

Chapter Ten

AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: TOWARDS A NON –ANTHROPOCENTRIC AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM

Chinedu Stephen Ifeakor, PhD

*Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka*

cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng

&

Andrew Otteh

*Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka*

andrewotteh@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

Africa today is faced with several environmental issues ranging from gully erosions, desertification, flooding, overpopulation, water pollution and Co2 emissions from cars and engines et cetera. Two factors responsible for these are: the aging earth and the activities of humans. Environmental ethics, therefore, seeks for the extension of moral community to include the eco-system as a whole. African environmental ethics is an enquiry into the thought system and ontology of the Africans on the environment. This paper looks at the theories and conceptions put forward by scholars in their bid to evolving a promising non anthropocentric African environmentalism. Oruka and Jumia's Parent earth ethics, Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness, Tangwa's eco-bio-communitarianism, Mogobe Ramose's Ubuntu ecology, Behren's African relational environmentalism, etc. In the journey so far, using the philosophical method of analyses, one observes that these theories are either not African

at all, judging from African ontological system or not African enough in the sense of not reflecting on important aspect of African ontology. I propose, however, that obligatory anthropocentrism is a more promising African environmental attitude. My view gives a sense in which humans have a pride of place in African ontology (obligation). It also stresses the developmental implications for the African continent.

Keywords: African, Environment, Ethics, Anthropocentric, Eco-Bio-Communitarian

Introduction

Challenges to our environment in the 21st century have been an issue of great concern. Few factors in the writer's view have contributed to these challenges. The first is nature. By this I mean ageing world and its implications. This means that an old man cannot but be old in the bones with shrunk body no matter how much health care and food that is given to him/her. The world is not getting any younger and so we see some of its implications on the environment. The second factor and the most important one too, is the activities of man. Science and technology brought with it industrialization. Even though the human person has tried to explore and improve his or her life on earth, it came with some disadvantages. In environmental ethics, there is this presumption that if the activities of human kind can be directed aright, the environment can be saved from further degradation. Thus environmental ethics is an attempt to prescribe to humankind the right way to relate to the environment so as to preserve the environment. While ethics deals with rights and wrongs, good and bad in the realms of human conduct, environment ethics deals with rights and wrongs, good and bad in our relationship with the environment.

The need for reorientation is now as the 21st century is experiencing serious environmental degradation. Let us see some of these challenges; Pollution: Pollution of air, water and soil require millions of years to recoup. Industry and motor vehicles exhaust are the number one pollutants, heavy metals, nitrates and plastics are toxins responsible for pollution while water pollution is caused by oil spill, acid rain, urban runoff, air pollution is caused by various gasses and toxins released by industries and factories and combustion of fossil fuels, soil pollution is majorly caused by industrial waste that deprives the soil from essential nutrients. Climatic changes like global warming is the result of human practices like emission of Greenhouse gasses. Global warming leads to rising temperatures of the oceans and the earth surface, melting of polar ice caps, rise in sea levels and also unnatural patterns of precipitation such as flash floods, excessive snow or desertification. Overpopulation: The population of the planet is reaching unsustainable levels as it faces shortages of resources like water, fuel and food. Population explosion in less developed and developing countries are straining the already scarce resources. Intensive agriculture practiced to produce food damage the environment through use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides. Overpopulation is one of the crucial current environmental problems. Natural Resources Depletion: Fossil fuel consumption results in emission of Greenhouse gasses, which is responsible for global warming and climate change. Globally, people are taking efforts to shift to renewable sources of energy like solar, wind, biogas and geothermal energy.

The cost of installing the infrastructure and maintaining these sources has pummeled in the recent years. Waste Disposal: The over consumption of resources and creation of plastics are creating a global crisis of waste disposal. Developed countries

are notorious for producing an excessive amount of waste or garbage and dumping their waste in the oceans and, less developed countries. Nuclear waste disposal has tremendous health hazards associated with it. Plastic, fast food, packaging and cheap electronic waste threaten the wellbeing of humans.

Climate change: Climate change is yet another environmental problem that has surfaced in the last couple of decades. It occurs due to rise in global warming which occurs due to increase in temperature of atmosphere by burning of fossil fuels and release of harmful gasses by industries. Climate change has various harmful effects but not limited to melting polar ice, change in seasons, and occurrence of new diseases. Frequent occurrence of floods and change in overall weather scenario.

Loss of biodiversity: Human activity is leading to the extinction of species and habitats and loss of bio-diversity. Ecosystem, which took millions of years to perfect, are in danger when any species population is decimating. Balance of natural processes like pollination is crucial to the survival of the ecosystem and human activity threatens the same. Another example is the destruction of coral reefs in the various oceans, which support the rich marine life.

Deforestation: Our forests are natural sinks of carbon dioxide and produce fresh oxygen as well as helps in regulating temperature and rainfall. At present forests cover 30% of the land but every year tree cover is lost due to growing population and its growing demand for more food, shelter and clothing. Deforestation simply means cleaning of green cover making such land available for residential, industries and commercial purpose. **Ocean Acidification:** It is a direct impact of excessive production of CO_2 . The ocean acidity has increased by the last 250

years but by 2100, it may shoot up by 150%. This has great impact on shellfish, Plankton as well as humans.

Ozone layer Depletion: The ozone layer is an invisible layer of protection around the planet that protects us from the sun's harmful rays. This depletion is as a result of pollution caused by chlorine and bromide found in chloro-floro Carbon (CFCs). Once these toxic gasses reach the upper atmosphere, they cause a hole in the ozone layer, the biggest of which is above the Antarctic. Ozone layer is valuable because it prevents harmful ultra violet radiation from reaching the earth. This is one of the most important current environmental problems.

Acid Rain: Acid rain occurs due to the presence of certain pollutants in the atmosphere. Acid rain can be caused due to combustion of fossil fuels or erupting volcanoes or rotting vegetation which release Sulfur dioxide and nitrogen into the atmosphere. Acid rain is a known environmental problem that can have serious effect on human health, wildlife and aquatic species.

Genetic Engineering: Genetic modification of food using biotechnology is called genetic engineering. Genetic modification of food results in increased toxins and diseases as genes from an allergic plant can transfer to target plant. Genetically modified crops can cause serious environmental problems as an engineered gene may prove toxic to wildlife.¹ Humans have greatly contributed to these environmental problems as it is the activities going on in factories, industries, urban areas, etc., that cause these problems.

Human technology in general, and biotechnology (agricultural and human) in particular, have narrowed the gap between the

natural and the artificial, between nature and humanity, between “God’s work” and “work of human hands” to the extent that some have proclaimed God and/or nature dead. Human tinkering with nature, which can be said to have begun with the discovery of agriculture about ten millennia ago, and which seems both inescapable and unobjectionable, has evolved, (thanks to modern technology) into wholesome interventions in the process of nature, exemplified by the engineering of novel artificial life forms. Such developments have gradually turned the perennial moral concern with the physical environment and with medical practice into moral disquiet and even moral alarm.

As Frederick Ferre pointedly remarked at the Nairobi World Conference of Philosophy on Philosophy, Humanity and the Environment:

By the time organisms are sufficiently artificial to be patentable, it is clear that the relative weights of nature and culture have reversed themselves. Culture is in the driver’s seat and nature is hanging on for dear life (literally) as we hurtle down unexplored roads with poor visibility, and with uninspected and untried brakes.²

The cogency of this remark made before mammalian cloning became a scientific fact in 1997, is today even more evident than before. Nevertheless, biotechnology also holds a certain justified fascination for human beings, because of its positive potential in such domains as preventive and therapeutic medicine and in agriculture.

In the face of these developments, human ethical sensibilities and responsibilities are urgently called for. As human beings, we carry the whole weight of moral responsibility and obligation for the world on our shoulders. The claim that humankind is the

apex of biological existence as we know it, has sometimes been dismissed as an arrogant spiciest claim and contested by some human militants for the rights of animals and/or plants less disputable, however, is the fact that while human beings have putative moral responsibilities toward inanimate objects, plants and the animals, these later cannot be considered, without absurdity, as having any reciprocal moral obligation toward humans. Human intervention in nature could plausibly be justified by appeal to this asymmetrical responsibility, although this does not imply that every intervention is justifiable. For these reasons, our focus on eco-ethics, environmental ethics, developmental ethics, medical ethics, bioethics – all of which can be gathered into one basket labeled “eco-bioethics” is not only appropriate but also quite timely.³

In African background this search for harmony is important for few reasons; African perspective is important because the world is searching for theories which will help man conserve the environment, Africa being a part of this whole can contribute through their thought towards this project. Second, if the world will come to value their environment, they have to be conscientized and taught to. Eugene Hargrove commented that teachers of environmental philosophy in developing or evolving theories that will enable them teach their students, should be careful not to import from other cultures but to look into the ontology of such people there will be rich cultural or ontological materials which will enhance effective communication of values for the conservation of the environment. Third, Huttington’s clash of civilization teaches the world that every culture or civilization brings something important to the world table Africa being rich in culture and civilization can lend voice to the search for ethical attitude of mankind to the environment.

It has been held by scholars like J, Baird Callicott, J.S. Mbiti, Benezech Bujo, etc., that African ontology is anthropocentric, however, African scholars as Ogungbemi, Behrens, Chemhuru, Ekwealor have argued and strongly too that African ontology and environmental understanding is non anthropocentric. Time may not allow for detailed analyses of these arguments both for and against anthropocentrism, we simply seek to look at the theories so far put forward by some African environmental ethicists in their effort to evolving a promising non anthropocentric African environmental ethics.

For a theory to be fully African, it has to show mastery of African ontology otherwise it lacks the characteristics of being African. The human being and the interconnectedness of being are two of the salient values in African ontology which are relevant to the environment. These two values have been erroneously interpreted in various ways. For instance, the pride of place of the human being in African ontology has been described as anthropocentric by Kai Horthenske, Ramose in his *Ecology through Ubuntu* posited that humans in African ontology are part of the whole of ecosystem but “a privileged part”, Thad Metz in his relational theory of moral status posited that it is the relationship “with human” that confers moral status to other beings in the ecosystem. I argue in this paper that while Horthenske’s anthropocentric stance on Africa is untenable, Ramose failed to give the sense in which the human being is a privileged part of the ecosystem. Also Thad Metz failed to give us the sense in which it is the relationship with humans in particular that confers moral status. It is human capacity for obligation, for action, for taking responsibility that singles her out in the ecosystem. The privilege humans enjoy stems from the fact that they are saddled with the responsibility of tending, caring for the whole of the ecosystem which they are a part. I call

it obligatory anthropoholism. This paper is divided into four parts; the introduction, African environmental theories so far, obligatory anthropoholism as a viable African environmental ethics and conclusion.

Theories in African Environmental Ethics: Towrads an African Non anthropocentric Environmental Ethics.

A look at some theories put forward by African environmental ethicists in their attempt at evolving a non anthropocentric African environmental ethics is necessary for some reasons. First, examining what have been done so far enables the researcher to stand on the shoulder of scholars to see clearer, valuing the contributions of scholars makes for academic humility since it simply implies that just as the weaknesses of their theories are shown here, so also will the weakness of my own attempt be shown by others. Second, in the works of other theorists, one discovers a *lacuna* that forms the real reason for writing. In the theories we will be looking at, careful scrutiny will show that the place of man 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 at given perspective to African environmental philosophy.

We will look at Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness, Tangwa's eco-bio-communitariam, Odera Oruka and Jumia's Parental earth ethics. 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.

Ethics of Nature -Relatedness

Segun Ogungbemi in his paper "*An African perspective in the environmental crisis*"¹ 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 African 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 problems 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 has 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. Second, science and technology and third, political conflict, including international economic pressures.⁴ 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, Ogungbem 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.³ 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 Africa to the environmental crisis, Ogungbemi recognizes the drive to catch up with the developmental pace of the western world by African state 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.

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 machine, artillery air raids, etc. 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 to be stated, however, that Ogumbemi posited that it is not clear that population by itself is the key problem.⁶

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, Ogmgbemi 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.⁷

By ethics of care Ogumgbemi meant an orientation in which one is not taking more than one's needs from nature. However, Ogumbeni 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 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 Ogungein 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 Ogunigbemi 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.⁸

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 offers 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 brek through volcanoic eruptions, earthquakes, etc., and have a drastic reduction on our population growth rate. Three, he recommended a turnaround in Africa'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 Ogungbemi'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

Eco Bio Communitarian Theory

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 bases his conception of an African orientation in environmental ethic on the metaphysical outlook of pre- colonial traditional African societies, which he called *eco-bio communitarian*.⁹

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 way, manner and cosmic relations between human beings. It is also responsible for why traditional Africans were more cautious in their attitude 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 emphasises further that the traditional African 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.¹³ 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 that such a mindset has a very significant implication for the way nature is approached and treated by traditional Africans. Illustrating his position on the conciliating relation between human and the environment in tradition African culture, Tangwa cited the stance of his own culture, the Nso in Cameron, According to him, 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.¹⁰

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.

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 on environmental ethics 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 environment in which we live with respect for the sake of current and future human wellbeing. One major problem with Ogungbem's ethics of nature relatedness is that it bears little affinity with African cultural belief system. Though Ogungbem'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.¹²

Quite true, as he states, environmental problem in African 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 culture experiences of the people and barriers to sustainable green environment. In fact, Ogungbem'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 Ogunbem's ethics of nature relatedness is the strong point of Tangwa's environmental ethics

of eco-in-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 a meaningful African environmental ethnics. 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. Latent in that metaphysics are folkloric ascertains and certain taboos that are conservational of iconological balance of the environment. 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 albeit ignorance and poverty. This is the strong and commendable point explicit in Ogungbem'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 upraised 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 who 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 ethnics in order to salvage the African environment from further deterioration? The solution to environmental destabilization is not purely technological or exclusively attitudinal. Environmental ethics no matter how grounded in African experience or intellectually sophisticated it can't alone solve the environmental crisis in Africa. There has to be an orientation that keeps in mind the various imperatives as mentioned above.

We will in the next subheading look at other relational environmental theories as put forward by Ramose, Behrens, etc. This will be in line with our commitment to look at some of the African environmental theories and see their strengths and weaknesses before we try to put forward a plausible 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.

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*.¹³ He posited that *Motho ke motho ka Batho* is a Sotho proverb found in almost all the indigenous languages on African. It means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity 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 proverbs core or central meaning.²¹ 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 on the evolution of Western philosophy. Humanness for him is a better rendition of the concept. According to Ramose, 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 closeness or a kind of absolute either incapable of or resistant to, any further movement.¹⁴ But motion being the principle of change, it follows that resistance to motion is tantamount to resistance to change. Ramose 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.²³ 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.

The loss of *Ubuntu* for Ramose is compensated for by the somewhat disconsolate comfort and easy life brought about by technological advancement continues to reaffirm the need to restore *Ubuntu* because more than ever before, humanity is faced with the threat of catastrophic ecological disaster. This is exemplified by widespread air pollution, climate change, the destruction of the ozone layers and the ever constant threat of nuclear homicide. Botho can make a significant contribution according to Ramose to the quest for universal peace now threatened by nuclear war, however, remote such a war may seem. As is widely understood, while nuclear war will reduce the planet to a radioactive rubble, any nuclear accident will have far reaching ecological consequences. The threat of nuclear war represents a water shed in thought on war and peace as it underline the fundamental irrationality of resorting to such a method of warfare. Thus, it simultaneously enjoins not only would be nuclear belligerents but also all human kind to seek for peace and build a solid foundation for the construction of peaceful relations among human beings to seek for peace.

Parental Earth Ethics

Ecophilosophy can provide a practical basis upon which to formulate a new ethics that would take into accounts the complexity and totality of nature. This, Oruka and Jumia call *parental earth ethics*.¹⁴ Parental earth ethics is not simply on intellectual enquiry. It is the basis upon which different cultures around the world including Africa will base their environmental perception. This ethics can be presented on the form of principles and rules.

Imagine families with six children, two of the six are relatively rich and four generally poor. Among the rich, one is extremely rich while among the poor, three are very poor. The reason for the difference in status have to do partly with the family history, partly with personal luck and partly with individual talents. Though the children have different and diverse possessions, they have certain things in common such as parents (whether alive or diseased), they are also common in that each of them has status and achievements based on the teaching which the family as a whole provided. Some made better use of that while others may have squandered it.

The children find that their lives and relationships are guided by the unwritten ethical laws which can best be summarized under two main principles (i) Parental debt (or bond) Principle (pp) and (ii) individual luck principal.¹⁵

Parental Debts Principle

This principle according to Oruka and Jumia, consists of four related rules dealing with family, security and dignity, parental debt, and individual and family survival. The family security rules states that the fate and security (Physical or welfare) of each member of the family is ultimately bound up with the existential

reality of the family, as a whole. Any one of the six members may for example, be arrogant and have enough to claim self-sufficiency and independence from the rest, however, eventually, the person and the person's own progeny may experience a turn of events which could make them desperately in need of protection from the family.

History abounds with such example; both the Roman and the Otoman Empire disintegrated and their children and dependents sought their security and fate elsewhere. Western Europe was liberated from economic rain after the Second World War by a power outside her borders and today, the former Soviet Union is desperately looking for rescue from such a small power as Italy.

The kinship rule is that the life condition of any member of the family affect all the others materially and emotionally, as no member can be proud of his or her situation, however, happy, if any member of the family tree lives in squalor. There is a partial non earthen application of this rule in our current world. European powers are more inclined to help fellow Europeans out of their squalor than they are prepared to do the same for some third world country. The parental debt rule assumes and explains the relationship and debt between the family members. Whichever member is affluent or destitute owes his fortune or misfortune to the parental and historical factors inherent on the development of the family. Hence, within the family, no one above is fully responsible neither for his affluence nor for his misfortune.

The individual and family survival rule states that no member of the family given the above rules has any moral obligation to refrain from interfering with the possession of any brother or

sister who ignores the obligation to abide by the rules of the family ethics. This rule allows the disadvantaged to demand assistance from the affluent but it also allows the creative and the hardworking members of the family to repossess underdeveloped possessions of the idle relatives and develop them for use of posterity.

This is made up of three constituent rules according to Oruka et al, dealing with personal achievements, personal supererogation, and public law. The personal achievement rule states that what a member passes is due mainly to the person's special talents. This is a kind of family individualism which disregards historical experience and the organic constitution of the family. The personal supererogation rule provides that every member has a right to do whatever he or she wishes with his or her possession. Finally the family public laws states that any member of the family who contravenes the right of another member as given by the second principle will be subject to the family public law, and would be punished or reprimanded and ordered to restore justice. The parental debt principle takes precedence over the individual luck principle in case of a conflict between the two. And this is all it should be. Why, for example, would we not see it as senseless that an individual member of a family would want to do anything she wishes with her possessions, while a member of her kids or kin may be in desperate need of help? The basic ethical rationale for why the parental debt principle takes precedence is as follows, the individual luck principle (P) is supported fundamentally by the "right of first occupation, personal luck and achievements, i.e., the veil of fate but the first principle (PP) springs from the fact of organic unity between the children, the common pool of their wealth (whatever the differences in possessions) and the need for common security. The ethics of common sense shows that when

in any given family or community matters of common wealth, and common security conflict with matters of the personal possession, lack or achievements, the former must prevail over the later.

There is no country, he argues, in which for example, an individual institution will be safeguarded if it endangers the security or the economy of all the nation. And it is also clear that no country will accept the wish or a will from one of its citizens which stipulates that upon death, all his achievements, however, dear to the country, should be exterminated or kept out of use by anybody. The reason for such a will will be that those achievements are personal and hence, the personal superogation rule is to prevail. The objection to this will only be supported by involving the issue of common origin, common security and common wealth. It is clear for this, that the earth or the world is s kind of a family unit in which the members have kith and kin relationship with one another, so far our discussion is driven towards the claim that the earth is a common wealth to all humanity.

We are prepared to concede that the world has no sovereign. But this does not affect the claim that planet earth not the world is a common good or heritage for all humankind. The question of the right by first occupation or personal achievement does not overrule this truth. If it did, then it would make no sense to accept the territorial rights of the Europeans who migrate to America after Christopher Columbus discovered that continent over five hundred years ago.

The territorial rights and sovereignty in the Americas would in that case rightly and legitimated belong to the indigenous Indians. However, the reality today is such that indigenous

Indians have no legitimate claim to that part of the earth than the migrants who invaded it five hundred years ago. Again if the rights of first occupation or generally the veil of fate is to prevail over the principle of the earth as a common good for all humankind then all that was procured through the colonization of such places like Africa and India should have been returned to these former colonies a long time ago. But nowadays, it seems it does not make sense to demand that such resources be returned. On colonialism, what we lament is the fact that those who developed themselves by it have turned their backs on those they colonized and now claim that they (the former subjects) have no share in or claim to any of their current possession. But given the organic constitution of life and the principle of parental earth ethics the former colonies have a legitimate claim to such possession.

Oruka et al tried to argue that earth is not a common good in the sense of sharing whatever we have gained from it with everybody. The earth is a common good only in the sense that is an open field for the survival of the fittest.¹⁶ The third, Reich of Hitler was to last 1000 years. But it lasted for only 12 years. The Roman empire of course lasted a long time, but it did not last forever. Today, the descendants of (say) the British Empire will surely feel some relief and pride in any historical revelation of any good which the empire did to the colonies for it is precisely from the goods not the evils done by colonization that makes former subjects tolerant.

The kinship issue is not being dragged into this matter just as moralization of the virtue of declaring all human beings, and all species in nature as “brothers and sisters”, it is given here as an assertion derived from the ecological truth about nature and the ultimate common fate of all creatures living on planet earth.

Without the element of kinship or organic unity of nature none of the arguments of the current environmental protectionist would be valid for all peoples and nations. But given the organic unity of nature, the arguments make sense for it is clear that the pollution and the degradation of sections of the earth are likely to have consequence in the rest of the globe. This is the concern that led to the convening of the earth summit in Brazil in 1992. The meeting was a symbol of family gathering.

The last objective is one which claims that we are placing creatures such as even earthworm in the same moral level as human beings. Equality of all human beings may be understandable, but how about equality (say) between a head of a state and an earthworm? The earthworm does not demand or require equality with a head of state but nature demands that we do not extinguish earthworm specie. Earthworms are a part of biodiversity without which even a head of state will be non-existent.

There are basically two main reasons in the need for the sustenance of biodiversity. One is that all sentient- being has an intrinsic value and the other is that human life on earth is doomed to perish if we destroy biodiversity. Although the first reason is still too remote for most people to grasp, the second reason is and should be today common knowledge. We propose parental earth ethics as a basic ethic that will offer a motivation for both a global environment concern and a global redistribution of the wealth of nations.

African Relational Environmentalism

Relational theory in African ethical discourse was first put forward by an American born philosopher by name Thaddeus Metz. This he did in his intelligent article titled: *An African Theory*

*of Moral Status: A Relational Alternative to individualism and Holism.*¹⁷ 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 welfares grant an equal moral status either to animals 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 Horthenske, 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.¹⁸ 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. The second strong importance of the three theories; Ubuntu, parental earth ethics and rotational theory is that they are somewhat not ethnocentric. 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 otherwise it can only pass for ethnophilosophy. I hereby applaud the sense in which Ubuntu, parental earth ethics and Relational moral status posit their theories. Nevertheless I argue here that if we extend this relational moral status to the environment like Kevin 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 interconnectedness of being, posited what he called African relational environmentalism.¹⁹ 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 belief in the interdependence of natural entities clearly implies 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*.⁴² 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 individuals 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, wellbeing, 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, inhabit spirit and folklore etc. Behrens argues, 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 approach. To distinguish it from more conventional biocentric or life centered approaches, he refers to this view as “web of life centered”²⁰ 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' 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 in my view, is a broader perspective. While Metz's concept of African moral considerability is a being that relates more closely to humans, Behrens conception is somewhat holistic.

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 a place; an obligatory place, a task based, job oriented place. It is humans who should take responsibility for the whole of ecosystem.

Obligatory Anthropoholism; a Plausible African Perspective to the Environment

The theory I wish to pursue as a plausible alternative to these theories should be one that will have the following characteristics first, it should show mastery of African ontology. Thereby being African enough. Second, it should highlight holism as an important aspect of Africa ontology which informs our relationship to the environment. Third, it should relate what an African environmental ethics should be, being informed and also standing on the view of other African environmental ethicists. Fourth, the theory I wish to pursue should have and retain a special, privileged place for humans in line with African ontology. This pride of place has been the subject of misunderstanding in African environmental ethics as it is often branded anthropocentric. It is worthy of note here that African

ontology has that place for man from Tempels, Ogotemeli, Ubuntu, Uwa ontology, Igwebuike ontology, Ife and Onye ontology, Relational moral status, etc. Fifth and more importantly, there should be a sense in which humans are a privileged part in the holistic ecosystem. This sense brings to the fore the non-anthropocentric understanding of African environmental attitude. This portends that even though humans are a privileged part of the ecosystem, it cannot be interpreted as anthropocentric. Sixth, I will give an application of my theory into real environmental issues like erosion at Oko and Ekwulobia Nigeria.

I call this theory, Obligatory anthropoholism. This underscores both the place of man (Anthropos) the holistic concept of being in Africa, whereby all existing things intercompennetrates each other (Holism) and I give a sense in which humans are singled out of the whole. This sense is the fact of obligation. It is human who is under obligation to care for the whole of ecosystem. I am writing because I wish to prescribe to humans and not cows, how to relate, care, tend and conserve the ecosystem.

In obligatory anthropoholism, obligation is not targeted at just human ends, for human benefit or for his economic enrichment, rather the African concept of holism; the interrelatedness, interconnectedness, intercompentraion between both the seen and the unseen elements puts humans under obligation to tend, care and conserve the environment. It is nonanthropocentric when we look at the end to which obligatory anthropoholism aims. The chief end or purpose for anthropocentrism is human benefit but not so for obligatory anthropoholism, the purpose obligatory anthropoholism is holistic, the whole of ecosystem, humans are just the agents that can fulfill this end. Thus, I propose that African environmental philosophy seen from this

light provides a promising nonanthropocentric, practical and very simplistic approach to the environmental concerns of both Africa and the world at large

Few objections and criticisms can be made against obligatory anthropoholism in my view; the first is that it is anthropocentric because it makes humans the agent of obligation and sees human from a privileged perspective. This by implication will make humans exploit rather than tend the environment, at the end of the day, we are back to anthropocentrism again. Second, there can be criticisms about its Africanness, where scholars have argued that African environmental perspective is simply anthropocentric. Third, is the question of how this theory can comfortably fit into the issues and challenges in the African soil, fight and defeat them.

It is this relationship defined from the obligatory role that makes African relational environmentalism worthwhile. It is the obligatory role of humans to the environment that makes it necessary to assert as Metz does, that it is relating with humans that somewhat confers moral status. The implication of this theory is germane, humans have a pride of place in African ontology and this place is the place of obligation to care for not just herself in the sense of using the physical nature for personal gains but rather in holistic sense of being the one who enforces holism.

In the end, all theories if seen from an obligatory action perspective will come back to an agent (humans) and thus nonanthropocentric view can as well be justifiable with this. On the question of the Africanness of obligatory anthropoholism, a theory in African environmental philosophy is African to the

extent to which it imbibes the values extracted from African ontology.

Conclusion

Obligatory Anthropoholism has a strong conviction that environmental ethics or no environmental ethics, Africa should be developed; starting from the human person to infrastructure and to all other spheres of human endeavour. Obligatory anthropoholism does not abdicate the social responsibility of development to God, the Government or institutions alone; it asserts that all humans have something to add. It also calls on African governments to establish more educational institutions. Here lies the developmental import of obligatory anthropoholism as a plausible non anthropocentric African environmentalism. With adequate enlightenment, even the uneducated can value the environment. With adequate enlightenment, even anthropocentrism will lead humans to care for the environment. Without adequate enlightenment, even nonanthropocentric environmental ethics and obligatory anthropoholism will not be effective as regards environmental conservation. Obligatory anthropoholism, therefore, affirms the importance of humans in any developmental concept or approach in Africa.

Endnotes

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