

UBU-NTU ETHICS IN DIALOGUE WITH KANT'S DEONTIC ETHICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Kant’s second thoughts on race”² is our gateway to the dialogue between the ethics of ubu-ntu and his deontic ethics. The thesis defended in the dialogue is that Kant’s quasi-absolute prohibition on revolution to bring about a new state dispensation changes into an endorsement of an ethical revolution in pursuit of truth, justice and peace both in the national and international domains. The endorsement applies to the ethical exigencies of restoration, restitution and reparations due to the conquered peoples. This latter expression, “the conquered peoples” is explained later in this essay.

Having presented our thesis above, we will then proceed to the ‘approach’ to our subject matter stating why it is ‘an African orientation in philosophy’ and, what this means precisely. We then explore the question, ‘what does Kant want in Africa?’ followed by, ‘Kant and the right to revolution’. The point here is not to adjudicate between the different and, even contending interpretations of Kant’s quasi-prohibition on “the right to revolution”. It is rather to show that Kant’s quasi-prohibition was theoretically irrelevant to the theory and practice of revolution in Africa. The next section is a critical exploration of ‘the African question to Kant’s categorical imperative’ with particular reference to the Western unjust wars of colonisation. The question serves as the gateway to “Kant’s second thoughts on racism”.

Taking the cue from there, we recognise – under the rubric – ‘Kant: from an intellectual to an ethical revolutionary’ that Kant went through a metanoia that qualified him as a partner in dialogue with the ethics of ubu-ntu. We then proceed to explain the philosophy of ubu-ntu so that the reader can identify Kant’s dialogue partner. Since the dialogue partners originate from different, and perhaps even contending cultural contexts, we consider – in the subsection

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2021.v9n2.p33>

‘dealing with difference’ – the conditions for engagement in dialogue. The last and final section, ‘ubu-ntu ethics in dialogue with the deontic ethics of Kant’, is the culmination point of all the preceding sub-sections. The logic of all the sub-sections renders a separate section under ‘conclusion’ unnecessary.

2. APPROACH

Kwasi³ Wiredu acknowledges “science” and its consequences have and continue to influence Africa⁴ and the world at large. He notes that “science” has come to Africa in an ethically questionable manner, namely, “through colonialism”. I wish to add, Western “colonialism”. By this route the indigenous peoples of Africa were compelled to study the “science” in its various ramifications, as well as the Humanities imposed by the Western colonial conqueror. He concedes that some educated Africans applied their learning to specific African problems. Against this background he posits the question: “can the African student approach the pursuit of Philosophy in a similar spirit?” It is to be noted that Wiredu’s question refers specifically to the “spirit” as distinct from the “method”. According to Wiredu, it is sensible for an African student to adopt and pursue the same method of study when it comes to the natural sciences but the same cannot be said with regard to the Humanities and the Social Sciences. This is because “there is no such thing as a generally accepted technique of philosophising”.⁵ Wiredu is critical of the attitude of an “African universalist” who willingly and uncritical submits to the study of other philosophies without regard for “his own”.

There is no need to be embarrassed by focusing attention on one’s own philosophy even if it might be “traditional”. This is because the idea of “traditional” is not restricted to African philosophies. “Every traditional philosophy is essentially pre-scientific; and every people have their own traditional philosophy, ... I am inclined to recommend it seriously to African sociologists and anthropologists to research into the traditional philosophies of the ‘developed’ nations. I venture to suggest that such a study might have the salubrious effect of discouraging people from too readily declaring this or that aspect of traditional African philosophy to be peculiarly African”.⁶ Wiredu rejects the insistence that African philosophers should be preoccupied with philosophical problems identical in every detail to those of non-African philosophers. For him, “an African orientation in philosophy must surely be a sensitivity to the specifics of the African situation”.⁷ Wiredu’s compatriot, Kwame Nkrumah agrees with him in these terms: “Our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people. It is from those conditions that the intellectual content of our philosophy must be created. The emancipation of the African continent is the emancipation of man”.⁸ Nkrumah recognises the interconnectedness of human beings within and outside of Africa. He is also aware that in this context, emancipation is still a fundamental issue with reference to both the oppressor and the oppressed. Accordingly, an African orientation in philosophy is of immediate relevance to the world. In the same text referred to here, Nkrumah posits the question similar to that of Wiredu’s, namely, whether or not a student of philosophy hailing from other parts of the world may study the subject in the same “spirit” as its Western

counterpart. He answers that the student may not enter into nor adopt the “spirit” of its Western counterpart.

I concur with both Wiredu and Nkrumah on the question of an African orientation in philosophy. However, I do extend this orientation to all the other fields of study including religion. I complement my concurrence by reference to Bondy. According to him,

“I believe it necessary to call attention to the fact that I am not postulating the necessity of practical, applied or sociological philosophy, as has been proposed more than once as a model of Hispanic American thought. It has been suggested, ..., that in the distribution of philosophical tasks, theory should belong to Europe and application to Hispanic America. I am convinced also, however, that the strict theoretical character, which is the highest contemplative requirement indispensable to all fruitful philosophy, is merely another way of condemning ourselves to dependency and subjugation. In philosophy, as in science, only he who has the key to theory can appropriate the advances and powers of civilization. Our philosophy should be, then both theory and application, conceived and executed in our own fashion, according to our own standards and qualities. ... so too, should philosophy be elaborated by us as theory according to our own standards and applied in accord with our own ends”.⁹

Bondy's reference to “high” evokes the idea of “low”. The hierarchisation of philosophy in this way is ethically objectionable because it is an open door to the language of “superior” and “inferior”. This vertical reasoning about philosophy refers to the concrete active philosophers some of whom have, historically, been relegated to the rank of “inferior” even in ontological terms. This vibrant historical fossil need not be encouraged to stay alive by use of the language of “high” and “low”.

Bondy complements the African orientation I have adopted from Wiredu and Nkrumah by adding specifically that philosophy should be conceived and fashioned by us in both theory and practice in the pursuit of our own ends. But who are these “us”? The “us” is the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation by the West. It is these conquered peoples still engaged in the continuing struggle for the realisation of the ethical exigencies of reparations, restitution and restoration in the name of truth, justice and peace. In this essay I will refer to this segment of humankind as the conquered peoples. I mention truth in the threesome pursuit as a direct reference to his – story commonly referred to as history. The “scientific” reconstruction of information about the past is not necessarily a statement of unassailable “facts”. It is an individual interpretation intertwined with the subjective preferences of the interpreter despite its claim to “scientific objectivity”.¹⁰

My characterisation of the conquered peoples may not be construed as a synonym of Dussel's “victim”. He avers that: “My point of departure here is from the perspective of the victim, such as Rigoberta Menchu (a woman, of Maya Quiche indigenous origin, brown-skinned, Guatemalan ...). ‘Goodness claim’ becomes inverted and is dialectically transformed into ‘evil’ because it has produced a victim such as her”.¹¹ Rigoberta, the victim is seen as ‘the other’. Dussel then explains this thus:

“I would like to emphasize that when I refer in this work to the concept of the “Other” I will situate myself always and exclusively at the anthropological level. It is too simplistic to pretend to refute Ethics of Liberation by misunderstanding the theme of the Other as that of a nonphilosophical problem-by suggesting, for example, that it is theological in character, as in the case of the work of Gianni Vattimo

or Ofelia Schutte. In my approach, the Other is understood as being the other woman/man: a human being, an ethical subject, whose visage is conceived of as the epiphany of living human reality in bodily form (corporeality). ... the Other will not be denominated either metaphorically or economically with the label of the 'poor'. Now, inspired by Walter Benjamin, I will refer instead to the subject of Ethics as a 'victim', a concept that is both broader and more exact".¹²

Dussel's definition of the "Other" as an ethical subject bearing the visage understood "as the epiphany of living human reality in bodily form" is consistent with his earlier description of the "Other" as "a person as an imploring, revealing, and provoking face".¹³ The same applies to his definition of "the victim".¹⁴ Although Dussel distances himself from theological connotations, I doubt if such distancing is successful. My doubt extends to his claim that the concept of "victim" is "broader and more exact". The concept of "victim" stands in uneasy proximity to the Easter sequence chant written in 1048, 'Victimae paschali laudes...' ('May you praise the Paschal victim...') It is problematical to accept this particular one as a 'victim'. By virtue of its participation in the triune godhead, the Paschal victim knew in advance about its victimisation. It appeared in the world willingly to become the 'victim' having the prior knowledge and assurance that it would celebrate its triumph through the 'resurrection'. If Dussel accepts that this is both religious and theological then his distancing of himself from Vattimo and Schutte collapses.

A this-worldly man or woman enmeshed in anthropology and history does not have such special knowledge and assurances. For example, it neither foresaw nor expected conquest in the unjust wars of colonisation waged by the West. The conquest was a concrete reality initiating the struggle for truth, justice and peace. This struggle, with multiple contortions and convolutions is unfolding to this day as the struggle for the abolition of structural, systemic poverty and epistemic injustice. By now, the conquered peoples in this struggle are much more than the "bottom billion"¹⁵ of the 1990s. Do we really need this inexorable increase of "the bottom billion" sixty years after former USA President J F Kennedy declared in his inaugural speech that: "man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life"?

Kennedy used "all" twice in this sentence. This suggests that "all" was used deliberately. The birth of strategic nuclear weapons demands the extension of the second "all" to cover other forms of life. This is because the kind and the power of these weapons is such that not only the belligerents shall perish if a strategic nuclear weapons war breaks out, but other forms of life shall also be reduced to a radioactive rubble. The weapons have "an overkill" capacity justifying the appellation "nuclear omnicide". This living threat to life is based on the will to defend an ideology. It is the will permitting the killing of "the other"¹⁶ – softly or brutally – if "the other" resists being treated only as a means to an end. Russell argues against this stance with particular reference to nuclear weapons. He emphasizes the recognition of human fallibility and the important role it plays in human affairs. Because of this "no dogma is so certain as to afford an excuse for widespread cruelty"¹⁷ indeed, we wish to add, widespread annihilation.

Despite Russel's argument, it appears that the will to treat "the other" as a means to an end is much stronger than obedience to Kant's categorical imperative to treat "the other" as an end in itself. The original injustice of conquest in an unjust war is geographically broader and historically more exact than Dussel's "victim" clothed in religious and theological language. Accordingly, I stay with my characterisation of 'the conquered peoples' to refer to this prevailing condition of treating "the other" as a means to an end.

3. WHAT DOES KANT WANT IN AFRICA?

By the time Kant was born, Western "capital accumulation"¹⁸ based on the use of ethically unjustifiable force was on-going. The veins of Latin America were opened wide by the ethically unjustifiable violence of Western colonialism.¹⁹ Romanus Pontifex was also part of Kant's cultural heritage.

"The new argument for European and Christian domination was based on Portugal's rights of discovery and conquest that stemmed from the alleged need to protect Indigenous peoples from the oppression of others and the need to convert them. A pope could hardly disagree with the value of converting pagans to Christianity. Consequently, in 1436, Eugenius IV issued the papal bull Romanus Pontifex and authorized Portugal to convert the Canary Islanders and to control the islands on behalf of the papacy. This bull was issued several times in the fifteenth century, each time expanding Portugal's authority to exercise jurisdiction and economic rights in Africa. In addition, in 1455, Pope Nicholas V granted Portugal title to the lands of Indigenous peoples in Africa that Portugal had "acquired and that shall hereafter come to be acquired," and authorized Portugal "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans" and place them in perpetual slavery and to seize all their property".²⁰

All this was to happen without the prior knowledge and consent of the Indigenous peoples of Africa. Mudimbe corroborates Miller.²¹ Furthermore, Mudimbe comments thus on the violence of christianity²² with particular reference to Romanus Pontifex: "Paragraph four of the bull is terrifying. In the name of God, it gives the King of Portugal and his successors the right not only to colonize but also to convert forcibly to Christianity and enslave ... in perpetuity".²³

An integral part of Kant's cultural heritage in this regard is that "more energy went into attempts to deny that Africans belonged to the same species as the rest of mankind".²⁴ These attempts strengthened the narrow interpretation of Aristotle's famous "man is a rational animal". This interpretation excluded Africans, Amerindians, Australasians and women from the category of "rational animal". The mission to convert the "pagans" to christianity was faced with this exclusion. Either the missionaries returned back home since faith could not be delivered to animals or they had to renounce the exclusion and, admit the excluded into the category of "rational animals". The option for the latter was the authoritative *Sublimis Deus*, the Bull of Pope Paul III declaring that "All men are rational animals".²⁵ The declaration justified the stay of the missionaries in foreign lands for the purpose of pursuing the conversion of the "pagans". It contradicted and counterbalanced both the irrationality and the inhumanity

of the preceding Bulls. However, it did not erase the conviction, among Westerners and others who came into contact with “Black Africa”, that only “some men are rational animals”. The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the contemporary “Black lives matter” movement are testimony to this enduring conviction. These considerations suggest that the winds of knowledge about Africa did blow in the direction of Kant as well. It is in this cultural context that Kant knew about Africa.

In the initial phase of his moral philosophy Kant espoused a hierarchical theory of human beings²⁶ according to which the humanity of the peoples of Africa could be placed in doubt. Kant:

“discerns four races in a racial pecking-order. The ‘white’ on the top, followed by the ‘yellow’ and the ‘negro’ and at the bottom the American or ‘red race’. The pecking-order is defined by a decrease in mental and general ability: ... there are no possibilities to defend Kant’s racism within his edifice in a non-contradictory way”.²⁷

“Kant’s racism” exposed the indigenous peoples of Africa, conquered in the unjust wars of Western colonisation, to use and abuse. Kant himself affirmed this exposure to abuse with his declaration that: “This fellow was quite black ... a clear proof that what he said was stupid”.²⁸ Kant’s abuse in this regard extended to women as well. Comparing Kant’s observations on women in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* and his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* and, admitting that the last mentioned is “an early work”, Carol Gould cites Kant thus:

“All the other merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful which is the proper reference point; ... all education and instruction must have [this] before its eyes. ... Deep meditation and long-sustained reflection are noble but difficult, and do not well befit a person in whom unconstrained charms should show nothing else than a beautiful nature. A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mme. Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, might as well have a beard”.²⁹

Julia O’Falolain and Lauro Maritines express the same reservation about Kant’s philosophical attitude towards women. Their focus is upon marital relations between husband and wife. They note that according to Kant the obedience of the wife to her husband is natural. It is thus proper that it be supported by law.

“This, however, cannot be regarded as contrary to the natural equality of the human pair, if such legal supremacy, looking to the common interest of the household, is based only upon the natural superiority of the husband’s faculties compared with those of the wife, and if the right to command is based merely upon this fact”. [Kant, *The philosophy of law*]³⁰

The denigration and abuse of a people, the opposite sex or people of different sexual inclinations in this way is fertile ground for their enslavement. This, together with his philosophical racism, allowed Kant to condone the enslavement of the conquered peoples. The historical and cultural heritage of Kant shows that he came to Africa on the ticket of the

ethically unjustifiable violence of Western colonialism. Would he concede that the indigenous conquered peoples of Africa had the right to revolt against their Western colonial conqueror?

4. KANT AND THE RIGHT TO REVOLUTION

Many scholars have dealt with the question whether or not Kant prohibited or permitted the right to revolution. There are multiple convergences and divergences among them.³¹ The weight of opinion, with nuanced qualifications,³² holds that Kant prohibited revolution against established legal authority. I will refer to one exception to his below. In my study of these texts, I constantly posed the question: does the prohibition apply to Africa in view of the ethically unjustified violence of Western colonialism? The question was simply not addressed except in the case of Kleingeld.

But the language of “revolution” is vast and varied in the history of the struggles for the liberation of Africa. It appears that Kant was, even theoretically, remote from the reflections on the imperative for an African revolution by philosophers and activists engaged in the struggle for the liberation of Africa. It was not Kant but Marx, Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro who inspired the revolution in Africa. I could find no single appeal to Kant in Cesaire,³³ Fanon,³⁴ Nkrumah³⁵ and Lembede.³⁶ Revolutions against the established legal but colonial states were planned and executed in some African countries such as Mozambique and Angola without regard for Kant's prohibition. Some of the revolutions have come and are now gone.³⁷ These African experiences suggest that Kant's prohibition was simply irrelevant to the question of the African revolution. It is, however, doubtful that the irrelevance is complete and total in philosophical and theoretical terms. The basis for the doubt is “Kant's second thoughts on race” already referred to. It is to this that we now turn.

5. THE AFRICAN QUESTION ON KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Given Kant's insistence “that it is always contrary to justice to rebel against the sovereign authority of the state”,³⁸ does his categorical imperative concede the right of the indigenous peoples, conquered in the ethically unjust wars of colonisation, to rebel against legitimate authority based on such conquest? This question is based on the recognition of the distinction between ethics and law.³⁹ Lea Ypi refers to this distinction thus: “... Kant's rejection of the right to revolution is not problematic after all, for what Kant really means to deny is a legal right to revolution not a moral claim to overthrow an illegitimate government”.⁴⁰ The problem with Ypi's reference is that she prefers to leave aside “the complex issue of the relation between justice and morality, and the costs of isolating the two concepts in Kant's body of thought”. It seems there is no cogent reason to leave out the other works of Kant in an attempt to give an adequate exposition of his arguments on specific subjects.

“Kant’s racism” is an integral part of the above question. Hegel’s concept of history⁴¹ did not apply to the “darkness” which he called “Africa proper”.⁴² Does the categorical imperative of Kant apply to the “stupid” black indigenous peoples of Africa in claiming the moral right to resort to revolution?

6. KANT: FROM AN INTELLECTUAL TO AN ETHICAL REVOLUTIONARY

Kant’s influence on the history of German political thought is enduring. The Rechtsstaat idea is one of his legacies.⁴³ I have stated that his prohibition on the right to revolution may best be described as “a quasi-prohibition” on the basis of the exception identified by Reiss. According to Reiss, Kant conceded the right to revolution under a totalitarian state because the “totalitarian state has violated the idea of the original contract. And the social contract is a principle of Reason which rests on the ideas of human dignity and freedom. For the totalitarian state has suppressed public freedom, and this is the only clear case, . . . , where the individual can set himself up as a judge against the government and act on his judgment. . . . it is permissible not only to disobey passively . . . but also to disobey actively by seeking to overthrow the government”.⁴⁴ Beck casts doubt on this but without adequate argumentation.⁴⁵ The significance of Kant’s exception is that it opens the way to answering the African question on his categorical imperative.

Kant’s intellectual revolution awakened him to his “dogmatic slumber” whereas his ethical revolution woke him up from “the sleep of inhumanity”.⁴⁶ Sobrino experienced this metanoia. Kant and Sobrino were among the latest who were awakened from “the sleep of inhumanity”.

At first, like all his contemporaries, Las Casas accepted the fact of slavery as such. Like others, he even supported certain petitions that black slaves be transported from Spain to replace the work force that had been recruited among the native peoples of the Antilles, who were on their way to extinction. . . . he has been harshly reproached for this. It is also well known that years later he wrote painful, contrite pages about his ‘blindness’ in this matter. Las Casas’s final, definitive position is clear today to every serious historian and anyone else willing to consult the facts and the texts.⁴⁷

In the light of this, Kant’s metanoia comes as no surprise. On the basis of his “second thoughts on racism”, acknowledged and censured the ethically unjustifiable “right of conquest” claimed by the Western colonial conqueror.⁴⁸ This is a shift in perspective since Kant held previously that it was fitting to enslave Native Americans and Africans. This shift in perspective allowed Kant to concede that the conquered peoples have “the right of first possession” (sometimes referred to as “the right of first occupancy”) to assert sovereign title to their territories. According to Kant, as quoted in Kleingeld:

The principles underlying the supposed lawfulness of appropriating newly discovered and purportedly barbaric or irreligious lands, as goods belonging to no one, without the consent of the inhabitants and even subjugating them as well, are absolutely contrary to cosmopolitan right.⁴⁹

Reflecting upon Kant's cosmopolitan right from the perspective of global justice theories, Madrid⁵⁰ corroborates Kleingeld's recognition that Kant did change his mind with regard to racism. This metanoia turned him into a dialogue partner⁵¹ with ubu-ntu. Kant is accordingly invited to a palaver⁵² – a truth telling dialogue – with ubu-ntu. What then is ubu-ntu? We now turn to answer this question.

7. THE PHILOSOPHY OF UBU-NTU AND UBUNTU AS A PHILOSOPHY

Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy among the Bantu-speaking peoples. The African tree of ontology, knowledge and ethics stems from ubu-ntu with which it is connected indivisibly. Apart from a linguistic analysis of ubu-ntu, a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a "family atmosphere", that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous peoples of Africa. No doubt there are and, will be variations within this broad philosophical "family atmosphere". But the blood circulating through the "family" members is the same in its basics.⁵³ In this sense ubu-ntu is the basis of African philosophy.

We will adopt a philosophical approach in giving an exposition of the philosophy of ubu-ntu. In terms of geographic demarcation, we agree partially with the delimitation of De Tejada. The ubu-ntu philosophy we are about to discuss "goes from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar."⁵⁴ However, this delimitation is questionable since the Sahara Desert is not the indelible birthmark of Africa.⁵⁵ For this reason the meaning and import of human interaction before the birth of the Sahara Desert must be taken into account. We shall not, however, pursue this line of inquiry in the present essay.

Philosophy in ubuntu

It is best, philosophically, to approach this concept as an hyphenated word, namely, ubu-ntu. Ubuntu is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix ubu- and the stem ntu-. Ubu- evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity. Ubu- as enfolded be-ing 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. At the ontological level, there is no strict and literal separation and division between ubu- and -ntu. Ubu- and -ntu are not two radically separate and irreconcilably opposed concepts. On the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as a one-ness and an indivisible whole-ness. Accordingly, ubu-ntu is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people. Ubu- as the generalized understanding of be-ing may be said to be distinctly ontological. Whereas -ntu as the nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or, a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be the distinctly epistemological.

The word *umu-* shares an identical ontological feature with the word *ubu-*. Whereas the range of *ubu-* is the widest generality *umu-* tends towards the more specific. Joined together with *-ntu* then *umu-* becomes *umuntu*. *Umuntu* means the emergence of *homo loquens* who is simultaneously a *homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens* here speaks to the being with the right to exist-reason. Ex-is-tence is coeval with the right to reason.⁵⁶ It speaks to Aristotle's definition: "man is a rational animal". The apotheosis of "reason" in the West, with its deleterious effects on women and the conquered peoples, is seen, for example, in Thomas Aquinas in whose time "reason" was perhaps an instrument of mollification, a means for submission and compliance dogma. But under the banner of Kant's *Sapere aude!* ("Dare to reason"), reason was used as a weapon for a critical questioning of beliefs and practices and, a challenge to dogma. Was Lukacs, referred to by Forst,⁵⁷ against Kant's "reason"; the *Sapere aude!* principle? Kant immortalised "reason" twice by his Critique of pure reason and, the Critique of practical reason. He did not Germanise "reason" nor did he Arabise it like al-Jabri.⁵⁸ He did not colour "reason" either like Mbembe has coloured it "negro"⁵⁹ or "black". "Reason" is the court of appeal against "arbitrariness". It is the language and the weapon of the "justificatory beings".⁶⁰ In what way then is Forst in favour of "the destruction of reason"?⁶¹

Umuntu is the specific concrete manifestation of *umu-* which continues to conduct an inquiry into be-ing, experience, knowledge and truth. This is an activity rather than an act. It is an ongoing process impossible to stop unless motion itself is stopped. On this reasoning, *ubu-* may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion. We propose to regard such incessant motion as verbal rather than the verb. *-ntu* may be construed as the temporarily having become. In this sense *-ntu* is a noun. The indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of *ubu-ntu* means, therefore, that *ubuntu* is a verbal noun.

Because motion is the principle of be-ing, for *ubu-ntu* do-ing takes precedence over the do-er without at the same time imputing either radical separation or irreconcilable opposition between the two. "Two" here speaks only to two aspects of one and the same reality. *Ubu-ntu* then is a gerund. But it is also a gerundive at the same time since at the epistemological level it may crystallize into a particular form of social organisation, religion or law. *Ubu-ntu* is always a -ness and not an -ism.

We submit that this logic of *ub-ntu* also applies to *hu-* and *-nhu* in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. Therefore, it may not be rendered as *hunhuism*⁶² as Samkange has done. The -ism suffix gives the erroneous impression that we are dealing with verbs and nouns as fixed and separate entities existing independently. They thus function as fixations to ideas and practices which are somewhat dogmatic and hence unchangeable. Such dogmatism and immutability constitute the false necessity based upon fragmentative thinking. This latter is the thinking – based on the subject-verb-object understanding of the structure of language – which posits a fundamental irreconcilable opposition in be-ing becoming. On the basis of this imputed opposition be-ing becoming is fragmented into pieces of reality with an independent existence of their own. The philosophy of *ubu-ntu*, as explicated thus far, recognises separate entities in existence but its point of departure is not fragmentative reasoning.

Without the speech of umuntu, Ubu- is condemned to unbroken silence. The speech of umuntu is thus anchored in, revolves around and is ineluctably oriented towards ubu-. The language of umuntu 'relevates', that is, it directs and focuses the entire epistemological domain towards the ontology of ubu-. This it does by the contemporaneous and indissoluble coupling of ubu- and umuntu through the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu* (*motho ke motho ka batho*). Although the English language does not exhaust the meaning of this maxim, it may nonetheless be construed to mean that to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them. Ubu-ntu, understood as be-ing human (human-ness); a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others constitutes the core meaning of this maxim. Ubu-ntu then not only describes a condition of be-ing, insofar as it is indissolubly linked to umuntu but it is also the recognition of be-ing becoming and not, we wish to emphasise, be-ing and becoming.

In this sense it is simultaneously a gerund and a gerundive since the latter is implied in the imperative, *nga bantu*. In other words, be-ing human as a mere ex-is-tent among others, is not enough. One is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being. This is an ethical appeal. What is decisive then is to prove oneself to be the embodiment of ubu-ntu (bo-tho) in behaviour because the fundamental ethical, social and legal judgement of human worth and human conduct is based upon ubu-ntu. The judgement, pronounced with approval or disapproval respectively, is invariably expressed in these terms: *ke motho* or *gase motho*. In the original language, in this case the Se-Sotho cluster in the Bantu-speaking grouping, these expressions may not be interpreted literally since in literal terms they mean he/she is a human be-ing or she/he is not a human be-ing. A literal interpretation boils down to an affirmation or negation of the obvious if we restrict ourselves to the biological definition of a human being. Even worse, the negation would ultimately be meaningless since its assertion neither abolishes nor alters the biological definition or nature of a human being. Thus, the affirmation or negation of ubu-ntu (bo-tho) is a metaphor for ethical, social and legal judgement of human worth and human conduct.

In the light of the above, ubu-ntu is a philopraxis; a philosophy in practice. It is an everyday⁶³ philosophy. The epistemicide⁶⁴ perpetrated by Western colonialism deprived ubu-ntu of a voice in the construction of human relations globally. The achievement of political independence in Africa has provided a platform for ubu-ntu to be engaged in dialogue with other philosophies. But it enters into dialogue as a new and different face. The face and the voice of Kant are different from ubu-ntu. The palaver between these two must take cognisance of the question of difference. What does this mean? We now turn to answer this question.

8. ON DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE

Dealing with difference is an ontological and ethical necessity. It is the imperative to learn how to live humanly with be-ing, especially, other human beings. Dialogue that aims at learning in order to change both oneself and the other for the better must proceed on the

ethical principle that all human beings are equal in their humanity.⁶⁵ Human co-existence requires more than just mere hearing. It demands listening to one another. Listening to the other thus requires the move away from virtual to actual dialogue. The latter consists in the construction of “polyphonic or ‘heteroglossic’ texts that permit those being represented to speak in their own voices, tell their own stories, challenge the ethnographer’s constructions, advance alternatives...”⁶⁶

Difference is not always opposition. It can also be an invitation to co-operation. Acceptance of the invitation requires openness to learn and to change. It is transformational learning. The indispensable condition for the attainment of transformational learning is the willingness to listen.⁶⁷ This must be predicated on the recognition that one’s ways of thinking and doing are on the same level as those of the other and may therefore be compared. We now turn to dialogue with Kant.

9. UBU-NTU ETHICS IN DIALOGUE WITH THE DEONTIC ETHICS OF KANT

Q. You have now read and understood the philosophy of ubu-ntu, Mr Kant?

A. Yes, I have.

Q. Have you understood the ubu-ntu ethical maxim of *motho ke motho ka batho* as explained above?

A. Yes, I have. But I think there is a difference with my categorical imperative. The difference lies in the fact that my categorical imperative is rigidly formal whereas the praxis dimension of ubu-ntu imbues it with materiality or corporeality (bodiliness) oriented towards flexibility and change.

Comment: Indeed, Mr Kant. You have got it right.

Q. Do you agree, Mr Kant that the following are the enduring ethical duties of Western colonialism? (1) To renounce the lie that Africans are sub-human beings. At the DNA level, Africans are identical to any other human being on Mother Earth.⁶⁸ (2) The restoration of the injustice of colonialism in its various manifestations. This includes the return of sovereign title to the territories of its indigenous owners from time immemorial; the abolition of the enduring economic bondage; reparations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, including the depopulation of Africa and, the practical implementation of epistemic justice.

A. I have stated already, that “The principles underlying the supposed lawfulness of appropriating newly discovered and purportedly barbaric or irreligious lands, as goods belonging to no one, without the consent of the inhabitants and even subjugating them as well, are absolutely contrary to cosmopolitan right”.⁶⁹

Comment: Today, the living threat of strategic nuclear weapons nullifies violent revolution and war except the irrational will to resort to it. Your answer to the question of the

ethical duties of Western colonialism is appropriate. However, the duties cannot be fulfilled by recourse to violent revolution. Another maxim of ubu-ntu ethics, namely, *feta kgomo o tshware motho* (if and when one is faced with a choice between preserving human life and accumulating wealth then one ought to choose for the former) ought to replace the Western idolatry of deifying⁷⁰ wealth and money and, relegating the preservation and protection of human life far below profit-making. The imperative for replacement demands an ethical revolution. May the West learn from your metanoia, Mr Kant even though you have not favoured posterity with information on why and how you arrived at it.

Modu wa taba: Re tsena ditabeng ka go amogela gore monna wa bohlae bjo bo tibileng, Kant, o ile a fetola mogopolo mabapi le kgethollo semorafe. Kant o tsebjwa a nyakile a ganetša tsogelo ya mmušo ka marumo, nyepo ele go tliša phetogo motheong wa setshaba. Re ema ka la gore kganetšo ye e a fetoga ge poledišano magareng ga botho le thuto ya Kant ya maitshwaro a mabotse e thoma. Phetogo ye e namile eba tsela leetong la go nyaka therešo, toka le khutšo setshabeng le ditshabatshabeng.

Abstract: “Kant’s second thoughts on race”⁷¹ is our gateway to the dialogue between the ethics of ubu-ntu and his deontic ethics. The thesis defended in the dialogue is that Kant’s quasi-absolute prohibition on revolution to bring about a new state dispensation changes into an endorsement of an ethical revolution in pursuit of truth, justice and peace both in the national and the international domains.

Keywords: dialogue, ethics, justice, Kant, peace, truth, ubu-ntu

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NOTES

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² This is a reference to Pauline Kleingeld's, "Kant's second thoughts on race", *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 229 October 2007. p. 573-592.

³ In studying the text to which I am referring, I was faced with a puzzle. First the author of the article appears in the title page of the Journal as J. E. Wiredu but the first page where the title and author appear has, J. E. Wiredu. So, is the first a spelling mistake? I decided to answer the question in the affirmative in part because of my familiarity with the linguistic texture and style of the author, not forgetting his characteristic critical argumentation. But then, what about the initials? There was no Kwasi that I have been familiar with. Upon inquiry from those closest to him, I was informed that in fact the initials stand for his names, Johnson and Emmanuel. The change of name to Kwasi occurred either in late 1971 or early in 1972 because Johnson had resolved to drop the "*abrofo din*" literally, "the name of white men". He even went to the school of his children to have their names changed. So, the names of "white men" remain in the article because the manuscript was already in the hands of the Journal, *Second Order* when the decision was taken. The title of his article is: *On an African orientation in philosophy, Second Order*, Volume 1 Number 2 July 1972, p. 3-13. The current citation of the question appears at page 3.

- ⁴ I have problematized “Africa” in several of my previous publications. For the present, suffice it to state that together with Ali Mazrui, I use the concept under protest. See, Ramose, M. B., “I doubt, therefore, African philosophy exists”, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 2, 2003, p. 113-127.
- ⁵ Wiredu, J. E., *On an African orientation in philosophy*, p. 4.
- ⁶ Wiredu, J. E., *On an African orientation in philosophy*, p. 4 and 7.
- ⁷ Wiredu, J. E., *On an African orientation in philosophy*, p. 10.
- ⁸ Nkrumah, K., *Consciencism, philosophy and ideology for decolonisation*, 1970, Panaf, London, p. 78.
- ⁹ Bondy, A. S., “The meaning and problem of Hispanic American thought” [Can there be a Latin American philosophy?] in Gracia, J. J. E., (ed.) *Latin American philosophy in the twentieth century*, (translators) Cooper, W., Myers, F. M., Jaksic, I., Schmidt, D. L., Schofield, C and Gracia, J. J. E., Prometheus Books, New York, 1986, p. 243 [page range: 233-244] (Italics in the original text).
- ¹⁰ For an extended discussion of the distinction between his-story and history, see Ramose, M.B., Critique of Ramon Grosfoguel’s “epistemic decolonial turn”, in *Alternations* 27, 1(2020) 271-307 at pages 275-277.
- ¹¹ Dussel, E., *Ethics of liberation In the age of globalization and exclusion*, (trans.) Mendieta, E., Bustillo, C. P., Yolanda Angulo, and Maldonado-Torres, N., Duke University Press, Durham and London 2013, p. xvii.
- ¹² Dussel, E., *Ethics of liberation*, p. xxi-xxii (Italics in the original text).
- ¹³ Dussel, E., *Philosophy of liberation*, (trans.) Martinez, A and Morkovsky, Christine, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1985, p. 43.
- ¹⁴ Dussel, E., *Globalization and the victims of exclusion: From a liberation ethics perspective*, The Modern Schoolman, January 1998.
- ¹⁵ Collier, P., *The bottom billion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
- ¹⁶ Arnsperger, C., “Competition, consumerism and the ‘other’: a philosophical investigation into the ethics of economic competition. Discussion paper 9614”, IRES – Institut de Recherches Economiques, Departement des Sciences Economiques, Universite Catholique de Louvain D/1996/3082/14 :12, p. 12-13.
- ¹⁷ Russell, B., *Common sense and nuclear warfare*, Routledge Classics, London and New York, p. 57.
- ¹⁸ Frank, A. G., “World accumulation, 1492-1789”, *Monthly Press Review*, New York and London, 1978.
- ¹⁹ Galeano, E., *Open veins of Latin America: Five centuries of the pillage of a continent*, (trans.) Belfrage, C., Monthly Press Review, New York, 1973.
- ²⁰ Miller, Robert J., “The future of international law in indigenous affairs: The Doctrine of Discovery, the United Nations, and the Organization of American States”, in Lewis & Clark *Law Review*, Vol. 15:4 847-922, 2011, p. 857-858.
- ²¹ Mudimbe, V. Y., *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 45.
- ²² We take the view, in concurrence with Soyinka, that “the convention that capitalizes this [christianity, christian] and other so-called world religions is justified only when the same principle is applied to other religions, among them, the Orisa”. Accordingly, we will in the main use the small letter “c” for ‘christianity’, ‘christian’, including reference to the “God” of this religion. Where capitalization is used it will be in inverted commas. The use of the capital or small letters with reference to all religions and their respective gods is intended to eliminate the implicit hierarchy and, thus the superiority of some religions and their “gods” over all the other religions. In the case of verbatim citation we will use capital letters. Soyinka, W., *The burden of memory The muse of forgiveness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999. p. 32.
- ²³ Mudimbe, V. Y., *The idea of Africa*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana, 1994, p. 32.
- ²⁴ Popkin, R. H., “Pre-Adamism in 19th century American thought: speculative biology and racism”, *Philosophia*, Vol. 8, 1978-79, p. 212.
- ²⁵ Hanke, L., “Pope Paul III and the American Indians”, *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume XXX, 1937, p. 71-72.
- ²⁶ Ramose, M. B., “The liberation of reason from racism”, in Wahba, M., (ed.) *Creativity and pax mundi*, Goethe Institute, Cairo 1998, p. 111 [page range: 109-115].
- ²⁷ Neugebauer, C., “Hegel and Kant – A refutation of their racism”, *Quest*, Volume V, No. 1 June 1991, p. 58 and 63 [page range: 50-73].

²⁸ Cited from, Eze, E. C., (ed.) *Race and the Enlightenment: A reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, p. 38. In this book, Eze states that: “Kant’s theories on race abound in these essays and the books. From this collection readers may judge for themselves whether or not the dismissive assessments of these writings have received from several scholars in our times”. p. 3-4 What is striking though is that this same edited collection limits the abundance of “Kant’s theories on race” by omitting and excluding the essays pertaining to “Kant’s second thoughts on race” as brought to light by Kleingeld to whose work we have already referred in footnote There is no need to speculate over Eze’s omission. However, it does give an incomplete image of Kant with regard to the question of his philosophical racism. Outlaw, L. T., *On race and philosophy*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996 also does not refer to texts pertaining to “Kant’s second thoughts on race”. See, p. 145-151 and 161.

²⁹ Carol C. Gould, “The woman question: philosophy of liberation and the liberation of philosophy”, in Carol C. Gould and M. W., Wartofsky (ed.) *Women and philosophy Toward a theory of liberation*, Longman Canada Limited, Toronto 1976, p. 18-19 [page range: 5-44].

³⁰ Julia O’Faolain and Lauro Martines, (ed.) *Not in God’s image: Women in history*, Virago, London 1979, p. 297.

³¹ For example, Azeri argues at page 592, footnote 2 that Reiss is “mistaken” in his assumption that there is “tension in Kant’s account of the right of revolution”. Azeri, S., “Kant’s rejection of the right of revolution”, *Filosofia* 64, 6 2009, p. 592 [page range: 592-603] Azeri is referring to Reiss, H. S., “Kant and the right of rebellion”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Apr. 1956, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 179-192. My first puzzle is that Azeri attributes “revolution” to Reiss whereas “rebellion” is the specific concept used by Reiss. The assumption of synonymity between these words is conceptually and historically problematical. Furthermore, even though Reiss does not refer explicitly to “the transcendental self” and “the empirical self” as Azeri would like him to do, this is implicit, or even strongly, directly present in Reiss’ “any individual” because such an individual is simply thus and not in any way described as “a citizen”. Reiss’ prior statement before this, namely, “for he asserted the independence of the individual” is silent on the kind of “authority” at issue. If “independence” is understood as human freedom then Reiss has qualified it appropriately by referring to it as “the core” of Kant’s philosophy. (p. 179) He shows how Kant preserves the “core problem” by permitting “rebellion” against a “totalitarian state”. Azeri’s criticism of Reiss is rather dubious. As stated under the rubric of “approach”, I prefer to avoid as much as possible this trend of doing philosophy. My option is to read the texts from the perspective of the conquered peoples.

³² Beck, L. W., “Kant and the right of revolution”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Jul. – Sept., 1971, Vol. 32, No. 3, p. 411-422.

Axinn, S., “Kant, authority and the French revolution”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, July. – Sept., 1971, Vol. 32, No. 3, p. 423-432 at page 430

³³ Cesaire, A., “Discourse on colonialism”, (trans.) Joan Pinkham, “A poetics of anticolonialism”, Kelly, R. D. G., *Monthly Review Press*, (1972) 2000.

³⁴ Fanon, F., *Toward the African revolution*, (trans.) H. Chevalier, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1967.

³⁵ Nkrumah, K., *Revolutionary path*, Panaf, London 1973.

³⁶ Lembede, A., *Freedom in our lifetime*, (ed.) Edgar R. R & Luyanda ka Msumza, Kwela Books, Cape Town, 2015.

³⁷ Astrow, A., *Zimbabwe: A revolution that lost its way?*, Zed Press, London, 1983.

³⁸ Hill, T. E., “Questions about Kant’s opposition to revolution”, *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36: 283-298, 2002, p. 287.

³⁹ Hill, T. E., “Questions about Kant’s opposition to revolution”, p. 287-291.

⁴⁰ Lea Ypi, “On revolution in Kant and Marx”, *Political Theory*, 2014, Vol. 42(3) 262-287 at page 267 (italics in the original text).

⁴¹ Beck, L. W., “Kant and the right of revolution”, p. 421.

⁴² Hegel, G. W. F., *The philosophy of history*, (trans.) Sibree, J., Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1956, p. 99.

⁴³ Reiss, H. S., “Kant and the right of rebellion”, p. 191.

⁴⁴ Reiss, H. S., “Kant and the right of rebellion”, p. 190-191.

⁴⁵ Beck, L. W., “Kant and right of revolution”, p. 412. I am disinclined to go further than making the point that Beck’s doubt does not refute the evidence furnished by Reiss on this exception. Going beyond this point would involve me in doing philosophy in the same “spirit” as my Western or other counterparts. Another example of doing philosophy in this spirit would be to consider whether or not *Widerstandsrecht* may be rendered as “right to revolution” given Kant’s *Revolutionen der Umbildung*. See, Nicholson, P., “Kant on the duty never to resist the sovereign”, *Ethics*, Apr., 1976, Vol. 86, No. 3, p. 214-230 at page 215. I prefer to avoid this in favour of my “African orientation in philosophy”.

⁴⁶ Sobrino, J., *The principle of mercy: Taking the crucified people from the cross*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1994, p. 1.

- ⁴⁷ Gutierrez, G., *Las Casas: In search of the poor of Jesus Christ*, (trans.) Barr, R. R., Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1993, p. 320.
- ⁴⁸ Kleingeld, Pauline, Kant's second thoughts on race, p. 586. Kleingeld's use of "non-Europeans" and "non-whites" in the text is ethically objectionable. The conquered peoples are neither the counterfoil of "Europe" nor of the metaphorical "whites" who are closer to pink in skin colour. When Nyerere used the counter concept, "non-African" this was met with objection as it happened also to the present author. See, Italiaander, R., *The new leaders of Africa*, (trans.) McGovern, J., Prentice-Hall, International, London, 1961, p. 82.
- ⁴⁹ Kleingeld, Pauline, "Kant's second thoughts on race", p. 588.
- ⁵⁰ Madrid, N. S., "Kant's juridical cosmopolitanism from the standpoint of some recent global justice theories", *Studia Philosophica Kantiana* 2/2014, p. 26 [page range: 18-31].
- ⁵¹ Healy, Paul, "Rethinking deliberative democracy: from deliberative discourse to transformative dialogue". In: *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 37, No. 3, 2011, pp. 302-303 for a similar argument see, Healy, Paul, "Self-other relations and the rationality of cultures". In: *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 26, No. 6, 2000, pp. 71-73 and, Healy, Paul, "Dialogue across boundaries: on discursive conditions necessary for a 'politics of equal recognition'". In: *Res Publica*. Vol. IV, No. 1, 1998, pp. 63-65.
- ⁵² Scheid, Anna Floerke, "Under the palaver tree: Community ethics for truth-telling and reconciliation", *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 2011, Vol.31, No. 1, p. 17-36 at page 19.
- ⁵³ Ki-Zerbo, J., quoted by De Tejada, F.E., "The future of Bantu law", *ARSP, Beiheft Neue Folge*, Nr. 11 1979. p. 304.
- ⁵⁴ De Tejada, F.E., "The future of Bantu law", p. 304.
- ⁵⁵ Davidson, B., *Africa in history*, Granada Publications Ltd., London, 1974. p. 28.
- ⁵⁶ Gutierrez, G., *The power of the poor in history*, (trans.) Barr, R. R., SCM Press, London and Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1983, p. 101.
- ⁵⁷ Forst, R., "The justification of progress and the progress of justification", in (ed.) Lauer, Helen and Yitah, Helen, *The tenacity of truthfulness: Philosophical essays in honour of Mogobe Bernard Ramose*, EARS, Pretoria, 2019, p. 147-163 at page 162.
- ⁵⁸ Al-Jabri, M. A., *Critique of Arab reason: Text, tradition and the construction of modernity in the Arab world*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Mbembe, A., *Critique de la raison negre*, Editions la Decouverte, Paris, France, 2013 The English translation published by Duke University Press in 2017 is: Critique of black reason
- ⁶⁰ Forst, R., *The right to justification: Elements of a constructivist theory of justice*, (trans.) Flynn, J., Columbia University Press, New York, p. 1
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Recebido / Received: 14 de novembro de 2021 / November 14, 2021

Aceito / Accepted: 2 de dezembro de 2021 / December 2, 2021

