

The place of humans in African environmental theories: *Obligatory anthropoholistic perspective*

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Abstract

African environmental philosophy has been branded anthropocentric by Western as well as African scholars. The extent to which this is true is arguable. This paper looks at various theories in African environmental ethics in the light of tracing the place of the human being in them. It argues that African ontology has a place for the human being in the environment but these theories failed to give the sense in which humans have a privileged place in the ecosystem. . Philosophical analysis will show the weaknesses inherent in some of the theories put forward by scholars in African environmental ethics. Obligatory anthropoholism as a viable African environmental theory argues that humans hold a privileged place in African ontology which does not translate to anthropocentrism or holism. The place of humans therefore is an obligatory place, for it is humans who are capable of tending, caring and preserving the ecosystem. The purpose of this care is for the balance of the holistic ecosystem

Introduction

African Environmental Ethics has been branded Anthropocentric by Western and African Scholars alike. Callicott, an Emeritus Professor from the University of North Texas. Houston was one of the scholars who criticized Africa as having a purely Anthropocentric stance: In his words:

Apparently, therefore Africa looms as a big spot on the world map of indigenous environmental ethics for a very good reason, African thought orbits seemingly, around human interest. Hence one might expect to distil from it no more than a weak and indirect environmental ethic. Similar to (a) type of ecologically enlightened utilitarianism, focused on long-range human welfare. Or perhaps one could develop a distinctly African stewardship environmental ethics grounded in African Monotheism.¹

For Callicott, African thought, or philosophy revolves around anthropocentrism and therefore inadequate. Beyond Callicott, other scholars in Africa have lent their voices to this view. For them, African worldview or culture is human centered and thus Anthropocentric. Africans believe in the hierarchy of being according to Mbiti. But a more recent articulation of this hierarchical argument is found in South African philosopher, Augustine Shutte's book². Apart from a permanent causal relationship between God and the universe, he identifies two other features of the traditional view of the Universe, namely, its hierarchical structure and the fact that it is centered on humanity.

The hierarchy of the Universe is a hierarchy of strength or power. God is at the top, inanimate things are at the bottom, with humanity in the middle. For him, humanity occupies the central place and this is true not in the sense that we occupy the middle tier of the hierarchy of life or vital force, but also is the most important players in this drama.

Another way of understanding the hierarchy of beings would be to see it as involving three worlds. The spiritual world consists first and foremost of the Great Spirit, God, but also include family ancestral spirit and chiefs, territorial ancestral spirit; which is why they are commonly associated with traditional African ecological religious beliefs. The human world according to Tarringa, consists of the living dead and those who are yet to be born. In fact, living human beings have strict duties of obedience both to the dead and to the yet to be born. This is illustrated by the popular Kenyan proverb, *the world was not given to you by your parents – was lent to you by our children*. God communicates with living human beings through the ancestors. Within the realm of living human beings the elders occupy a higher position than youths. The older use their experience to transmit moral wisdom to the young through tales and proverbs. The young have strict duties of obedience to the elders, duties of respect and duties to listen to the wisdom disseminated which becomes the common moral position of those living finite lives³. Finally the natural world consists of animals, plants and all biological life. Animals are mostly personified in the principle of totem-animals. This is a religious idea around which many if not most traditional African countries understand their relationship to each other and the rest of the world.

One observes consent to Callicott's branding of Africa scattered in the works of African writers. Ogumbemi also acknowledges that the African ethic of care is different from the feminist ethics of care in that it is essentially human centered. Humans are taken necessarily to rely on the non-human world for survival. In essence, it is precisely for the sake of present and future human well being that we must treat the natural world in which we live with respect.

Beyond traditional African theory, Modern African thought also revolves around humanism. The human person/being has a pride of place which is often interpreted as human centered ethic.

1. The human being in African understanding

Augustine Shuttle in his work, *Philosophy for Africa* did a work on contemporary African conception of the human person and his ontological positioning in Africa. He used the Shona term *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* to discuss this. For him, because a person subsists in the relationships that unite them to others, the character of the person changes as these relations change. In African thought, this change is understood in a very radical way.⁴ It is a people themselves and as a whole that change. We are in fact under construction. As we grow older, we become more, more of a person, more ourselves. One does not just take an additional features, one also undergoes fundamental changes at the very core of one's being. Growth therefore, is always a normative notion. In African thought however, the growth of a person has not only a psychological meaning but an ethical one. As Menkiti puts it, personhood is something at which individual could fail.

The point here is that the human person has a pride of place in African ontology. It is not a stand-alone human being but a human person in a community. This community is often interpreted as only human community but later in this work, we will still show that this community also includes the inanimate community. Menkiti's conception of community is unique in that he distinguishes the African idea of community from the view that sees it simply as *the aggregated sum of individuals*. Instead he calls it *a collectivity in the truest sense* namely one where there is an organic dimension to the relationship between the

component individuals.⁶ Individuals develop within this organism; it is not formed by the association of individuals. Indeed African thought asserts an Ontological independence to human society and moves from society to individuals rather than in the manner of Western thought, from Individuals to Society. Senghor though agreeing with Menkiti's anti-individualist account, is not happy with his collective alternative. His chief concern is to distinguish the African view of community from all the best known European ones, all of which he labels collectivist in a negatively critical sense. He especially wants to differentiate the African view from any form of communism or European Socialism speaking instead of a *Community Society* and coining the term *Communalism* to express the African conception. He holds a community-based society, communal, not collectivist. We are concerned here, not with a mere collection of individuals, but with people conspiring together, con-spiring in basic Latin sense, united among themselves even to the very centre of their being (1963:16).

Senghor discussing the place of the human person in African ontology always cannot but go with discourse on the community. For it seems that it is the community that makes the individual and not the other way round. What then is the relationship between the individual and the community in African humanism? Also what is this community? Mulago tries to answer the first question of the mode of relationship between the individual not the community. For him, it is that of "participation". This denotes the way in which the individual is seen as belonging to the group in African thought. Participation is the element of connection which unites different beings as beings, as substance, without confusing them. It is the pivot of relationships between members of the same community, the link which binds together individuals

and groups, the ultimate meaning not only of the unity which is personal to each man but of that unity in multiplicity, that totality, that concern hic and harmonic unity of the visible and the invisible worlds.⁷ Senghor also speaks of “the general activity of the group and of dialogue as a special kind of activity that both creates and expresses a community.

As to what constitutes community in the African concept of a person (human) Mogobe B. Ramose attempted a beautiful explication of the concept of community. He uses a different word from that used by Shutte; *Motho ke Motho ka batho*.⁸ This is a Sotho proverb found in almost all the indigenous languages of Africa. To buttress his point, Igbo use proverbs like *Igwe bu ike; (Unity is strength)*. That word means that to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis, establish human relations with them. Accordingly, it is Botho (humanness or humanity) and a humane respectful and polite attitude towards other human beings which constitute the proverb’s core or central meaning. For Ramose, the concept of *Botho or Ubuntu* as it is referred to in this proverb in Indigenous African languages is not readily translatable into humanism, especially if humanism is understood as a specific trend in the evolution of Western Philosophy. Humanness is a better rendition of the concept. Humanness suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding. It is thus opposed to any “ism” including humanism, for this tends to suggest a condition of finality, a closedness or a kind of absolute either incapable of, or resistant to, any further movement. But motion being the principle of change, it follows that resistance to motion is tantamount to resistant to change. This basic difference between humanness and humanism speaks to two different perceptions of and perspectives on reality or being.

For Ramose, humanness regards being, or the universe as a complex wholeness involving the multi-layered and incessant interaction of all entities. This condition of permanent, multi-directional movement of entities is not by definition chaos. On the contrary, it is both the source and the manifestation of the inherent order of the universe. Herein lies the ecosophical dimension of the indigenous African concept of Ubuntu. Thus, for Ramose, the concept of community or wholeness applies also (by extension) to the relationship between human beings and physical or objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for physical nature as well. For him, without such care, the interdependence between human being and physical nature would be undermined. Moreover, human beings are indeed an intrinsic part of physical nature although possibly a privileged part.⁹ Thus, any perspective on African environmental ethics which does not recognize the privileged part of human being in the universe is not in strict sense African environmental ethics. I describe it as Holism. We will still come back to this point. Ramose further avers that caring for one another is the fulfillment of the natural duty to care for physical nature too. The concept of harmony in African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of balance in terms of the reality of the relations that can be maintained between and among human beings as well as between human beings and physical nature. The quest for harmony is thus the striving to maintain a comprehensive but specific relational condition among organisms and entities. It is the constant striving to strike, and then maintain a balance between human beings and physical nature. One notices the two sides of Ramose's conception of Ubuntu and the environment. The first is the place of man (human beings) as a privileged part and the second and also very crucial is the wholeness,

community, communal, communitarian aspect of African ontology. To describe African environmental ethics as Anthropocentric tends to exclude this wholeness aspect of her ontology and also to brand it Holistic still hides the place of human being in the process. Any theory or ethics that will capture African environmental ethics or attitude should incorporate these two values. We will still see that most of the theories put forward by African environmentalists good as they may be, try to either shy away or over bloat their views so as to protect African environmental ethics from being branded anthropocentric.

Lewis R. Gordon on African humanism in Modern Africa in his work; *An Introduction to African Philosophy* published by Cambridge University Press avers, *I know no African Philosopher who has not argued that African philosophy is humanistic.*¹⁰ He however defined humanism as a value system that place priority on the welfare, worth and dignity of human beings, its presence in pre colonial African religious and philosophical thought can easily be found. In religious thought such as that among the Akan in what is today Ghana, for example, human beings do not seek redemption in an afterlife because, for them, punishment or redemption exists only on earth. Consequently, there is a tendency to place great weight on human action and human subjects.

Despite the presence of many indigenous ethnic groups in Africa, there is much similarity in the cosmologies that ground their religious practices, especially those of people south of the Sahara. A major reason for this commonality, for Gordons, is that many of them descended from a set of communities along the ancient lakes and plains of the Sahara-Sahelian region of Northern Africa that subsequently dried up and became a desert. The second phase is connected to the history of ancient Egypt,

particularly the Archaic or Thinite period (3100BCE – 2700BCE) and the Old (2650 – 2134 BCE) and middle (2040 – 1640BCE) Kingdoms. The peoples of those older kingdoms were pushed away from the Northeastern region of Africa and eventually became known as the variety of Sub-Saharan groups of today. Scholars particularly linguistic anthropologists have shown the connections, however, between the language of some of these people today and those of the ancient Egyptian Past.¹¹

For Ikenga Oraegbunam, humanism is a slippery word that today covers a watershed of opinions, attitudes, outlooks and movements that centre on man. Various scholars have developed a wide range of interest on some aspects of humanism some of which are theistic or atheistic, literary or intellectual, ethical or political. He further avers that African humanism and development therefore would take the line that calls for living in harmony with ones neighbour both visible and invisible, the environment and with oneself-physical, social, spiritual, natural and supernatural realities. For him, the concern of the philosopher is more of the determination of this holistic worldview rather than the number of the elements that enter into the constitution of man.¹² Metuh, discussing African humanism, asserts that man maintains a vital relationship with God, deities, ancestors, the tribe, clan and with nature as a whole.

Another way to understand the ontological placement of the human being is in the names given in Africa. *Names and symbols in Africa*. George Ehusani has identified their names in Epira language in Southwestern Nigeria. Examples are Ozovehe (the human person is life) Ozohu (The human person is supreme) Oziohu (children are supreme). Ozovisa the human person is worth a great deal) Ozovize (the never ceases to exist) Ozovinoyi (the human person is multitude.²⁰ The place of humans in African

thought made scholars to assert her environmental attitude as anthropocentric but at a second look one sees that man in African context does not live in isolation as in other ontologies. Man lives in communities. It is therefore in the community that man finds his individuality. This, however, has been argued by scholars as being the reason for African underdevelopment and often times the individuality of the African person is often asserted to be confused in the community. Even though this is not what this work intends to solve yet the individuality of the African man is not swallowed.

What then constitutes this community? If the human being anthropos has a pride of place only in her relationship with the community, what are the components of this community? Readily, it can be said to be human community the elders, extended family, but it also includes the ancestors and more importantly the physical nature. The concept of community has been described in various ways as it relates to African environmental ethics, Communitarism, Holistic ethics, Relationality etc. The simplest understanding of the human person in African Ontology is that man lives in a community, thus no discourse in African philosophy can be done successfully about the human being without making mention of his community. This implies few things: firstly, that the human being has an advantaged position. Secondly, that the human being in African context is not complete alone except in a community of other beings both above and below her. Thirdly, that, the community cannot also function properly without the instrumentality of the human person. Let us briefly look at the Holistic conception of African ontology, this will enable us see the loophole in branding African environmental ethics Anthropocentric. If African Ontology is also community based,

holistic or communal in such a way that it is in togetherness that the individual realizes herself, it then means that anthropocentrism as African environmental ethics is not admissible.

2. The human being in an interconnected universe

The African is convinced that all things in the cosmos are interconnected. All natural forces depend on each other, so that human beings can live in harmony only in and with the whole of nature. Munya radzi Felix speaks of the interdependence of individual within the larger society to which they belong and to the environment on which they all depend and describes an ethical outlook that suggests that human well-being is indispensable from our dependence on and interdependence with all that exists, and particularly with the immediate environment on which all humanity depends.¹³ Godfrey Tangwa, a highly regarded philosopher, born in Cameroon, writes that the pre-colonial traditional African metaphysical outlook implies recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful co-existence between earth, plants, animals and humans.¹⁴

Kelvin Behrens opines, however, that the question that remains is how best we might understand this strong emphasis on the inter-connectedness of nature. For Kelvin, the whole talk about interconnectedness wholeness, interdependence, harmony etc. could still prove to be essentially grounded in human interest. The implication of any position that holds that everything in nature is interdependent is that the well-being and continued survival of human beings is dependent on the health of the environment. And one good reason to preserve the environment is to ensure the interests of humans in the present and in future generations. He cited Bujo as supporting his claim. Bujo wrote

that by seriously considering the sacred, cosmic and interhuman relationship people should become aware of the fragile nature of their human existence... Human existence could break down if the cosmos is neglected. Murove argues that the African belief in the necessity to maintain good relationships with the ancestors implies the need to promote harmonious existence in between the past, present and future and claims that traditional African ethics in general recognized the intimate bond between men and their environment, the debt that the members of any generation owe to their forebears, and their consequent responsibility to posterity. Kelvin, however, differ from his anthropocentric stance to say that the interconnectedness of being should not be seen completely as human-centred, citing Kofi Opoku, an authority on African religion and culture. There is community with nature since man is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it; and this sense of community with nature is often expressed in terms of identity and kinship, friendliness and respect.¹⁵ Bujo claims that the African understanding of nature regards the human person as a microcosm within the macrocosm. This microcosm however, has the task of showing respect for creation and liberating it from slavery and “corruptibility.”¹⁶ Describing African conception of the environment as holistic seems implausible too. This is true because man has powers above him which he respects and below him too. This recognition also brings with it a sense of obligation to work for the betterment of the environment. Western holistic conceptions are strongly grounded in the findings of ecological sciences, that organism and species exist in ecosystem and are mutually interdependent, where damage to one part of the system can severely affect other parts of the system, and so forth. In a pre-scientific way, African

indigenous thought recognizes a similar interconnectedness in nature, albeit it is in more metaphysical terms.

3. The human being in African environmental theories

In the theories we will be looking at, careful scrutiny will show that the place of human is conspicuously missing and where it is shown, as in Ubuntu Ecology and Relational environmentalism, they failed to give the sense in which humans are a privileged part of the whole ecosystem. The failure to give this sense reduces their work somewhat to anthropocentrism. However, we are simply doing an attempt, not claiming mastery, nor saying that ours is all there is and should be in African environmental ethics. Ours is also a contribution to scholarship and an attempt to given a perspective on African environmental philosophy. We will look at Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness, Tangwa's eco-bio-communitarianism, We will also explore the strengths and weaknesses of Ramose's Ecology through Ubuntu and finally Kelvin Behrens' African Relational environmentalism. Let us start with Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness.

i. Ethics of nature – relatedness

Segun Ogungbemi in his paper "*An African perspective in the environmental crisis*"¹⁷ discusses the nature of the environmental crisis in Africa. In doing this, he came to a number of conclusions concerning the principal causes of the environmental crisis in Africa and proposes some ethical reflection and practical suggestions on how to mitigate the challenge posed by the environmental crisis

Ogungbemi construes environmental crisis in global content and as one of the greatest global problem of our time. In his thinking, environmental crisis is a conjunction of some natural

disaster such as earthquake, volcanic eruption and storms together with man's activity of exploration and utilization of natural resources such as through the ingenuity of science and technology, which have impacted negatively on the environment and human well being. While recognizing the universality of the environmental crisis, Ogungbem notes that in understanding the nature of environmental crisis within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, three points are sacrament. First, ignorance and poverty. Secondly, science and technology and thirdly, political conflict, including international economic pressures. He argues that in order to properly understand the nature of the environmental crisis in Africa, we need to understand the ways in which both traditional and modern social structure have led to environmental degradation.

On the factor of ignorance and poverty, Ogungbemi explains that the majority of traditional Africans live in rural areas where the people wallow in poverty and lack of basic amenities such as good water supplies, adequate lavatories and proper energy use. As a consequence, the rivers were polluted with human waste exposing the people to avoidable water borne diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and cholera. The excessive use of fuel wood and constant bush burning which is a predominant practice in traditional Africa, increases air pollution, affects air quality and depletes the forest and other natural habitats. This factor of poverty cum ignorance on the part of traditional Africans Ogungbemi argues, does not necessarily exonerate our people from their contribution to environmental hazard.¹⁸ This is particularly so given that the relevant patterns of behaviour may come at least in part from an inability to exploit nature because of low levels of economic and technological development.

Besides the crude contribution of traditional African societies to the world environmental crisis mention must be made of the more catastrophic contribution of modern African to the environmental crisis, Ogungbeni recorganizes the drive to catch up with the developmental pace of the western world by African states government as responsible for the mass destruction of our ecosystem through unguided explorative engagements with African natural resources, the flora and Fauna. Many African nations are resource rich, but because their economies are not structured to take full advantage of these resources, they are exported with little or no value added. The net results are relatively few jobs and other economic advantages (and what advantages there are often siphoned off by the corrupt elite) and considerable environmental damage. Moreover, the damage often results in loss of agricultural land that the poor rely upon, and significant pollution of waterways.

Ogungbeni argues that the way in which natural resources such as land, water and air are being used goes contrary to the traditional practice of environmental conservation with respect to land for instance the drive to develop has led to increased deforestation with its incalculable effects on turbidity, erosion, flood and desertification. In another instance, in a bid to catch up with developed nations, modern African has exploited some of its essential minerals, namely gold, copper, oils, diamond, coal uranium, etc, thereby creating ecological imbalance and environment problem.

Water is another essential natural resource that has been adversely affected in modern African through human activities. the deposition and dumping of toxic waste on the African coasts and inland by industries both within and outside the continent, pollute the water through oil exploration and defacto spillage, and

through bacteriological and chemical agents like fertilizers have made our waters unsafe not only for humans but also for other species in our waters.

Ogumbegmi further pointed out how air which is an essential natural resource for living has been threatened by human techno-scientific activities. Most fundamental in this regard is the uncontrolled nature of the emissions coming out from automobile industrial machines, artillery air raids and the like. In addition to the causes of pollution of air, land and water in Africa, Ogumbemi equally identified the unprecedented population growth in contemporary African as another factor that has continued to aggravate the destruction of the environment in Africa. The logic here is simple: the more the population, the more the stress on the natural resources and consumption ipso factor increase. More consumption results in more disposal of waste and where waste is carelessly managed as it is the case in many African states, the more hazardous the environment is prone to. It needs be stated, however, that Ogumbemi posited that it is not clear that population by itself is the key problem rather it is inequitable distribution of global resources on earth.

Granted that many African traditional folks as well as their contemporary counterparts have in some ways contributed to the general environment problems of the world today, Ogumbemi equally underscores how traditional Africa has lived with nature with respect and awe. He writes in traditional environmental management thus;

In our traditional relationship with nature, men and women recognize the importance of water and air management to our traditional communities. The ethics of not taking more than you need from nature is a

moral code. Perhaps this explains why earth, forest, rivers wind and other natural objects are traditionally believed to be both natural and divine. The philosophy behind this belief may not necessarily be religious but a natural means by which the human environment can be preserved the ethics of care is essential to traditional understanding of environmental protection and conservation.¹⁹

By ethics of care Ogungbemi meant an orientation in which one is not taking more than one's needs from nature. However, Ogungbemi is quick to note that this moral code is not unique to African societies as it has a universal appeal and applications, and that there are some interlocking questions that may obliterate its sensibility, justification and adoption in contemporary African order. Pertinent among these questions are. How do we know how much we need, given, the nature of human greed and insatiability? Who judges whether we have been taking more or less than we need from the natural resources? If we have been taking more than we need, what are the penalties and how fair are they?

The fundamental questions raised by Ogungbemi are quite strong and as a consequence, he attempted a reformulation of the traditional environmental practices of *Ethnic of care* in order to make it applicable to contemporary African situation. This conceptual reformulation pale into what Ogungbemi called *ethics of nature-relatedness*.

According to him, ethics of nature relatedness asserts that our natural resources do not need man for their existence and

function. the ethics of nature relatedness can be succinctly stated as an ethic that leads human beings to seek to co-exist peacefully with nature and treat it with some reasonable concern for its worth, survival and sustainability.

In Ogumbemi's submission, ethics of nature relatedness has three basic elements; reason, experience and the will. It does not attribute natural resources to a spiritual nature nor does the creation of natural resources have any religious affinity. With this new ethical thinking, Ogumbemi's expectation is that our present reckless use of nature can be put into order.

In addition to this environmental ethic he proposed, he offered some practical suggestions on how to mitigate the current environmental crisis in African. One, he suggested the generation, transmission and distribution of solar energy at a reasonable cost as a safety value in reducing African over reliance on fuel wood, coal kerosene, gas, and petrol as source of energy . Two, on the issue of population, Ogumbem prophesies that when our population has reached an alarming situation nature will invariably apply its break through volcanic eruptions, earthquakes etc) and have a drastic reduction on our population growth rate. Three he recommended a turnaround in African's political leadership in order to put in place good policies that are environmental friendly, he urged them to demonstrate the political will that is necessary in reducing the amount of industrial and agricultural wastes and properly dispose of them so that both our industrial and commercial centers as well as our rural areas are safe from air, land and water pollution.

There are some critical problems in Ogumbemi's ideas of environmental crisis in Africa and his environmental ethics. But before exposing these, let us also see the perspective of Godfery Tangwa on an African orientation in environmental ethic

ii. Eco bio communitarian

Tangwa is another Africa philosopher that has made some reflections and contributions towards creating philosophical awareness on the need for an ethic of the environment in Africa. In his paper: *Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental ethics*, Tangwa based his conception of an African orientation in environmental ethic on the metaphysical outlook of pre- colonial traditional African societies, which he called *eco-bio communication*.²⁰

This metaphysical world view involves the recognition and acceptance of inter-dependence and peaceful co-existence between earth, plants, animals and humans. This metaphysical outlook underpinned the ways, manners and cosmic relations between human and his fellow humans. It is also responsible for why traditional Africans were more cautious in their altitude to plants animals and inanimate things and the various invisible forces of the world. True to Tangwa, traditional Africans were more disposed towards the attitudes of live and let live. Tangwa emphasizes further that the traditional Africa metaphysical dichotomy between “plants animals and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual, is a slim and flexible one.”²¹ It is in line with this metaphysical framework that one can consistently and coherently situate the people’s belief in transmigration of the soul into animals, plants or into forces such as the wind. On the basis of this metaphysical understanding of nature and the nature of man Tangwa says such a mindset has a very significant implication for the way nature is approached and treated by traditional Africans. Illustrating his positions on the conciliating relation between human and the environment in traditional

African culture, Tangwa cited the stance of his own culture, the Nso in Cameroon, According to him, the view of the Nso attitude towards nature and the rest of creation is that of respectful co-existence, conciliation and containment, there are frequently offerings of sacrifices to God, to the divine spirits, both benevolent and malevolent, to the departed ancestors and to the sundry invisible and inscrutable forces of nature.

In all these, the point of Tangwa is that African culture is not against technology whole handsomely, but consistent with cautious and piecemeal use of technology. And given the respect for natural human values that adorn traditional African culture, there are some lessons to be learnt by western culture that has subjected such values to the caprice of the good of technology, industrialization and capitalism.

As against the western worldview, which Tangwa sees as predominantly anthropocentric and individualistic, African worldview, he maintains is eco-bio-communitarian. The distinction notwithstanding, Tangwa is aware that, that does not necessarily have automatic consequences on the environment. He holds:

An anthropocentric ethnic, even an individualistic one if it were sufficiently rational, need not necessarily endanger the environment, just as an eco- bio-communal one may not necessarily forestall all dangers to the environment.²²

What is more opposite for Tangwa is that there is nothing wrong with the technology in and of itself but only with the motivation for its development and the uses to which it is put. He condemns the motivation for development of Western technology

and the uses to which it has been put which he identified as the will to possess and dominate the world. In his submission, a more humble motivation for the pursuit of science and technology based on the eco-bio-communitarian attitude of live and let live can be substituted for the aggressive motivation of domination to the immeasurable advantage of the whole of mankind.

Commenting on the African perspective to environmental ethic of both Ogungbeim and Tangwa is necessary. This is because there are points of disagreements between the two even though they both try to bring to fore, solutions to the peculiar African environment crisis. According to P. Ojomo of the Lagos State University, Ogungbemi proposed a reconstructed return to the traditional attitude reflected in the ethnics of care, regarding our interactions with the environment led him to what he termed ethics of nature relatedness. This ethic of nature relatedness is not a preservationist approach nor is it in any way non anthropocentric. It does not even imply, as he observes, “that natural resources actually have a spiritual nature rather it is an approach that reorganizes that humans necessarily rely upon the natural world for existence because of this reliance, we must treat the environments in which we live with respect for the sake of current and future human well being. One major problem with Ogungbem’s ethics of nature relatedness is that it bears little affinity with African cultural belief system. Though Ogungbeim’s discourse shows a good understanding of African dimension of the environmental crisis, especially with his analysis of the traditional and modern African societies’ contribution to the complexity of the environmental crisis, his position on the needed environmental ethic is alienation of the African spirit and peculiar experiences.²³

Quite true, as he states, environmental problem in Africa and anywhere else is primarily a consequence of human action. And as value systems inform our actions, we need to search for a viable environmental ethics that is in agreement with African ontology. This is essential in order to pave way for environmental policies that will be compliant with the historic cultural experiences of the people and barriers to sustainable green environment. In fact, Ogungbeim's alarming recommendation that nature should invariably apply its brake through volcanic eruptions earthquakes and others in order to have a drastic reduction in African population growth rate is reflective of the disconnectedness of his ethics of nature relatedness and African ontology.

The above mark of deficiency in Ogunbemi's ethics of nature relatedness is the strong point of Tangwa's environmental ethics of eco-bio-communitarian. Though not without its own problems, the merit of Tangwa's position is that he reorganized the indispensability of African metaphysics in the construction of meaningful African environmental ethics. The absence of the dichotomy between plants, animals and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual in the African metaphysical worldview informed the traditional African disposition and attitude of live and let live. Such metaphysics is not one of domination instigated by greed nor is it consumerist in nature. The problem with Tangwa's exploration of an African environmental ethics is that it is an ethno-philosophical defense of indigenous African treatment and management of the environment. He never reorganized the ways and manners by which traditional African contributed to the degradation of the

environment through ignorance and poverty. This is the strong and commendable point explicit in Ogungbemi's position.

In the account of both Ogungbemi and Tangwa, some fundamental questions, which are ethically essential to a plausible African orientation in environmental ethics are left unappraised let alone discussed and this shall form the concept we seek to pursue in this work. Such questions as what should be the nature of human obligation and role in the relationship between humans and nature? How can the human person which has a pride of place in African thought system be fitted nonanthropocentrically into African environmental discourse? What is the need for an environmental ethics that is African in orientation? And must such be exclusionary of the existing known environmental theories from the west? What are the political, cultural, economic educational, legal and moral imperatives to be taken into consideration in the construction of an African environmental ethics in order to salvage the African environment from further deteriorations? The solution to environmental destabilization is not purely technological or exclusively attitudinal. Environmental ethics no matter how grounded in African experience it could be or intellectually sophisticated it could be cannot alone solve the environmental crisis in Africa. There has to be an orientation that keeps in mind the various imperatives mentioned above.

We will in the next subheading look at other relational environmental theories as put forward by Ramose and Behrens. This will be in line with our commitment to look at some of the African environmental theories put forward and see their strengths and weaknesses before we try to put forward a possible interpretation of an African non-anthropocentric environmentalism. It is worthy of note that these theories by Ogungbemi and Tangwa are all attempts at positing a non-

anthropocentric interpretation of African attitude to the Environment.

iii. Ecology through Ubuntu

Mogobe B. Ramose wrote a brilliant article to articulate African conception or attitude to the environment in the article he titled 'Ecology through Ubuntu'.²⁴ He posited that *Motho ke motho ka Batho* is a Sotho proverb found in almost all these indigenous languages of African. It means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity reorganizing the humanity of others and on that basis establish human relations with them. Accordingly, it is *Botho* (Humanness or humanity) and a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards other human beings which constitute the proverbs core or central meaning. Neither the single individual nor the community can define and pursue their respective purposes without recognizing their mutual foundedness, their complementary natures. Wholeness is the regulative principle here since what is asserted is that the single individual is incomplete without the other.

The concept of *Batho* or *Ubuntu*, as it is referred to by Ramose in indigenous African languages is not readily translatable into humanism, especially if humanism is understood as a specific trend in the evolution of western philosophy. Humaneness for him is a better rendition of the concept. According to Ramose, humanness suggests both a condition of being and the states of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding. It is thus opposed to any "ism" including humanism for this tends to suggest a condition of finality, a closeness or a kind of absolute either incapable of or resistant to, any further movement.²⁵ But motion being the principle of change it follows that resistance to motion is tantamount to resistance to change.

Ramos avers that this basic difference between humanness and humanism speaks to two difference perceptions of and perspective on, reality or being. Humanness regards being, or the universe, as a complex wholeness involving the multi layered and incessant interaction of all entities. This condition of permanent, multi- directional movement of entities is not by definition chaos. On the contrary, it is both the source and the manifestation of the intrinsic order of the universe. Herein lies the ecosophical dimension of the indigenous African concept of Ubuntu.

The principle of wholeness applies also to the relation between human beings and physical or objective nature. For Ramose, to care for one another, therefore implies caring for physical nature as well. Without such care, the interdependence between human beings and physical nature would be undermined. Moreover human beings are indeed an intrinsic part of physical nature although possibly a privileged part.²⁶ The point Ramose tries to show is that humans are parts of the whole of nature but having a special place. Accordingly, caring for one another is the fulfillment of the natural duty to care for physical nature too. The concept of harmony in African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of balance in terms of the totality of the relations that can be maintained between and among human beings as well as between human beings and physical nature. The quest for harmony is thus the striving to maintain a comprehensive but specific relational condition among organism and entities. It is the continuous striving to strike and then maintain a balance between human beings and physical nature.

iv. African relational environmentalism

Relational theory in African ethical discourse was first put forward by an American born philosopher. Thaddeus Metz in his

intelligent article titled. *An African Theory of Moral Status. A relational Alternative to individualism and Holism*. This view argues that animals and humans both have moral status that is of the same kind but different in degree; in the sense that even a severely mentally incapacitated human being has a greater moral status than an animal with identical internal properties and a new born in fact has a greater moral status than a mid – to- late stage foetus. He argues too that the holists accord no moral status to any of these beings assigning it only to groups to which they belong, while individualists such as welfare grant an equal moral status either to animal or severally mentally incapacitated humans. Relational theory of moral status therefore argues that it does a better job of accounting for degrees of moral status. Thus according to Metz, something has moral status in so far as it is capable of having a certain causal or intentional connection with another being.

This view is grounded in salient sub-Saharan moral views roughly according to which the greater a being's capacity to be part of a communal relationship with us the greater its moral status. I understand this theory to be purely African in a great sense. The more relationship is closer to human the more moral status it has. This therefore implies that a goat has better, moral status than a rat, it also implies that a mad man still has a stronger moral status than a goat because of the status of the relationship. This theory has been criticized especially by Hortenske, in his *Animal and African Ethic*; as anthropocentric. For him, it is human centered to judge moral considerability based on relationship with humans in particular. Otherwise why should it be humans whose close relationship with, confers moral status.²⁸ the researcher understands Metz work to be strongly based on Africa ontology at least English speaking Africa. This relational

conception can also be seen in theories like Ubuntu Ecology. Ubuntu argues that all things interrelate but that humans are a privileged part of the relationship. Even though Romose failed to give the sense in which humans are privileged. This can therefore make the argument that the privilege accorded man in Ubuntu is anthropocentric. This is what this work sets out to do. This paper sets out to give a sense in which humans has a pride of place in African environmental philosophy or in African ethical discourse: the sense being purely non anthropocentric. The second strong importance of the theories; Ubuntu and relational theory is that they are somewhat not ethrocentric. They do not base their arguments on the ancestors, gods, spirits and those ethnocentric insinuation that in my view do not pass for professional philosophy. One can assert the ontology of particular society but philosophy demands that we do not just stop at a sociological religious interpretation of being in societies but sieve out philosophical, critical perspectives that is universalizable and that can pass for real philosophy. Nevertheless I argue here that if we extend this relational moral status to the environment like Kelvin Behrens did few problems will emerge that will tilt the theory towards anthropocentrism.

Behrens Kelvin after citing few examples of works of African philosophers that posited the interrelated and inter connectedness of being, posited what he called African relational environmentalism.²⁹ His project was to articulate if possible, a promising non-anthropocentric African theory as a counter to the anthropocentric view of philosophers. According to him, some philosophers like Callicott, Bujo, Tempels have claimed erroneously that African ontology favour anthropocentrism. He therefore posited that contrary to anthropocentric ideas that there is a strong emphasis on the interrelatedness or interconnectedness

of human beings and the rest of nature that is also evident in African thought providing basis for a promising African environmentalism.

According to many African theorists, the believe in the interdependence of natural entities clearly imply that people should respect and live in harmony with the community of nature. The robustly communitarian character of much African ethic informs this moral requirement to live in harmony, individual members of the community of nature can be fulfilled only in and through their relationship with others. These relationships are often characterized in familial terms, emphasizing the need for mutual support, solidarity, care and nurturing. I have suggested elsewhere that this approach to environmentalism holds promise for environmental ethics because of its relational focus. This is what Behrens calls *African relational environmentalism*. He avers that on this relational approach virtue is achieved through maintaining harmonious relationships that prioritize neither the individual nor the community while respecting both. Since the interest and needs of both individual and groups always count, and always need to be kept in balance, this approach is able to avoid the extreme of both individualism and holism.

In developing this non anthropocentric African relational environmentalism further, Behrens also tried to establish what kind of things might plausibly, be considered to be part of the community of nature and capable of being included in this familial or communal relationship. Since on this African approach, harmonious relationships with other natural entities ought to be nurtured. In defining what should constitute the community or what should be morally considerable, Behrens tries to differentiate between moral status and moral considerability. For him, moral status could mean just respecting

and promoting a being but moral considerability is much more. In the literature of environmental philosophy, the notion moral considerability is quite often used interchangeably with the notion of moral value. But the two notions are not exactly the same. Moral value is something that ought to be protected and/or promoted. But to say that something has moral considerability is to say that its existence, well being, interest, preference and /or some other aspects of it ought to be directly rather than indirectly given positive weight in our moral deliberations about action that are likely to affect it. Hence while things are mostly considerable, it is not necessarily the other way round.

Thus Behrens identified few factors that confer moral considerability; life, sentience and rationality. He also identified few factors that confer moral considerability in African thought system, example interrelatedness, life force, totemism, and folklore etc. Behrens agrees however that if one understands life as existing in individual things as well as in an interconnected web, then this African view may well be described as life – centered approached. To distinguish it from more conventional biocentric or life centered approaches, he refer to this view as “web of life centered”³⁰ For him, what grants moral considerability or constitutes community to an entity is not that it has an individual life telos of its own but that it is part of the web or fabric of life. And then on this view all things that can be part of this web of life that themselves share or enable this life can be morally considerable. Since everything that forms part of the web is in some way interconnected or interdependent with other parts of the web, all these entities need to be taken into account morally. Hence Behrens asserted that most plausible interpretation of the various overlapping conceptions of moral

considerability in African thought is that they ground moral considerability in being part of the interconnected web of life.

In essence Behrens' African relational environmentalism and Thad Metz's relational theory differs in some subtle sense, while moral standing or moral considerability is granted to being the closer they relate to human, Behrens view of moral status is web of life centre" entity. This means in my views a broader perspective. While Metz's concept of African moral considerability is being that relates more closely to humans, Behrens conception is somewhat holistic. I see in Metz's conception a purely African understanding of moral standing in so far as humans in African context have a pride of place. Also Metz concept of modal relation answers deeper questions as regards moral standing of a fetus, mad woman, and other serious ethical puzzles. Nevertheless here is a sense in which philosophers like Horthenske would see relational theory as anthropocentric. Modal relational theory distinguished humans form the rest of the ecosystem in the sense that it is relationship with Human that should confer moral stand. Horthnske would ask, why not relationship with animals like dog or lizard? I see Metz as asserting that in African at least English speaking sub-Saharan African humans has a stake, a strong stake in the whole of ecosystem, same view was reiterated by Ramose when he posited a holistic view of the ecosystem but did not forget to say that human are a privileged part, even though it is part of the whole ecosystem. How then do we describe this human place? Failure to give the sense in which humans participate in this whole drama will simply be termed anthropocentric.

4. Conclusion

Humans have a place in the ecosystem and such place is not right based where humans have the legal or whatever right to kill, eat and dominate the world, rather it is an obligatory place, a task based, job oriented place. It is humans who should take responsibility for the whole of ecosystem. I call it obligatory anthropoholism. This is a plausible African conception of our attitude to the environment. The views discussed above are all in one way or the other throwing light and clarifying views on African environmentalism, but giving just a holistic approach, in my view does not just answer the question of who tends or who should work the other. Also highlighting the place of humans without giving a sense in which humans have this place, distinguishing it from the old anthropocentric view begs the question. I seek to assert and subtly too, that humans have a place in the whole of ecosystem.

Obligatory anthropoholism as a theory in African environmental ethical discourse posits that humans have a place in African ontology as regards the environment, an obligatory role not a right based role, to care, tend and conserve the whole of the ecosystem for the balance of the ecosystem.

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