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## Delving into the Ethical Dimension of *Ubuntu* Philosophy

Nicolito A. GIANAN

Department of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences  
University of the Philippines-Los Baños,  
College, Laguna, Philippines 4031  
nagi27\_uplb@yahoo.com.ph

**Abstract.** The article aims to delve into the ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is an African philosophy that reverberates in other cultures and in various forms, thus exemplifying its universality and universalizability. In this dimension, it tries to re-examine the notion of ethics in relation to morals/morality, including “is” and “ought”, with reference to the human person. Moreover, *Ubuntu* philosophy is articulated and communicated in the maxim that is an essential component in the lived experiences of the Bantu-speaking African community: “A person is a person through other persons.” With this, the article integrates some related European and Asian philosophies, considering the fact that *Ubuntu* philosophy endures as it is tenaciously upheld and edified alongside its implications.

**Keywords:** African philosophy, ethics, morality, *Ubuntu* philosophy

### INTRODUCTION

The investigation of the emergence of *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is an African philosophy, has spawned various applications, particularly in the academic, political, economic, cultural and even scientific communities worldwide.<sup>1</sup> The African word *Ubuntu* literally means humanity to others. This African meaning is valuable in mainstream philosophical thinking, for it entails the comprehension of the human individual or the human person as an existential and simultaneously ethical being. From this meaning, *Ubuntu* is conceived as a philosophy that is thought to be universal and universalizable. This conception of *Ubuntu* as a philosophy rings a bell in other cultures, though it is manifested in various ways.

One aspect of *Ubuntu* philosophy that can easily illustrate its universality and universalizability is its treatment of the human person. This aspect is recognized in its Zulu maxim: “A person is a person

through other persons.”<sup>2</sup> This maxim exposes an ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy. But, with this dimension, a problem arises concerning the individual’s understanding of ethics and morals/morality. Many people use them interchangeably; others claim that these are distinct yet essentially related. Apparently, these conflicting notions necessitate a re-examination of each, thereby featuring the dialectics of “is” and “ought” involving human action. Furthermore, this can be better understood by integrating some views of Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur and an inclusion of Asian philosophies characterizing *Ubuntu* philosophy,<sup>3</sup> stressing its ethical dimension and implications.

### UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY: UNIVERSAL AND UNIVERSALIZABLE

*Ubuntu* philosophy is manifested in other cultures and in various forms exemplified in European and Asian philosophies, rendering it universal and universalizable. It has come to the consciousness of non-Africans through the notion and exposition of African philosophy, and through various oral and written sources, reflecting the disposition and lived experiences of Africans (Ramose, 1999: 1ff). Also, the lived experiences of non-Africans are practically akin to the original practitioners of *Ubuntu* philosophy: Africans in general and the Bantu-speaking people in particular. It is noted that *Ubuntu* philosophy is revealed in the *volkegeist*, the spirit of the people (Quito, 1990: 1ff),<sup>4</sup> particularly of the Bantu-speaking African peoples.

Other cultures have attestations to the fact that every human person is to be treated as a value or as an end, not as a means to an end. This view, which essentially reflects a Kantian perspective, is claimed to be universal and universalizable. This is an appraisal that should be learned and understood by all those who make use of other people literally as means to achieve their selfish goals/ends. Obviously, applying this claim in another sphere, the *Ubuntu* philosophy does not perpetuate competition (in its negative sense) as espoused by those who possess the crab mentality and a damaging disposition towards others.<sup>5</sup> In this presentation, *Ubuntu* philosophy espouses well-meaning cooperation and participation within and among human individuals, and within a certain culture in relation to other cultures.

Moreover, *Ubuntu* philosophy is known and understood not only through the ruminations of African philosophers but also through non-African thinkers and cultures. It has become manifest even in politics, and has swayed people in the corporate and business world. With science and technology, particularly the computer hardware and software world, *Ubuntu* philosophy has made itself manifest.<sup>6</sup> Even the information and communications technology (ICT) world has heeded the call of *Ubuntu* philosophy and applied it in various contexts.

However, there are some instances wherein *Ubuntu* philosophy can be ignored and, hence, abuses can be carried out easily. The academe, for instance, is supposed to be a venue for inculcating the value of honesty, the ability of caring for the Other, for nurturing the right human values.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, these are frowned upon by mostly oblivious learners and even educators – the “learned”. In the academe, it has been observed that dishonesty can lurk in the seemingly smartened up buildings and offices of the “learned”, including the learners who possess the same twisted value system.<sup>8</sup> A great number of them are selfish; still some do not consider the basic fact that other people deserve the reverence due them. But then, in our context, this twisted value system would not come about if *Ubuntu* philosophy was to be applied. Noticeably, with *Ubuntu* philosophy, the “learned” should serve as models of the right values. The “I am because you are” mentality of *Ubuntu* emerges at this point, in view of the fact that the “learned” must exhibit and exemplify every respectable act anywhere, anytime.

The academe is supposed to be the place where true value formation must be “taught” and “caught”.<sup>9</sup> Learners are “taught” about the what, why, how, etc. of human values. Yet the more important part of the learning process is when values are “caught” not just “taught”. Values are “caught” because learners can observe how their educators educate them and, most importantly, notice their lifestyle in and out of the classroom or workplace. Again, it is very unfortunate that a number of educators do not care about values and the welfare of others. They even continue to exhibit an “I don’t care!” attitude among their peers and students. A number of them act as if they are “gods” and “goddesses” in the academe. Based on first-hand experience, together with some other concerned individuals with similar experience, these callous educators/learners continue to “pollute” the already “polluted” academe. But as it happens, *Ubuntu* philosophy does not recognize their insensible

approach. Fundamentally, *Ubuntu* philosophy turns away from any depersonalizing way of thinking. If this insensibility or depersonalization still lingers, then achieving the good, accomplished life possibly becomes bleak, given that the academe is regarded as one of the institutions of values formation.

Furthermore, *Ubuntu* philosophy maintains its impact in almost every facet of human existence worldwide. An added impression of this impact is that humans must be treated with value, respect and dignity most of all, regardless of colour, race, belief, worldview, profession etc. Agreeably, through this kind of treatment, *Ubuntu* philosophy develops and sustains the spirit of humanity to others.<sup>10</sup> It pushes the idea that humanity means more than just the ability to care for the human Other as much as one cares for oneself. It entails voluntary self-offering, which requires the Other to duly and unselfishly reciprocate as well. It conveys mutual human recognition of one another. By recognizing the Other as another self, true peace becomes attainable, and violence can be easily avoided or thwarted.<sup>11</sup>

It has been observed that *Ubuntu* philosophy has made its presence felt, understood and supported worldwide. Then again, in facets of human existence where it tends to deteriorate and be gradually yet deliberately ignored, this worldwide presence needs to be sustained because the *Ubuntu* attitude is susceptible to abuse by the unscrupulous, which the latter can easily take advantage of. There are individuals who simply disregard the predicaments of their peers, while the latter continue their struggle for a respectable human way of life. Still, unfortunately, many find it easy to cheat and kill, projecting a very problematic situation, especially if it is worldwide. It is a situation that manifests the questionable ethics/morality of a number of individuals in a particular culture. This notion of a questionable ethics/morality commences from the recognition of the experiences of human suffering, oppression or domination perpetuated by the unscrupulous, unmindful, complacent, selfish individuals who also have a distorted understanding of ethics/morality. Hence, with these opposing notions of ethics/morality, there appears to be a need for their re-examination. At the same time, it is noted that, once rightly recognized and assimilated in the context of *Ubuntu* philosophy, ethics/morality can bring about the transformation of those individuals with a twisted values system and enable them to act accordingly on anyone, anywhere, anytime.

## RE-EXAMINING THE NOTION OF ETHICS AND MORALS/MORALITY

Many of the writings available have oftentimes utilized the words “ethics” and “morals”/“morality” interchangeably. Considering this interchangeability, it can be thought that ethics is morality; one becomes moral when one becomes ethical. Norms are conceived by the human community, so that every member must act accordingly; and there are rules to be observed by all. Nonconformity or violation of a rule then makes the individual unethical and, hence, s/he becomes immoral. But this stance seems to be problematic because an unethical act does not necessarily mean that the act or the person is automatically immoral. For others, it seems that being ethical is a prerequisite to being moral. Still others present these as distinct because they claim that being ethical does not necessarily mean that one is always being moral. When one becomes immoral, it does not mean that one becomes unethical at once. The ethics of a certain culture does not automatically reflect its morality, and vice versa. The unscrupulous would think that cheating/killing is good for them and in the process they claim to be ethical/moral; oftentimes, they would impose their own brand of morality on others. Having these conflicting views in mind, it becomes necessary to review and re-examine the notion of ethics and morals/morality. Nonetheless, it is important to know and understand their etymological derivation/linguistic origin and meaning.

The notion of ethics can be understood in two ways: 1) from its etymology; and 2) other lexicons. First, the notion of ethics comes from the original Greek language. Specifically, ethics, taken collectively, is derived from the Greek *ethos*, meaning custom. *Ethos* refers to the characteristic and distinguishing attitudes, habits, beliefs, etc. of a certain individual or group. Second, ethics refers to a system, code or standards of conduct; it recurrently refers to tradition, practice, norm, pattern or way of life.<sup>12</sup>

The notion of moral(s) is derived from the Latin language. Specifically, it comes from the Latin *mos* (*singular*)/*mores* (*plural*), literally meaning custom(s). It is obvious at this point that the Latin *mos* (custom) is used as the counterpart of the Greek *ethos* (custom).<sup>13</sup> But that which particularly deals with a human person capable of right or wrong action, or that which relates to a right or wrong act, is what we regard as moral(s). Next, morality comes from the Late Latin *moralitas*/Latin *moralis*, which literally means moral quality or character; accordingly, it

signifies the quality of an act or a human action – either right or wrong. Nevertheless, it indicates that the quality or character of an act corresponds with the standards of a particular culture or society.

It seems that there are two views to take into account, namely: 1) the goal of one's action or the aim to which the performance of an act is directed; 2) the manner through which the goal or aim is attained. With these views, one can readily distinguish the ethical from the moral(s)/morality. Although both of them operate on the notion of the good or the bad, one can still easily provide a distinction between the ethical and the moral. The ethical view or ethics indicates the goal or aim, of an accomplished life for example (Aquino, 2009: 2). Ethics, then, is conceived as that which employs the marvellous faculty of human reason upon the supremely important question of what an upright life is and must be (Glenn, 1965: xi–xii). This conception presents the view that any human action, for it to be ethical, must be directed towards a certain goal or aim – it is and must be an upright human way of life and living. Many would consider this idea as pointing towards the attainment of the good life, an accomplished life. That which the human person aspires to achieve is the good, accomplished life – an ethical life. This aspiration is not to be done in isolation of self from others. Each human person should aim at the good life with and for others in just institutions (Ricoeur, 2000: 1ff). Treating another as oneself can reveal a dimension that elicits an *Ubuntu* attitude, which is not meant to be destructive of the Other. In this context, human action is supposed to be always directed toward the good. The human aim of the good becomes the impetus for doing something (Aquino, 2009: 2). Specifically, it is doing something for the sake of the good life. The good, accomplished life becomes the norm/rule for which the human person acts or does something.

Morals/morality pertains to the communication or expression of this goal or aim in terms of norms or rules that are considered to be mandatory or obligatory (Dauenhauer, 2005). It refers to the articulation of the goal or aim in norms characterized by the claim of universality and by an effect of constraint (Aquino, 2009: 2; Ricoeur, 2000: 1ff). Accordingly, moral norms are considered to be universal and these are considered to exercise some constraint on human conduct (Dauenhauer, 2005).

Both notions of ethics and morals/morality are applicable primarily to the human person and one's action in relation to oneself and others. In view of this, ethics is considered as teleologically oriented – that which is

directed to a goal/aim/purpose/end – and morals/morality is deontologically oriented – that which indicates a duty/obligation or the manner with which the act is demonstrated or articulated (Dauenhauer, 2005). Hence, human action is regulated by its goal/aim and the manner in which it is performed by the actor or agent.

Moreover, as an acting and speaking being, the human person is dependent on the norm or rule, on which the notion of “is” and “ought” of one’s action may be established. Some people characterize the relation between “is” and “ought” as a vexatious dichotomy (Aquino, 2009: 1). Yet, this seems to be not the case because, with reference to the human person, “the very ‘is’ of his actions comes with the ‘ought’ of precepts” (Aquino, 2009: 1; Ricoeur, 1992: 169). It becomes certain that the “is” of human action must also direct itself to the “ought”. In fact, the “ought” cannot be without the “is”. All the same, the very “is” of one’s action is not incompatible with the “ought” of precepts; they are supposed to be harmonizing.

It is noted that the human person is capable of thinking and acting. The human person can know and understand the state of affairs in the world. Every rational human person can engage in a deliberate, free and intelligent discourse with another human person, and vice versa. In this assessment, the human person is also considered to be capable of recognizing the Other as another human person on the same level as oneself. In fact, this way of thinking is espoused by *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is well exhibited in the famous Zulu maxim. Hence, transposing the assessment in this presentation, it can be claimed that, in the context of *Ubuntu* philosophy, a human being becomes truly a human being through other human beings. And so, it is asserted further that the human person treats one’s self as an-Other (self) – the Other, capable person.<sup>14</sup> This assertion gives rise to an existential-ethical account of *Ubuntu* philosophy, which may be more enhanced and understood by integrating the Levinasian Other and the Ricoeurian capable person.

#### LEVINASIAN OTHER AND RICOEURIAN PERSON

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is also demonstrated by its counterparts in other cultures, which is exemplified by integrating some views from Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur. This integration likewise clarifies the significance of the Zulu maxim, wherein the concept of Other is

epitomized by “the Face” or “Other” of Levinas, and the “capable person” is shown by Ricoeur.

Africans and Europeans are living in two different worlds in this seemingly diverse human universe. But it is noted that, by looking into their cultural background, they already had an encounter, an experience that would later be considered providential on the part of Africans. A part of Africa was once European in the sense that the former used to be one of the colonies of the latter. This experience is providential because Africans have endured the test of time with their audacity to affirm and uphold their humanity. Their audacity has brought to a conclusion the ill-effects of apartheid, and the world recognized this as beneficial to other communities with similar predicaments. The eradication of apartheid has transfigured the African worldview, and it has gradually brought a new way of looking at the world itself. For a fairly long period, the French played a role in the development of the African way of thinking and living. However, this does not mean that the French or other Europeans perpetually influenced the African mindset. On the contrary, it is noted that the African *volkegeist* has persisted, in spite of the fact that Europeans dominated it for that length of time.<sup>15</sup> The constant struggles of African fighters for independence and freedom have paved the way for a renewed interest in their own philosophy, which is exemplified by the promotion of *Ubuntu* philosophy itself and, in this context, corroborated by the universality and universalizability of the Levinasian and Ricoeurian ideas.

Emmanuel Levinas was a French existentialist and, agreeably, an ethical philosopher *par excellence*. Taking a cue from his philosophy, it is noted that his thought seems to resonate in the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. He gives the impression that his own experience of the body of the Other (Pol-Droit, 2006: 2) also reflects the Bantu maxim, upholding humanity to others, particularly in the assertion of the primacy of the Other (Burggraeve, 2002: XVII), wherein the notion of ethics becomes evident. For Levinas,

Ethics is not a reflexive activity but an experience. It does not result from a line of reasoning. It is not deduced but experienced. With the perception of the Other, each one finds himself forced and obliged by the presence of the Other. For the philosopher, the central fact – of ethics but also of humanity as such, is to be found in the rupture brought about in the world by this bodily presence of the Other who imposes himself in a mode very different from things (Pol-Droit, 2006: 2).

Apparently, the Other of Levinas is not the inanimate object of our will, not a thing, but the human Other. “In its weakness and misery, the body of the Other not only shows that it is vulnerable but also inviolable. It prohibits murder” (Garcia, 2008: 2). The experience of the presence of the Other calls for a recognition of the other person, not superficially but sincerely. When Levinas calls this experience “the Face”, he does not mean only literally the human face and its physical features. Garcia (2008: 2) explains this, saying: “The Face is not simply the human face but ‘the entire body of the Other insofar as human, insofar as it directly addresses itself to me and bestows upon me a responsibility that I am not able by any means to cast away.’”<sup>16</sup>

But the pervading attitude in the world seems to be contrary to what this thinker has advocated, and even contrary to what *Ubuntu* philosophy tries to convey for the sake of humanity. However, understanding the ethical significance of seeing the Other, as a manifestation of an-Other self, and practising it draws the human being/person or culture out of egoism, complacency and indifference (Garcia, 2008: 2). The Zulu dictum, properly applied, enables one to shun or turn away from selfish, egoistic, complacent and indifferent attitudes. The human person is then enabled to feel responsible for the Other. Garcia (2008: 2) points this out as he quotes Levinas (1969: 215): “It is my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign that constitutes the original fact of fraternity.” In view of this “feeling responsible for the Other”, the human person is driven to fundamentally understand oneself, so that in the process of recognizing the presence and affirming the primacy of the Other – “the Face” – one can become ethical. “To become ethical is to affirm the primacy of the Other. It is to take as a rule of life the dictum of etiquette ‘After you, please!’ (*après vous!*)” (Garcia, 2008: 2).

Paul Ricoeur was a French philosopher and literary critic, particularly educated in the existentialist and phenomenological traditions (Blackburn, 2005: 319). It is observed that he embraced a philosophy of the existentialist tradition, specifically existential phenomenology. Gradually, he combined this view with the science of interpretation or hermeneutics, accordingly allowing him to have a better look at his philosophical anthropology and its remarkable implications on the human person.

Ricoeur (1992: 169) considers the human individual as a capable person. This consideration is significantly reflected in his subsequent works,

wherein he promotes the idea that each human person can engage in a free, thoughtful action; but he never accepts any version of a substance dualism in the human person as required in the thinking subject (*cogito*) of Descartes or the transcendental subject of Kant (Dauenhauer, 2005). The human person is capable of acting and speaking. As such, the human person is also exposed to the rules or precepts with which one's acting and speaking should correspond. With the presence of these precepts, it is claimed that there is actually no dichotomy between "is" and "ought". This claim, in Ricoeur's view, somehow shows a kind of non-dualism (similar to Tillich's dialectics of being–nonbeing). For Ricoeur (1992: 169), the alleged is–ought dichotomy, in regard to the human person, does not arise because the very "is" of one's actions comes with the "ought" of precepts (Aquino, 2009: 1).

The relation of "is" and "ought" is discernible in every human person. Taking this is–ought relation into account and agreeing with Dauenhauer, it is maintained that every human person is capable of initiating a new action and what s/he does is imputable or attributable to her/him as a deliberately and freely chosen action. Generally, when one does something, it goes along with one's intention and volition; that is, it tends to comply with the corresponding norms/precepts. The exercise or performance of one's action likewise corresponds with the dimension of meaning, wherein it really makes sense to evaluate, and therefore relate to, the norms and precepts of doing something, as stressed by Aquino (2009: 2). One must know these norms/precepts in order to appropriately direct one's action. These norms/precepts are the results of the deliberations of human persons in community; these become the standards that each human individual member must adhere to. Agreeably, nonetheless, these standards are never the fruit of the ruminations of the solitary actor or agent, but of a community of practitioners (Aquino, 2009: 2; cf. Ricoeur, 1992: 176).

In addition, the human person's capability of acting entails one's basic power to gauge his/her actions and others' as well in accordance with the standards of excellence that serve as constitutive rules (Aquino, 2009: 2). Every human person should act according to the rules as set by one's culture. This human culture imposes its own rules for the constituents to follow faithfully. In this perspective, every human person's basic power is understood as one's power to esteem – his entitlement also to esteem and respect.<sup>17</sup> In the context of *Ubuntu* philosophy, it becomes one's

entitlement to esteem and respect the other person in that culture, and the same is applied to other cultures.

After having been exposed to some attestations from European philosophy, *Ubuntu* philosophy is likewise demonstrated in the integration of Asian philosophy as exemplified by the philosophy of *jen* (Chinese) and the philosophy of *loob* (Filipino).<sup>18</sup>

### PHILOSOPHY OF *JEN* AND PHILOSOPHY OF *LOOB*

The foregoing has exhibited the view that the force of the presence of the Levinasian “Other” coupled with the Ricoeurian “capable person” also concretizes the Zulu dictum. Likewise, considering this integration laconically, it is asserted that the philosophy of *jen* and the philosophy of *loob* complement the European manifestations of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

The philosophy of *jen* is of Chinese origin. It was espoused by one of the foremost Chinese thinkers, the renowned first teacher, Confucius. As a universal virtue, one which becomes the basis of all goodness (Fung, 1953: 42; Chan, 1963: 1ff), *jen* was revolutionized by Confucius. Among its many allusions, one can readily expect that humanness, human-heartedness, humanity to others and benevolence would emerge (Cooper, 1996: 64). In particular, and agreeably, the idea of humanity to others or benevolence is universal and universalizable as well. Every human person possesses this kind of virtue or value that needs to be cultivated and nurtured in relation to other human persons.

Meng Zi, also known as Mencius (Latinized name), a Confucian, forwarded the thought that human nature is inherently good. The nature of humanity to others derives from the “seeds of goodness” of every human person. More to the point, “The beginning of *jen* or benevolence is the *xin* that is sensitive to the sufferings of others” (Llanera, 2010) This point also expresses the essence of humanity to others. In this case, humanity elicits the “feeling for the human other” in community. This Confucian–Mencian view demonstrates the fact that every human being possesses the goodness required in relating with other human beings. After all, every human being is predisposed to act for the good of the Other by the heart-mind harmony.

When it is the will alone which is active, it moves the passion-nature. When it is the passion-nature alone which is active, it moves the will. For instance now, in the case of a man falling or running, that is from the passion-nature, and yet it moves the mind.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, Mencius does not separate one's thought from one's feelings; he doesn't isolate his will from his passion-nature. In the context of the belief that thought influences one's actions, the inherent goodness of every human person becomes the basis of thinking of something good, and doing it for the sake of the Other. This belief also resonates in the philosophy of *loob*.

The philosophy of *loob* is of Filipino origin (see Gianan, 2009: 17–24; Andres, n.d.) and is an embryonic Filipino philosophy (Mercado, 1974: 1ff; Abulad, 1988: 1–13; Gripaldo, 2009: 1ff; Co, 1988: 27–34; Dy, 1988: 35–41; Miranda, 1988: 1ff; Timbreza, 2008: 1ff; Ferriols, 1999: 1ff; Alejo, 1990: 1ff). It is advocated by Filipino thinkers who believe in its power of edifying not only the self, but also the Other as oneself. It indicates a Confucian–Mencian belief that every human person is naturally good, as opposed to Xun Zi's belief that human nature is evil.<sup>20</sup> *Loob* is naturally humane, as it also espouses the human goodness within.<sup>21</sup> What makes the human person bad or evil is the influence of the outside stimulus or external force that imposes itself on the human will (Llanera, 2010).

The concept of *loob* exhibits human interiority as a superior human benevolent attribute. Essentially, it promotes the good of the Other as well. Unfortunately, a number of individuals or Filipinos succumb to doing the contrary – not because they're fundamentally bad or evil but because of the external influence of, for instance, the capitalistic mindset. The imposition of the idea of business rivalry or competition has brought with it the suppression of the value of cooperation and participation. The so-called crab mentality, which is known to be a universal phenomenon, has seeped into almost all forms of human relationships and every culture in the world. This crab mentality has nearly subjugated the “*bayanihan*” attitude of the Filipinos.<sup>22</sup> The “*bayanihan*” attitude has also gradually eroded due to the influx of the Western way of thinking and acting or lifestyle. Even so, the philosophy of *loob*, as embodied by Filipino “*kalooban*” (see Dy, 1988: 35–41) or “*kagandahang-kalooban*” (the goodness of the human within) is neither destructive nor annihilating.<sup>23</sup> The philosophy of *loob* never takes

advantage of the Other, particularly the weak and the lowly. It never looks down on any human individual, other people or culture.

According to what has been said, the Chinese philosophy of *jen* exhibits and upholds the human-heartedness and inherent human goodness of every human person. It promotes every humane and benevolent action towards the Other. The Filipino philosophy of *loob* essentially articulates the same thought.<sup>24</sup> It also preserves the humaneness, human-heartedness and benevolence of every human person. These are but a few characterizations of *Ubuntu* philosophy, interrelating humanity to others in the non-African cultures. By and large, this integration, i.e. of the Levinasian-Ricoeurian philosophies with complementary Asian exemplifications, further endorses the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, its ethical dimension and some implications.

### ETHICAL DIMENSION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is also conceived as an African philosophy for peace (Manda, 2009: 1ff), may be viewed from its notion of humanity to others, as it elicits some of its relevant implications. Likewise, it expresses some views on the Zulu maxim: "A person is a person through other persons." Correspondingly, this maxim illustrates the human person as existential and ethical. From this perspective, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* continues to be given life in other cultures in different ways as it retains its existential-ethical characterizations, promoting and upholding humanity to others.

The African treatment of the human person is not the result of the ruminations of any child on some magical things and experiences. Rather, it is an offshoot of the cogitations of the African people as existent human beings who partake of the capacity to think and reason (Gianan, 2010: 94). Applying the Cartesian *cogito* at this point, it is noted that the human person thinks, therefore, s/he is; s/he thinks, therefore, s/he exists. The African thinks, therefore, the African exists. This recognition is also true for non-Africans that think and reason. With this thought, articulating the ethical dimension entails recognition of the fact that the Africans are not only existing but also fundamentally thinking human beings (Louw, 1998: 1ff).<sup>25</sup> Besides, their existence and way of thinking characterize their disposition towards their fellow humans, their being-with-others. It is a disposition of extending their humanity to

others – human individuals and cultures that recognize, understand and accept them.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, this ethical dimension entails a sense of community and communality (Gianan, 2010: 86), which is reflected in the belief that the human person should not live in isolation of the Other (human person). Every human person should consider the value of the presence of the Other(s) in community. In any case, Africans are of the view that a human being is only recognized as a human being through other human beings. “We affirm our humanity when we acknowledge that of others” (Manda, 2009: 1ff). The human being is a human being because of the collective participation of other human beings; hence, this relation is also communal. If one is deprived of this collective participation, then one becomes a “non-entity”; hence, it becomes a deprivation that illustrates an uncaring and dehumanizing way of thinking/behaving (Manda, 2009: 1ff). In contrast, it must be noted that the philosophy of *Ubuntu* actually promotes the principle of caring for the Other(s). (Manda, 2009: 1ff; Mandela, 1994: 1ff)

Furthermore, *Ubuntu* philosophy aims for the full realization of others, or the self-fulfilment of each human being, leading to the edification of the Other as an-Other self, i.e. as a process of self-realization through others (Louw, 1998: 1ff; cf. Broodryk, 1997: 1ff). Outside of the purview of this aim, the human being becomes unethical. Although this does not immediately make one immoral, still there is a possibility to be such, in the process of acting or doing something. The act may become malicious, because one’s action may no longer conform to the attainment of the aim – human being’s fullness of existence, one’s full self-realization.

Nevertheless, upholding the ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy may bring about PEACE. Embedded in this notion of PEACE, among others, are the following implications: Personal, Economic, Axiological, Cultural and Environmental. Given the fact that a human person cannot live in isolation of the other person, *Ubuntu* philosophy seeks to improve another person as oneself. The “I am because you are” is given an intra- and inter-personal feature of human relationships; hence, the *personal* entails one’s harmonious relation with another human person (social) and one’s relation with the government or the state (political). Rather than competition, it espouses the idea that cooperation and participation can bring about better *economic* progress and prosperity. The *axiolo-*

*gical* implication is expressed in the idea that it values the self and the Other (human person); it essentially sorts out the nature and type of the values of every human person regardless of colour, race, nationality, profession or status in life. The *cultural* implication is exemplified by the recognition and promotion of *Ubuntu* philosophy worldwide, involving other cultures in the pursuit of the edification of the human Other, capable person. The *environmental* implication is not to be ignored in the process, since the human–environment relationship has become so unstable and unpredictable. Climate change, for instance, is predominantly attributed to the unhampered, indiscriminate tinkering of the natural environment by human beings themselves. With these implications, among others, the ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy also elicits the kind of responsibility (more specifically, response ability) that every human person possesses, and with which everyone can attain the plenitude of humanity to others.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* has been articulated in an attempt to promote the meaning of humanity to others, which is essentially universal and universalizable. The notion of humanity to others leads to the communication of its existential-ethical attributes. With this, the notion of ethics and moral(s)/morality has been reviewed and re-examined, and it yielded the idea that ethics or the ethical life relates to the aim, goal, purpose and end of human action (teleological realm) – the good life; while it is noted that moral(s)/morality pertains to the nature of the act itself (deontological realm), either right or wrong; it pertains to the rectitude or malice of the expression/articulation of human action towards the attainment of the accomplished, ethical life. Accordingly, this reassessment has elicited the idea that the “is” of human action goes along with the “ought” of human precepts. Moreover, upholding the *Ubuntu* philosophy fundamentally reinforces the maxim: “A person is a person through other persons.” The human person becomes a human person on account of other human persons. In any event, this maxim implies two views, namely negative and positive. The negative view is exhibited by some individuals who take advantage of the human person’s self-offering for the Other; many of them exploit the vulnerability of the Other. This negative view is also exemplified by malevolence in the

context of competition or rivalry; this negative view is likewise clearly typified by crab mentality. The positive view demonstrates honesty to oneself and others, cultivating an attitude of caring for the Other(s). It aims for the edification of the Other in oneself. “I am dedicated to the well-being of the Other, without having chosen it. In spite of themselves, people are called to dedicate themselves to the well-being of the Others” (Garcia, 2008: 3). In addition, the philosophy of *jen* and the philosophy of *loob* put forward a corresponding manifestation of *Ubuntu* philosophy in the Asian perspective. Generally, both of them exhibit humaneness, benevolence and humanity to others as well.

Finally, delving into the ethical dimension of *Ubuntu* philosophy indicates the pre-eminent role of every human person in promoting and upholding humanity to others, realizing the good life – the accomplished human culture of life. Once properly understood and carried out, *Ubuntu* philosophy can bring about an ethical PEACE. It puts meaning on the dialectics of the self as an-Other and as a capable person (personal). It promotes cooperation and participation in the context of, for instance, pursuing economic prosperity (economic). It promotes the value of every human person as an end (axiological), not as means to a selfish/self-embellishing end. It upholds its own culture, while respecting and enriching other co-existing cultures (cultural). It seeks to restore harmonious human–environment relations (environmental). Hence, in its advocacy of the realization of humanity to others, *Ubuntu* philosophy calls on everyone to responsibly act towards the humanization and attainment of such ethical PEACE, i.e. with and for oneself, the Others and the world.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This invites readers to understand African philosophy in general and recommends a separate study on the Bantu philosophy in particular.
- <sup>2</sup> This maxim emanated from the Bantu-speaking African peoples. See Placide Tempels. *Bantu Philosophy*. Trans. Colin King. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959: 1ff.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ubuntu* philosophy is also articulated in the Levinasian “Other” as “the Face” and the Ricoeurian “capable person”, including Chinese philosophy of *jen* and Filipino philosophy of *loob* (*lo-ob*). [NB: This also serves as rectification of some errors in the previous work on “Valuing the emergence of *Ubuntu* philosophy” (CIJPCA, VII: 1, 2010: 90). With apologies to all concerned, some words (previously handwritten notes) were inadvertently omitted in its final draft/last edition (electronic). In that volume, the statement should read: “...reminiscence of the ‘face’ of Emmanuel Levinas and the ‘capable person’ of Paul Ricoeur.”]

- <sup>4</sup> “*Volkegeist* means “the spirit of the people” and *Volke* is “a community of people whose shared language and historical traditions shape the mental process of its members and provide essential resources for the process of its development”  
(<http://www.volkegeist.org/>).
- <sup>5</sup> “This concept references an interesting phenomenon which occurs in buckets of crabs. If one crab attempts to escape from a bucket of live crabs, the other crabs will pull it back down, rather than allowing it to get free. Sometimes, the crabs seem almost malicious, waiting until the crab has almost escaped before yanking it back into the pot ... When someone has a crab mentality, it means that they are unwilling to allow someone to get out of a situation, or to get ahead. In a classic example of crab mentality, people who are attempting to get out of bad life situations often find themselves foiled by friends and family members who keep sucking them back in. For example, a Latina immigrant in the United States who decides to pursue a college education in the hopes of securing a good career may find herself discouraged by family members who do not approve of education, or fear that she will become distanced from her family after going to college. The crab mentality can strike at all levels of life ... In office environments, the crab mentality can be particularly devastating, as coworkers snipe at each other to bring each other down, rather than congratulating someone who earns a promotion.”  
From <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-crab-mentality.htm>;  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crab\\_mentality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crab_mentality);  
<http://emania.com/philippines/2010/01/19/crab-mentality-is-universal/>
- <sup>6</sup> Thanks to Canonical Ltd., Netherlands and its collaborators, for also promoting the *Ubuntu* philosophy.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Andres Tomas. *Positive Filipino Values*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1989: 1ff.
- <sup>8</sup> This view does not mean to universalize dishonesty as *the* practice of every educator in every educational institution. But it is asserted that dishonesty must not be a practice to be exhibited at anytime by anyone, in any institution, by any educator/learner. The “polluted” environment refers only to those educational institutions that have educators who are dishonest. The presence of dishonest educators can destroy the credible ecology of any concerned educational institution.
- <sup>9</sup> The author learned about “values are taught and caught” during one of the seminar-workshops in teaching around 2002–2005.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. <https://help.ubuntu.com/6.06/Ubuntu/about-Ubuntu/C/aboutUbuntu.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> This view calls on all “suicide bombers” and all those with malicious intent: stop any plan/action to eliminate or harm other humans. Violence is neither an answer nor a solution to world problems. Your life is also precious; live and share it with others. Desire a culture of life and peaceful coexistence for all human beings.
- <sup>12</sup> See Webster’s New World Dictionary, New York: Prentice Hall, 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> Latin *mos* (nominative case, singular); *moris* (genitive case, singular); *mores* (nominative case, plural) – custom(s). *Mores* (plural form of Latin *mos*) entails human manners or (literally) morals; it was used by Cicero as a translation of the Greek *ethikos* (Latin, *ethicus*) / *ethos*. Cf. also Webster’s New World Dictionary.

- <sup>14</sup> See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/>; Aquino, 2009:1; Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992: 169) and Leovino Garcia's paper "Responsibility for the Other's Rights: Fraternity as Foundation for Equality and Freedom", World Philosophy Day, 20 November 2008. Cf. [http://www.unesconatcom.ph/shs\\_papers.html](http://www.unesconatcom.ph/shs_papers.html) – Accessed on 4 March 2011.
- <sup>15</sup> See <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=orl>; [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/K-12/French\\_16178.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/K-12/French_16178.html); <http://www.questia.com/library/book/the-french-encounter-with-africans-white-response-to-blacks-1530-1880-by-william-b-cohen.jsp>
- <sup>16</sup> Including the quotation by Garcia (2008: 2) from Roger Pol-Droit, *The Other Above Everything*. Trans. Leovino Garcia. Le Monde. 6 January 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> Aquino (2009: 2) stresses: "On this level, the capable person's power is at the basis of his rights, but this is not the power to claim rights, nor to enforce them against others, but principally the power to use the qualifiers good or bad in respect of his own actions and those of others, at the same time as he attributes or assigns these actions to himself."
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Dionisio Miranda's *Loob: The Filipino Within*. Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 1988: 1ff; Rolando M. Gripaldo (ed.), *Filipino Cultural Traits: Claro R. Ceniza Lecture; Philippine Philosophical Studies, III*. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005: 1ff.
- <sup>19</sup> As quoted by Llanera (2010: NA), from Mencius, *The Life and Works of Mencius*. James Legge (trans.). London, 1875: 164–166.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. <http://shadowintheblade.com/chinesephilosophy/tag/human-nature-is-bad/>
- <sup>21</sup> "Within" is literally translated as "loob"; "loob" elicits a sense of human interiority, an inherent and benevolent Filipino characteristic. Cf. "Understanding The Filipino Philosophy Of Resiliency: *Katatagang-Loob* And Its Phenomenological Considerations." Joseph Anthony Narciso Z. Tiangco, <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series03/IIID-4/chapter-3.htm>
- <sup>22</sup> "*Bayaniban* (pronounced [ˌbajɐˈnihan]) is a Filipino term taken from the word *bayan*, referring to a nation, town or community. The whole term *bayaniban* refers to a spirit of communal unity or effort to achieve a particular objective. The origin of the term *bayaniban* can be traced from a common tradition in Philippine towns where community members volunteer to help a family move to a new place. The process involves literally carrying the house to its new location. This is done by putting bamboo poles forming a strong frame to lift the stilts from the ground and carrying the whole house with the men positioned at the ends of each pole (...) The tradition also features a small fiesta hosted by the family to express gratitude to the volunteers." See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayaniban>.
- <sup>23</sup> See foreigner's view at <http://michaeldsellers.weearth.com/2010/11/14/pacquiao-margarito-what-we-can-learn-from-the-humility-empathy-and-grace-of-manny-pacquiao/>
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. Katrin De Guia. *Kapwa: The Self in the Other: Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2005: 1ff.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriLouw.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, they are those who do not complete the “mutual exposure”/mutual recognition of one another. Cf. Charles Taylor. *Philosophical Papers (vol. 2): Philosophy and the human sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995: 1ff; from Dirk Louw, “Ubuntu: An African Assessment of the Religious Other.” *Paideia*, 1998: 1ff.

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