency more in terms of those aspects of experience that unite them to other agents and fellow participants and less in terms of those experiences that separate them" (Jennings, 1991: 461).

What made this system democratic is that the government, from the smallest social units of the traditional society, to the highest sphere, the king/chief, operated on the basis of consensus (Gyekye, 1992: 240 - 250). Representation was both formal and substantive: not only were people structurally represented but they were represented in the actual substantive issues that affected their welfare. Even the minorities had a right to be heard and their influence, ideally, was to bear on the decision. It is a "government by consent, and subject to the control, of the people as expressed through their representative. It was consensual because, as a rule, that consent was negotiated on the principle of consensus" (Wiredu, 1996: 187 & Gyekye, 1992: 240 - 256). "The dedication to consensus seems to have been rooted in the form epistemological belief that knowledge is ultimately dialogical or social and in the ethical belief in the collective in the collective responsibility of all for the responsibility of all for the welfare of the community" (Wamala, 2004: 437). "African social organization is undergirded by the principle of solidarity. It is characterized by the humane people centeredness" (Teffo, 2004: 445). Power in this system is conceived differently, Wiredu (1996: 187) argues that "for all concerned, the system was set up for participation in power, not its appropriation … underlying philosophy was one of cooperation and not confrontation". And Wiredu (1996: 189) in the light of the above calls for:

> Consider a non-party of alternative. Imagine a dispensation under which governments are not formed by parties but by consensus of the elected representatives. Government, in other words, becomes a kind of coalition. A coalition not, as in the common acceptation, of parties, but of citizens…But in councils of state, affiliation with any such association does not necessarily determine the chances of a selection of a position of selection. First, political associations will be avenues of channeling all desirable pluralisms, but they are without the Hobbesian proclivities of political parties…And Second, without the constraints of membership in parties relentlessly dedicated to wrestling power or retaining it, representatives will be more likely to be actuated by the objective merits of given proposals than by ulterior considerations. In such environment a willingness to compromise, and with it the prospects of consensus will be enhanced

What Wiredu does not do, which would have been philosophically interesting was the justification of the moral authority of consensus, and what constitutes it, philosophically

speaking. It is one thing to observe, descriptively, that the system was consensual and another thing to show the normative justifiability of consensus. To the extent that he rejects multi-party system it seems he has the responsibility to justify the alternative.

Wingo (2004: 450) begins by also acknowledging the necessity and relevance of consensus as a way to negotiate an African democracy. Wingo, however, unlike many African scholars does not shy away from the liberal democracy, as does Wiredu, he actually advocates a liberal politics which is grounded on the African value of consensus and what he calls fellowship associations. Fellowship associations are defined as "people freely associating and communicating with one another forming and reforming groups of all sorts, not for the sake of any particular formation … but for the sake of sociability itself. For we are by nature social before we are political or economic, beings" (2004: 453). These associations are reported to (Wingo, 2004: 456 - 457) "live outside the state's coercive apparatus"… We are also told that "a sense of cohesion and cooperation is a prime feature of the organizations in question" … And "these should be valued as paedeia to build civic virtue, encourage cooperation and foster trust as well as promote political participation." Wingo (2004: 454) cites Appiah saying that "if the state is ever to reverse recent history and expand the role it plays to the lives of its subjects, it will have to learn something about the surprising persistence of these "pre-modern" affiliations (what I call fellowships associations), the cultural and political network identity is conferred". Then Wingo (2004: 457 - 458) makes an important suggestion relative to the above quote by Appiah: "Legitimate … democracy is to decentralize as many state functions as possible and reinsert them at the local level … since this will promote … responsibility, reciprocity and accountability". Wiredu (2008: 338) political vision seems to be plagued by one fundamental limitation. The system he suggests was historically possible because it was supported by kinship relationships; which in the post – colonial Africa are no longer because of colonization and urbanization. The society has taken a different shape and structure all together, the advantage of kinship relations that fostered the kind of consensus is no longer available.

But the kind of fellowship associations as suggested by Wingo seems, on the *prima facie* basis, to be sufficient to carry the day and salvage Wiredu's limitations. These associations seem to be possible in the modern and urban Africa. These fellowship associations seems to be what could

ground the rule by "the people" and people would be able to do decisions about issues that affect within these associations, and issues beyond their ken may be referred to the central state. If Lincoln is correct to define democracy as 'the rule of the people, by the people, for the people'; this picture of democracy as characterized by consensus and fellowships associations seems to be very democratic. There is still a need for further research to consider whether political parties are necessary or not and how these fellowships associations may work, and what would constitute a legitimate fellowship association in terms of political life and functioning, and how these will actually manage and run function delegated to it by the state. But the above picture is sufficient to show how if the state becomes minimal and the people through these fellowships associations functioning through consensus, may be a best way to construct and carry out popular will of the people, allow for political responsibility, participation, accountability and transparency.

How ought *ubuntu* to account for social (distributive) justice?

The aim here is to give a rough picture of what proclivities concerning justice may emerge in the light of the discussion above. And a simple definition of justice will be employed just to give preliminary understandings of how *ubuntu* may deal with matters arising out of theoretical concerns related to justice. Pojman (2002: 250) observes that justice is a social concern that arises "in situations of scarcity when we seek to adjudicate between competing needs". Thus we will limit ourselves to justice as concerned with scarcity. The central questions then becomes, how ought *ubuntu* which values "harmony" deal with the challenge of distribution in a context of limited goods or scarcity. The concern for *ubuntu* as a socio-political vision will be to frame this question of justice in this fashion: "how to manage scarcity in a way which promotes harmony and minimizes discord? Two responses seem to be possible to answer this question. But before we deal with these answers, Hume's understanding of justice will be proffered as it is considered illuminating, and will provide a proper platform to understand and to advance an *ubuntuan* response to justice concerns.

Hume identifies two conditions under which justice may not be a concern, at all. The first concern, relates to a context in which there is super-abundance of goods, analogous, to the abundance of oxygen. This is a situation in which nature is bountifully liberal in all its

provisions. In this situation Hume (2002: 252) observes that "it seems evident … in such a happy state, every other social virtue would flourish, and receive tenfold increase; but the cautious, jealous virtue of justice, would never once have been dreamed". The second condition he gives is of a situation in which the "mind is enlarged" … and the heart is … so replete with friendship and generosity, that every man has the utmost tenderness for every man, and feels no more concern for his own interests than that of his fellows. It seems … the use of justice would, in this case be suspended by such extensive benevolence" (Hume, 2002: 253). It can be concluded from Hume that justice is a social virtue that arises because of the limited supplies of the goods of nature and also because of the condition human nature, which is, selfish. *Ubuntuan* scholars have generally a construed justice in terms of what might called "networks of care". The idea that the community is structured so as to cater for the needs of its people: friendship or family model to justice."The Fundamental social belief of the African ideal of justice is rooted in the mode of corporative existence and mutual responsibility ... The social thrust of an ethic of corporative existence implies a conception of justice as rooted within a model of common solidarity within members shaped by common vision and purpose of life" (Chichane, 2008: 167). Chichane goes on to identify that in the thinking of Mbiti the notion of needs is important in the understanding of justice. She argues that an idea of justice rooted on needs, as opposed to merit, "extends to compassion, hospitality, generosity, and empathy" (Chichane, 2008: 169). Then in the same breath she gives a *formal* (as opposed to material) definition of justice: "*justice is all that promotes life and adequate human relationships; and injustice is the opposite, all that dehumanizes or reduces social existence"* (Chichane, 2008: 169). Simply put, a community is a network of relationships that are characterized by pervasive acts and feelings of altruisms.

Justice as addressed by "networks of care" seems to function to diffuse the impact of scarcity. Mosolo describes this kind of justice lucidly in the following manner: *ubuntu* "calls for mutual and reciprocal responsibility from everyone … Everyone is called upon to make a difference by the contributing to the creation of the humane conditions which, at least, conduce to the reduction of unhappiness and suffering" (Mosolo, 2004: 495). He also argues that "individuals will have a chance of realizing their interests, conceived as being intrinsically bound up with the interests of others in the community (Mosolo, 2004: 494). The distributive principle that regulates the control and access to resources in this principle is described as "the economy of

affection". And this principle of "the economy of affection" is explained in the following manner, "while liberalism focuses on such things as the enactment of laws that protect the rights and freedoms of individuals and institutions and to promote and protect the rights of the individual to justly pursue their interests, communitarianism builds on empathy and other such altruistic feelings" (Mosolo, 2004: 494). As such the idea of justice and its regulative distributive principle rooted on "affection" by a "networks of care" that diffuse the impact of scarcity or 'conduce to the reduction of unhappiness and suffering' seems to be the common understanding of justice. This view of justice however appealing seems to be limited, as it does not tells us what would happen if scarcity would be so severe to an extent that the networks of care will be inadequate to diffuse the impact of scarcity. The concern here is how to deal with the natural inequality that will emerge because of the fact of scarcity.

To deal with this challenge two formal principles are stipulated, and these are considered to be congruent with *ubuntu*, if not derivable from *ubuntu*: 1) Responses to scarcity must not leave the worst off outside of the community 2) To the extent that there will be inequalities - inequalities must be endorsed by all. The first response to concerns of justice seems not to necessarily involve the state in dealing with concerns of justice. The idea of a community as advocated here in terms of *shared-identity* and *good-will* seems to ground what has been described as "networks of care" or "the economy of affection". The formal principles articulated in 1 and 2 however, seem to require a government or form of political organization. A kind of state as argued for by Wiredu (1996: 182 - 193), which is, consensual by nature. Through a consensual process or procedure, which is socially embedded, and structured to maximize decisional representation of all affected by scarcity, will lead to the development of the above two principles. Consensus in this thinking is considered as valuable for justifying the functioning of the state and for conceiving of what constitutes a just state. This state will function to promote "harmony" by ensuring that its results always reflect a society that is characterized by 1 and 2, than not. If consensus is the work as described in this paper as in which there will be no losers and winners, and there work of many hands, minds and voices; it seems to follow that all affected by scarcity will understand the nature of the limits that exists in the in the availability of resources, and will buy into the consensus decision. As such, even the worst off will endorse even the inequalities and will not feel like outsiders, because the decision will be made in a way that promotes

harmony. The idea is not that they are endorsing the inequality itself, but rather, the processes, decisions and the kind of society which deals with inequalities and scarcity without alienating anyone, seems to be more just than one that does not.

From the above the argument is made that an inequality that is justly construed and distributed, though there may the worst off, they will be better than in a society in which they were not part of the process of consensus on endorsing and understanding why some are worse and measures to diffuse the kind by promoting the community more and more. A lot of work still needs to be done in this regard, but as stands, this idea seems to promise a rich account of justice.

Conclusion

This chapter gave a preliminary account of the socio-political vision of *ubuntu*; on how this politics may address the question of: "what are the foundations of a just society?" This gave a vision of a harmony based society as conceived by *ubuntu* as one which is constituted by "shared – identity" and "good-will". This chapter also argued that a democracy based on the virtues of consensus and fellowship associations, on the face of it, seems attractive. It was also argued that justice based on the principle of harmony seems to promise a better world for the worse off and a more peaceful society.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The question that was investigated in this research project was: 'What Can the Socio-Political ethic of *ubuntu* Contribute to *Contemporary Conceptions of Development*?' This question sought to explore what conceptual or theoretical contributions may be derived from a Sub - Saharan ethic of *ubuntu*, such that, it could offer something to talks of 'development'. The specific contribution to be made by this theory to understandings of 'development' was specifically investigated within the parameters of the conceptual framework posited by DE. The conceptual framework, as offered by DE, is constituted by three ancient philosophical questions, which are: What is a meaningful life? What stance ought human beings to assume towards nature? What are the foundations of just society? These three questions seem to be aim at giving a rounded account of what is the best possible state of affairs that ought to characterize a qualitative human life. An answer to these questions constitutes what might be considered a preliminary contribution of *ubuntu* to 'development'.

In chapter 1, I presented an account of *ubuntu*, as articulated by the aphorism 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' and 'I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am'. I argued that these aphorisms entail an ethical vision that prizes harmony as a fundamental good that should characterize the chief good; and discord or division as a moral evil. The community was established to be central in this ethic, insofar as plays an important role in helping the person to be a good person and the person also to contribute to the survival of the community. As such to be an "umuntu" is really a call for one to develop virtues that are harmony enhancing. One is expected to live and thrive only in the community. To exist is to be enmeshed and to participate in harmonious relations. Living harmoniously was argued also implies self-realization on the part of the moral agent, such that, the common good of living in ways that seek harmony do not undermine the individual, on the contrary, it entails perfection of the individual's social nature.

In chapter 2, I argued that a good life is only possible in a context in which harmony as a virtue is promoted. As such a good life requires a reciprocal commitment on the part of the community and individual to actively create a society characterized by friendship, care, and nurturing

relationships. One will flourish if they live in a community of care, mutual support, friendship and love. Thus, the aim of development is creating more and of such a community. 'Harmony based development' is a call to create more friendly oriented communities. This means that fullness of life or a more humane world is a world in which people are bonded and connected together by feelings and actions of good-will: envisaged, here, are relationships of care which will bind one person to the other for the embetterment of all involved. The call here is that of understanding development as a process of promoting 'familial and filial' tendencies in the world, and this is what development is all about, according to *ubuntu*. 'I am because we are' is a development call that calls for interdependence and co-existence that binds one to another as a brother and sister; and says, "we are better off together than when separated" with shared-interest rather than self-interest. The contribution that *ubuntu* is specifically making in this regard, is to give a new understanding of freedom, that one is actually more free when they are free *for* (note not 'from', as in negative freedom) and free *with* (note, not apart). This sense of freedom requires one to be available to others (free for) and not only be available to others but be with them (free with). This gives a distinctive understanding of positive freedom or effective freedom.

In chapter 3, I argued that *ubuntu* need not to be interpreted anthropocentrically. It was also pointed out *ubuntu* grounds respect for the environment on two related ideas; that of interdependence and that of vital force. My focus was on the metaphysical idea of vital force. This metaphysical idea of vital force is useful since it can explain how nature is a bearer of moral status and as such worthy of moral regard. Interesting as this idea might be, it still needs to be developed. Notwithstanding the sketchy status of this as presented here, this idea has interesting implications; in terms of accounting for the moral responsibility we have towards nature. It places this responsibility outside of the needs of humanity but locates the source of this respect for nature in something in and about nature itself – vital force. This means that Sustainable Development may benefit in two related ways. The anthropocentric tendency of Sustainable Development may be corrected in the light of *ubuntu*; which suggests that, whatever economic and social development plans we may have, they must be executed with respect and concern for all stakeholders – including nature. This means that it deepens our appreciation of life and concern for the future by taking into the cognizance of the concerns expressed "in *our common* future" to be inclusive of the environment as well. Secondly, harmony grants Sustainable

Development a way of grounding responsibility towards nature that suggests that all of us are one community, in one community and hoping for a better future for all, as such, the best way to relate to each other is through harmony or friendliness.

In Chapter 4, I sketched a preliminary normative account of a community, as best represented by familial and filial relationships. The community as constituted by "shared-identity" and "good-will"/"solidarity", was argued, gives an intuitively appealing vision of a society. The vision entails that an *ubuntu* based society may be caricatured as a society characterized by caring relationships. Pervasive networks of care will be a characteristic feature of such a society. This will be a community built on affect and solidarity rather than affect neutral and self-determining. In a world of uncertainty and danger, what better conception to diffuse the many social ills than the one conceived here? In the same vein, a democratic vision composed of Consensus and Fellowship associations was propounded. The synthesis of Consensus and Fellowship associations was argued that it seems to promise a good rendition of the democratic expression of "the people" or the idea of popular will. Fellowship associations and consensus seem to be able to create space for people to take charge of their destiny, since people will be directly involved in talks and activities that affect their fate and destiny. This society was argued will deal with issues of scarcity more justly since it will rely on "networks of care" and on the procedure that will produce principles that will protect the worse off. From the above it is clear that *ubuntu* is a call for community, as an enabling structure and context, and a channeling force towards development of the world and solving problems of the world. *Ubuntu* is a call that we share in the desire to lead humanity upward by realizing that we are partners in life therefore lets realize that we need one another, competition is a problem since it is divisive, and not promoting harmony. Cooperation and unity as strategic points of departure are essential and will make the world a better place.

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[i] Analytic philosophy

[ii] The controversial nature of the description 'African' is noted, and the discussion of this word will be used shall be discussed in chapter 1.

[iii] Sen (1987:123) explaining the history of economics observes:

"Economics had had two rather different origins, both related to politics, but related in rather different ways, concerned respectively with "ethics" on the one hand, and with what may be called "engineering" … The engineering approach is characterized by being concerned with primarily logistic issues rather than with ultimate ends and such questions as what may foster "the good of man" or " how should one live". The ends are taken as fairly straightforwardly given, and the object of the exercise is to find the appropriate means to serve selves"

[iv] Metz (2007: 328 - 334) identifies six principles trying to account for *ubuntu:*

U1:"An action is right just insofar as it respects a person's dignity; an act is wrong to the extent that it degrades humanity."

U2:"An action is right just insofar as it promotes the well-being of others; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to enhance the welfare of one's fellows."

U3:"An action is right just insofar as it promotes the well-being of others without violating their rights; an act is wrong to the extent that either violates their rights or fails to the enhance the welfare of one's fellows without violating their rights."

U4:"An action is right just insofar as it positively relates to others and thereby realizes oneself; an act is wrong to the extent that it does not perfect one's valuable nature as a social being."

U5:"An action is right just insofar as it is in solidarity with groups whose survival is threatened; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to support a vulnerable community."

U6:"An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that fails to develop community."

[v] The current author wants to express his indebtedness to LenkaBula (2008: 375-394), and more so, to Behrens (2010: unpublished paper) for the thesis and arguments advanced in this chapter are strongly influenced by him.

[vi] The idea that nature could be a bearer of morals status strikes one as extremely controversial. But it seems to be the best interpretation that emerges from the talk of vital force - that understood as divine spark - which is resident in all things. Some African thinkers have thought human beings have value because of this vital spark. If this recognizable feature is not only possessed by human beings only, but by all things, this may suggest that there are ways in which nature might be worthy of recognition respect (Darwall, 1977: 36 - 49). Hence, Behrens (2010, unpublished paper) expresses this challenge "it is clearly implied that interdependence grounds the moral requirements to foster harmonious relationships within the community of nature*. It is not easy to give an account of quite how the acknowledgement of interdependence entails a normative requirement to foster a certain kind of relationship*." I am here suggesting that the normative requirement emerges from the fact that all things share a similar attribute, that being, a vital force. The weakness in this account might turn out to be an ethic of respecting a bee or a mosquito, which might strike one as unattractive and too demanding. This weakness, however, need not suggest that this line of thought is faulty in holding the thesis of treating nature as a bearer of recognition respect or a bearer of moral status, rather, it simply suggest that there is a need to still work out in detail what this respect means. Even Behrens (2010, unpublished paper) admits to the challenge that it is still not clear how one might have a harmonious relationship with a mountain, insects or even inanimate things, for example.